

# **University of Manchester**

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*Printed copies are available from:*

Linney Direct  
Adamsway  
Mansfield  
NG18 4FN

Tel 01623 450788

Fax 01623 450629

Email [qaa@linneydirect.com](mailto:qaa@linneydirect.com)

## **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

<b>Summary</b>	<b>1</b>		
Introduction	1		
Outcome of the audit	1		
Features of good practice	1		
Recommendations for action	1		
Outcomes of discipline audit trails	2		
National reference points	2		
<b>Main Report</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>Section 1: Introduction: the University of Manchester</b>	<b>4</b>		
The institution and its mission	4		
Collaborative provision	5		
Background information	5		
The audit process	6		
Developments since the previous academic quality audit	6		
<b>Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes</b>	<b>7</b>		
The institution's view as expressed in the SED	7		
The institution's framework for managing quality and standards	7		
The institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards	9		
Internal approval, monitoring and review processes	9		
External participation in internal review processes	10		
External examiners and their reports	11		
External reference points	12		
Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies	14		
Student representation at operational and institutional level	14		
Feedback from students, graduates and employers	15		
Progression and completion statistics	16		
Assurance of the quality of teaching staff, appointment, appraisal and reward	16		
Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development	17		
Assurance of the quality of teaching delivered through distributed and distance methods	18		
Learning support resources	19		
Academic guidance, support and supervision	19		
Personal support and guidance	20		
<b>Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline trails</b>	<b>21</b>		
Discipline audit trails	21		
<b>Section 4: The audit investigations: published information</b>	<b>32</b>		
The students' experience of published information and other information available to them	32		
Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information	33		
<b>Findings</b>	<b>35</b>		
The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes	35		
The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards	36		
The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning	36		
Outcomes of discipline audit trails	37		
The use made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure	39		
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	39		
Commentary on the institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards	40		
Reliability of information	40		
Features of good practice	40		
Recommendations for action	40		
<b>Appendix</b>			
The University of Manchester's response to the audit report	42		



## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Manchester (the University) during the week commencing 31 October 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 awards.

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

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

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

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

### Outcome of the audit

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

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

### Features of good practice

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

- the high level of resources made available to support student learning

- the overall institutional pastoral support provided for students
- the high-quality Careers Service provided for students and recent graduates
- the information and support provided for pre-entry students
- the support and environment for postgraduate research students, particularly at the local level.

### Recommendations for action

The team advises the University to:

- review and develop the institutional oversight of quality and standards so that the University can assure itself that the framework is fit for purpose, that it operates effectively and is implemented consistently across the University
- review the University's current quality assurance procedures to ensure that they take full account of the purposes and intentions of the *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ)
- provide transparent and coherent policies and regulations in assessment, progression and award that align with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 6: Assessment of students*, published by QAA, and which are applied consistently across the University.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- continue to develop corporate statistics systems and reporting tools that are fit for purpose and produce reliable and accurate data to inform quality assurance, enhancement and standards
- develop a more integrated institutional approach to the dissemination of good practice in learning, teaching and assessment, and to staff development planning and delivery
- develop more effective formal means of communication which allow identification and signposting of institutional information

relating to quality assurance and enhancement to all levels of the institution

- continue to review the purpose and effectiveness of student feedback mechanisms, in particular the student survey.

*and standards in higher education: Final guidance.* The report states that at the time of the audit, the institution was meeting the requirements for the publication of teaching quality information set out in *HEFCE 02/15* and *03/51*.

### **Outcomes of discipline audit trials**

#### **Biology; geography; law; linguistics; physics; psychology**

The team also looked at the following specific areas of provision by undertaking discipline audit trails: biology; geography; law; linguistics; physics and psychology, to find out how well the University's systems and procedures were working at the discipline level. The University provided the team with documents, including student work, and here too the team spoke to staff and students. As well as supporting the overall confidence statements given above, the team considered that the standard of student achievement in the six discipline areas was appropriate to the title of the award and its place in the FHEQ. The team considered that the quality of the learning opportunities available to students was suitable for 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 University of the Academic Infrastructure which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points to define both good practice and academic standards. The audit found that the institution still has some work to do to ensure that the FHEQ and the section of the *Code of practice* on assessment are embedded within its standard quality assurance procedures.

QAA's audit teams will comment on the reliability of the information about academic quality and standards that institutions will be required to publish, which is listed in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document *HEFCE 03/51, Information on quality*



# **Main report**

## **Main report**

1 An institutional audit of the University of Manchester (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 31 October 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility for its awards.

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

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

## **Section 1: Introduction: the University of Manchester**

### **The institution and its mission**

4 The University of Manchester came into being on 1 October 2004, and was formed following the dissolution of the Victoria University of Manchester (VUM) and the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST). This is a new institution, not a merger. Those who planned the formation have ambitions for it to become a new and innovative type of university, both in terms of how it is managed and what it seeks to achieve. The University was granted full degree awarding powers by the Privy Council when it was created.

5 It occupies a large site to the south of Manchester city centre, a legacy of UMIST and VUM. There is already underway a complex programme of estate development to bring cognate areas and activities together and optimise use of available space, facilities and resources within one large integrated campus.

6 In 2005-06 the University had 38,866 registered students, the majority (72 per cent) of whom were undergraduates (26,311 full-time, 1,291 part-time). Most (73 per cent) of the 10,986 postgraduate students was registered full-time. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of the student population was overseas (9,361 students) for fee purposes, with almost identical numbers of undergraduates (4,682) and postgraduates (4,679).

7 The University is structured into 23 academic schools grouped into four faculties - a large Humanities faculty (1,627 academic staff; 18,428 students; 10 schools) and three science and technology faculties; Engineering and Physical Sciences (EPS) (1,786 academic staff; 9,630 students; nine schools), Life Sciences (645 academic staff; 2,377 students; one school), and Medical and Human Sciences (MHS) (1,092 academic staff; 8,132 students; five schools).

8 Academic provision within the University covers both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and science and non-science disciplines. The University attracts and recruits high-quality students from the UK, the European Union and overseas.

9 The University is characterised by four main features:

- *the newness of the University*: the President and Vice-Chancellor was appointed after the decision was made to create the new University, but before it happened. Project Unity was designed to bring together the best features of the legacy institutions (VUM and UMIST), and provide a framework for creating the new institution
- *the managerial culture*: decision-making at institutional level is based on performance management against agreed targets, using Operational Plans. This process is driven and informed by annual monitoring of performance against target, using a defined set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
- *the delegation of authority and responsibility*: the institution sets objectives and broad frameworks within which the faculties must operate, with faculties given discretion over how they achieve agreed objectives. Much responsibility and authority is delegated to the faculties, whose executive deans also serve as vice-presidents of the University, and are members of the senior management team
- *the focus on stakeholder satisfaction*: the University's strategic plan envisages a continuing rise in stakeholder satisfaction, particularly among students and employers. Two key tools used in the evaluation of student satisfaction are the unit questionnaire, and the University student satisfaction questionnaire

10 The University's mission is to:

'...make the University of Manchester, already an internationally distinguished centre of research, innovation, learning and scholarly enquiry, one of the leading universities in the world by 2015'.

## Collaborative provision

11 Collaborative provision of the University of Manchester is the subject of a separate QAA audit.

## Background information

12 The published information available for this audit included:

- the information on the University's website
- on-line datasets on the Teaching Quality Information website
- the reports of a continuation audit of Victoria University of Manchester, conducted by QAA in 2000, and an institutional audit of UMIST, conducted by QAA in November 2003
- reports of reviews by QAA of provision at subject level, conducted since the continuation and institutional audits. These cover Developmental Engagements in Chemistry at UMIST (2003), and in Accountancy (2003) and Social Work (2004) at VUM.

13 The University initially provided QAA with:

- an institutional self-evaluation document (SED), and appendices
- the institutional strategic plan, Towards Manchester 2015
- discipline self-evaluation documents (DSEDs) for the DATs in biology, geography, law, linguistics, physics and psychology.

14 During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was given ready access to a range of the University's internal documents, both in hard copy and through its intranet. During the audit visit the University gave the team access to a range of documentation relating to the selected DATs, and examples of students' assessed work. The University also provided the team with access to internal documents, including working documents and committee minutes.

## **The audit process**

15 A preliminary meeting was held at the University in February 2005. Matters discussed included the University's pattern of internal review and the distribution of students across programmes. Following the preliminary meeting QAA confirmed that six DATs would be conducted during the audit visit. The final selection of DATs was: biology; geography; law; linguistics; physics and psychology. QAA received the institutional SED in June 2005 and the DSEDs in September 2005.

16 A briefing visit was conducted at the University on 28-30 September 2005. The purpose of the briefing visit was to help the audit team to explore with the President and Vice-Chancellor, senior members of staff and student representatives, matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the SED and other documentation provided for the team. At the end of the briefing visit a programme of meetings was submitted to the University in preparation for the audit visit.

17 At the preliminary meeting for the audit, the students of the University were invited, through their Students' Union, to submit a separate document expressing views on the student experience at the University, and identifying any matters of concern or commendation with respect to the quality of the student experience and the standards of awards. In July 2005, a statement was submitted to QAA by the Students' Union on behalf of the University's students. The audit team is grateful to the students for preparing this statement to support the audit.

18 The audit took place from 31 October to 4 November 2005. During the audit visit the audit team met with staff and students both at institutional level and in relation to the selected DAT areas. The team is grateful to all those who made themselves available to discuss the University's quality management and academic standards arrangements.

19 The audit team was Professor T Davies; Professor M Davies; Dr S Hargreaves; Mr P Hicks; Dr S Hill; Professor C Park; Dr L Roberts; and Dr

G King (Audit Secretary). The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr J Ellis, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

## **Developments since the previous academic quality audit**

20 The University stated in its SED that in devising its approach to quality assurance and enhancement, it had the benefit of 'inheriting processes that were generally robust and effective', and could take account of the recommendations of the 2000 QAA Quality Audit of VUM, and the 2003 Institutional Audit of UMIST. The most relevant recommendations in relation to the current audit were:

- 'To improve institutional oversight of, and consistency of practice in, faculty-level processes for assuring the quality or provision and the maintenance of standards' (VUM Audit 2000)
- adopt 'a more robustly documented approach to the management of quality and academic standards' (UMIST Audit 2003)
- 'Reflect further on the purposes and intentions of the academic infrastructure...to ensure that...quality assurance procedures at the local level take full account of these external reference points' (UMIST Audit 2003)
- 'Adopt a more systematic approach to the institution-wide dissemination of good practice' (UMIST Audit 2003).

21 The new University's approach to quality assurance and enhancement was designed during Project Unity, guided by the aim of 'without being bound by existing ways of working, to propose arrangements that would embody best practice in the sector and meet the needs of the new University.' This has entailed a comprehensive revision of university-level policies and procedures since previous audits, and a reorganisation of institutional support for teaching and learning. In reaching its conclusions and recommendations the audit team recognises the challenges of creating a new University, which has been in existence for little more than a year, from the two precursor institutions.

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

### **The institution's view as expressed in the SED**

22 While the institution itself is new, it has sought to build on the strengths of VUM and UMIST. The University claims in its SED that its 'confidence in [the arrangements] stems not only from their intrinsic merits and from comparison with practice in other institutions but also, in many cases, from the proven effectiveness of their precursors'.

23 The SED pointed out that 'many processes and structures are still being established during the period of this Audit', that the University faces 'many challenges in trying to ensure that these changes are introduced in the right order and at the right time, and that members of the University are kept appropriately informed', and that inevitably 'some of the new arrangements are better developed than others'.

### **The institution's framework for managing quality and standards**

24 The SED explained that the Board of Governors has ultimate responsibility for the University's strategic development and that Senate is the principal academic authority. The composition and operation of these bodies reflect the principles of accountability set out in the University's strategic plan, *Towards Manchester 2015*. These include the principle that 'responsibility and accountability rest finally with designated individuals, never with a committee: the role of University committees (except the Board, of programme) is consultative or advisory'. The roles and membership of faculty and school boards are defined by University statute, but faculties and schools are free to devise extra structures for the management of quality and standards. All faculties have committees concerned with undergraduate provision and graduate education, but some also have separate structures for teaching and learning policy at a

strategic level.

25 The University has a unitary management structure. The President and Vice-Chancellor is the chief executive officer and there are eight vice-presidents, four with policy portfolio responsibilities and four who are executive deans of the faculties. Heads of school are appointed by the Board and report to faculty deans. The Registrar and Secretary heads the University administration, which comprises six directorates and includes the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Office (TLAO) which has a significant role in respect of quality assurance. Each faculty also has a comprehensive administrative structure.

26 The SED described how 'the operation of University structures and the conduct of (quality assurance) business are facilitated by a number of committees and staff networks. Besides Senate, there are five formal University bodies whose remit relates to teaching and learning'. In particular, the Quality Advisory Group (QAG), chaired by the Vice President Teaching and Learning (VPTL) and the Research and Graduate Education Committee (RGEN), chaired by the Vice President for Research. There are several informal groups and University networks, including: The Senior Executive Team; The Teaching and Learning Group; The Faculty Liaison Group; The Quality Administrators' Network (QAN) and an equivalent graduate administrators network also exists. Similar, smaller networks operate within faculties.

27 At university level, the VPTL is 'responsible for a broad policy portfolio that covers programme standards and quality and the student learning experience'. He works with the Associate Vice President (Graduate Education) AVPGE). In respect of executive responsibility for the conduct of business relating to quality and standards, the VPTL chairs the QAG whose membership includes the Head of TLAO, the AVPGE, the associate deans from each Faculty, the Head of Academic Quality (HAQ) and the faculty quality administrators. The terms of reference of QAG relate particularly to 'the operation of the quality framework', and 'to consider an annual report, prepared by TLAO,

of good practice, strengths and issues arising from annual monitoring and reports of periodic reviews'. The audit team noted that some significant cross-University roles were identified for TLAO staff in respect of the monitoring and review of quality assurance within faculties. The chair of QAG is a member of Senate, which is chaired by the President and Vice-Chancellor.

28 The quality assurance aspects of faculty work are assigned in large part to the VPTL and the Faculty Quality Administrator (FQA) functions, with similar functions existing at School level. The Faculty of Life Sciences does not have a Faculty Quality Administrator but the role is shared between four Education Administrators who work as a team. In general, the audit team considered that these operational aspects were settling down well. Besides the five formal bodies identified above, there are several networks, both formal and informal, that have roles in both communicating and coordinating. The SED identified the Manual of Academic Practice (MAP) and the good practice website as mechanisms for communicating relevant policy, procedures and advice to staff, but in discussions with staff, the team often heard that they were either not aware of or not making use of these and that some policies were not in the MAP (see below, paragraphs 49, 51, 52, 99, 137). The team considered it would be desirable for the University to develop a more effective formal means of communication which allows the identification and signposting of institutional information relating to quality assurance and enhancement to all levels of the institution.

29 The audit team also learned of the role and activities of the QAN and the TLAO as monitors, facilitators, and integrators of quality assurance and enhancement, in particular the QAN was seen by the team as being a potential feature of good practice. The team heard that these and other areas had been developing in this first year, both in respect of 'in-Faculty' and 'cross-Faculty' activities and concluded that some were more advanced than others. In discussion with staff, it became clear that their understanding about and their use of available

sources of information and support was variable (see below, paragraphs 74, 102, 137, 161). The team formed the view that, across the University, there was work to be done in respect of the clarity and coordination of these aspects of University processes. The team concluded that it would be desirable for the University to develop a more integrated institutional approach to the dissemination of good practice in learning, teaching and assessment.

30 Towards Manchester 2015 includes the provision of annual Operational Performance Reviews (OPR) as a key strategic management facility, to assess the progress of each faculty and of central administration against KPIs. Each Faculty OPR includes consideration of nine strategic goals, of which teaching and learning is Goal 4 and has four key indicators: annual improvements in student satisfaction; annual increases in the number of academic promotion applications based largely on achievements relating to teaching and learning; annual improvement in the satisfaction of key employers with the quality of Manchester graduates; and annual increases in the percentage of programmes enhanced by on-line learning. Faculty OPR includes the linked analysis of constituent schools, where their performance is monitored against identified KPIs and other factors including data from statistical surveys of students, employers and other stakeholders. The audit team formed the view that the strategic mechanisms in place were strongly focussed on the OPR, which itself only contained a subset of the total information relevant to the effective oversight of the quality and standards of awards issued by the University. The team saw and heard of quality and standards information feeding upwards, for example from faculties and TLAO to QAG and Senate and considered that, in this first year of operation, the amount of information that had been considered formally had been relatively small. The team was also mindful of the advice from previous QAA visits to VUM and UMIST in respect of the institutional oversight of quality and standards.

31 The SED acknowledged that the University still has some way to go before all the new arrangements are in place. The audit team agreed with this and took account of the short time that had been available for processes to become effective when contextualising its findings. It was able to evidence that much work had been progressed and that some of the processes were settling in well. However the team formed the view that there was a need to ensure that institutional oversight was maintained. The team became aware of varying practice within and across faculties in respect of quality and standards (see paragraphs 49, 50, 52, 69, 99, 161). The team concluded that it was advisable that the University review and develop the institutional oversight of quality and standards so that it can assure itself that the framework is fit for purpose, that it operates effectively and is implemented consistently across the University.

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

32 Towards Manchester 2015 includes nine goals that articulate and define the University mission. Implicit in this is an enhancement agenda. The goal for teaching and learning is supported by six explicit priorities with other relevant priorities in the strategic plans for Student Support and for Human Resources. Faculty strategic plans include priorities concerned with teaching and learning, in which the broad goals and priorities for the University are articulated in local contexts. All these strategic plans are accompanied by operational plans that set out actions and resource commitments for the coming year. The SED listed some 13 linked actions towards enhancement and identified that one of the main approaches to assessing progress on enhancement was through the OPR.

33 The audit team was of the view that it was too early to be able to form a judgement on the effectiveness of these intentions, but noted that the parallel activity of annual monitoring did not receive such detailed focus as the OPR

activity, and indeed was not prominent in the SED as an enhancement facility. The University may wish to consider the strategic place of feedback from the annual monitoring and review processes to inform the coherent enhancement across the University of the quality and standards agenda.

### **Internal approval, monitoring and review processes**

#### **Programme approval**

34 New programmes are considered and approved by a two-stage process. During the first stage the academic rationale for a new programme is articulated and the business case is developed. If approved in principle, work then begins on the second stage of development which involves detailed work on the curriculum and preparation of the programme specification and the information needed for the programme handbook. At the end of each stage the proposal is signed off by the Associate Dean and is forwarded to the TLAO which checks that institutional guidelines have been followed and send the second stage proposal to the VPTL, noting whether the proposal conforms to existing guidance and expectations or whether it presents issues of novelty or principle. In the majority of cases, the Vice President approves the proposal on behalf of the institution and reports that to Senate; exceptionally, he may convene a small group to consider the proposal further. Amendments to existing provision are defined as either minor or major. Minor amendments are approved by schools and reported to the relevant faculty, whereas major amendments are approved by the faculty and reported to the University.

35 These processes are supported by clear and comprehensive guidelines for use by Faculty, School and central administrative staff that identify the roles of all involved. The audit team noted that the stage two process does not include a formal approval event but operates through correspondence and that full use is made of an external academic advisor who conducts business through interactions that include a written report with pre-defined

areas for commentary. However, the stage two process only requires that all the core units and any new options are considered, so the appropriateness and currency of existing optional units is not formally scrutinised. The team concluded that the processes were broadly sound but that the University may wish to review the apparent lack of scrutiny of units that already exist and contribute to the new named award as options.

### **Annual monitoring**

36 A new procedure for annual monitoring was developed during 2004-05. The process covers all undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes as well as non-award-bearing continuing education provision. Administrative staff in faculties and schools support academic staff in annual monitoring and review, and the output is formalised as minutes from programme committees or equivalent structures and an action plan. This is presented to the appropriate School committee and an extract is reported to the FQA and the appropriate Faculty committee. The process requires that faculties report upwards to the QAG on the conduct and outcomes of annual monitoring, noting in particular any concerns or good practice for University attention, and TLAO also generates a report for QAG.

37 The audit team noted that, during 2004-05, annual monitoring processes were not operating uniformly across the University. There were examples of different practice and indeed, in some cases, of no annual monitoring having taken place. The team learnt that, from 2005-06, annual monitoring would be carried out in all areas under the new procedures. The team was aware that there was not explicit reference to the annual monitoring of units in the latest document, but saw some evidence that it did take place. The team noted the relatively early stages of implementation of the review process and considered that the policy and procedures had the potential to be effective overall. As systems settled down, the University may wish to review the mechanisms for the annual monitoring and review processes relating to quality and standards, with the upward reporting

of key outcomes. This review might extend to the positioning and interactions with OPR activities.

### **Periodic review**

38 The new internal periodic review (IPR) process centres on the preparation and consideration of an SED by the School/discipline concerned and will include provision for a written submission by students. The Review Panel will be chaired by an associate dean or nominee and will include staff external to the providing Faculty, a representative of the Students' Union and at least one external adviser. A member of staff from the TLAO will participate, but the focus will be on review by the Faculty, not by the University. The review report will include commendations and recommendations for enhancement and is presented both to the relevant Faculty committee and to QAG. Faculties have the responsibility to ensure that recommendations are acted on; the role of the QAG is to check that the process is being conducted rigorously and act as a forum for sharing good practice.

39 An annual report on the outcomes of programme approval, monitoring and review is prepared by the TLAO, and is considered by the QAG, but at present University oversight of the processes is exercised largely through the involvement of relevant personnel. During 2004-05 the piloting of some aspects of this new process took place and the audit team saw this in some of the DAT areas, as well as examples of the legacy processes from 2003-04. While there were few examples of the new process, the view of the team at this early stage was that periodic review was founded on good practice and had the potential to be effective.

### **External participation in internal review processes**

40 The SED identified that external advisers will be appointed for the approval of new programmes and for the periodic review of taught programmes. The audit team was able to confirm that these requirements are detailed in the University documentation and saw



evidence that both processes were operating soundly and that external advisers made appropriate contributions. The team noted that there had been an internal review by QAN of the new programme approval process in July 2005 and that external participation was generally considered to be working well.

### **External examiners and their reports**

41 The SED described the University's intention of harmonising and enhancing the procedures associated with external examining inherited from UMIST and VUM. The audit team considered that the approach adopted by the University was sound in principle, potentially building on previous strengths and addressing weaknesses. Arrangements were described as transitional in 2004-05, with some hybrid procedures in place to enhance previous ones before the introduction of a new University Code of Practice for External Examining from October 2005.

42 The SED noted that an initial step had been to review the procedures for selecting and appointing external examiners. The University publishes clear and full guidance on the criteria for appointment of external examiners and the procedures for approving nominations. The roles and responsibilities of external examiners are also clearly defined. Nominations are made by schools and are normally approved by the associate deans and then sent to the TLAO where they are recorded and arrangements are made to issue a formal appointment letter. The team concluded that the newly introduced procedures were sound and, provided they are fully implemented, are likely to be effective in future.

43 In its final year before merger VUM piloted an induction workshop for newly appointed external examiners, which the SED claimed to be successful although modest in scale. The audit team learnt that the University intends to offer such events regularly from 2005-06 and that a dedicated website for external examiners was planned. The team welcomed these proposals and would encourage the University to see them through to fruition.

44 All of the University's external examiners for taught programmes are required to submit written reports. The reports are completed on a standard pro forma which was revised during 2004-05. A large part of the revised form is designed to elicit yes or no answers to standard questions with the opportunity to elaborate on each if the external examiner wishes to do so, but does not prompt such responses. Sections of the form are also provided for external examiners to make discursive and general comments. The SED noted that the pro forma is designed to complement and not duplicate the minutes of examination boards, which also recorded comments of external examiners for immediate use. The audit team saw a number of completed reports for the academic year 2004-05 and in some cases, the external examiners chose to make comments to supplement yes or no answers, as well as providing useful general feedback. In other cases feedback was not so extensive or, in one case, not recorded at all. While the external examiners concerned answered 'yes' to the questions asked, thus confirming satisfactory standards and procedures, the University may wish to reflect on whether this is sufficient. While the team accepted that dialogue with the external examiner at programme level and minutes of examination boards might provide useful feedback at a local level, it was clear that interesting comparative information across reports might be lost when they were looked at, for example, at faculty or university level (see above, paragraph 30).

45 The University's SED identified two historic weaknesses in the procedures for external examining inherited from the precursor institutions that it had addressed as it developed its own systems. The first weakness concerned the mechanism for tracking reports and the second weakness was the absence of any University mechanism for identifying common themes or university level matters contained in reports other than in upward reporting from annual monitoring. The SED described how in the development of procedure for the new University both matters had been addressed through the enhanced role

of the TLAO. The audit team welcomed the enhancement to the procedures, and was able to see the early stages of implementation in the handling of reports from the 2004-05 academic year. However, the team considered that to some extent the ability of the TLAO to identify common themes may be limited by the new report format, especially where external examiners chose not to provide any commentaries (see above, paragraph 44). However, where the external examiners do provide information the TLAO is in a position to produce an overview report. The team had sight of the first of these, produced in the autumn of 2005, with the minutes of QAG where it had been discussed. The report was clearly of value and allowed QAG to identify university-level matters that could not be considered easily at programme, school or faculty level. Overall, the team concluded that improvements to the central oversight of the external examiner system were a valuable addition to the University's procedures.

46 The reports of external examiners are considered at programme level by programme teams and this is assured through the annual monitoring system where programme reports are considered with the external examiner's reports. Programme teams also respond directly to external examiners regarding any matters raised in their reports and this response is copied to TLAO allowing the latter to verify that issues identified in the central analysis of all reports have been responded to and that responses have been made to all reports. This second procedure is useful in that it provides assurance that external examiners reports have been considered. Evidence seen in the DATs confirmed that the procedures were sound and that matters raised by external examiners were addressed. Importantly, external examiners routinely confirmed that academic standards are effectively maintained and that the standards of student achievement compare well with those elsewhere.

47 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University's external examiner system was sound, and particularly with recent

enhancements and planned developments, was likely to be effective into the future.

### **External reference points**

48 In its investigations the audit team inquired how the University had taken account of the Academic Infrastructure in its policies, regulations and procedures. This included *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (Code of practice), subject benchmarking and the use of programme specifications.

49 The audit team saw clear examples of reference to the FHEQ, for example in the most recent periodic review reports, where reference was made to the FHEQ. However, many of these reports predated the formation of the new University. The team therefore looked for the ways in which the new University had benchmarked its awards and level definitions against the FHEQ so that merged programmes and regulations that it developed are consistent with the Framework. The team asked for documentation to illustrate how this had been achieved. The documentation that was provided illustrated how programmes had been merged and a common set of Programme Specifications was to be produced, but not how the University had systematically defined its own new awards and benchmarked them against the FHEQ. Although undergraduate regulations and the ordinances and regulations for the master's degree, postgraduate diploma and postgraduate certificate (PgCert) adopted by the University made reference to levels, the team could not identify clearly defined and agreed level descriptors for the University's awards which were also referenced to the FHEQ.

50 The audit team also noted that the University had adopted a credit framework to complement the regulations. The adoption of a credit framework requires clarity about levels and can have consequences for regulations. For example, the team observed that the regulations for the PgDip award define it as requiring the achievement of 120 'M' (master's)

level credits and the regulations for a master's award require the achievement of 180 'M' level credits (which is consistent with the FHEQ), yet the Pass mark for the same units contributing to the PgDip is 40 per cent and when contributing to a master's is 50 per cent. The University may wish to reflect on whether normal principles for the award of credit (threshold achievement at a defined level) are consistent with having two Pass marks for award of credit at the same level. In another instance the team noted that final year honours students (level 3) were given the option of studying level 2 units. The team was informed that the level 2 units were 'enhanced' for level 3 students who took them and that this enhancement took the form of more work. The team noted that more work would, in principle, simply lead to more credit at level 2, and that to achieve level 3 the intended learning outcomes and associated assessments would need to be set at level 3, referenced against generic level descriptors (see below, paragraph 99). The team noted that it might be possible for these arrangements to compromise the University's requirements for the amount of level 3 credit contributing to an honours degree. Finally, the team observed instances where the formal awards of the University were referred to in different ways in documents such as student handbooks. A noticeable example was reference to the award of PgDip as a 'diploma' or an 'advanced diploma', neither of which are awards of the University. The University should consider ways of ensuring consistency in this area.

51 While the team acknowledged that the history of the two precursor institutions gave some security to the referencing and benchmarking of awards, however, the new University may wish to consider a more systematic approach, not least to harmonise approaches that might have differed in UMIST and VUM, to ensure consistency with the FHEQ and to ensure that the consequences of having adopted a credit framework are considered. The University may also wish to disseminate more widely a guide to writing learning outcomes published on its intranet site as some staff appeared unaware of its existence (see above, paragraph 28). The team concluded

that the University is advised to review its current quality assurance procedures to ensure that they take full account of the purposes and intentions of the FHEQ.

52 At the briefing meeting the University provided a detailed document which illustrated how the University's practices and procedures were consistent with the *Code of practice*. However, there was one area where the team considered that the University had not fully addressed the expectations of the *Code*: assessment of students. The University's document analysing practices in relation to the *Code* was silent about this section and the team was also informed that the intention of the University, as stated in the SED, to produce an assessment strategy had been abandoned (as had other strategies except the University's strategic plan and faculties' plans for delivering this), in favour of expressing the strategic approach as a policy framework. As noted elsewhere in this report the team found variable approaches to a number of aspects of assessment (see below, paragraphs 102, 161), including instances where clear and directive University policies were not followed (for example, policies and procedures for anonymity in assessment). Senior staff explained that an overarching strategy might not be necessary with a range of policies and procedures in place. Nonetheless the team considered that it would be advisable for the University to provide transparent and coherent policies and regulations in assessment, progression and award that align with the *Code of practice*, *Section 6: Assessment of students* and which are applied consistently across the University.

53 The University has introduced programme specifications for taught programmes in a common format. The audit team viewed a number of these and concluded that they were generally comprehensive and useful reference documents. They clearly referenced the relevant subject benchmark statements and the latter were also referenced during the review of programmes. At the time of the audit visit the University was reviewing its approach to programme specifications because of concerns

that the format adopted, while being appropriate for internal use as reference documents, might not be user friendly for an external audience in the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) set.

### **Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies**

54 Professional statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) reports are considered within schools, and any broader issues or lessons learned are reported upwards through annual programme monitoring. Faculties provide administrative support for schools during accreditation visits, and this provides an extra and informal means of learning from these events. Also the TLAO monitors the occurrence of accreditation events as an aid to scheduling University reviews.

55 The audit team noted that faculties are empowered to approve changes to academic regulations where this is a requirement of accrediting bodies. In discussions with staff, it heard that subject areas involved in the provision of accredited programmes generally believe this to be an important feature of their academic provision and a valuable external input in respect of academic standards. The team formed the view that the University handled its interactions with PSRBs appropriately.

### **Student representation at operational and institutional level**

56 At institutional level students, mainly through the officers of the Students' Union, are represented on Board of Governors, Senate, Planning and Resources Committee and General Assembly, as well as on the groups and committees that support their work. There are also regular meetings between Union officers and members of the Senior Executive Team. The Students' Union officers who serve on University committees are expected to feed information back to the student body about institutional level discussions and decisions.

57 Faculty Committees are required to include student representation and School

Boards are required to have staff-student liaison committees (SSLC) or similar formal arrangements that allow them to be fully informed about students' views. Students' views are also collected, often through focus groups for reviews at subject level, and Students' Union Officers are invited to go to faculty level reviews. The mechanisms that are being put in place to meet these requirements are varied, reflecting the size and complexity of local structures and in some cases the desire to maintain and preserve pre-existing arrangements that were working well, but local arrangements are expected to conform to the policy and guidelines for student academic representation. The new guidelines also lay down expectations in terms of feedback to students. In faculties and schools, a variety of methods are employed. At the least, schools are expected to provide a noticeboard for students, on which the minutes of SSLC meetings are posted, and some schools provide extra facilities such as supporting student representatives in communicating with the student community through the intranet.

58 There have been considerable changes in terms of structures and procedures consequent upon development of systems inherited from UMIST and VUM, and at the time of the audit visit these were beginning to bed in. Although reservations were expressed in the students' written submission about the legacy arrangements for student representation at all levels, members of the Students' Union who had been actively involved in discussions and planning for improved systems for representation expressed strong support for and confidence in the new arrangements which are coming into place for the current academic year. The audit team heard that the institution is committed to monitoring the operation of these enhanced arrangements, in dialogue with student representatives and through student evaluation systems, to check that the student voice is being heard and that systems at school level meet institutional expectations. This may serve to regulate the level of variability in process which currently exists in the University.

59 The majority of students who met the audit team were content with the functioning of systems for representation and indicated that they felt that they were listened to and that appropriate actions were taken in reaction to their comments. There was, however, some evidence (see below, paragraph 141) that both staff and students shared a perception that SSLC systems were for dialogue about problems only, with the consequence that there was a lost opportunity to use the process for discussing such matters as enhancement of existing provision or the introduction of new curriculum content. The new guidelines, which include an expectation that students should take an active role in planning and decision making, should serve to ensure an appropriate balance in SSLC discussions and to create an environment within which students can play a full role in quality assurance and enhancement.

### **Feedback from students, graduates and employers**

60 The University now includes feedback from students and employers among the performance indicators employed to demonstrate achievement towards planning goals. This has had the consequence that there have been major changes in methods for obtaining feedback from students and employers.

61 The SED acknowledged weaknesses in the processes for obtaining feedback from students in the predecessor universities which resulted in gathering of a mass of information which might have an enhancing function at discipline level but which was difficult to use systematically across the institution. New procedures, which are operated centrally, have therefore been introduced 'to gather longitudinal data about student satisfaction through unit level surveys conducted at the end of each semester and programme-level' surveys undertaken towards the end of each year of study. This covers students' experience of their programmes as a whole, as well as their experience of the University and its facilities. The data are considered at University level by the Student Survey Monitoring Group

(SSMG) as well as locally by faculties, schools and programme committees.

62 The new unit-level survey was introduced quickly in 2004 and encountered some initial difficulties. The questionnaire itself was relatively limited, involving a small number of questions allowing quantitative responses. In semester 2 of 2004-05 a comments sheet was added to the questionnaire and schools were asked to discontinue their own local questionnaires. For the current year the system has been relaxed with schools being allowed to supplement the institutional questionnaire with school-specific questions. This is intended to restore the formative function of the unit-level survey in terms of local practice. The SSMG oversees the conduct of these surveys and decides how the data should be presented and circulated. Summary data for each unit were circulated to faculties, and aggregate data for each school were considered at Senate. The University was thus able to demonstrate a significant improvement in the value of the survey for institutional level planning compared with what had been achieved in the predecessor institutions.

63 The annual programme-level institutional survey is designed to provide only an overall indication of student satisfaction, rather than a detailed evaluation of learning and teaching. In the last academic year this was conducted electronically but achieved only a low return at undergraduate level with patchy levels of response from different faculties. Students expressed the view that the form had been too lengthy for purpose and that advertisement and distribution of the form by email had been ineffective. The University is aware of these issues and is seeking to enhance the level of return to the current year's programme-level survey.

64 The University has a range of mechanisms for collecting the views of graduates and employers and conducts surveys at both discipline and institutional levels with targeted surveys of graduates and employers. Considerable significance is attached to the outcomes of these surveys, and trend analysis from independent employer satisfaction surveys

of Manchester graduates has been identified as a KPI for judging the success of the strategic plan. The enhanced system for collecting this information was implemented in 2004 and resulted in a useful report which has been considered by faculties and schools as part of their review and planning processes.

65 Although the approach to collecting comment from graduates and employers appears to be effective, the institution acknowledges that it makes more use of feedback from current students in its planning and review processes than it does from graduates and employers. Given the significance attached to student evaluation processes for strategic planning and academic review, the audit team considered it desirable for the University to continue to review the purpose and effectiveness of student feedback mechanisms.

### **Progression and completion statistics**

66 The responsibility for maintaining a statistical database of student achievement lies with the Planning Support Office. Although the SED stated that 'the use of progression and completion statistics is an important element in quality management', it also acknowledged that the 'use of progression and completion statistics is hampered at present by the inadequate systems and sometimes unreliable data'. In the SED the University described the analysis of data for research students as 'very challenging' and staff the audit team met were able to confirm the poor quality of the data. At the time of the audit, two central systems were in use: one from each legacy institution, although a temporary 'data warehouse' had been established, allowing the two systems to be interrogated in a common format.

67 It is the University's intention that progression data should feed into the annual planning and accountability cycle by means of annual monitoring reports. However, the SED stated that the institution does 'not monitor progression and completion statistics routinely at University level', preferring to 'entrust faculties and schools with operational responsibility for managing programme quality'

where periodic trends in the data are addressed. To this end, in 2004-05 the University devolved the production of data to inform annual monitoring and periodic review to the faculties, although these review processes do not include an analysis of data by programme. At a local level data are input into the central records system by administrative staff, but when these data are returned to the schools for checking there are often errors and some schools routinely keep their own data which they use for assessment and awards boards. The audit team formed the view that there is a lack of accurate centralised statistics that can be reliably used to inform strategic decisions.

68 At the time of the audit a new single system was being used to register undergraduate applicants with anticipated implementation of postgraduate admissions software in December 2005 and full roll out for student data management from October 2006. The introduction of the new data management system should provide the opportunity for the University to articulate information more clearly for both internal and external clients, and to produce appropriate statistical analyses of student progression and completion data.

69 The audit team formed the view that the lack of reliable and accurate data is hampering the University's ability to monitor the achievements of its students at both unit and programme level. The team considers it advisable for the University to continue to develop corporate statistics systems and reporting tools that are fit for purpose and that produce reliable and accurate data to inform quality assurance, enhancement and standards.

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

70 The University's appointment procedures were described by the SED as well-established and embodying principles of equality of opportunity and good employment practice. Most staff are appointed to an initial period of probation. During their probation, staff are assigned a mentor whose role is to support

their development both in teaching and research. All new staff are invited to go to a half-day induction event organised by the University and local induction is also provided within faculties.

71 The aim of the University's Performance and Development Review (PDR) process is to encourage excellence in research, teaching and the administration that supports these activities. The current procedures, which were relatively new at the date of the audit, build upon the processes for appraisal and review that operated previously in UMIST and VUM. They recognise that for academic members of staff, academic freedom and a significant level of autonomy are essential if excellence is to be achieved. The University has published detailed Guidance Notes for Performance and Development Review to help staff. Early adoption of the new PDR process across the University was considered to be a priority and a full programme of Reviewer and Reviewee training was put in place by the Staff Development and Training Unit. The audit team heard that, while not all staff had undertaken PDR at the date of the audit, staff were generally aware of the new process, some staff had undertaken PDR and found it useful and others had dates already fixed for their PDR meetings.

72 Within its Teaching and Learning Strategy, the University expresses a commitment to the recognition and reward of staff who teach and support learning. The SED explained that this is achieved not only through promotion and career progression but also through individual teaching awards. Promotion to senior lecturer or reader considers performance in four areas, including teaching and learning. The procedure for appointment to Teaching Fellow and Senior Teaching Fellow is based upon learning and teaching and service and leadership. Further career progression can be achieved by Teaching Fellows through promotion to Professorial Status. The University's individual awards comprise: the 'Teacher of the Year' award, which recognises outstanding achievement during the previous academic year; and Teaching Excellence Awards, which recognise sustained excellence in teaching

and support of learning, and teaching sabbaticals. On the basis of its discussions with staff, the audit team concluded that the University's mechanisms for the recognition and reward of staff were well known, understood and generally valued.

### **Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development**

73 The SED explained that the Staff Training and Development Unit (STDU) has responsibility for developing institutional policy on staff development and is the main provider at institutional level. Other agencies, within the University, complement this work, including: The Disability Support Office; Manchester Computing; the TLAO, and the Teaching, Research and Development Network (TRDN) and the Faculty Pedagogic Centres.

74 The audit team learnt about a wide range of staff development activities provided both centrally and in faculties and schools. The SED acknowledged that staff support and development opportunities concerned with teaching and learning were not as well coordinated and coherent as the University would wish and the team learned that work was planned to clarify and achieve better complementarity between the support to be provided at the centre, in faculties and in schools.

75 The University had made some progress towards the achievement of these goals, for instance in its planning for the development of the New Academics Programme. Feedback from the staff survey had revealed a low level of satisfaction with the University Learning and Teaching programme for new staff. The programme did not meet Faculty needs for discipline-related content and it was uncertain whether it would satisfy new Higher Education Academy accreditation criteria. In response to these concerns, the University had developed a New Academics Programme, which had been granted Academy accreditation. The first sessions of an interim version of the new programme had run in September 2005, but the programme was still under development

and it was intended that further phases would be delivered in Faculty groups, commencing in January 2006.

76 The adoption of the centrally devised PDR scheme (see above, paragraph 71) demonstrated progress towards better complementarity between support at central and local levels. Moreover, with the introduction of a new system for recording staff engagement in continuing professional development, the audit team noted that the University would be able to monitor these and future developments more closely. However, as the University itself had recognised, it was apparent that greater coherence in staff support and development was desirable. The team considered that this applied not only to coordination between the various central agencies engaged in the planning and delivery of staff development, as well as between these agencies and faculties, but also to specific areas of activity, most notably the training of Graduate Teaching Assistants and the peer observation of teaching.

77 The University employs over 500 Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) annually. The SED stated that there was an expectation that GTAs complete a programme of induction and preparatory training, provided in part by the University and in part by faculties or schools. The team noted that University guidelines required the provision of appropriate training for GTAs. While GTAs confirmed that induction and training were available, it was evident that the extent of their participation had been variable and that the quality and effectiveness of the University's provision in this area could be significantly enhanced through greater coordination between the centre and faculties and schools.

78 While recognising the progress made in some areas, the audit team concluded that it would be desirable for the University to develop a more integrated institutional approach to staff development planning and delivery.

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

79 Teaching delivered through distributed and distance methods forms a relatively small, but growing, proportion of the institutional portfolio and is, as far as possible, subject to the same quality management processes as other provision. The small element of distance learning is nearly all at postgraduate level, in specialist discipline areas, and is mainly in learning programmes where material delivered through the internet (and occasionally through traditional paper-based resources) is blended with face-to-face sessions.

80 Distributed and distance provision is supported through the Faculty Pedagogic Centres and by a specialist Distributed Learning team within the TLAO, who focus on the pedagogic aspects of distributed and on-line learning, and by a technical team in Manchester Computing. Detailed guidance on the design, delivery and assessment of distance learning programmes is provided in the MAP which lays down expectations to be met when new programmes of this kind are developed and approved. In the process of programme review, when the provision is largely on-line, a member of the Distributed Learning team in the TLAO joins the panel ensuring the involvement of staff with expertise relating to the particular issues involved in this sort of provision.

81 At the time of the audit visit the University was in the final stages of the process of developing and approving its Strategy for On-Line Learning. The draft strategy has been designed to accommodate an anticipated expansion of distance and distributed provision and provides for increased resource to support this expansion. The developing strategy has also been informed by an analysis of responses in the unit-level student survey which indicated a lower level of satisfaction with on-line elements in programme units as compared with elements delivered by more traditional methods. Through the Research Centre for e-Learning, the University is developing a detailed model and a comprehensive suite of



checks for the planning, design, development, delivery, maintenance and review of on-line and distance learning.

82 While the audit team considered it was too early to form a judgement about the impact of a developing strategy, it is clear that the University is approaching this development responsibly, and in a thoughtful and reflective way, addressing identified areas for development enhancing areas of strength.

### **Learning support resources**

83 The SED noted that the unification of the libraries of the predecessor institutions has enhanced the combined resources and that all students now have access to over 4 million printed items, over 20,000 electronic journals, virtually every abstract, index and reference work of interest and nearly half a million electronic books. The library operates a comprehensive support service with each discipline area and school having a designated academic liaison librarian overseen by the relevant faculty librarian. An extensive information skills training programme is offered to all students and there is a special fund to support the specific needs of students on taught programmes. The library has a Disability Support Coordinator and there are designated rooms available to students in need of special help. Student surveys of the library resources and services are undertaken regularly and student satisfaction with the library is now monitored annually as part of the student survey.

84 The Information Systems Directorate (ISD) provides computing support for learning and teaching. There are 10 'public' clusters of PCs across the campus open to all registered students with several additional, restricted access, clusters in faculties or schools. Overall there are over 3,000 PCs available in clusters with a ratio better than one PC for every ten students. All University halls of residence and several privately-owned halls are wired for Ethernet access and public locations on campus are currently being equipped for wireless access. In addition to three helpdesks provided by Manchester Computing for all users, each Faculty has its own helpdesk and computing

support to meet more specialised needs. Students with disabilities are supported by special software, accessible workstations, and hearing loops in training rooms and at helpdesks. The ISD provides a wide range of training to help develop students' information technology (IT) skills and Manchester Computing has developed a generic IT induction/proficiency test that helps to identify the existing skill levels of individuals and identify training suited to their particular programme of study. The Manchester Computing website also has a wide range of on-line training packages, workbooks and exercises.

85 In meetings with students the audit team learnt that in general the student body appreciated the quality of the teaching environment and the learning support for students, in particular the library and IT facilities. The team considered that the quality of the learning resources and the high level of resources made available to support student learning was a feature of good practice.

### **Academic guidance, support and supervision**

86 The SED acknowledged that high-quality student support is a key factor in providing a satisfactory learning experience for students but that the University has inherited arrangements that 'are not as consistent as we would like', which has led to some student dissatisfaction. The University is nevertheless confident that the measures it is currently putting in place will yield better and more consistent academic support across the University.

87 For undergraduates there is an extensive orientation and induction programme and each student is appointed to a 'personal tutor'. The SED noted that personal tutoring is organised by individual schools and that local arrangements vary. The personal tutoring system has not been working as well as the University would wish but several measures are being adopted to address this problem. Personal support of students is now to be assigned to suitably trained support staff with the 'personal tutors' assuming the role of

academic tutors. The audit team learnt that students were aware of the changes proposed in the scheme and had mixed reactions about the move away from academic staff toward the use of trained administrative staff as personal tutors. However, the University intends to increase guidance and support for staff fulfilling this role, including a manual of good practice.

88 An institutional policy for Personal Development Planning (PDP) is also being formulated and a senior officer in the TLAO is coordinating a programme of work to expand the provision of PDP and to develop the scheme in a way that is linked with the curriculum and is useful to students. However, it was also apparent to the audit team that the implementation of the PDP scheme was uneven and that uptake was largely up to the individual student. The team is of the opinion that the University could be more active at both institutional and school levels in encouraging effective student participation in this scheme.

89 The SED noted that a distinctive theme of the University's teaching strategy is that of 'students as partners'. The University places great store on 'supplemental instruction' (SI) and claims that VUM and UMIST had gained an international reputation for their work in this field. The first of the SI initiatives is the Student Mentoring Scheme where higher-year students act as mentors to students at an earlier stage of the programme. The relationship provides both academic as well as personal support, and mentors undertake training that is organised and supported by the University. The Peer-Assisted Study Schemes (PASS) differ from the mentoring scheme in that they focus explicitly on academic support and they usually involve group activities rather than being one-to-one. Many of the students had taken part in the Student Mentoring Scheme and thought that it was a profitable exercise that should be more widespread.

90 In large taught postgraduate programmes it is common for master's students to have personal tutors although, in smaller schemes, the Programme Director is likely to take on this

role. The University is seeking to strengthen this type of personal support in the same way as for undergraduates. One of the University's current priorities is the development and enhancement of supervisory practice for research students. A new policy on the supervision of such students has been introduced which builds on previous practice and reflects the guidance in the revised *Code of practice*, published by QAA. Another priority is the development of training for students in research skills and transferable skills and a Skills Development Coordinator has been appointed to take this work forward. The team considered that the support and environment for postgraduate research students, particularly at the local level, was an area of good practice.

91 The audit team learnt from students that the pre-entry events and information were informative and comprehensive. The students were also very satisfied with the various arrangements for induction in their different schools. International postgraduate students were particularly appreciative of being linked to a student mentor before entry to help them prepare for their move to the University and during their induction. The team formed the view that the information and support provided for pre-entry students was a feature of good practice.

92 The audit team found that University's provision for academic guidance, support and supervision was generally good. However, the University may want to consider the concerns of students regarding the implementation of the revised personal tutoring scheme and to be more proactive in promoting the uptake of the PDP scheme.

### **Personal support and guidance**

93 The University is in the process of implementing the introduction of specialist staff to provide increased personal pastoral support for students in the schools. These staff will take over the more pastoral aspects of the support provided by the traditional personal tutors. The University believes that this will make better use of staff time and will ensure that personal support is consistent and well informed across the institution.

94 Most of the student support services are overseen and coordinated by the Student Support and Services Office (SSSO). This office is responsible for the Student Services Centre (SSC) and a number of specialist support services. It also administers the student satisfaction surveys and deals with student complaints. There is close and regular liaison between the SSSO and the Students' Union to ensure that provision is coordinated and that student needs are being met. The SSC is a centrally situated 'one stop shop' that students can access personally, by telephone or by computer, and aims to deal with most administrative matters of concern to students.

95 The SED described the Careers Service as one of the largest in the country and it was voted the best by employers in 2002 and 2003, 2004 and 2005. It provides a comprehensive service for all students at the University and for alumni up to three years after graduation. It operates on three sites across the campus and throughout the year. There is a team of 17 careers consultants who are supplemented by an extensive library and website. There is an ongoing programme of talks and events aimed at pre-final and final-year students and Careers Management Skills units embedded in degree programmes reach over 2000 students each year, being one of the largest programmes of its kind in the UK. The Careers Service was repeatedly singled out for praise by both undergraduate and postgraduate students and this lends support to the opinion expressed by employers about the effectiveness of the services provided. The audit team considered the high quality Careers Service provided for students and recent graduates was a feature of good practice.

96 Students who met the audit team during their visit were complimentary about the pastoral support and advice that was available both in the schools and centrally. In particular, the central services were thought to be of a high standard, were easily accessed, and liaised closely with the Students' Union. The team formed the view that the overall institutional pastoral support provided for students was a feature of good practice.

## **Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline trails**

### **Discipline audit trails**

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

#### **Biology**

98 The DAT covered all 22 undergraduate programmes with a focus on the single honours programmes in Biochemistry and Biomedical Sciences. The DAT SED comprised the 2004 submission document of the internal Five Year Review of the undergraduate provision in the School of Biological Sciences, VUM, the Review report, and a contextual statement. Programme specifications for Biochemistry and Biomedical Sciences were appended.

99 The programme specifications were consistent with the relevant subject benchmark statements. The programme specifications mapped the programme learning outcomes including the learning and teaching methods and the assessment profile, and included learning outcomes appropriate to each level of the programmes. The programme specifications indicated that some level 2 units could be taken as part of level 3 studies. The audit team noted that while the University's undergraduate regulations require that of the 360 credits necessary for an honours degree, only 100 need be at level 3 or above. Staff the team met indicated that level 2 units studied at level 3 were 'enhanced' and have 'added-value' without a modification of the learning outcomes. Further, while most unit learning outcomes were set at an appropriate level, some, particularly at level three, were minimal in nature or descriptive of the syllabus and lacked linkage to the skills and attributes of students expected in the FHEQ (see above,

paragraph 49). In a few cases learning outcomes expressed in programme handbooks were different to those issued to students in unit handbooks and available on the intranet.

100 The Faculty uses locally-derived statistics to monitor student progression and completion and staff met by the audit team expressed concerns about the reliability of data generated centrally. The Annual monitoring report draws on minutes from the various Boards and committees and groups and considers external examiners reports, and staff and student feedback. It is the Faculty's intention to move to a monitoring system based on meetings to consider individual programme performance. The team viewed such monitoring as essential because although there is reporting on student evaluation of units, there is currently no systematic reporting of individual programmes or units as a whole.

101 The audit team saw external examiners' reports that were constructive and useful developmental documents, and to which the Faculty, through the Annual monitoring process, responded appropriately. This confirmed that University procedures were being used consistently and effectively. The Faculty responded in an appropriate and swift manner directly to the external examiners taking care to address all points raised by them.

102 In the absence of a University Assessment Strategy the Faculty was in the process of developing its own procedures in relation to assessment or following those of VUM. Although there was no Faculty assessment strategy in place, consistent practices with respect to double marking, feedback to students and its timeliness, the late submission of assessed work, and information issued to students, including generic and some specific grade criteria, were applied across the Faculty's programmes. The audit team viewed the practices in development as generally fit for purpose. Appropriate marking guidelines are issued to staff for most types of assessment. However, the students the team met expressed concern about both the variable quality of feedback on assessed work and the lack of

assessment criteria for some units. The students also expressed concern about the timeliness of feedback. In some cases work was returned after the feedback it contained could be usefully used by students (see above, paragraph 52). There was clear evidence of internal moderation of assessed work. Although two assessors conduct the marking of student projects independently, one marks to a modified set of criteria issued to the other so that double marking does not take place.

103 The audit team reviewed a sample of assessed student work. Overall the team was satisfied that the nature of the assessment, and standard of student achievement were appropriate to the title of the award and its location within the FHEQ.

104 The student handbooks were comprehensive and contained relevant information. The students the audit team met regarded the handbooks as useful documents. The team saw examples of handbooks for the various units which were also informative and allowed students to understand what was expected of them.

105 The audit team learnt that the students were satisfied with the learning resources and support that was available to them. They praised the central library facilities and the availability of computing facilities. Some of those in later stages of their programmes had made use of the careers service which was described as 'excellent'. Students also had access to on-line bulletin boards which they use to discuss academic topics with peers and with staff. There is a strong system of academic tutorial support, linked to assessment. The students the team met expressed satisfaction with personal support and were knowledgeable about the central services the University offers.

106 The audit team learnt there were some concerns from students about the variable quality of support from demonstrators in practical classes. The students reported that in many cases the demonstrators were diligent but that in some others they were unhelpful and insensitive to the needs of students.

Although the Faculty holds one-day training events for demonstrators, it may want to review the performance of demonstrators, especially in relation to assessment and giving feedback, to maximise their effectiveness in supporting student learning.

107 Feedback from students is formally collected by questionnaires and through the SSLC. Feedback is compiled into a short report as part of the annual monitoring report. The first level student handbook stated that 'each unit is evaluated at least once every 3 years', but the discipline self-evaluation document indicated that 'the School has not instigated programme evaluations since 2002'. The University indicated that, as from 2004-05, all programmes within the Faculty are surveyed annually and all units once per semester.

108 Students are represented on a variety of faculty-level committees. There was a student representative on the recent OPR of the Faculty. The Faculty has a single SSLC which meets termly. The students the team spoke to were satisfied with their role in quality management and were able to cite changes in delivery and programme administration that had resulted from their input. While in some cases the Faculty Department had responded appropriately to student comment, in many others the students were asked to seek solutions themselves. For example, when the students raised the quality of demonstrating staff as an issue, on both occasions the students were asked to take the issue up with relevant unit coordinators. The audit team considered that the Faculty administration may want to consider ways in which it can enhance the effectiveness of its responses to feedback from students.

109 Overall, the audit found that the quality of learning opportunities is suitable for the undergraduate degree programmes in Biological Sciences.

### **Geography**

110 The scope of the DAT comprised the following programmes: BA/BSc (Hons) Geography; BA (Hons) Geography and Archaeology; MA Human Geography; MA

Economy and Space; MSc Environmental Monitoring, Modelling and Reconstruction. The DAT SED was largely the material prepared for the University's IPR of Geography in March 2005. The IPR SED provided clear and useful information on how QAA's Academic Infrastructure has been taken into account in arrangements at the discipline level. The audit team found that the programme specifications conformed to the University template and were comprehensive and clear and had considered the intentions of the relevant subject benchmark and FHEQ.

111 The audit team learnt that staff had some concerns about the reliability of the student progression and completion data and that they check the central data against local records where there are uncertainties. There was clear evidence that progression and completion data, and module-level feedback from students had been presented and discussed at the IPR and in the 2004-05 annual monitoring of undergraduate programmes. The IPR paid particular attention to retention rates for programmes, and ways of further improving them, and it claimed that 'Geography's excellent record of retention (UG and PG) and progression, and positive feedback from students in programme unit evaluations, provide evidence that the diversity in teaching and learning offered to students is effective'.

112 The University's new internal monitoring and review processes included the production and review of action plans and monitoring against the statements in the programme specifications. In line with University policy, the panel for the 2005 IPR included a subject specialist from outside the University and three academics from other schools within the University. No evidence was available on the approval processes, because the geography programmes were continued through from VUM. The audit team saw evidence to conclude that the internal monitoring and review process was working effectively.

113 The audit team saw external examiners' reports, and examination board responses, for all taught programmes, for 2002-03 to 2004-

05, and this confirmed that University procedures are being used consistently and effectively. Geography takes seriously the views of its external examiners and external examiner reports, and action plans, are considered in annual monitoring. All three external examiner reports for 2004-05 were very positive; the externals had met with students, found standards good, and reported that suggestions from previous years had been carefully considered by the discipline.

114 Although there is no institutional assessment strategy, assessment of all geography programmes is informed by the Geography Teaching and Learning Strategy. Programme handbooks contain information about how students will be assessed, the weightings given to different pieces of work, grade descriptors for different types of work, and how the various formats of assessments are designed to meet particular intended learning outcomes. In line with University policy, all student work is marked anonymously and marks are moderated. There was evidence that all Fail exam scripts had been double-marked.

115 The audit team was able to look at a range of different types of student work, from all three undergraduate years and from units within the master's programmes. The samples of work seen, and the marks and comments on them, appeared to be consistent with the expectations of the programme specifications, and with the views of external examiners. In the view of the team the standard of student achievement is appropriate to the titles of the awards and location within the FHEQ.

116 Student handbooks (including year handbooks) are available for all geography programmes, and for undergraduates there are also an induction handbook (Welcome to Geography 2005-6) and a comprehensive Student's Guide to Degree Programmes in Geography. All of the student handbooks contain information designed to help students' understanding of learning and assessment expectations, and students think they are useful.

117 Geography students were complimentary

about the learning resources and support that are available to them. Students have good access to the main Library, and they particularly like the well-stocked and staffed geography library which they are concerned is likely to disappear when the discipline moves into a new building in 2007. Students are also happy with ICT provision overall, although there are some concerns about lack of support for Geographic Information Systems software, and likely loss of IT cluster space in the new building. In terms of broader support, the geography students the audit team met were happy with both academic and pastoral aspects of tutorial support; they spoke positively about the helpfulness and accessibility of GTAs and appreciated the embedding of generic skills and employability into a second year module that is delivered jointly by the geography discipline and the University Careers Service.

118 Feedback from students at module level was collected during 2004-05 using the standard University system of eight set questions. Some staff were disappointed by the University's policy to discontinue previous module-level feedback mechanisms, which inhibits longitudinal tracking and comparisons. They also regret that the University questionnaire provides little feedback that is directly relevant to enhancing teaching and learning, although the procedure from 2005-06 onwards will allow an extra eight tick-box questions which the discipline will decide. The IPR SED notes that 'Geography intends to introduce focus groups to elicit qualitative feedback from their students'. Students also commented that they are unable to express their views in narrative form in the module-level feedback process. Student feedback at programme level is collected through the University's Student Satisfaction Survey, which feeds into the OPR process at faculty and institutional levels. At undergraduate level, geography has reinstated qualitative feedback questions at the School level in addition to the eight discipline-level questions allowed on the institutional questionnaire.

119 Student representation in quality

management arrangements appeared to be fit for purpose. There is no separate SSLC, but there are student representatives on programme committees whose input is both formative and problem-oriented. Students volunteer to be a one-year representative, and elections are held when necessary. Student representatives are trained by the Students' Union, and feed information back to other students by email and by means of a notice board in the discipline. Students met by the audit team were able to cite examples of where improvements had followed as a result of student representative involvement in programme committees, and they felt assured that their views were listened to and responded to.

120 Overall, the audit team found that the quality of learning opportunities in the programmes encompassed within the DAT is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

#### **Law**

121 The law DAT covered the LLB and the LLB in English Law and French Law. The DAT SED comprised the submission document for the June 2005 IPR of the two programmes, with a supplementary contextual statement. The appended programme specifications, set out within the University's standard template, were full, detailed and well articulated with the *Subject benchmark statement* for law and made clear, if not explicit, links to the FHEQ and the *Code of practice*.

122 A range of statistical data was provided with the annual monitoring reports, covering progression and completion, distribution of final award classifications and student profiling. The School of Law expressed concerns about centrally provided statistics, which it regarded as not sufficiently accurate for use in annual monitoring. The School had consequently relied on its own statistics to inform the review process. These were clearly presented, though the programme teams might consider whether year-to-year comparisons relating to student progression might be further facilitated through consistent presentation of statistics in

percentage as well as numerical format. The team considered that statistical information was being used effectively to inform review and enhancement.

123 Staff described a rigorous iterative process for programme approval, with appropriate externality. Rigour of process was also evident in internal monitoring and review. A complete set of recent annual monitoring reports was made available to the audit team. Set out in standard format and addressing both quality and standards, these incorporated action planning, with reports on action taken following the previous years' review. The audit team noted a range of matters that had been followed through, such as the provision of exam feedback meetings for first and second-year students, the continuing review of student admissions criteria, the monitoring of demand on library resources and guidance to students on writing styles to avoid plagiarism. The team concluded that annual monitoring of both programmes was thorough and effective.

124 The audit team viewed documentation relating to the internal five-year periodic review. The Review Report listed the extensive documentary evidence which had been provided to support the SED and recorded the outcomes of the panel meetings held with both staff and students during the review event. The team noted that the School of Law had prepared responses to the recommendations and considerations of the Review Report, recording action already taken or pending, and heard from staff that these responses had been submitted to the Faculty. Overall, the team concluded that the internal review process was comprehensive, searching and robust.

125 External examiner reports are considered at School level by the Undergraduate Committee, the relevant minutes then being despatched direct to the external examiners by way of response, with copies to TLAO. Annual monitoring also made reference to action taken as a result of external examiner reports. Partly as a result of external examiner comment, the School recognised one particular point for critical action: the low numbers of First class

honours degrees awarded. At the date of the audit, action had already been taken to address this. Staff explained that, in addition to formal written reporting, external examiners also had the opportunity to make oral comment at the Examination Boards. This clearly provides an effective means of gathering immediate feedback on quality and standards at local level, although the School might consider whether current reporting procedures and requirements ensure that this extra feedback is also available for consideration at university level (see above, paragraph 28). The audit team viewed recent external examiner reports and School responses and, on the basis of this and other documentation, concluded that, in general, the responses and follow-up were generally appropriate and timely.

126 The School of Law has produced a series of documents on aspects of assessment. In the absence of a University assessment policy, the audit team considered this local provision to be essential to the maintenance of standards. The School of Law conforms with the requirements of the professional bodies, the Law Society and the Bar Council, for Qualifying Law Degree status and in doing so applies more rigorous compensation rules than those permitted under the University's examination regulations. The team heard that local variations of University examination regulations were subject to approval at faculty level. The team found that all the information on assessment was detailed, clear and easily accessible.

127 Examples of students' assessed work viewed by the audit team, with generally positive external examiner comment on the standard of student work, confirmed the School of Law's own view that students were achieving the learning outcomes and that the standard of work was appropriate to its location within the FHEQ.

128 Students said that they were clear about what was expected of them and expressed general satisfaction with the feedback they received on their work. However, the audit team noted student comment to the internal review panel that, while the majority of tutors were willing to arrange a meeting, feedback

given on their work was insufficient. The Undergraduate Committee was aware that feedback could be improved and was addressing this. Students were happy with learning resources, including library and IT provision and commented on the usefulness of on-line database access off-campus.

129 There is a long tradition of a very strong personal tutor system within the School of Law. Students clearly valued the support of their personal tutors, in particular regarding career-related advice and information, and did not favour the University's plans for the provision of personal support from suitably trained administrative and other support staff. However, the School of Law recognised that the personal tutor system in the School was under strain, largely because of increasing student numbers. Students' experience of the Student Mentor Scheme appeared to be varied and, following student comment to the internal review panel, the School was to investigate support and training provided centrally through the 'Students as Partners' project.

130 Student feedback is gathered both through the University's unit questionnaires and the School's own unit questionnaires. These are considered by the Undergraduate Committee and are used proactively as an enhancement tool. Student feedback is also obtained through student representation on all committees within the School, as well on the Faculty of Humanities Committee. Students met by the audit team said that issues raised by them were fully considered and that action was taken appropriately. The team concluded that student representation in the School of Law was working well.

131 On the basis of the evidence provided and their discussions with staff and students, the audit team was able to confirm that the quality of learning opportunities was suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

## Linguistics



132 The linguistics DAT covered the following programmes: BA Linguistics, BA Linguistics and Social Anthropology, MA Linguistics and MA Applied Linguistics. The DAT SED consisted of a contextual statement appended to the discipline's SED which was prepared for the IPR conducted in May 2005. The audit team was able to examine the documentation provided for the IPR as well as the recent report and the discipline's draft responses.

133 The programme specifications conformed to the University guidelines and were fit for the purposes defined by the University, although staff expressed the view that they were not appropriate for student use. Programme specifications in full were available on the Linguistics and English Language website and the student handbook indicated where these could be found, but students stated that they did not use them as a point of reference. The content of the programme specifications made use of subject benchmarks for languages and English, and also, although the links were less explicit, articulation with the FHEQ. Progression was demonstrated in an explicit statement in the programme specification and in statements of expectations in unit descriptions. Programme specifications demonstrated clearly and comprehensively how students could achieve programme outcomes through varied combinations of units. Consideration of issues of level by discipline staff has led to greater differentiation of intended learning outcomes for units at Intermediate and honours level.

134 The audit team learnt there was very limited progression and completion data available and this was the subject of critical comment in the IPR report. Staff confirmed that the data provided by the University did not meet their needs and that they were waiting for the implementation of the expected new management information systems (see above, paragraph 66). However, the IPR report contained a recommendation that the discipline must present a full analysis to the faculty before the next academic year. Although use of statistical data to inform monitoring of quality and standards was accordingly limited, in one

year notice had been taken by staff of a drop in retention rates and appropriate action had been taken in terms both of analysis of causes and consequent modification of some curriculum content and structure to support student achievement.

135 Annual monitoring is conducted following institutional guidelines although it appeared that this had not occurred in respect of postgraduate provision in one year and that action plans had varied in their fullness and the extent to which they had been followed up in subsequent annual monitorings. In the view of the audit team the IPR was conducted in a searching and thoughtful way based on a reflective self-evaluation provided by the subject staff. There was appropriate externality on the IPR panel, and student opinion was collected effectively through facilitated focus groups. The resulting report was full and thorough and contained a good range of relevant well-evidenced commendations and suggestions for improvement.

136 The audit team was able to consult the most recent external examiners' reports. These confirmed that, taken overall, standards were secure, but one report contained several critical comments relating to standards in marking, drawing attention to variability of expectation and reward, and to problems in process including unfairness generated through scaling processes. In this case it was clear that external examining process had operated effectively to redress issues which had arisen at discipline level, although the team considered that issues raised by the external examiner could have been reported more fully to the University's Quality Advisory Group. The team saw examples of assessed work which demonstrated that students were achieving the learning outcomes and that the standard of work was appropriate to its location within the FHEQ.

137 Assessment tasks were set out clearly in student handbooks which contained indicative assessment criteria to guide student effort, and students expressed themselves content with the workload and the nature of assessment tasks. Discursive essays were the predominant form of

assessment although thought was being given by staff to diversification of approach. Feedback attached to samples of assessed work was variable in quality and extent with a variety of forms being used and different approaches to use of marginal notation. There was also substantial variability around the nature and purpose of feedback on assessed work with a substantial proportion of it tending to be summative rather than formative. The discipline is moving towards standardising procedures in this area and has been encouraged in this by a recommendation in the IPR. This will represent a substantial enhancement of local practice, although it should be stated that students met by the audit team expressed no concerns about the quality or timeliness of feedback and indicated that they valued informal oral feedback given in tutorial sessions. Although they were aware of enhancement activities at school level, staff appeared to the team to be unaware of relevant materials in the MAP and the good practice website and also the institutional policy to downgrade the proposed assessment strategy, and indicated that they were waiting for institutional decisions before creating a local policy.

138 Student handbooks were clear and comprehensive with useful guidance and explication of expectations. There was a range of helpful and informative further information available through the intranet. Students met by the audit team commented that the handbooks were somewhat out-of-date in their printed form, but that current updated versions were available on the website.

139 The audit team heard that the linguistics programmes are well supported in terms of library provision with staff and students praising this facility in terms of holdings and the support provided by library staff. There appeared to be effective communication between the discipline and library staff concerning use of available acquisition resource. Students expressed themselves to be content with IT resources including both access to hardware on campus and access to e-publications. Students were happy with the quality of teaching space

although they indicated that first-year classes sometimes exceeded classroom capacity and also expressed a desire for more dedicated social space.

140 Student views are collected through the mechanisms of evaluation questionnaires and student representation on the School's Academic Committee. Students met by the audit team were aware of unit evaluation processes, including questionnaires and focus groups and indicated that they felt that these were effective and had the potential to lead to improvements to content and delivery even though there was no formal method of feeding back information about resultant actions other than through discussion at the Academic Committee. Staff expressed to the team reservations about the University's decision to centralise the module evaluation process on the grounds that the range of questions asked on the form was too restricted and information about analysis of the second round of returns had arrived too late to be useful for the annual monitoring process. Staff expressed their support for the revised evaluation form which will allow more discursive and discipline-specific questions to be added. Students were almost entirely unaware of the institution-wide student satisfaction survey. The small number of students who were aware expressed doubts about the extent to which the questionnaire was fit for purpose, in view of the extended time required to complete it and issues with the electronic mode of distribution.

141 Both students and staff indicated to the audit team that they saw SSLC as a reactive process intended to provide a mechanism for discussion of problems rather than as a process for more proactive dialogue about plans and aspirations as well more negative issues. There have been occasions when student representatives were selected rather than elected, but this had not been a great source of concern to students when it occurred, and they indicated that the process of representation of students' views at the School's Academic Board was appropriate and effective. Students confirmed that they felt that they had been

properly consulted through the focus groups conducted during the recent IPR. Both staff and students stressed the point that in this small subject area there is constant and trusting interaction between staff and students which serves to secure immediate resolution of many problems.

142 Students expressed themselves content with personal tutorial arrangements in linguistics, and confirmed to the audit team that members of staff, both academic and administrative, were accessible and supportive. Students confirmed that this fact made a strongly positive contribution to the quality of the learning environment in linguistics.

143 Overall, the audit team found that the quality of learning opportunities in the programmes encompassed within the DAT is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

### Physics

144 The documentation provided for the DAT was the IPR in Physics and Astronomy held by VUM in March 2004. The programme specifications provided for the March 2004 Review, and since reviewed in the light of the Review report, are very comprehensive and match the requirements of the FHEQ and the subject benchmark statement. The overall aim of each programme is clearly specified and intended learning outcomes are given for each year of study and for individual programme units.

145 Comprehensive progression and completion data were presented in the IPR and in the Annual monitoring reports with extensive analysis of the results. It was noted in the Contextual Statement that, at present, the central University systems are not appropriate for compiling the necessary statistical data so that these had to be derived from School records. As a result the School is confident of the accuracy of its data but it is difficult to make comparisons with other schools in the Faculty and University in general.

146 The School undertakes an Annual monitoring of its teaching provision and from the audit team's consideration of recent reviews showed that these were thorough, informative and constructive. The School intends to carry out a similar process in November 2005 but will then move to the new University format for Annual monitoring in future years. The Annual monitoring is submitted to the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee. The Faculty Postgraduate Committee conducts a similar annual monitoring for postgraduate taught degrees. The team considered that the school responded appropriately to the points raised in the IPR and there was further follow-up on actions taken after a 12-month period. In the view of the team, the School Annual monitoring and the IPR processes are detailed and effective in maintaining and enhancing the quality of teaching provision.

147 External examiners' reports are now received centrally. They are then looked at by the Head of School, the Chair of the Examination Board, the Director of Teaching and the School Teaching Committee. The School is responsible for providing feedback to the external examiner on actions taken with copies also being sent to the TLAO. Information on external examiners' reports is included in the Annual monitoring which is sent to the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee. The audit team found that recent external examiners reports have, in general, been highly favourable and confirm the high standard of degrees awarded in the School of Physics and Astronomy.

148 The assessment strategies and policies of the School of Physics and Astronomy are clearly laid out in the 'Blue Book', and the audit team considered this to be a very useful document for students. The team reviewed a range of undergraduate student work, from all years of study and across the ability range, and was satisfied that the nature of the assessment and the standard of student achievement met the expectations of the FHEQ.

149 The audit team learnt from students that the information available to them before commencing the programmes was full and

accurate and that there was a thorough induction process after arrival. The handbooks covered both pastoral and academic matters and gave full details of the programme structure, support facilities and the examination regulations. Overall, the students indicated that they found the information supplied was comprehensive and informative.

150 The students that the audit team met indicated that the learning resources were of extremely high quality with excellent library and IT provision. The students also indicated that laboratory facilities were good with appropriate help and support being given by the graduate demonstrators. During the first two years of study, the graduate demonstrators undertake some assessment of laboratory performance and laboratory reports but there is a mechanism in place for the standardisation of marks awarded by different demonstrators.

151 The traditional personal tutoring system is still in existence but is now under active discussion. The students indicated that they would welcome the University's strategy of moving away from the use of academic staff as personal tutors to a system where specially trained administrative staff take over the non-routine support role for students with complicated or personal problems. The audit team concluded that the system of academic support was working well.

152 The students commented favourably on the help that the peer mentoring scheme gave during the early stages of their University career and were generally very complimentary about the whole range of academic and pastoral support given at both school and University levels. The primary mechanism for detecting problems early is the Year Group teaching meetings which take place twice a semester for the first three years and twice a year in the fourth year. These meetings are attended by student representatives and lecturers and tutors in that year and other students are invited to go to if they wish. In addition there is an annual meeting of the SSLC that is attended by relevant staff, student representatives and any interested students.

153 Programme unit questionnaires are issued and are analysed centrally with the intention of informing the institutional Operational Performance Review about student satisfaction with teaching provision. The School, however, feels that the present University questionnaire does not meet its needs, and thus further student feedback is obtained by means of questionnaires issued by the School at the end of each semester. These are filled in during a core lecture to ensure a high return rate. The modified University Programme Unit Questionnaires will be used in future years since they allow the School to add a number of specially-tailored questions to the standard set and there will also be provision for written comments by the students.

154 Student representatives sit on the Laboratory Committee, the Teaching Committee and the School Board and there are also two student representatives on the Faculty Teaching Committee. In their meeting with the audit team, the students indicated that there is an appropriate response and feedback on matters raised in Year Group teaching meetings, in SSLC meetings and in the questionnaires.

155 Overall, the audit team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for the programme of study leading to the named awards.

### **Psychology**

156 The DAT focused on two of the postgraduate programmes, MSc/PgDip Applied Psychology and MRes Psychology. The MRes was largely a replacement for the MSc programme, which was being phased out. Following discussion with staff it was clear to the audit team that the phasing out had been done with considerable care, overlapping the two programmes to test the viability of the new MRes and also taking effective steps to safeguard the interests of the remaining students on the MSc. The aims of the two programmes are clearly laid out in programme specifications which provide comprehensive information. The intended learning outcomes in the programme specifications are clearly

aligned at a level consistent with that of master's level in the FHEQ.

157 The audit team viewed papers relating to the IPR carried out in April 2004. The team concluded that the procedure was thorough and that the outcomes of the review had been effectively followed up. The team also concluded that the review methodology provided a sound basis for the procedure being evolved by the new University.

158 The audit team was provided with annual monitoring reports for both the MSc and the MRes for the academic year 2003-04. These addressed a wide range of issues relating to academic standards and the quality of the student experience. The programme team received feedback from the Faculty committees that received their reports and which approved the action plans. The team was interested to note that an annual report had still been produced in a year when a periodic review had taken place for the MSc. Given the evident robustness and effectiveness of the annual monitoring process as carried out by the School the team was interested to discuss the implementation of the University's new procedures. First, it was clear that the new process was understood by staff and that they were fully engaged with it. Second, it was also clear that staff believed the new process they were implementing for the first time would be more beneficial, particularly in terms of involvement of more staff in the process at the relevant committees. The team formed a view that the School was committed to self-reflection and continuous improvement based on effective use of the evolving annual monitoring procedures of the University.

159 In addition to being considered in the annual monitoring process, external examiners' reports were considered by the programme teams and by the School as a whole. The School followed the revised external examiner system and it was also evident that the School paid careful attention to the reports and addressed issues that they raised.

160 A range of student work was made available to the audit team. External examiners confirmed that standards set were appropriate for master's level, and that student achievement against these standards was generally good, with examples of excellent work. The team concluded that the standard of student achievement was consistent and appropriate for the title of the award and location within the FHEQ.

161 The School had moved from double marking to sample moderation of assessed work. The audit team regarded this as a sensible and pragmatic change that would continue to safeguard standards, but noted that it was one that had been made in the absence of any clear University strategy policy on quality assurance of assessment practices. Students are provided with general written feedback on assessed work. Examples seen by the team were generally helpful and students confirmed that this was the case. However, the students also commented that they had little idea how marks were broken down for different aspects of assessed work and little information about criteria for grades. Staff indicated that it was normal practice to return marked assessed work to students within four weeks. However, students noted that there were instances where return of work took longer and where the next assignment was under way or completed before feedback was received on the previous piece of assessed work (see above paragraph 52). The team asked staff about their understanding of the rationale for different Pass marks for PgCert and PgDip stages of the programmes (40 per cent) compared to the requirements for the MSc and MRes (50 per cent) given that M level credit is awarded for all of the awards. The staff recognised the issue being raised, but indicated that it was a matter for the University regulations for postgraduate programmes more generally which applied to their programmes (see above, paragraph 49).

162 Students informed the audit team that the information that they had received before entering the programme was helpful, realistic and accurate. On arrival an induction to the

programme and learning resources was provided, which students also considered to be helpful. The audit team saw comprehensive student handbooks which provided a range of information about the programme and the University. Students confirmed that academic and pastoral advice was readily available from staff teaching at the time and the programme director. Although there was no formalised scheme of academic and pastoral tutors assigned to each student, the team concluded that satisfactory arrangements were in place for relatively small groups of students studying at postgraduate level. Students were also clearly aware of services available at university level if they were required. Students informed the team that they felt a valued part of the School academic community, with access to friendly and approachable staff and a wide range of School activities such as research seminars.

163 The students met by the audit team were positive about the learning resources available for their programmes at both local and University level. They described the library as excellent. They observed that remote access to learning resources was helpful and that a dedicated facility for postgraduate taught students in the School, including information and communications technology resources, was very valuable.

164 Staff indicated that module questionnaires had not been successful with small groups of students and that student managed focus groups had been introduced as a more effective way of seeking student opinion. In these circumstances it was considered that a formal SSLC and student representation on programme management committees was not necessary, especially as with small numbers of postgraduate students regular communication was always taking place in informal ways. The audit team noted that the effectiveness of student consultation was a part of the annual monitoring process. Students indicated to the team that their voice was heard through these various mechanisms, that changes often resulted and that feedback was given.

165 The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities is suitable for the programmes leading to the postgraduate awards offered by the School of Psychological Sciences.

## **Section 4: The audit investigations: published information**

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

166 The accuracy and utility of published and issued information was discussed in meetings with officers of the University of Manchester Students' Union and students in each of the DATs. Students were asked about published information, both hard copy and on the intranet; information provided as part of their programmes, including information on regulations applicable to students; that supplied before they joined the University; and information available to them during and before engaging in an industrial placement. Students reported that the information provided was generally accurate, reliable and informative. The students the audit team met particularly praised the utility of the intranet and the quality of information supplied to them before they enrolled which allowed them to form an accurate and complete view of University life.

167 Students were generally satisfied with the completeness of programme handbooks and information available electronically, particularly the information on assessment, but noted that some handbooks might require updating.

168 From documentary evidence and meetings with staff and students, the audit team concluded that the SED provided an accurate account of the University's approach to published and other information for students. The team formed the view that the information provided to students about the University and their programmes of student was, in general, both clear and accessible.

**Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information**

169 The University publishes a wide range of publicly available information both through its website and in print form such as prospectuses, programme leaflets and handbooks. The extensive range of published information seen by the audit team during the audit included prospectuses and websites providing programme and University information, and unit and programme handbooks. The University regards its information about its provision to be 'complete and accurate', but admits that it 'cannot be as confident of this as we would like'.

170 Some technical difficulties with the University's website mean that the University is reliant to some extent on parts of the legacy websites of VUM and UMIST to provide information to staff and students. Some University web pages were labelled as 'interim', and many gave a warning about the accuracy of information. The University acknowledged that some information was out of date, however a web development project is taking the matter forward.

171 Based on meetings with staff and students and documentation made available by the University, the audit team found the University's currently published information to be broadly accurate and reliable.

172 Data for TQI publication are produced by the faculties, collated by the TLAO and signed off by the Vice-President for Teaching and Learning. In its SED the University reported that it was 'disappointed' by the low return of TQI external examiner summary reports for 2004-05 and has reviewed procedures to encourage a greater return, including a redesign of the report form so as to provide a summary appropriate for TQI reporting. A sampling of the data on the TQI website revealed that, although not complete with respect to external examiners' reports, in general, the University is at an advanced stage towards meeting the TQI requirements for information to be present and current.

# Findings



## Findings

173 An institutional audit of the University of Manchester (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 31 October 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility as a UK degree-awarding body. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and Universities UK (UUK), six audit trails were selected for scrutiny at the level of an academic discipline. This section of the report of the audit summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and recommendations to the University for enhancing current practice.

### **The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes**

174 Senate is the principal academic authority. Its responsibilities include the oversight and enhancement of academic standards and quality, and the development and review of academic strategy. The Vice President (Teaching and Learning) has executive responsibility for the conduct of business relating to quality and standards. Academic provision is delivered through 23 schools which are grouped into four faculties that take responsibility for approving, monitoring and reviewing the academic provision of their constituent schools, and the University maintains the framework of policies and procedures within which the faculties operate. The quality assurance aspects of Faculty work are assigned in large part to the Associate Dean and the Faculty Quality Administrator, with similar functions existing at school level.

175 The University strategic plan includes the provision of annual Operational Performance Reviews (OPR) as a key strategic management tool, to assess the progress of each Faculty and of Central Administration against key

performance indicators. The audit team found that the strategic mechanisms in place were strongly focused on the OPR, but did see other mechanisms operating such as quality and standards information feeding upwards, for example, from faculties and the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Office (TALO) to Quality Advisory Group (QAG) and Senate and also to elements of the OPR process.

176 New programmes are considered and approved by a two-stage process. During the first stage a summary proposal is presented to the Faculty for 'approval in principle' and the second stage involves detailed work on the curriculum. The faculty level approval is signed off by the Associate Dean and is forwarded to the TLAO who check that institutional guidelines have been followed. The audit team concluded that these processes are broadly sound and noted they were supported by clear and comprehensive guidelines for use by Faculty, School and central administrative staff that identify the roles of all involved.

177 A new procedure for annual monitoring was developed during 2004-05 and covers all University provision. The audit team noted the relatively early stages of implementation and considered that the procedures had the potential to be very effective overall. As the new procedures settle down, the University may wish to review the annual monitoring processes, and the upward reporting of key outcomes. This review might extend to the positioning and interactions with OPR activities.

178 The University identified plans for a new procedure for periodic review from September 2005. It would centre on the preparation and consideration of a self-evaluation document (SED) by the school/discipline concerned and include provision for a written submission by students. The review report includes commendations and recommendations for enhancement and is presented both to the relevant Faculty committee and to QAG. While there were few examples yet of the new process, the view of the audit team at this early stage was that periodic review was founded on good practice and had the potential to be effective.

179 A range of approaches is employed to gather student feedback. A unit-level survey is taken each semester and a programme level survey is taken towards the end of each academic year. The University aims to use this statistical information generated to help manage and improve academic provision through the OPR and annual monitoring processes. The view of school staff and students was that these surveys, as operated in the first year, were of limited value in respect of generating output information that reflected the actual situation on the ground. Local processes for seeking student views include formal representation on school committees and informal mechanisms such as personal tutor interactions. The audit team met with students in the discipline audit trails (DATs) and their view was that these local mechanisms were generally effective. The team concluded that, given the significance attached to student evaluation processes for strategic planning and academic review, it was desirable for the University to continue to review the purpose and effectiveness of student feedback mechanisms.

180 The University acknowledged that there was 'some way to go' before the new arrangements to manage the standards and quality of provision are fully implemented and understood. The audit team agreed with this and noted the short time that had been available for processes to become effective. It was able to evidence that much work had been progressed, but became aware of some variability of practice within and across faculties in respect of quality and standards and advised that the University continue to review and develop the institutional oversight of the quality and standards framework.

### **The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards**

181 The SED described the institutional frameworks for managing standards and quality as relating to structure and governance, management, planning and resources, strategic and operational planning, committees and staff networks, internal communication, staff and

student surveys and finally, external reference points. During the audit it also became clear that the University has in place a number of other frameworks for the maintenance of standards, notably, monitoring procedures, award regulations and the external examiner system. External examiners' reports are favourable about the quality and standards of the education provided. Procedures for considering the reports and responding to them are thorough.

182 Data on progression and other data relating to monitoring standards are largely produced at a local level and their use is somewhat variable. The University is installing a new record system, which is intended to provide more accurate and consistent management information to contribute to the monitoring of standards.

183 The findings of the audit team confirm that broad confidence can be placed in the University's current management of the standards of its awards. The team was cognisant of the fact that the University was still going through a period of rapid change following its formation from the two precursor universities, but concluded that it was handling the transition and development of its own structures, policies and procedures appropriately. The team therefore confirms that broad confidence can also be placed in the soundness of the University's future management of the standards of its awards.

### **The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning**

184 The level of resources available to both undergraduate and postgraduate students of the University is high. There was uniformly high praise from students for the quality of the teaching environment with particular mention being made of the library and computing facilities provided centrally and in the schools.

185 The University's provision for academic guidance, support and supervision of undergraduate and taught postgraduate students is generally of a high standard and

students were particularly complimentary about the great care that the University took in providing information and support for students before entry.

186 The audit team found, however, that the traditional personal tutoring scheme appeared to have been working in rather a patchy manner in the different schools with some students having a very positive experience while other had hardly any contact with their personal tutors. There was also a difference of opinion between students of different disciplines about the likely effectiveness of the proposed new personal tutoring system where specially trained administrative staff will take over the more pastoral part of the role previously played by members of the academic staff. It is recommended that the University should consider consulting further with schools and students to ensure that the new personal tutoring system provides consistent and effective support for students of all disciplines.

187 At postgraduate level, the responsibility for supporting teaching and learning lies primarily with the schools. The evidence seen by the audit team indicated that this was at the highest level with the research students that the team met being enthusiastic about the general research environment and the high quality support, supervision and guidance that they received both before and after entry.

188 The audit team found that the arrangements for personal support and guidance are comprehensive and effective. Students were appreciative of the accessibility and level of the pastoral support provided in the schools and by the University central services which work closely and effectively with the Students' Union. The Careers Service was repeatedly singled out for praise by students and provides a first class service to existing undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as recent graduates.

189 The audit team considered the following to be features of good practice: the high level of resources made available to support student learning; the high quality Careers Service

provided for students and recent graduates; the overall institutional pastoral support provided for students; the information and support provided for pre-entry students; and the support and environment for postgraduate research students, particularly at the local level.

## **Outcomes of discipline audit trails**

### **Biology**

190 The programme specifications set out appropriate educational aims and learning outcomes. These in turn were effectively linked to programme delivery and the assessment of students, although there is room for improvement in articulation of unit learning outcomes with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). In general, the programme specifications matched the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure. From its study of examples of assessed work, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the programmes was appropriate to the title of the awards and their location in the FHEQ.

191 The students who met the audit team commented in broadly positive terms about their experiences of the programmes as a whole. The Faculty is generally responsive to the concerns of students, although a review of the quality and timeliness of feedback that students receive on their written work, and of the provision of demonstrating staff, would be appropriate. The team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for the programmes of study leading to the Faculty's undergraduate awards.

### **Geography**

192 The IPR SED provided clear and useful information on how QAA's Academic Infrastructure has been taken into account in arrangements at the discipline level. The audit team found that the programme specifications conformed to the University template and were comprehensive and clear, and had considered the intentions of the relevant subject

benchmark and FHEQ. From its study of examples of assessed work, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the programmes was appropriate to the title of the awards and their location in the FHEQ.

193 Geography students were very complimentary about the learning resources and support that is available to them. Student representation in quality management arrangements looks fit for purpose. Based on the available evidence, the audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for the taught programmes of study leading to the named awards.

#### **Law**

194 The School of Law's quality assurance procedures are thorough and robust. There is appropriate externality in programme approval and internal review and the outcomes of the annual monitoring and internal review processes inform programme enhancement. The School makes effective use of its own statistical data in annual monitoring and review. External examiner reports are carefully considered and responses are made in a timely manner, with appropriate action being taken. From its study of examples of assessed work, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the programmes was appropriate to the title of the awards and their location in the FHEQ.

195 Students praised the academic and personal support available to them and, in particular, commended the provision of career planning advice and information. Students emphasised the high level of career-related and skills activity offered. Based on the available evidence, the audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for the taught programmes of study leading to the named awards.

#### **Linguistics**

196 The programme specifications were full, detailed and well articulated with the *Subject benchmark statement* for languages and related studies and made appropriate links to FHEQ. From its study of examples of assessed work, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the programmes was appropriate to the title of the awards and their location in the FHEQ.

197 Students praised the academic and personal support available to them and, in particular, commended approachability of staff and their unfailing timely response to emailed questions. Students have access to comprehensive and detailed information about their programmes through handbooks and the intranet. They are represented at school level and expressed the view that they were listened to when they expressed views through unit questionnaires. The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for the taught programmes of study leading to the named awards.

#### **Physics**

198 From its study of examples of assessed work, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the programmes was appropriate to the title of the awards and their location in the FHEQ. The programme specifications meet the expectations of the subject benchmark statement and the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

199 Students are given high levels of both academic and pastoral support and their progress is monitored carefully. Student evaluation of the provision is very favourable and there is a high standard of student achievement. Based on the available evidence, the audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for the taught programmes of study leading to the named awards.

## Psychology

200 From its study of examples of assessed work, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the programmes was appropriate to the title of the awards and their location in the FHEQ. However, the University should review its approach of having different Pass marks for the same (M) level of credit associated with postgraduate awards located at the same level in the FHEQ. Programme specifications lay out appropriate educational aims and learning outcomes and clearly describe the programme arrangements.

201 Student evaluation of the programme was generally very positive. Students were particularly complimentary about learning resources provided by their School and by the University. Students are consulted about their opinions on the programmes they are studying and their views are taken seriously and acted upon. Based on the available evidence, the audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for the taught programmes of study leading to the named awards.

## The use made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure

202 The University's awards are de facto aligned with the FHEQ largely because of the traditions of the precursor universities. However, the new University has not formally defined its academic awards against the FHEQ and has not produced guidance about levels and credit practice that are entirely consistent with the FHEQ. There are consequently some instances of regulations and practice that it would be advisable for the University to review, particularly relating to credit at a lower level contributing to the level above and differential pass marks for awards which are at the same level.

203 The University's response to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, has been generally satisfactory apart from *Section 6: Assessment of*

*students*. In this case a formally stated strategy leading to consistently applied policies and procedures mapped against the *Code of practice* has not been produced. While many instances of effective practice in the assessment of students were observed, there was significant variability and room for improvement in some instances, notably relating to feedback to students and the development of grade and marking criteria.

204 The University requires all programmes to be described in standard format programme specifications. These are comprehensive reference documents and, where relevant, make clear reference to subject benchmark statements.

## 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

205 The team considered that the SED provided a clear and useful description of the institution's approach to quality assurance and enhancement, and sound evidence of its capacity for self-evaluation. It describes the complex process of creating the new institution from the University of Manchester Institute for Science and Technology and Victoria University of Manchester through Project Unity, outlines the ambition to create new systems and processes informed by the best practice across the sector and inherited from both institutions, and describes how new quality assurance and enhancement processes are being established.

206 Inevitably, so soon after the creation of the new University, much remains work in progress or is still being discussed or planned, but both the SED and the accompanying strategic plan emphasise the ways in which the University seeks to be reflective and engage in evidence-based decision-making, particularly through the planning and accountability cycle, operational performance reviews, and stakeholder satisfaction surveys.

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

207 The enhancement agenda is extremely strong and is articulated in the strategic plan which includes a teaching and learning goal 'to provide students with teachers, learning environments, teaching and learning infrastructure and support services equal to the best in the world.' Faculty strategic plans include features concerned with teaching and learning, in which the broad goals and priorities for the University are articulated in local contexts. The University identified that one of the main approaches to assessing progress on enhancement was through the OPR, including the use of student and employer feedback. The audit team was of the view that it was too early to be able to form a judgement on the effectiveness of these intentions, but noted that the parallel activity of annual monitoring of quality and standards did not receive such detailed focus as the OPR activity, and indeed was not prominent in the SED as an enhancement facility.

### **Reliability of information**

208 The University publishes a wide range of publicly available information both through its website and in print form such as prospectuses, programme leaflets and handbooks. Students generally expressed high levels of satisfaction with the quality of information available to them.

209 The audit team formed the view that the information provided to students about the University and their programmes of study was generally accurate and reliable and noted the particular praise given to the quality of information supplied before enrolment. The University is at an advanced stage towards fulfilment of the Teaching Quality Information requirements.

210 A sampling of quantitative data available internally showed no evidence of unreliability or inaccuracy. Based on meetings with staff and students and documentation made available by

the University, the audit team found the University's currently published information to be broadly accurate and reliable, but noted that the University's web presence required consolidating and updating.

### **Features of good practice**

211 The following features of good practice were noted:

- i the high level of resources made available to support student learning (paragraphs 83 to 85)
- ii the support and environment for post graduate research students, particularly at the local level (paragraph 90)
- iii the information and support provided for pre-entry students (paragraph 91)
- iv the high quality Careers Service provided for students and recent graduates (paragraph 95)
- v the overall institutional pastoral support provided for students (paragraph 96).

### **Recommendations for action**

212 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- i review and develop the institutional oversight of quality and standards so that the University can assure itself that the framework is fit for purpose, that it operates effectively and is implemented consistently across the University
- ii review the University's current quality assurance procedures to ensure that they take full account of the purposes and intentions of the FHEQ (paragraphs 49-51)
- iii provide transparent and coherent policies and regulations in assessment, progression and award that align with the QAA's *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* and which are applied consistently across the University (paragraph 52).

213 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- iv develop more effective formal means of communication which allow identification and sign-posting of institutional information relating to quality assurance and enhancement to all levels of the institution (paragraph 28)
- v develop a more integrated institutional approach to the dissemination of good practice in learning, teaching and assessment, and to staff development planning and delivery (paragraphs 29; 75-76)
- vi continue to review the purpose and effectiveness of student feedback mechanisms, in particular the student survey (paragraphs 62 to 65)
- vii continue to develop corporate statistics systems and reporting tools that are fit for purpose and produce reliable and accurate data to inform quality assurance, enhancement and standards (paragraphs 66 to 69).

## **Appendix**

### **The University of Manchester's response to the audit report**

The University of Manchester welcomes the auditors' conclusion that broad confidence can be placed in the academic standards of its awards and in the present and future management of the quality of its programmes. The University is also pleased that the six Discipline Audit Trails fully supported this overall statement of confidence.

As the auditors noted, the University is still in its infancy and the quality management arrangements observed by the team were neither complete nor fully operational at the time of the audit visit. We acknowledge the recommendations of the auditors and find these helpful; most were anticipated in the self-evaluation document and are already part of our planned programme of work. An action plan is in place to manage this work.



