London Metropolitan University

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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.

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Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited London Metropolitan University (the University) from 16 to 20 May 2005 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

To arrive at its conclusions the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the University and 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 awards. 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 University's policies and practices in the field of staff development, training and support, in particular the work of the Centre for Academic Professional Development and the Teaching and Learning Technology Centre

- the University's active engagement in pedagogic research, and the contribution this makes to the enhancement of the quality of learning and teaching

- the University's strategic approach to addressing issues of retention, progression and achievement, as reflected in the innovative features of the Undergraduate Modular Scheme.

Recommendations for action

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

- undertake a review of its committee structure, at departmental as well as institutional level, to ensure that the structure as a whole fulfils its regulatory and deliberative functions in an effective and economical way

- proceed with its stated intention of establishing and embedding a holistic and streamlined quality framework which enables it to have complete confidence in the quality of the student experience across all areas of the institution

- continue to review and refine its collection, analysis and dissemination of management information, particularly relating to students, so as to ensure that its implications are thoroughly understood and addressed such that they contribute optimally to the University's enhancement agenda

- ensure that, throughout the institution, the reports of external examiners are fully and appropriately addressed, and that any consequential changes are communicated directly to the external examiners themselves

- require that its monitoring, reporting and action planning arrangements ensure that realistic deadlines are set and procedures completed in a timely manner.

Summary outcomes of discipline audit trails

The audit team looked at the following areas of provision: business studies, electronic and communications engineering, fine art, information systems, philosophy and politics to establish how well the University's systems and procedures are working at the discipline level. The University provided the team with documents, including student work, and the team spoke to staff and students. As well as confirming the overall confidence statements given above, the team considered that the standard of student achievement in the six discipline areas is appropriate to the title of the awards and their place in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The team considered the quality of the learning opportunities available to students is suitable for programmes of study leading to those 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 that help define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the audit suggest that the University has responded appropriately to the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements, programmes specifications and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, published by QAA.

In due course the institutional audit process will include a check on the reliability of the information set published by institutions in the format recommended in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) document, *Information on quality and standards in higher education* (HEFCE 02/15) and its successor HEFCE 03/51, *Final guidance*. The findings of the audit are that, at the time of the audit, the University was alert to the requirements set out in document HEFCE 02/15 and to the implications of document HEFCE 03/51, and was addressing its responsibilities in this respect.

Main report

Main report

1   An institutional audit of London Metropolitan University (the University) was undertaken from 16 to 20 May 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 the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and Universities UK (UUK), which has been endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills. For institutions in England, it replaces the previous processes of continuation audit, undertaken by QAA at the request of UUK and SCOP, and universal subject review, undertaken by QAA on behalf of HEFCE, as part of the latter's statutory responsibility for assessing the quality of education that it funds.

3   The audit checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of its academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study leading to those awards; and for publishing reliable information. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, the audit included consideration of examples of institutional processes at work at the level of the programme, through discipline audit trails (DATs), together with examples of those processes operating at the level of the institution as a whole. The scope of the present audit did not encompass collaborative arrangements leading to the University's awards, which will be the subject of a future, separate audit.

Section 1: Introduction: London Metropolitan University

The University and its mission

4   The University was formed in August 2002 from a merger between the University of North London and London Guildhall University (the heritage institutions). Operating on two campuses three miles apart, the University aims to be a unitary distributed organisation which it defines as having systems and academic structures that can be extended to wherever it operates. After a period of joint principalship the University now has a Vice-Chancellor as chief executive and accounting officer, and a non-executive President with a brief for external affairs and communications. The Vice-Chancellor chairs the Executive Group, which comprises the two deputy vice-chancellors, the Director of Human Resources and the Director of Finance (see paragraph 23). The Executive, together with all heads of academic and professional service departments, constitutes the Senior Management Group, a flat structure designed to facilitate communication among senior colleagues.

5   With a student population in excess of 33,000, of whom 70 per cent are undergraduates, 21 per cent postgraduates (of whom nearly 400 are research students) and the remainder in further education (FE), in terms of student numbers (some 45 per cent of its students being part-time) the University is one of the largest in the country. It is also a strong recruiter of international students, 21 per cent of the total originating from overseas, including 6 per cent from other European Union countries. In the academic year 2002-03 the University employed 3,818 staff (2,325 full-time equivalents (FTEs)), of whom 2,149 were academics. With 13 academic departments, most of which operate on both campuses, and one academic centre, the University is able to offer courses from sub-degree to postgraduate level and research supervision across a wide spectrum of subjects.

6   While not neglecting the international dimensions of its aspirations and achievements, the University perceives its mission as including the provision of such education and training as will help a diverse and predominantly London-based student population fulfil its potential and London succeed as a world city. In this context the University, which affirms its commitment to both personal development and social justice, prides itself on the diversity of its student base.

Black and ethnic minority students make up nearly 58 per cent of the population, over 4 per cent have declared disabilities and many come from low participation locations and high deprivation index areas.

7   The Strategic Plan for academic years 2003 to 2008 includes a series of operational sub-strategies being taken forward by groups led by senior managers. Current priorities include the effective integration of systems and procedures, achieving advances in efficiency and effectiveness, widening participation, improving student retention, progression and employability, and increasing services to industry, commerce and local communities. The University recognises that improving student retention and progression rates is among the most challenging of these aims, and its Retention, Progression and Achievement Group, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), is accountable directly to the Executive Group, reporting as appropriate to the Board of Governors and Academic Board.

Collaborative provision

8   The University is committed to a cautious planned expansion of collaborative provision, with a preference for large-scale, institutionally-led links with partner institutions. Since, in the London region, most partner bodies are seen as providing access to higher education (HE), the collaborative strategy is linked to the University's widening participation agenda. In view of the size and complexity of collaborative provision, however, it has been agreed that it will be the subject of a separate audit. Accordingly it features only incidentally in this report.

Background information

9   The published information available to the audit team included information on the University's website, including its undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses, the reports of continuation audits of the two heritage institutions, published in 2000 and 2001, and the reports of all subject level reviews and developmental engagements of the merged institution.

10   The University initially provided QAA with an institutional self-evaluation document (SED), and appendices, discipline self-evaluation documents (DSEDs) for each of the six selected DATs and supporting information. This information included details of the governance structure, membership and terms of reference of key committees, the Quality Assurance Handbook, Academic Regulations for undergraduate and postgraduate provision, and details of the University Undergraduate Modular Scheme (UUMS) and the Postgraduate Scheme. In addition, the University provided the results of student satisfaction surveys conducted in academic years 2002-03 and 2003-04, a CD-ROM containing course and unit monitoring data for academic year 2003-04, and access to its web-based knowledge management system.

11   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 electronically, and to a range of documentation relating to the selected DATs, including examples of assessed work. The team was also grateful to be provided with distant intranet access before the briefing visit and between that visit and the audit proper.

The audit process

12   Following a preliminary meeting at the University, QAA confirmed that six DATs would be conducted during the audit visit. QAA received the SED in January 2005, and on the basis of this and other published information the audit team confirmed that the DATs would focus on business studies, electronic and communications engineering, fine art, information systems, philosophy and politics. The DSEDs were received in March 2005. The SED and DSEDs were written specifically for the audit.

13   At the preliminary meeting, students of the University were invited, through the Students' Union (SU), to submit a separate document expressing views on the student experience, and identifying matters relevant to the quality of programmes and the academic standards of awards. They were also invited to give their views on the level of representation afforded to

them and on the extent to which their views are noted and acted upon. In generating the students' written submission (SWS) the SU consulted widely within the University, mainly by means of a student survey which formed the basis for its account of student views. The SWS was received by QAA in January 2005 on a non-confidential basis. The audit team is grateful to those responsible for preparing it.

14   A briefing visit was conducted at the University on 4 to 6 April 2005. The purpose of the visit was to explore with the Vice-Chancellor, senior members of staff and student representatives matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the SED and other documents provided. At the end of the visit a programme of meetings was submitted to the University in preparation for the audit visit itself. The audit team did not select any area for thematic enquiry.

15   The audit visit took place on 16 to 20 May 2005, and included meetings with groups of staff and students both centrally and in relation to the DATs. The audit team comprised Dr R Davison, Professor N Goddard, Dr A Gregory, Professor P Hicks, Professor G Hurd, Professor A Walker and Mr N Wiseman, auditors, and Ms S Welham, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor R Harris, Assistant Director.

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

16   The present audit is the first occasion on which the University has been subject to external institutional audit. While reports of continuation audits of the two heritage institutions were published in 2000 and 2001, QAA has decided that the size, shape and distinctiveness of the new institution make it difficult to relate the findings of previous audits to current practice. Hence this report does not track issues arising from the continuation audits of the University of North London or London Guildhall University, albeit that the University did appropriately refer to such issues in its SED.

17   It follows that this audit took place in special circumstances. In particular, much of the evidence for the audit consisted of the transitional arrangements designed to secure the University's operation, the academic year in which the audit took place being the first in which significant elements of the academic framework were operational; although other elements were by that time better established.

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The University's view as expressed in the SED

18   In its SED the University claimed to have confidence in its ability to maintain the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. It referred in particular to its quality management strategy for academic years 2004 to 2006, which defines a range of key terms and establishes the principles underpinning its approach to maintaining and improving quality and standards. Four strategic goals were defined, one of which is the Quality 2006 initiative, within which the expertise and commitment of academic staff are identified as the most important features. The aim is to develop by 2006 a new generation of quality procedures comparable to those of national systems and those overseas, and which are smart, holistic and attuned to business and organisational development.

19   The University expressed the view that the assurance of quality and standards becomes increasingly reliable the closer it is to the point of delivery, and considers its system of departmental quality committees and quality representatives ensures accountability at departmental level. At institutional level the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) exercises oversight of, and, particularly through the Quality Assurance Handbook, provides guidance on, quality assurance matters, including the University's engagement with the Academic Infrastructure.

20   The University believes standards are ultimately articulated, realised and measured through the assessment process operating within a transparent and robust framework. Academic Regulations are a key element of this framework. These, described by the University as clear and authoritative, are designed to encourage progression and achievement, to control the assessment process and to sustain academic standards. The UUMS, introduced at the beginning of the academic year in which the audit was conducted and operational only for students not undertaking heritage programmes of study, is another key component of the framework, as is the postgraduate scheme that was introduced in September 2003. In a reflection of the University's commitment to making its programmes of study relevant to the lives of its students, UUMS in particular is so designed as to have an employability strand running through each year of study. The University stated in its SED that critical attention has also been given to the roles of external and internal examiners and the functions of both tiers of the assessment process (subject standards boards and a University Awards Board), which it regards as a central means of delivering its commitment to both academic standards and fairness.

21   The University claimed in its SED to be maintaining the long-standing and embedded tradition of its heritage institutions in seeking and heeding external advice in respect of quality and standards. It cited as evidence for this its decision to invite senior members of a range of universities to sit on its overarching Awards Board and make judgements about its academic standards.

The University's framework for managing quality and standards

22   The University noted in its SED that transitional arrangements for the management of quality and standards were based on the frameworks of the heritage institutions. During this period the University initiated a wide range of exercises designed to integrate systems, harmonise regulations and establish a common framework. A single Quality Assurance

Handbook, subsequently amended, was first published in 2003 as a comprehensive guide to its quality assurance structures and procedures; postgraduate provision was harmonised for new entrants in academic year 2003-04 and undergraduate provision a year later.

23   Although the University has a President with a brief for external affairs and communications, the Vice-Chancellor is Chief Executive and responsible to the Board of Governors for the strategic and operational management of the University. The Vice-Chancellor heads a small Executive Group, comprising the two deputy vice-chancellors, the Director of Human Resources and the Director of Finance. Members of the Group act as line managers for the heads of the 14 academic departments and the directors of the main professional service departments and functions.

24   Academic Board is the University's supreme academic body. One of its three subcommittees, Academic Development Committee (ADC), has responsibility for taught provision; QSC, which reports to ADC, is responsible for overseeing the quality and standards framework. The audit team confirms that the quality procedures described in the Handbook engage appropriately with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*), published by QAA, although at the time of the audit visit some of these procedures had yet to be implemented.

25   The University stated in its SED that it anticipates introducing a streamlined committee system for academic year 2005-06 but did not explore the rationale for this change. A series of consultation papers to Academic Board between 2002 and 2005 reported concerns about bureaucratic processes, top-down communications and costs of a committee system. However, the audit team learned that in response to the consultation a decision had been made to defer further consideration of the committee structure for reasons which included concerns that streamlining would impose heavier workloads on remaining committees, lead to

increased numbers of informal meetings and that more time was needed before making further changes. While acknowledging that many committee systems are susceptible to the criticisms which surfaced through the consultation process, in the team's view these were, in this case, of sufficient weight to convince it that the University should resume its review of the structure. This view was reinforced by the particular case of QSC which is prone to late circulation of papers, heavy workloads and reliance on a core of senior staff and administrators for the conduct of business. The University is therefore advised to pursue its stated intention to review the committee structure, at departmental as well as institutional level, to ensure that the structure as a whole fulfils its regulatory and deliberative functions in an effective and economical way.

26   The Department of Quality and Standards (DQS), comprising the Quality Unit, Academic Audit Unit, Partnerships Office and Secretariat, provides the infrastructure for quality assurance, collaborative provision, external engagements, quality-related information (including teaching quality information (TQI)) and Academic Regulations; the Department of Academic Administration, together with the undergraduate and postgraduate centres, deals with almost all aspects of student administration. DQS deals with academic appeals by students and cases of academic misconduct. In addition, in academic year 2004-05 the University introduced a Quality Network, designed to embrace a wide cross-section of staff with the aims of producing institution-wide consistency in quality matters, fostering departments' sense of responsibility and accountability and establishing positive relationships with DQS. While noting that the University's departmental quality representatives consider the Network useful thus far, the audit team is conscious of the level of pressure currently experienced by some departments in meeting the expectations of the quality framework. It accordingly encourages the University to keep the Network under review, to ensure that it does not inadvertently contribute to increasing the complexity of its quality framework.

27   The University's commitment to locating operational responsibility for quality and standards as close as possible to the point of delivery gives academic departments a pivotal role in the quality and standards framework. Departmental quality committees (DQCs), chaired by departmental quality representatives, are responsible for ensuring compliance with relevant policies, regulations and procedures, and for coordinating departmental review and validation activities. The audit team confirms the importance the SED ascribed to the work of quality representatives, but notes that there is no University job description for this role. It appeared to the team that departmental heads, while under considerable pressure in the period since the merger, have taken a conscientious and generally successful approach to quality management.

28   Academic Regulations reflect the University's widening participation agenda in terms of both its strategic approach to retention, progression and achievement, and to academic standards. The Assessment Framework contains extensive discussion of assessment principles, access to materials and examples of good practice in areas such as assessment design, marking and feedback, and is cross-referenced to the relevant section of the *Code of practice*. In respect of academic standards, the University stated in its SED that the newly prepared Regulations are designed to treat students equitably, encourage progression and achievement, and exercise rigorous control of assessment and academic standards. In the view of the audit team they meet these aims, and external examiners' reports confirm the appropriateness of the standards of awards. Although some programmes of study, mainly professionally accredited programmes with exceptional completion dates, are currently outside the scope of the University Awards Board, the team is confident that the further work necessary to bring all awards within the scope of the Regulations will be promptly undertaken.

29   Assessment procedures begin with departmental subject standards boards which undertake a range of standards-setting functions and confirm marks on a defined group of modules. External examiners are asked to

comment on the effectiveness of procedures for agreeing examination papers, other assessment instruments and marking schemes, and on the conduct of the boards themselves. Since academic year 2004-05 a single University Awards Board, with a remit to monitor and report on assessment policy, has received confirmed marks from subject standards boards, and confirms awards on a non-discretionary basis. External examiners appointed to the Awards Board ensure compliance with institutional procedures and the standards of the awards, and are asked to comment on the management of the procedures themselves and on whether assessment regulations accord with good practice across the sector.

30   The University claimed in its SED that student assessment data are robust and the assessment system is consistent and equitable and, although at the time of the audit visit the University Awards Board had met only once, external examiners expressed confidence in data and procedure and in the software and algorithms for classifications. While it would be premature to comment on the efficacy of the new arrangements, the audit team considers them conscientiously designed and implemented, and to have the potential to provide a systematic and comprehensive picture of student performance and standards.

31   The University claimed in its SED to be planning to achieve a holistic quality system by aligning its procedures more closely to mission and strategic direction, making them cost-effective and basing them on best risk management practice. The audit team formed the view that further work is needed to ensure the quality framework is fit for purpose, noting the tension between the principle of locating quality assurance close to the point of delivery and the procedures currently in place. Accordingly, the University is advised to proceed with its stated intention to establish and embed a holistic and streamlined quality framework enabling it to have complete confidence in the quality of the student experience across all areas of the University.

The University's intentions for the enhancement of quality

32   In its SED the University, which defines enhancement in terms of the further development of course design, pedagogy, assessment and services to students, identified its quality enhancement agenda as a particular strength. In support of its association of enhancement with its learning and teaching strategy, the University noted that two staff are national teaching fellows, that it has made two successful Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning bids and introduced a fund to stimulate academic development, and that its pedagogic research reflects and contributes to its learning and teaching agenda. In particular, the Centre for Academic and Professional Development (CAPD), open to both departments and individuals, promotes and supports good practice and innovation in learning and teaching and curriculum development through activities such as workshops, an annual learning and teaching conference and an in-house journal. CAPD also plays a central role in providing staff development to promulgate new practices, policies and procedures, an activity especially valuable during the harmonisation process.

33   The University has continued to be active in furthering its enhancement agenda, and the audit team noted a number of developments introduced since the production of the SED, including an action plan to respond to the most recent student satisfaction survey and a clarification of its intentions for reviewing and streamlining its committee and quality assurance structures along the lines described above (see paragraph 25). Overall, in the view of the team, both the CAPD and the pedagogic research conducted within the institution are important components in the University's realisation of its enhancement objectives through its learning and teaching strategy, and constitute features of good practice.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

34   Until 2004, review and approval were subsumed in the harmonisation exercises, but the audit team noted that at the time of the visit some new procedures described in the current Quality Assurance Handbook had not been implemented. In addition, the Quality Management Strategy 2004-06 indicates that the University proposes to introduce a new generation of procedures in the course of 2006.

35   The audit team was able to track the approval with conditions of a comprehensive postgraduate scheme in November 2004 which followed a procedure which appeared to the team adequate to safeguard quality and standards. The system involves externality, and external panel members expressed confidence in both processes and outcomes. Consideration of the undergraduate scheme took place with a thorough approval mechanism involving independently chaired departmental panels with external representation. Approval events did not normally include meetings with students, although due consideration was given to student support and guidance. The University's evaluation of these events acknowledged the tensions accompanying the procedure as well as the challenges arising from the scale and time frame of the exercise, which it stressed, do not reflect its intentions for future quality management.

36   The audit team is satisfied that the harmonisation exercises safeguarded quality and standards and were consistent both with the principles for review and validation contained in the 2004 Quality Assurance Handbook and with relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*. The team also noted that the UMS contains innovative features designed to support student progression, attainment and employability, and reflects a strategic approach to these issues which the team considers constitute a feature of good practice. The evaluation of the undergraduate exercise provided by the University was characteristically candid about the tensions between central direction and departmental autonomy that had accompanied the process and problems of deadlines,

workloads and closing out of conditions that had arisen due to the pressures on all those involved in such a large-scale exercise. The University also stated that the conventional approach to review and approval adopted in these events, though judged to be necessary, was onerous and not a reflection of its intentions for quality management in future. These observations further buttress the team's view that the University should proceed with its stated intentions of establishing and embedding a holistic and streamlined quality framework within which realistic deadlines can be set.

37   A single system for annual monitoring, adopted in academic year 2003-04, sets out a reporting sequence built on module, course and summary departmental monitoring reports. All these utilise external examiner and student feedback, as well as subject standards board reports on progression and attainment based on the Planning Office's analysis of trend data. Course monitoring reports are subject to detailed scrutiny by course committees, and also by the appropriate departmental quality committee, which makes recommendations to the head of department prior to final approval. Summary departmental monitoring reports are also submitted to QSC, a procedure leading ultimately to recommendations being made to Academic Board.

38   The University acknowledged in its SED that problems had been encountered in the course of the monitoring of academic year 2002-03, and explained how they had been addressed. In a supplement to its SED the University claimed that the monitoring exercise for academic year 2003-04 was almost complete; nonetheless, significant slippages have again occurred, leading to deadlines for submission of departmental reports to QSC being twice deferred. This in turn had a significant impact on subject standards boards, which in some cases were unable to meet external examiners to scrutinise student progression and attainment prior to making their annual certification of maintenance of degree standards. This caused further difficulties, since the certifications require

verification by external examiners before being signed off. The advice given to boards in the light of the revised deadlines included the option of retrospective ratification of a draft report to be sent to external examiners for written comment or 'other ways' board chairs 'may have devised'.

39   The audit team explored these issues, particularly in the DATs, and concluded that the University has yet to resolve all its annual monitoring problems. One department had not submitted an annual monitoring report for academic year 2003-04 by May 2005; another report was too late to be considered in the QSC overview report dated 11 May 2005; the QSC report identified six departmental overview reports that did not confirm closing the loop in respect of actions taken in response to student feedback and external examiners' reports; and a number of departmental reports raised concerns about the procedure itself, referring to problems of deadlines, congestion, overlap, the need for realistic timescales and the limited value of postgraduate course data.

40   While departmental reports and DATs provide evidence that academic standards have been maintained and departments exercise proper oversight of the quality of the student learning experience, annual monitoring exemplifies the challenges facing the University as it develops its quality management framework. These include the extent of the confidence it can have that its procedures to provide accurate and timely information about the quality of the student experience, the setting of realistic deadlines for completion of procedures, ensuring that the reports of all external examiners are addressed and the collection, analysis and dissemination of management information, all matters to which the University is advised to continue to give attention.

41   The University reported in its SED its plans to adopt a three-tiered approach to periodic review, involving periodic department reviews based on self-evaluation and peer judgement, subject level reviews to assure academic standards and the quality of the student experience and as preparation for external

scrutiny, and thematic audits, principally to identify and address cross-institutional issues. Separate arrangements are being made for the review of professional service departments. At the time of the audit, however, no departmental reviews had taken place, nor had a pilot subject level review from which the University had promised the team a report; and a pilot thematic audit of employability, a report of which had also been promised, was, only at a preliminary stage at the time of the audit visit.

42   The audit team, noting the deferral of a number of proposed new procedures and mindful of the University's problems in embedding its annual monitoring processes, scrutinised a schedule of departmental and subject reviews shortly to be considered by Academic Board. The team was concerned that introducing this schedule in conjunction with possible thematic audits, reviews of professional service departments and the substantial actions necessary in the wake of harmonisation and the undergraduate and postgraduate schemes risked placing considerable pressure on both departments and the quality management framework. The team was especially concerned to explore how the procedures contained in the 2004 Quality Assurance Handbook were to be translated into the 2006 framework, and how the introduction of the proposed range of reviews would be consistent with the achievement of cost-effectiveness. In its meetings with senior staff the team was advised that the former would be the building blocks of the latter and that department reviews could be conducted on a light touch basis. The team noted, however, that this would necessitate considerable modifications to the Handbook's current extensive requirements.

43   The SED, while pointing to some areas where further work is needed, expressed more confidence in the progress made towards embedding procedures for periodic review, approval and annual monitoring than the audit team found evidence for. Overall, therefore, the team formed the view that, while the University can be confident that processes are beginning to become embedded, it should not

underestimate the continuing support and developmental work needed to enable departments to meet its present quality assurance requirements. The team was concerned that the conjunction of partially embedded current procedures, intended new procedures for academic year 2005-06 and the proposed new quality framework for academic year 2006-07 will not be deliverable. The University is therefore advised to reconsider its timetable, ensuring that realistic deadlines are set so that procedures can be put in place in a timely manner; and to proceed with its stated intention of establishing and embedding a holistic and streamlined quality framework.

External participation in internal review processes

44   In its SED the University expressed confidence in its use of external participation in its quality procedures. The oversight of appointments by the DQS is designed to ensure appropriate independence, and the audit team found extensive evidence of the involvement of peers of appropriate experience and seniority from a range of HE institutions. For harmonisation external members were appropriately involved in both the postgraduate and the undergraduate exercises. Clear requirements are in place for the appointment of external members to all validation and review panels, and will apply to future department and subject level reviews. The team confirms that participation by external advisers in the harmonisation exercises and in procedures for approving new courses has been, and continues to be, scrupulous and effective.

External examiners and their reports

45   Procedures for appointing external examiners to either tier of the examining system (see paragraph 153) are set out in the Quality Assurance Handbook. An Examiners Group considers nominations and makes recommendations to the QSC, which has delegated powers to appoint. External examiners' roles, together with those of internal examiners, are specified in an Examiners' Handbook, which specifies and explains the

assessment regulations and provides a comprehensive list of pertinent University documents. In addition the University provides external examiners with substantial briefing materials, including a CD-ROM, as well as face-to-face meetings. All newly appointed external examiners are invited to visit the relevant department to meet staff and students and discuss curriculum and assessment issues.

46   In addition to considering and finalising module marks, subject standards boards have an annual monitoring role, considering a three-year run of retention, achievement and progression data, a task in which they are aided by a CD-ROM produced by the Planning Office. Although the late production of the CD-ROM contributed to slippage in the timing of the boards in the last academic year, the audit team was assured that this problem will not recur. Subject external examiners receive, and are invited to comment on, draft examination papers and coursework specifications, and moderate a full range sample of double-marked student work for each module. The team confirms that it saw evidence of double marking having taken place.

47   External examiners' reports are circulated to key individuals, including relevant course leaders and the head of department, who is responsible for responding to urgent issues. External examiners' reports inform course leaders' contributions to course monitoring reports which in turn inform annual departmental monitoring reports. Required actions are specified in course action plans.

48   The audit team noted some variability of practice in the method of responding to external examiners' reports. In some instances a personalised letter is sent (albeit in some cases several months after receipt of the report) detailing the response being made. In other cases the response is by means of the course monitoring report, where production delays sometimes occur. The team noted that not all issues raised by external examiners are invariably addressed in course monitoring reports; in several instances the fact that QSC has been unable to assure itself that action has

been taken on matters arising in external examiners' reports has led it to insist that assurances be given in the near future. Accordingly, while the team was somewhat reassured by the institutional recognition of the need to improve and make more transparent the information flow to external examiners, it advises the University to consolidate and insist on adherence to its protocols for processing external examiners' reports, including operational procedures for identifying, actioning and recording all issues raised in order to ensure that their reports are fully and appropriately addressed, and that any consequential changes are communicated directly to the external examiners themselves.

49   In its SED the University expressed confidence in its procedures for handling assessment boards and external examiners, identifying the monitoring role of subject standards boards as a key strength. While noting that the boards' monitoring reports are data-rich, the audit team, noting from board minutes that the quality and extent of discussion of these data are variable, encourages the University to deepen its analysis, using it to identify good practice as well as to address and remedy sources of concern. Overall the team formed the view that the University's use of external examiners contributes to the maintenance of standards, with appropriate use being made of them at the point of summative assessment.

External reference points

50   Responsibility for overseeing and managing the University's alignment with external reference points lies with the Academic Audit Unit and the Academic Audit Steering Group. The former, which lies within the DQS, is responsible for ensuring that the University is aligned with and fully cognisant of the norms and expectations of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. The latter, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and constituted under the QSC, oversees the operational management of external reviews, including ensuring that appropriate responses are made to all recommendations. The audit team noted that at validation events panels

are required to ensure that proposals take into account *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), the *Code of practice* and relevant subject benchmark statements; course specifications are routinely provided in documentation.

51   The University claimed in its SED that its Academic Regulations are, with the exception of conversion diplomas (where work to place them at honours level is continuing), compliant with the FHEQ, that its infrastructure and procedures engage fully with the precepts of relevant sections of the *Code of practice* and that benchmark statements are effectively used. While it acknowledged that further work is required to bring sandwich placements into full alignment with the relevant section of the *Code*, the audit team noted that arrangements for this have been incorporated into the Undergraduate Development Plan for the period 2004 to 2007. The University also claimed that its Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning Board is fully cognisant of, and works within, QAA *Guidelines on the Accreditation of Prior Learning*; in addition its Student Services Department has been judged to have achieved the Matrix Standard.

52   Overall the University makes extensive use of relevant sections of the *Code of practice*, ensuring that procedures are aligned with the *Code* and using it as a source of guidance in addressing perceived procedural weaknesses. While the audit team notes that the University has identified the need for further consideration of the *Code* as it affects collaborative provision, it is aware that it will in due course be subject to a collaborative provision audit. This apart, the team considers institutional procedures are appropriately aligned with the *Code*. In addition, course specifications seen by the team were well produced and constructively deployed, and benchmark statements are consistently used as a reference point in curriculum design and monitoring.

53   The audit team is therefore satisfied, on the basis of its enquiries, that the University engages appropriately and responsibly with the Academic Infrastructure, and that it meets all formal obligations in this respect.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

54   The University has had two subject reviews in the period covered by this report: law (May 2004) and computing (June 2004). In each case the reports expressed confidence in academic standards, particularly commending the quality of teaching and learning and learning resources, although with recommendations which included clarifying arrangements for academic guidance, improving the presentation of statistics for annual monitoring and addressing some high attrition rates. The audit team is satisfied that all matters identified in the reports are being appropriately addressed, and that the University carefully considers, and takes actions in response to, the findings of external reports.

55   The University has voluntarily submitted itself to, and has completed the first stage of, a Universities Safety Association accreditation commission's procedures. The audit team noted that the report emanating from this process is positive in tone, commending a number of features of institutional provision, including the University's strategic approach to widening participation. The team confirms that the University's engagement with a wide range of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRB) is supported by the database maintained by the Department of Quality and Standards, the work of departmental quality committees in considering and addressing PSRB reports and the central oversight of the Academic Audit Steering Group, which may report directly to Academic Board on issues of particular moment or concern.

Student representation at operational and institutional levels

56   Since the merger, when the University involved student representatives in a wide range of task groups intended to develop institutional strategy, it has sought to engage the student body, primarily but not exclusively through the SU, in its deliberative committees. Students are, therefore, involved in a wide variety of such committees, including the Board of Governors, on which the SU President sits ex officio, and departmental course committees, where representation is mandatory. While both the SU and University consider this involvement vital, the SWS reported mixed experiences on the part of representatives, with some committees perceived as significantly more welcoming and facilitative of student contributions than others. In addition, some representatives claimed to feel insufficiently well trained to be able to participate fully and confidently in committee business.

57   In the context of the varied make-up of the student body, a significant number of whose members are in employment and commute from home, the University and SU have experienced difficulty in gaining student representation at course level. The element of student disengagement resulting from this is repeated in the results of a survey undertaken for the SWS (see also paragraphs 62, 78, 81 and 138), from which can be discerned relatively low levels of awareness of, and confidence in, the teaching quality feedback system, in spite of the fact that the Quality Assurance Handbook outlines the mechanisms to be followed.

58   To address student representation at course and department level, in partnership with the University, the SU undertook a review of student representation during academic year 2003-04. The main outcome was the StARs (Student Academic Representative) scheme, designed to help define and provide support to student representatives, in particular by means of improved training and a bespoke Handbook, implemented in academic year 2004-05. However, student representatives informed the audit team that, in spite of the SU efforts, the scheme has in their view had varying degrees of take-up at departmental level.

59   Although the introduction of the StARs scheme aims to address student representation difficulties at course level, the recent nature of such efforts renders them as yet impossible to evaluate, other than to say that the departmental response thus far has been patchy. At institutional level, although the mechanisms for engaging the student body through the SU are more firmly embedded, further work might appropriately focus on

encouraging some members of academic staff to understand the importance of student representation and to engage more actively in supporting and encouraging it.

60   While the audit team believes the initiatives introduced in academic year 2004-05 have the potential to achieve an effective system of student representation, it would be premature to assess the likelihood of this potential being realised. The evidence thus far available, however, suggests that the University has some way to go to identify and implement its preferred methods of engaging with its particular clientele. The team anticipates, however, that it will continue to seek to do so as part of its enhancement agenda and in the interest of securing a consistently and reliably high quality of student experience across both campuses.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

61   It is an institutional requirement for module leaders to obtain student feedback on learning and teaching on a standard pro forma which, however, permits some customisation. Feedback thus elicited is used by course committees as an important part of monitoring. The audit team scrutinised questionnaires in different discipline areas, and its own enquiries suggest that student input into quality assurance is taken seriously and responsive action communicated to students.

62   The results of the survey conducted as part of the SWS do not, however, entirely support this view, which, nonetheless, broadly reflects that expressed by both the University and students who met the audit team. Over 40 per cent of respondents to the SU survey claimed not to have been asked for feedback, over 80 per cent claimed not to know how the feedback was utilised and some 65 per cent expressed scepticism as to the use to which the University would put the data. The team is not able, from its enquiries, to reconcile these differences, but assumes that the University will, as resources permit, undertake its own investigations.

63   At institutional level the University issues biannual student satisfaction surveys to monitor

the quality of services and for enhancement purposes. The results are circulated to all professional service and academic departments, whose responses contribute to their action plans. In the view of the audit team, the institutional level analysis of student satisfaction is careful, thorough and meticulously followed-up by targeted action plans, although evidence from the DATs suggests that departmental-level responses are more variable. The team also noted the progress being made in refining the uses of student feedback data which now include reporting back to students through the SU, and incorporating such data in departmental action plans.

64   The audit team was a little surprised to note, given the institutional priority to retention and progression, that little attempt is made to obtain information from students whose studies have been terminated or those who have withdrawn from the University. Similarly, while the Alumni Association enables the University to maintain links with its graduates, with a few exceptions little systematic effort is made to collect feedback either from them or from employers. Although the team was given information on a range of initiatives undertaken to research the employability of graduates, including the HEFCE-funded Graduate Employability Project and the Employer Liaison Forum, it believes further consideration could beneficially be given to the collection of feedback from employers and graduates.

Progression and completion statistics

65   Since the academic year 2002-03 annual monitoring at both departmental and institutional levels has been informed by cohort data delivered on CD-ROM by the University Planning Office. In its SED the University portrayed this as a sophisticated means of facilitating the retrospective monitoring of student progression, achievement and employment, both comparatively (since it sets institutional against national data) and substantively. The audit team found the data widely used in institutional, departmental and course monitoring, but noted that their utility is somewhat diminished by problems of timing

(provision of the CD-ROM is not wholly synchronised with the annual monitoring round), training (which, although currently available, could with advantage be extended) and reliability (the practice, common among many students, of switching between full and part-time modes of study interspersed with periods of intercalation has proved as challenging for those responsible for capturing the data as for those charged with analysing it or addressing the implications). This latter problem affects the University's strategic priority of enhancing retention, progression and achievement, since the provision, interrogation and utilisation of robust data are essential for targeted action to be effective and benchmark objectives achieved.

66   All academic departments have retention, progression and achievement targets, and have identified action points, in some cases strikingly imaginative ones, to identify students at risk of non-completion. Equally, the University has initiated actions, including HE orientation modules, aimed at reducing early attrition. While the University claimed in its SED that, with its 28 per cent wastage rate converging with the 24 per cent national benchmark figure, retention is improving, the audit team noted a continued decline in the pass rate in some areas. Noting that studies commissioned by the University identify the reasons for non-completion as complex and multi-causal, the team broadly concurs with the conclusion of a 2004 QAA academic review report that statistical evidence can make only a partial contribution to progress monitoring. Accordingly, while the team endorses the University's attempts to improve the efficacy of progression data it cautions realism as to their sufficiency, encouraging departments and others to continue to supplement them with both qualitative exploration of the reasons for wastage, which may vary from area to area and over time, and by disseminating successful strategies as a contribution to achieving flexible and targeted intervention.

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

67   The University described in its SED how, in line with its widening access mission, its intended staffing profile will in future more closely reflect its diverse student population. Interview panels receive training, including sessions for developing best practice for diversity, all appointments are monitored to ensure compliance with equal opportunities legislation and all senior appointment boards are chaired by the Vice-Chancellor or a deputy vice-chancellor.

68   Institutional and departmental induction is available for new staff. Induction programmes are well attended, and meetings with staff confirmed their value. The University operates a probationary scheme, successful completion of which is signed off by the Vice-Chancellor. Staff appraisal (known as the performance appraisal, development and award scheme) takes place annually, although the University acknowledged in its SED that the scheme, which is also used both to identify staff who have made an outstanding contribution to learning and teaching and to consider nominations for national teaching fellowships, has yet to be adopted by all departments. The Staff Handbook includes details of advancement possibilities and rewards, examples of which include incremental progression, opportunities for promotion from lecturer to senior lecturer and performance related pay schemes. Opportunities for professorial conferment are listed in the document Guidance on Professorial Roles (2005), and are available to research and non-research active staff.

69   At present a key item on the University's human resource agenda is the aftermath of assimilation of staff posts following merger. The University claims to view this as a complex operation which has, for the most part, progressed without significant impact on day-to-day operations or the student experience. The University acknowledged in its SED, however, and the Vice-Chancellor subsequently confirmed to the audit team, that some problems, notably an

unresolved dispute, remain, and both staff and students who met the team referred to the protracted nature of this dispute and its disproportionate impact on one campus. Overall, the University, while believing its staffing procedures to be robust, recognises that human resource management is a continuing process rather than a time-bounded event. The team reviewed aspects of the planning and implementation of transitional arrangements, and acknowledges the volume and complexity of what has been achieved. Nonetheless, while staffing assimilation has been completed formally, institutional and departmental meetings demonstrated that much remains to be done, in terms, for example, of supporting staff through culture change, workload pressures and the adoption of new procedures.

70   On the basis of its enquiries the audit team confirms the University's view of the strength of its staffing procedures and the thoroughness of guidelines and documentation available to applicants and interview teams. Induction, which offers a wide-ranging introduction to University life, has been greatly appreciated by staff with experience of it; in 2004 two national teaching fellows were appointed. The team was also made aware, however, that there is within the institution a perception among some staff that decision-making is heavily centralised, that their views are not always valued or taken account of, and that this has had an indirect effect on some aspects of their educational engagement with students. While the team appreciates that this perception may be common to many large institutions it especially encourages the University to ensure that staff continue to be supported through this period of rapid change, and that its emerging communications strategy encourages an effective and collegial process of two-way communication that will further staff engagement and commitment, and thus contribute to the enhancement of the quality of the student experience.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

71   The University's strategy of taking an integrated approach to staff management and support includes making the implementation of staff development policy the responsibility of a steering group chaired by the Director of Human Resources. In addition to the Staff Development Unit itself, the key organisations for staff development are the CAPD and the Teaching and Learning Technology Centre (TLTC). CAPD, an academic support unit, provided extensive support during the transitional period, including briefing sessions, awaydays, workshops and advice to individual staff in the production of course and module specifications. Currently, it promotes good practice, develops innovation and scholarship in learning, teaching and curriculum development, and identifies teaching excellence within the University and nationally. Its successful professional courses, tailored to the experience of staff, include a Certificate (of Credit) in Teaching Skills, aimed at hourly paid staff and research students and a Postgraduate Certificate and MA in Learning and Teaching. TLTC provides bespoke and published programmes of training and expert advice on the use of information and communications technology in teaching; its impact is apparent in the fact that over 1,000 staff attended its sessions on the use of the University's virtual learning environment (VLE) between September 2004 and May 2005.

72   The University stated in its SED that all departments are required to produce a learning and teaching strategy which meshes with the institutional strategy. To facilitate this learning and teaching, facilitators and learning support strategists have been appointed to all departments, although the University acknowledges that, in spite of a number of examples of good practice, the identification of development needs has yet to be addressed systematically on an institution-wide basis.

73   Peer observation of teaching is undertaken departmentally, on the basis of a flexible institutional framework. In its SED the University described its approach to peer observation as entirely developmental, although it is aware that this interpretation is not universally shared and that a need exists for a perceptual shift among some staff, who regard it in terms less of collegiality than of compliance. The audit team, noting that peer observation is to be universally implemented in September 2005, while supporting the University's decision to proceed thus takes the view that there is still substantial work to be done if the institution-wide scheme is to be successfully launched.

74   The audit team notes the wide-ranging nature of CAPD's support for staff, and the considerable respect in which many institutional staff hold it. In the case of TLTC, the team notes not only the range of training and staff development provided by the Centre, which includes multimedia support and drop-in learning, but also the flexibility of its provision. Overall, the team considers the University's policies and practices in the field of staff development, training and support, noting in particular the work of the CAPD and the TLTC, to constitute a feature of good practice.

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

75   The University is refining its approach to the development of distance learning, and in its draft e-learning strategy several pages are devoted to definitions which highlight the distinctions among e-learning, blended learning and distance learning. Meetings with staff drew to the audit team's attention the existence of high-quality training in distance-learning techniques. The University referred only briefly in its SED to arrangements for distance learning, which will be considered in the forthcoming audit of collaborative provision. Much of the operational responsibility for distance learning rests with TLTC which is charged with promoting the further development of learning technologies in line with the University's

e-learning strategy. All distance taught courses include introductions to the use of computers, as well as such other relevant training as accessing on-line materials and literature searches. Courses with distance-learning options include an MBA, MSc Manufacture and Design for Polymer Products (a joint venture with the Open University), and BA Early Childhood Studies.

76   The years since its introduction in 1997 have witnessed a considerable growth in expertise in the University's proprietary web-based software, leading to a growing confidence in its use. The audit team did not undertake extensive enquiries into this area of activity, but noted that, through the undergraduate e-enablement strategy, an 80 per cent growth in student use has been recorded during the past eight months and a 26 per cent increase in staff designers.

Learning support resources

77   Fundamental to the University's aim to be a student-centred institution is the network of strategies in place to drive many aspects of the student experience. In addition, the facts that the University is a two-campus institution and that for the most part its predominantly commuting student body spends only limited time on campus create an impetus for e-learning developments. This is reflected in the University's emphasis on developing the VLE, the technological support provided for students with disabilities and the encouragement given to staff to engage fully with the e-learning agenda. In addition, the SWS noted a number of recent developments in the learning infrastructure, including the Integrated Learning Resources Centre on one campus and the Learning Centre and Technology Tower on the other.

78   A large majority of those who responded to the SWS survey expressed satisfaction both with the learning resources available to them, albeit that this positive response eroded somewhat among more longstanding students, and with the Department of Student Services. These responses were echoed both in the results of the annual student satisfaction surveys and by students who met the audit team.

79 The University acknowledged in its SED that learning resources which are attempting to respond to the challenge of meeting the needs of a diverse student body, have as yet a number of shortcomings, but claimed that the situation is, for the most part, satisfactory. This statement, which appears to the audit team balanced and fair, is reflected in the comments of both staff and students who met the team. Staff pointed out that the links between the new undergraduate and postgraduate centres and service departments require further development; students, while not uncritical, claimed to be generally satisfied with learning resources and largely unaffected by the two-site campus. Since, however, this view may reflect the fact that as yet there is relatively little inter-campus student mobility, it may over time be modified.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

80 While the University actively embraces the diversity of its student body, the fact that a significant proportion of its student population comprises those for whom traditional routes of entry into higher education are unlikely to be available inevitably poses challenges. It follows that enhancing the student experience is central to the University's strategy, and, reflecting this exigency, the University claimed in its SED to be committed to providing expert guidance on learning for inexperienced learners. In this context a particular feature of the University's procedures for academic support is its recent creation of nine undergraduate and five postgraduate centres, spread over both campuses and designed to become one-stop-shops for academic and pastoral advice and guidance. Shortly before the audit visit every undergraduate was assigned a personal academic adviser (PAA), who will, when the scheme is fully operational, be located at specified times in a centre to meet students by appointment or on a drop-in basis. All advisers will be aided by a team of support administrators with procedural and other knowledge which may not be familiar to all members of academic staff. In the case of postgraduates the PAA function is fulfilled by course leaders.

81 Many students currently follow heritage programmes supported by a personal tutorial system. Hence not all students who met the audit team were clear about the new system, most saying they will continue to seek guidance from a personal tutor or appropriate member of academic staff. While many respondents to the SWS survey, which related to the personal tutorial system, reported being confused or unaware of the identity of their personal tutor, students who had brought problems to such a tutor claimed to have felt properly supported. There is evidence of considerable variability in the personal tutor system, however, and, when it is replaced, general academic guidance including advice on plagiarism will be provided almost exclusively in the new centres, in part to achieve greater consistency of service and reliability of information. At present the two systems function alongside each other, the University absorbing the resource and other implications of a dual system operation.

82 Because, in addition to their intrinsic purpose, the undergraduate and postgraduate centres have the instrumental purpose of contributing to the University's retention, progression and achievement strategy, their functions extend beyond responding to queries and include tracking attendance, engagement and achievement to identify students at risk of failure or withdrawal. While it would be premature to attempt to assess the initiative, its introduction is, in the view of the audit team, indicative of an institutional commitment to enhancing retention by means of a strategic and holistic approach to student support which it considers both distinctive and noteworthy.

83 In addition to its commitment to supporting a diverse group of locally-based and predominantly commuting students the University aims to expand its already considerable numbers of international students. The International and European Offices are located in the Student Recruitment Marketing and Communications Department, but in addition all academic departments have at least one member of staff responsible for the needs of international students. International students

who met the audit team appeared generally satisfied with the academic support they receive.

84   Academic guidance and support provided by centres, tutors and other members of academic staff, together with the facilities of the Student Services Department, form part of a network of support systems designed to ensure the best possible student experience. The audit team views the academic support for learning generally provided by the University as effective in itself and as a significant part of the integrated institutional response to the need to make further improvements in the area of retention, progression and achievement.

Personal support and guidance

85   The University claimed in its SED that student support and guidance are central to its mission. The Matrix standard Student Services Department offers a wide range of services, including information, advice and support on employment, funding, counselling, disabilities, student development, faith and child care. As well as offering face-to-face services the Department provides on-line support and advice through its own web pages and by email. It delivers bespoke induction programmes for students with identified disabilities and, in conjunction with the International Office, for international students, working also to support academic departments in addressing such institutional priorities as careers and the employability strand in the UUMS curriculum.

86   The Department's activities are monitored by consumer reviews and covered in annual course monitoring. While the SWS identified pastoral support and some aspects of central administration as areas of concern, the facts that the student satisfaction survey indicates that the Student Services Department is generally rated positively by users and that reasonable awareness of its services exists demonstrate the success of the promotion of its services in the Student Handbook, at induction events and on-line. The audit team confirms that the University's provision of student support and guidance engages appropriately with relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*.

87   As indicated above (paragraph 82), it would be premature to assess the success of the PAA system and the new centres, but the audit team believes the wide-ranging services provided by the Student Services Department and the International Office are fit for purpose, have the potential to enhance personal and administrative support to students and offer a reliable supplement to the variable levels of service provided through the personal tutor system.

Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline audit trails

Discipline audit trails

Business studies

88   The DAT for business studies covered the following courses in the Department of Business and Service Sector Management: BA Business, BA Business Administration and BA Business Studies plus the BA (Combined) Business (joint, major and minor) and BA European Business Studies, which admitted its last intake in academic year 2003-04. Students studying on the DAT courses represent over one third of the Department's undergraduate numbers. The DSED was produced for the audit and, although clearly written and helpful in content, was predominantly descriptive. Student progression data and course specifications were appended. All DAT courses other than BA European Business Studies were validated or revalidated in academic year 2003-04 to conform to the University awards framework. Course specifications confirm that in all cases they engage with the *Subject benchmark statement* for general business and management, and in the view of the audit team they are appropriately aligned with the Academic Infrastructure. Course specifications provide details of aims, learning outcomes, assessment and teaching and learning strategies, structure, entry requirements and career opportunities.

89   At the time of the audit, progression and completion data had been available for three academic years through a University produced CD-ROM which permits interrogation by

student characteristic at course and module levels. Although the Department expressed some concern about the accuracy of the CD-ROM data when it was initially introduced, it is clear that useful and informative data analysis has begun which will permit trends to be identified, particularly in respect of progression and achievement.

90   In the view of the audit team the Department has made significant efforts to bring its courses and practices into line with the new academic framework. The features of UUMS have been embraced, considerable work has been undertaken to include the required employability strand, and students reported themselves confident that their courses are preparing them for work. Institutional procedures specify that annual monitoring reports identify actions taken (or to be taken) at module, course or departmental level, and issues which are to be forwarded for consideration by QSC. While the team confirms that the monitoring of academic year 2003-04 was conducted in accordance with procedures, it noted that staff required training in the systems, and that delays occurred in part as a result of the late production of relevant monitoring data. Nonetheless, module, course and standards board reports were eventually produced to a good standard, and contributed to the departmental report.

91   Scrutiny of external examiners' reports suggests that such examiners consider the Department's assessment strategies, policies and operations, which include internal moderation, generally appropriate. For the most part they comment favourably on overall standards and on the performance of the best students which they consider comparable to that achieved in other institutions; although they also draw attention to a long tail of poor performance and withdrawals. Responses to external examiners' reports are discussed at subject standards boards, and through course monitoring reports and the subject standards report. While close attention is paid to external examiners' reports the audit team notes that delays in annual monitoring procedures resulted in delayed responses to their comments.

92   The audit team notes that module and course specifications ensure that teaching is aligned to course and module learning outcomes. Students who met the team reported that assessment requirements, learning outcomes and assessment criteria are provided in comprehensible form both in writing and verbally. They spoke positively about written feedback on course work and the normal turn-around time, and would welcome similar feedback on examination papers.

93   Students who met the audit team spoke highly of their experience of induction and the fact that the quality, accuracy and volume of written information they had received had enabled them to solve a number of academic problems themselves. Their comments about on-line learning resources and information technology (IT) facilities were similarly encouraging, although members of staff acknowledged that the integration of the University's VLE into teaching activities remains predominantly developmental.

94   All students who met the audit team had been allocated PAAs and were clear about their role and how to access them. They reported satisfaction with the support they receive and, while noting initial problems with the operation of the undergraduate centres, including obtaining assessment feedback, expressed confidence that they will become increasingly effective. Students particularly drew the team's attention to the work of the departmental international student coordinator, who provides academic, social and personal support for international students and discharges helpful liaison duties with the International Office.

95   Arrangements for course committees are in line with University policy, although at the time of the audit visit only summaries of meetings were available. Course leaders have responded to difficulties in securing student representation at meetings by meeting students at mutually convenient times, gaining views to present at course committees and reporting back on the outcomes. Students who met the audit team confirmed the adequacy of these arrangements and that issues raised are responded to; the team

also noted that the outcomes of course committees are reported back both through student notice boards and electronically.

96   Module evaluation questionnaire arrangements are also in line with University policy, although staff, drawing the audit team's attention to the problem of questionnaire fatigue, explained that tutors are also encouraged to seek informal verbal feedback. In addition to module evaluation both the Department itself and, separately and valuably, its Business Education Research Group (BERG), undertake student surveys, including exit interviews, conducted as part of BERG's Early Walkers research. Overall, the Department has engaged in a range of activities to address problems of retention, progression and achievement, although it acknowledges that it still has a considerable way to go before it has fully met the challenges which arise.

97   The Department's commitment to enhancing learning and teaching is reflected in the positive comments of both students and external examiners. From its study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and other documentation, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team concludes that the standard of student achievement in business studies is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

Electronic and communications engineering (communications technology)

98   The DAT for electronic and communications engineering covered the following courses in the Department of Computing, Communications Technology and Mathematics: BSc (Hons) Audio Electronics; BSc (Hons) Communication Systems; BEng (Hons) Electronic and Communications Engineering; BEng (Hons) Electronic Engineering; BSc (Hons) Electronics/Electronic Product Design; BSc (Hons) Microcomputer Systems and Interfacing/Microcomputer Systems Technology; MSc Digital Communications Networks. The DSED, especially prepared for the DAT, included a wide and appropriate range of material. Specifications were provided

for all courses included in the DAT, set out aims and intended learning outcomes and incorporated clear structure and assessment diagrams. The audit team confirms that all courses covered by the DAT engage appropriately with the Academic Infrastructure; at present no course included in the DAT is professionally accredited, although the possibility of seeking such accreditation is currently under consideration.

99   The Department monitors the progression and achievement of students using the University's CD-ROM, and is broadly satisfied with the accuracy of the data provided. Fewer than 50 per cent of students progress from level 1 at the first attempt, and a similarly high proportion of students fail to progress from level 2 to level 3. These figures, although disappointing, need to be considered in the context of the University's widening participation agenda, and the Department has, in the view of the audit team, taken reasonable and responsible steps to address the problem. Certainly the students who met the team spoke highly of the quality of teaching, describing staff as knowledgeable, approachable and dedicated, and particularly of the Maths Workshops provided by the Learning Centre which they see as providing excellent support for students lacking qualifications in the subject.

100   The DSED acknowledged that implementation of the new annual monitoring process is still evolving, and the courses covered by the DAT have yet to complete a full cycle with the current system. The audit team notes, however, that thus far significant slippages have occurred in meeting deadlines, and was particularly concerned to discover that no minutes of meetings of the Departmental Quality Management Committee since February 2004 had been considered by QSC until 11 May 2005, immediately prior to the audit visit. It assumes the Department will wish to reflect on the adequacy of current procedures for recording and progressing business through its deliberative structure.

101   Module monitoring reports, available for the full range of course units for academic year

2003-04, reveal that staff have been reflecting on aspects of delivery and taking account of student feedback, but contain little analysis of data derived from student achievement in assessments, a matter which in the view of the audit team, potentially contributes to the variable quality of debate which occurs at subject standards boards (see paragraph 43). Course monitoring reports for academic year 2003-04 were also available, and while these focus appropriately on issues raised in external examiners' reports the audit team noted that they pay less attention to points raised in module monitoring reports.

102 The assessment strategy for the majority of modules involves a combination of unseen examinations and course work, the former usually accounting for 60 per cent of the total mark. The audit team noted that two external examiners have commented on a disparity between examination and course work marks in some modules, a point confirmed by the team's own investigations, and the Department has, very properly, set up a group to investigate this. The team also noted that external examiners are not normally sent draft coursework assignment tasks, with the result that advice cannot be applied to the year in question, and that, in a small number of cases, examination questions are recycled in successive years, a practice which suggests the existence of weaknesses in the internal moderation process. Nonetheless, in general examination papers are properly set, and reflect module learning objectives. External examiners confirm that the standards of student performance are comparable to those achieved in similar programmes in other UK HE institutions and, on the basis of its review of a wide and appropriate range of student work the audit team is satisfied that the standard of student achievement is consistent with the learning outcomes contained in the course specifications.

103 All students receive a course handbook, which explains the course structure and module options and includes extracts from Academic Regulations and other essential information. The audit team confirms that, as is the case elsewhere in the University, these centrally produced handbooks provide wide-ranging and appropriate guidance on matters such as assessment criteria and students' responsibilities. Although the DSED referred to the fact that some instruments in teaching laboratories are nearing the end of their useful lives, students who met the team spoke highly of the facilities available to them, as they did of the availability of books and the quality of computing facilities.

104 Student representatives attend course committee meetings, and although in the past attendance has been disappointing, the Department reported in its DSED that there are signs of improvement following the introduction of the StARs system. Students who met the audit team expressed general satisfaction with the range of feedback mechanisms available to them, including the standard module questionnaires, although the Department noted in its DSED that some students do not treat these questionnaires seriously and that there is evidence of questionnaire fatigue, a matter to which the Department will doubtless wish to give further consideration.

105 From its study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and other documentation, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team concludes that the standard of student achievement in electronic and communications engineering (communications technology) is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

Fine art

106 The DAT for fine art covered the BA Fine Art, BA Fine Art (specialist route), BA Fine Art (Contemporary Theory and Practice) and an MA by project, all offered by the Sir John Cass Department of Art, Media and Design, a distinctive regional provider of HE in silversmithing, jewellery, furniture and music technology which offers an all-through portfolio from FE to research in its six subject areas. In academic year 2003-04 the Department had 327 undergraduate students, 37 taught postgraduates and 10 research students. The DSED was especially prepared for the purpose

of this audit. Course specifications and learning outcomes refer to appropriate level descriptors for honours degree and master's level courses. At research degree level reference is made to level descriptors, joint statements by the research councils and the Arts and Humanities Research Board, and guidance from the UK Council for Graduate Education. The audit team confirms that course specifications link appropriately to the FHEQ and engage fully with the Academic Infrastructure.

107 In its DSED the Department stressed its commitment to students, its links with external agencies and its student-focussed curriculum. The Associate Head of Department, who chairs the DQC and is a member of QSC and Quality Network, has lead responsibility for quality matters, including annual monitoring, all matters relating to external examiners, and validation and review. Monitoring occurs through individual unit monitoring reports which inform course action plans, which in turn are considered by course committees and QSC. Annual monitoring comprises course monitoring reports external examiners' reports and student feedback, and the audit team noted evidence of constructive responses having been made to the outcomes of this event.

108 The Department has taken a proactive approach to the realignment of its postgraduate and undergraduate provision, and all courses considered in the DAT conform to the University's common frameworks and assessment strategies and policies. Both formative and summative assessment are deployed, and each undergraduate module contains a self-assessment statement for students to complete. External examiners' reports are fully and professionally addressed: for example, a detailed and effective departmental response to a critical comment made in academic year 2003-04 attracted praise from external examiners. External examiners' comments confirm marking practices as transparent, fair and appropriate, and standards as appropriate to the levels of the awards. The assessed work seen by the team matched the course specifications, and the quality of the samples at each level was

appropriate to the title of the awards and to their location within the FHEQ. The team noted that the high achieving category included several examples of work by international students.

109 The Department receives a large amount of progression and achievement data from the University. Nonetheless, staff referred to problems negotiating them, a response seemingly associated with a broader concern, expressed by both staff and external examiners, over workload pressure and the very limited time frame within which they had been expected to embed new systems. The audit team formed the view that the Department has some way to go before it exploits fully the data's potential to address retention, progression and achievement challenges and contribute to the enhancement agenda, and the issue behind this problem is one to which the audit team assumes that the University will continue to give serious attention.

110 The Department's approach to academic support focuses on a 'creative curriculum' reflecting employability, professional practice, independent learning and the use of learning agreements. Staff provide students with opportunities for employment-related activities as part of their course, including exhibitions in Europe and residencies and workshops at local schools, and the Department's research ethos enables the work of its research centres to infuse the curriculum. Students who met the audit team reported good working relationships with staff who, they consider, provide high levels of academic and pastoral support.

111 The Department has received substantial development funding from the University for investment in its learning resources, the use of which is monitored in module and annual review and on course committees and boards of studies. Students who met the audit team described course handbooks as useful and accessible; and overall the team considers student support a major strength. External examiners confirm the audit team's view that the Department's widening participation agenda is effectively embedded in its teaching and learning and student support activities:

additional support for international students, for example, includes developing a pre-masters certificate and appointing a research fellow to investigate issues of difference.

112 The Department appoints three student representatives annually to key committees, for general studio housekeeping and as ambassadors to support candidates at interview. It collects student feedback through module monitoring reports, feedback questionnaires and course committees, and also benefited from a student open forum in academic year 2002-03 and a student survey, conducted the following year. The audit team, on the basis of its consideration of the conclusions and outcomes of these procedures and events, confirms that students provide constructive feedback, engage with course related issues and are active in quality management. Feedback reports in particular provided evidence that mechanisms exist to enable issues to be appropriately considered and addressed. Students who met the team demonstrated an awareness of how to highlight their concerns, and were clear as to which issues have been resolved and which remain.

113 From its study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and other documentation, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team concludes that the standard of student achievement in fine art is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

Information systems

114 The DAT for information systems covered the following courses in the Department of Accounting, Banking and Financial Systems: BA Business Information Technology Management (BITM), including single, major, joint and minor; MSc Computer Systems Auditing (CSA); and MSc Computer Applications in Accounting (CAA), all of which are fully aligned with the University's modular scheme requirements. The Department claimed in its DSED that it is too early to make meaningful comments regarding progression and achievement on the BA BITM, the first intake of which was in September 2001 and which currently has some 70 students, and

therefore included no data on these issues. The DSED did include brief information on continuation and withdrawal rates for the CSA and CAA, which reveal high attrition rates, the accuracy of which was under discussion at the time of the audit visit. The DSED, specifically written for the audit, was clear and relevant. Course specifications which the audit team found very useful were included for all named provision and are helpfully reproduced in students' course handbooks. They provide details of mode of attendance and professional body exemptions or accreditation, make reference to relevant subject benchmark statements and include course structures and module assessment details.

115 Course level progression and completion data are discussed in detail in subject standards board meetings and course monitoring reports, scrutiny of which yielded evidence of careful consideration being given to enhancing progression. Nonetheless, although some modules have very high pass rates, little analysis or sharing of good practice appears to take place, and the Department may wish to consider how the enhancement potential offered by these successes can best be exploited. The Department complies with institutional requirements in respect of annual, module and course monitoring. Nonetheless, the fact that the module monitoring pro forma contains no field for the consideration of progression and completion data has led to expressions of regret in departmental reports and to some staff, on their own initiative, retrieving them from the student record system. This has led to a variability in module monitoring reports which the University may wish to review.

116 External examiners' reports seen by the audit team were highly complimentary, those for the BA BITM referring specifically to high academic standards and dedicated staff. Nonetheless, in a small number of cases the reports themselves or the departmental responses to them were said to be unavailable, this being attributed to the fact that some external examiners were boycotting the University at the time of the audit visit. Responses to the reports

appear in course monitoring reports, and the team noted that, while the reports are generally taken seriously, in at least one instance issues raised by an external examiner had received no response, suggesting that closer alignment between external examiners' reports and the responses contained in course monitoring reports would be beneficial.

117 Assessment mechanisms include seen and unseen examinations, coursework, project and group work, class tests and case-studies, with learning outcomes appropriately aligned with modes of assessment. Students who met the audit team understood what was expected of them in assessments, and also the weightings of the various components. The team reviewed a range of assessed student work, both by level and module, and was satisfied that it had been second marked internally in accordance with institutional norms.

118 Students informed the audit team that induction arrangements are appropriate, that the information provided at all stages (pre-enrolment, induction and post-enrolment) is clear and helpful, that they are appropriately guided on such matters as module selection, and that course handbooks and module booklets, which set out staff contact details, learning outcomes, curriculum and assessment details, are useful sources of information. They spoke highly of the available library and computing facilities and of the University's enhanced IT infrastructure, reporting that good technical support is available during the day and lower level support in the evenings. Staff advised the team that they consider the student voice very significant in helping them monitor the adequacy of learning resources.

119 The audit team formed the view that communication between staff and students is effective at both formal and informal levels, though the Department expressed a preference in its DSED for the latter. Students consider the representative system a generally effective means of expressing their views, although they are not always sure what response has been made to suggestions made either by representatives or in feedback questionnaires, and the Department

may wish to give consideration as to how such outcomes can be more effectively communicated. Students considered staff responsive to their experiences and were complimentary about their availability and support, confirming that the office hour system works well and is appreciated. Since, however, some students reported difficulty accessing part-time staff outside timetabled contact hours the Department may wish to consider how students can best be supported when part-time staff are not available. Students who communicate with staff by email appreciate the fact that many, although not all, staff are quick to respond. All undergraduate students whom the team met were aware of the identity of their personal academic adviser, though few had yet availed themselves of this form of support.

120 From its study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and other documentation, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team concludes that the standard of student achievement in information systems is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

Philosophy

121 The DAT for philosophy covered the BA Philosophy (single, joint, major, minor pathways) and BA Ethics (joint, minor pathways). Philosophy is delivered by a small core team of four senior staff (2.5 FTE), including one 0.5 professorial appointment. In spite of institutional commitment, the discipline has experienced a decline in single honours numbers from 57 to 29 FTE over a three-year period, suggesting that it faces a number of challenges. The DSED, specifically constructed for the audit, contained appendices with all relevant course specifications, course structure diagrams and definitive documents. In common with other undergraduate courses, philosophy and ethics programmes have been realigned with the UUMS. The audit team confirms that the realignment process was academically rigorous and supported by an appropriate degree of externality, and that all provision included in the DAT engages with the Academic Infrastructure.

122 In its DSED the Department emphasised its commitment to the institutional priority given to retention, progression and achievement, although the unavailability of staff with detailed knowledge of the topic meant that the audit team was unable to engage in detailed discussion of the Department's employability strategy which had been raised by the realignment panel.

123 External examiners' reports confirm that the standards of awards are comparable to those achieved in equivalent HE institutions, that the strongest papers would be 'a credit' to any philosophy department and that programmes appear to be taught to a high standard. The audit team confirms that course monitoring reports pay careful attention to points of concern - including literacy standards, the structure of submitted work and a practice of not marking to the full range - raised by external examiners, and that in all cases the examiners profess themselves satisfied with the departmental response.

124 Annual monitoring has been subject to regular changes of procedure, although consistent features include the analysis of student feedback by module questionnaires and reports, annual programme reports drawing on the student feedback, examiners' reports and course committee minutes. In the view of the audit team the present system of annual monitoring, introduced for the first time in the present academic year, is operating effectively in philosophy.

125 Assessment in both philosophy and ethics is entirely by coursework and oral presentation. It was made clear to the audit team that this has been the subject of internal debate, and, while the assessment modes are in line with the subject benchmark statement, reliance on essays and coursework, even when supported by an oral presentation, inevitably raises issues of pedagogy and integrity. In its DSED the Department referred to the continuing evaluation of the effectiveness and appropriateness of assessment instruments, although the staff able and willing to meet the team did not have sufficient information to enable it to explore this area further. The team

reviewed assessed work drawn from a range of levels, and confirms that the sample matched the course specifications, that extensive feedback was provided and that there was evidence of double marking.

126 Student information is wide-ranging and clearly presented, and students confirmed to the audit team their satisfaction with the material provided. The Department has a policy of making available one copy of primary material per 12 students and one copy of secondary sources per 20 students, although students who met the team reiterated their dissatisfaction, previously expressed in course committees, with the adequacy of multiple copies available, the reliability of IT provision and the quality of some teaching accommodation.

127 Arrangements for collecting student feedback appear to the audit team to be acceptable. At module level it is obtained by means of a qualitative questionnaire whose results which are predominantly positive, particularly concerning the work of the staff, feed into the annual monitoring system. The Department has noted, however, that the fact that the questionnaires are issued at the end of the module means that no feedback is obtained from students who withdraw or fail to complete, and proposes in future to incorporate the questionnaires into module booklets. In addition the Department has an active course committee and students advised the audit team that they value the liaison opportunities that this provides and feel engaged in quality management. Examples of recent issues raised include the utility of the new standard student questionnaire, the operation of the PAA system, the relevance of new generic modules to the programme of study and the problem of variable student participation in seminars.

128 Overall the audit team noted high levels of enthusiasm among students. Nonetheless, with significant levels of module non-completion existing, retention and progression remain key issues, and, in spite of the fact that assessment is entirely by coursework, many students clearly find the subject very challenging. The team assumes that the Department will continue to

address this problem, including giving thought to such possible strategies as increasing the provision of teaching time at certificate level and on the HE orientation module called Thinking, Researching, Communicating.

129 From its study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and other documentation, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team concludes that the standard of student achievement in philosophy is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

Politics

130 The DAT for politics covered the BA Joint International Relations; BA Single International Relations; BA Deferred (heritage) International Relations; BA Joint Peace and Conflict Studies; BA Single Peace and Conflict Studies; BA Joint Politics; BA Single Politics; BSc (heritage) Single Politics; BSc (heritage) Joint Politics; BA Deferred (heritage) Politics; MA British and European Politics and Government; MA International Relations (interdisciplinary); MA Politics; MA International Relations and Globalisation. All these programmes are delivered in the Department of Law, Governance and International Relations. The DSED was specially written for the DAT and provided a wide range of information, with appendices including course specifications in respect of all courses covered by the DAT. All these engaged fully with the Academic Infrastructure and contained statements covering intended learning outcomes, a map of routes through the modular system and general information on the applicable assessment regime. All programmes have been brought within the appropriate institutional framework and there is evidence that harmonisation has been carried out appropriately but sensitively. In particular two distinct master's programmes in International Relations (one on each campus) have been allowed to co-exist on the basis of what are perceived to be cogent arguments that their curriculums are distinctive and their markets sustainable.

131 The annual monitoring round is appropriately used; admission, assessment, progression and achievement data are addressed in course monitoring reports and by subject standards boards. Some trend material is employed to give perspective, and progression rates are benchmarked against the University as a whole. The Department understands the challenges facing the University in terms of retention, progression and achievement, and engages with the agenda by closely monitoring its students' performances in all three dimensions of the strategy in liaison with the wider Retention Steering Group. Gender, age and ethnicity are just three of the student categories reported on, and attempts at analysis are made in the accompanying commentary. Overall there is strong evidence that the University's retention, progression and achievement initiative is being addressed departmentally.

132 The Department's wide range of assessment methods appears to the audit team to be congruent with its intended learning outcomes, to conform to institutional requirements and to articulate with its learning and teaching strategy. The team notes from its review of the range of assessed work that internal moderation takes place, that modules are monitored to identify particular attainment and progression problems, and that increasing emphasis is paid to formative assessment. External examiners confirm their satisfaction with the overall standard of student work and the standard of marking. The team saw evidence of a good working relationship between the Department and its external examiners, and appropriate responses are made to comments and recommendations. Students, who advised the team that plagiarism awareness is 'hammered' into them at every turn, attested to the use of diagnostic tests at induction, designed to identify and support those with particular needs, including where appropriate, referral for specialist help. Undergraduates were especially complimentary about the quality of feedback on marked work, although postgraduates' comments were more equivocal.

133 Student handbooks, both institutional and departmental, appear to the audit team to be of excellent quality, comprehensive in scope and clearly expressed - a view strongly endorsed by the students who met the team. Other learning

resources also appear largely appropriate, and although problems with computer maintenance, the quality of parts of the estate and the availability of key texts at peak assessment times were mentioned by students, evidence exists from monitoring reports that staff at all levels are aware of the resource issues requiring attention, and are responding as far as possible to student concerns.

134 At departmental level, student feedback mainly takes the form of responses to module questionnaires. The University is moving towards a uniform approach to gathering student feedback at module level, but currently there remains considerable flexibility in questionnaire style and content. Completed questionnaires scrutinised by the audit team indicate mainly high and always adequate levels of satisfaction. Two student academic representatives told the team that their input is taken very seriously, and in the team's view their conscientiousness and thoroughness are likely to ensure that all issues raised are properly addressed and responses disseminated to their constituencies. Overall the team concludes that the University's student-centred ethic is appropriately and consistently replicated in the courses covered by the DAT.

135 From its study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and other documentation, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team concludes that the standard of student achievement in politics is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

Section 4: The audit investigations: published information

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

136 At institutional level undergraduates are provided with a Student Handbook upon enrolment and a comprehensive guide to the UUMS. This includes short summaries of all modules delivered across the University and essential information on the scheme itself, personal academic advisers, module choices, transfers, timetables, vision, staff contacts and personal development planning. The Handbook is supplemented at departmental level by course handbooks and module booklets which, the audit team confirms on the basis of the DATs, are in line with University requirements.

137 The University has, mainly through the CAPD, undertaken extensive work in designing generic course and module specification templates, an exercise which has contributed significantly to the creation of the undergraduate modular scheme. While the University acknowledged in its SED that it is not yet able to guarantee the complete accuracy of all programme and module specifications, it has conscientiously undertaken checking exercises designed to reduce errors on a progressive basis.

138 The SWS survey indicated high levels of student satisfaction with course information provided prior to arrival, a view reiterated by students who met the audit team in the course of the DATs. The survey found that over 70 per cent of respondents consider the University website above average, and around two-thirds consider that information for students is useful, accurate and reliable, with postgraduate and professional respondents recording the highest satisfaction levels. Although discrepant satisfaction levels, which were expressed by the main campus of study, will presumably decrease when the harmonisation process has fully bedded in, they nonetheless raise issues to which the University may wish to give consideration. The survey reported significantly lower levels of satisfaction about information available on academic appeals and complaints procedures, but the audit team, noting that these were clearly set out in the Student Handbook and elsewhere, broadly accepts the institutional view that normally such regulations only enter students' consciousness if they are in dispute, an experience encountered by only a minority of students.

139 Overall, students' experience of published information is positive, with particular confidence being placed in its accuracy and reliability. The University considers the provision of consistent

information to students an emergent strength, and the audit team recognises the progress it has made in this demanding area.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

140 Authority to sign off published materials or amend the website is delegated to senior managers in services or academic departments, although the University states that materials are checked at a number of levels. Ensuring the accuracy and integrity of the Prospectus is the responsibility of the Student Recruitment Marketing and Communications Department; course handbooks have been centrally produced for the first time in the present academic year, and now draw on a common framework designed to ensure that students are offered consistent information, with course, module and regulatory material verified from a single source.

141 The University acknowledged in its SED that bringing together information from two discrete institutions has been challenging, presenting it with the problem of the same information being held in different ways in different systems with no clarity as to which is the authoritative version. It places particular reliance, as it moves towards what it terms information excellence, on its Enterprise Information Integration Programme. This initiative, currently in the first year of a five-year cycle, is charged with providing a single source for each information entity, with all information captured and validated at source and held as a corporate resource. As a step towards this, the University's internal knowledge management system is now the repository of all course and module specifications.

142 The University's TQI website went live with a partial dataset in August 2004, undergraduate external examiners' reports and the realignment reports being uploaded to the site in December 2004. The audit team confirms that, although work on the provision of a full array of data is still pending, the data on admissions, progression and achievement are on-line, and the University has made satisfactory progress towards meeting the requirements of HEFCE's

document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance.*

143 Overall the audit team notes the magnitude of the task in respect of information provision facing a merged institution, and accepts that substantial progress has been made. While the provision of the CD-ROM on student data has considerably assisted the monitoring process, the team believes that further refinement of its analytic capabilities will materially assist retention, progression and achievement at discipline level, especially with regard to the reasons for early student withdrawals or non-completions. The University's information strategy, although in its early stages, has, at both institutional and discipline levels, attracted broad student satisfaction, and in the view of the team confidence can be expressed in the availability and accuracy and completeness of published information.

Findings

Findings

144 An institutional audit of London Metropolitan University (the University) was undertaken during the period 16 to 20 May 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, and reflecting protocols agreed with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals and Universities UK, the audit included consideration of examples of institutional processes at work at the level of courses through discipline audit trails (DATs), together with examples of these processes operating at the level of the institution as a whole. This section of the report summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged during the audit, and making recommendations to the University for action to enhance current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

145 The conclusions of the audit reflect an awareness of the special circumstances in which it took place. Much of the evidence on which it is based consisted of the transitional arrangements designed to secure the University's operation, the academic year in which the audit took place being the first in which significant elements of the academic framework were operational; although some elements were by that time better established. The discussion of those processes here, and the advice given, are intended to assist the University as it develops its quality management framework.

146 The University reported in its self-evaluation document (SED) that, for the two years immediately following the merger, its quality assurance agenda had concentrated on a series of major exercises designed to integrate and harmonise the postgraduate and undergraduate provision of its two heritage institutions. The separate undergraduate and postgraduate harmonisation exercises were ambitious in scope, and it is, in the view of the audit team, to the credit of the University that they were successfully completed. The exercises made scrupulous use of independent external advisers, safeguarded standards through a period of intense activity and established undergraduate and postgraduate modular schemes to which all taught courses are intended to conform. The undergraduate modular scheme (UUMS) in particular contains innovative features designed to support student progression, attainment and employability, and is an example of a strategic approach to these issues which constitutes a feature of good practice. Nonetheless, the University also acknowledged, and the evidence of the present audit confirms, that, while these exercises' achievements have been striking, they also encountered problems of deadline slippage, excessive workloads and signing-off.

147 At the same time the University is looking towards what it sees as the next generation of quality systems, to be launched in 2006 and designed to provide a streamlined and cost-effective framework better aligned than current arrangements to mission and strategy; a complementary review of the committee structure, also intended to improve and streamline decision-making, has been deferred to the same year. It is understood that a number of still-to-be-implemented procedures in the Quality Assurance Handbook (including departmental and subject level review and thematic audit) and a new method for reviewing professional service departments will be the spine of future arrangements. It is not, however, clear how the University will ensure that the potentially time-intensive procedures due to be implemented in 2005 will be made consistent with its aspiration to achieve a cost-effective framework a year later. In particular, the proposal to hold 10 department reviews in academic year 2005-06 appears likely to put considerable pressure on both departments and the quality framework itself. Accordingly the University is advised to give further thought to its timetable for introducing any new processes, ensuring that realistic deadlines are set and

procedures put in place in a timely manner, and to proceed with its stated intention of establishing and embedding a holistic and streamlined quality framework which enables it to have complete confidence in the quality of the student experience across all areas.

148 The University's current approach to quality management involves requiring academic departments to exercise responsibility for quality and standards primarily by compliance with centrally defined and monitored regulations and procedures. The DATs provide evidence that this is being achieved and, more generally, that effective quality assurance and appropriate academic standards exist at departmental level. Nonetheless, while heads of department and departmental quality representatives have made strenuous efforts to complete procedures to institutional deadlines, they have not always succeeded. There is, therefore, insufficient evidence to give full support to the University's claim in its SED that its quality framework is now embedded, but every reason to believe that the embedding process has begun.

149 By the time of the institutional audit, which took place towards the end of the third academic year following merger, a comprehensive Quality Assurance Handbook was in place, providing a single source of reference for all aspects of quality assurance; and the annual monitoring of academic year 2003-04 which the University stated was nearly complete, was being conducted in accordance with the procedure set out in the Handbook. This exercise, in spite of having significant substantive merits was, in procedural terms, characterised by delays and deadline slippages. In addition, a number of departments raised concerns about congestion, overlap, the need for realistic timescales and the limited value of some data; and the report of the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) to Academic Board noted the absence, in some departments' summary reports, of confirmation that responses had been made to external examiners' reports.

150 The audit found substantial evidence of the University's systematic and thoughtful approach to articulating its aspirations for an effective and efficient quality management framework. There was evidence from the work of the departments that quality has been assured and standards maintained. While the University is more confident that its present quality assurance framework is embedded than was justified by the evidence of progress at the time of the audit, its intention is to devise a quality management framework which will be holistic in scope and streamlined in operation. It was not, however, clear how the procedures in the Quality Assurance Handbook due to be implemented in 2005 are consistent with the University's aspirations to achieve a cost-effective framework. The audit team was particularly concerned that the operational convergence of a not fully embedded set of current procedures, new procedures to be implemented in academic year 2005-06 and those elements of a new quality framework being explored for introduction in academic year 2006-07 might place considerable pressure on departments and those responsible for the operation of the quality management framework. With this note of caution the University is advised to proceed with its stated intention to develop an effective, efficient, holistic and streamlined quality management system.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

151 As part of its transitional arrangements the University instituted a Regulations Group, which, following consultation and consideration of regulations in similar institutions, produced a single set of draft regulations which was approved by Academic Board in June 2003. These govern the assessment of all students recruited from academic year 2004-05 onwards; they comply with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and allow for course-specific variations where required by professional bodies. At the time of the audit visit, draft regulations for conversion diplomas were being considered, but had yet to be completed. Both undergraduate and postgraduate structures adhere to a credit

accumulation framework consistent with practice across the sector.

152 Course validation appears rigorous, with contributions from external advisers an essential component. Documentation presented to the validation panel is required to include the course handbook, course and module specifications and module booklets.

153 Evidence from the DATs confirms that assessment tasks are generally varied to match the intended learning outcomes, that students are clear as to the nature of the assessment task, criteria and mark weightings, and that second marking is routinely undertaken. The University operates a two-tier assessment system. First, subject standards boards are responsible for awarding marks to modules. The University requires external examiners on these boards to receive and comment on draft assessment papers, both examinations and coursework, although evidence from the DATs indicates that this is not invariably done. Secondly, a single University Awards Board (which at the time of the audit had met only once) currently receives, but has no authority to change, module marks, confers awards and produces an overview of external examiners' reports, an initiative with the potential to enhance practice.

154 External examiners, whose appointments are considered and approved by QSC, submit their reports after the summer boards, though it is not clear that in all cases they receive a formal response or that such a response is routinely submitted to the University: immediately prior to the audit, for example, the May 2005 meeting of QSC was constrained to ask several departments to confirm that issues raised in reports for academic year 2003-04 had been addressed. The University is accordingly advised to take steps to ensure that a timely and appropriate response to external examiners' reports is made, reported and monitored.

155 Statistical data on progression and achievement are produced annually by the Planning Office, and data on CD-ROM are distributed to departments and contribute to annual course monitoring reports. These data can be interrogated at various levels, including

module, course and department, and by variables including age, gender and ethnicity; over time the data will facilitate trend analysis. Staff appear to have increasing confidence in data reliability, though it is noticeable that analysis and utilisation are still at an early stage.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

156 In its SED the University expressed a commitment to developing a holistic and strategic approach to learning support, embracing many of its main service departments, and also such policy areas as learning and teaching, diversity, and retention, progression and achievement. While claiming, with justification, to be making strenuous efforts to address the learning needs of its diverse body of students, the University acknowledged that some key areas have still to be addressed before it can claim to have implemented its overall strategic drive in full.

157 The University has, however, made considerable progress in a relatively short time. Its active engagement in pedagogic research, and particularly the impact of this on the quality of learning and teaching, is considered distinctive and as constituting a feature of good practice. Its development and continued monitoring of a virtual learning environment (VLE) have contributed to an enhanced student experience, and the recent establishment of the undergraduate and postgraduate centres to provide academic advice and guidance and to monitor student engagement has the potential to do so. The University can similarly claim credit for developing linkages between the undergraduate and postgraduate centres and the Student Services Department which offers students an extensive range of support services, and for initiating the use, in academic departments, of coordinators for its diversity, learning and teaching, and international students initiatives.

158 The University's policies and practices in the field of staff development, training and support, in particular the work of the Centre for Academic Professional Development (CAPD) and the Teaching and Learning Technology Centre

(TLTC), are considered collectively to constitute a feature of good practice. The former promotes and supports good practice and innovation through a range of professional activities; the latter promotes good practice, develops innovation and scholarship in learning, teaching and curriculum development, including offering support and training to staff, of whom over one thousand attended its sessions on the use of the University's VLE between September 2004 and May 2005.

The outcomes of the discipline audit trails

Business studies

159 Each of the courses considered in the DAT has a course specification developed in line with the FHEQ and referenced to the appropriate subject benchmark. External examiners report that courses are set at an appropriate level and that student achievement is comparable to that achieved in other institutions, also noting, however, the existence of a long tail of poor performance. Meeting institutional deadlines for the newly introduced annual monitoring procedures proved challenging in academic year 2004-05, as did ensuring that staff were adequately trained to operate the new system. It is confirmed, however, that, although deadlines were missed the process was complete by the time of the audit visit.

160 Students spoke positively of both their courses and the staff who teach them. Staff in turn appear committed to their work, and the Department's support of business education research contributes to learning and teaching practice and course development. Students felt appropriately supported and were optimistic about the likely benefits of the new system. The Department's student representative system is in line with institutional policy and has instituted effective arrangements to address the problem of disappointing student attendance at meetings.

161 From a study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and other documentation, and from discussions with students and staff, it is concluded that the standard of student achievement in business

studies is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

Electronic and communications engineering (communications technology)

162 Course specifications were provided for all courses included in the DAT, setting out aims and intended learning outcomes and incorporating course structure and assessment diagrams. Course structure and aims and award titles are clear, and all courses covered by the DAT engage appropriately with the Academic Infrastructure. Nonetheless, in annual monitoring significant slippages have occurred in meeting deadlines and approving minutes, and the Department is recommended to review the adequacy of procedures for recording and progressing business.

163 The Department has taken reasonable steps to address the challenges it faces in respect of retention, progression and achievement, and students spoke highly of the quality of teaching, describing staff as knowledgeable, approachable and dedicated. Assessment is by unseen examinations and course work, and in the light of external examiners' comments the Department has set up a group to investigate some striking mark disparities between the two assessment modes. Overall, however, external examiners confirm that the standards of student performance are comparable to those achieved in similar programmes in other UK HE institutions.

164 Students consider learning resources and the feedback mechanisms available to them to be generally satisfactory. There is evidence of departmental responsiveness to problems with the representative system and the Department may find it helpful similarly to address the issue of questionnaire fatigue.

165 From a study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and other documentation, and from discussions with students and staff, it is concluded that the standard of student achievement in electronic and communications engineering (communications technology) is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

Fine art

166 The Sir John Cass Department of Art, Media and Design is a unique regional provider of HE in silversmithing, jewellery, furniture and music technology. Course specifications and learning outcomes refer to appropriate level descriptors at undergraduate and postgraduate levels; course specifications link to the FHEQ and make satisfactory use of subject benchmarks and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*), published by QAA; and student learning opportunities are suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards. The Department has good links with the professional and research worlds of fine art; these appropriately inform course curricula and enrich learning opportunities.

167 All courses conform to the University's common frameworks at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and to its monitoring and assessment policies. A range of formative and assessment methods is employed, and each module contains a self-assessment statement for students to complete at undergraduate level. Assessed work seen in the course of the audit matched the course specifications and there was consistency in the quality of the samples at each level. External examiners confirm the appropriateness of standards achieved.

168 From a study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and other documentation, and from discussions with students and staff, it is concluded that the standard of student achievement in fine art is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

Information systems

169 Each of the courses considered in the DAT has a course specification developed in line with the FHEQ, reflecting relevant subject benchmark statements and setting out educational aims and learning outcomes, as well as details of teaching and learning methods and assessment. The Department is compliant with institutional requirements in respect of annual, module and

course monitoring; external examiners' reports are predominantly complimentary, though it is not always clear whether appropriate responses have been made to their advice and recommendations; assessment tasks are appropriately varied. Students, who speak highly of their course and the staff, understand what is expected of them and consider their learning resources adequate.

170 From a study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and other documentation, and from discussions with students and staff, it is concluded that the standard of student achievement in information systems is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

Philosophy

171 Each of the courses considered in the DAT has a course specification developed in line with the FHEQ, reflecting relevant subject benchmark statements and setting out its educational aims and learning outcomes, and providing details of teaching and learning methods and assessment. The Department is compliant with institutional requirements in respect of annual, module and course monitoring.

172 External examiners' reports confirm that the standards of awards are comparable to those achieved in equivalent HE institutions. Careful attention is paid to issues raised by external examiners: these include literacy standards, the structure of submitted work and the practice of not marking to the full range. Assessment is entirely by coursework and oral presentation, an approach which has provoked considerable debate within the Department. The assessed work seen in the course of the audit matched the course specifications. Extensive feedback is provided and there is evidence that double marking takes place.

173 Students expressed satisfaction with their overall course experience and with learning resources, though retention and progression remain key issues: it is clear that many students find the subject demanding, and significant levels of module non-completion exist.

174 From a study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and other documentation, and from discussions with students and staff, it is concluded that the standard of student achievement in philosophy is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

Politics

175 The courses considered in this DAT indicate active engagement with all aspects of the Academic Infrastructure and that the Department is compliant with all institutional quality and assessment requirements. The annual monitoring round is appropriately used; admission, assessment, progression and achievement data are dealt with in course monitoring reports and subject standards boards.

176 The sample of assessed work scrutinised in the course of the DAT indicates that internal moderation takes place; modules are monitored to identify attainment and progression problems. Students are clear about the nature of the assessment requirements; undergraduates are especially complimentary about the quality of feedback received on assessed work, though postgraduates are more equivocal. The reports of external examiners, with whom the Department's engagement is in line with institutional expectations and requirements, are predominantly encouraging and confirm the maintenance of standards.

177 Student representatives are conscientious and professional; students generally claim to be satisfied with the quality of their learning experience, speaking highly of their handbooks and, with the exception of specific comments about computer maintenance and core text availability, about learning resources generally.

178 From a study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and other documentation, and from discussions with students and staff, it is concluded that the standard of student achievement in politics is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

The University's use of the Academic Infrastructure

179 The University stated in its SED that Academic Regulations have been designed to be compliant with the FHEQ, and that the Academic Audit Unit is responsible for monitoring compliance with the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. There is evidence that, with a number of specific exceptions which are currently receiving attention, institutional procedures map on to the precepts of the sections of relevant sections of the *Code*.

180 The Quality Assurance Handbook requires validation panels to enquire whether course design has been fully informed by the *Code of practice*, subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ. Course specifications have been produced for all courses scrutinised in the course of the audit, are part of the documentation presented at validation and are reproduced in course handbooks. All arrangements regarding course specifications appear satisfactory, and the University is considered to have made appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure.

The utility of the SED as an illustration of the University's capacity to reflect upon its own strengths and limitations, and to act on these to enhance quality and standards

181 The SED was divided into four sections, the first three of which are aligned with the main subheadings suggested in QAA's *Handbook for institutional audit: England.* While it was appreciated that the University conceived its quality and standards framework holistically, it was sometimes difficult to gain a clear picture of the precise nature of the framework because of the level of detail provided about the extensive harmonisation process, the changes currently in train and the account of the forthcoming Quality 2006 initiative. Nonetheless, the University has produced a useful, wide-ranging and self-critical account of merger, reflecting the level, degree and velocity of change encountered by those most intimately involved with it. In particular, helpful summary evaluation

statements were provided at the end of major subsections, accompanied by a synopsis of areas the University regards as strengths and those which it has identified as requiring further action. It is considered that the approach taken by the University in its SED, and the content of the document, constitute evidence of a capacity for self-reflection as a basis for the development of the merged institution.

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

182 The University stated in its SED that its commitment to quality enhancement is expressed through learning and teaching, where it has achieved a number of competitive successes. In addition to instituting and developing the CAPD (see paragraphs 32 and 71) it encourages learning and teaching innovation and improvement through a fund which supports innovations on a competitive basis.

183 The University's intention that its approach to the quality infrastructure will evolve from being based on compliance into an increasingly developmental, enhancement-led approach is reflected in its plans to simplify procedures and adopt a holistic model supporting its strategic aims and mission. The existing quality infrastructure has permitted consolidation, but the evidence from the institutional audit supports the University's view that a more streamlined approach will better help it achieve its strategic objectives in the quality sphere.

Reliability of information

184 Authority to sign off published materials or amend the website is delegated to senior managers in services or academic departments; ensuring the accuracy and integrity of the Prospectus is the responsibility of the Student Recruitment Marketing and Communications Department; course handbooks are now centrally produced and draw up on a common framework designed to ensure the consistency and reliability of information for students.

185 Integrating information from two discrete institutions has been challenging, but the Enterprise Information Integration Programme, currently in the first year of its five-year cycle, is now charged with providing a single source for each information entity, with all information captured and validated at source, and held as a corporate resource.

186 Overall, substantial progress has been made in a major task. The provision of a CD-ROM on student data has proved helpful, though further refinement of its analytic capabilities will materially assist the University's retention, progression and achievement initiatives and help it achieve the optimal targeting of resources. The information strategy, with its promised availability of accurate and complete published information at institutional and discipline levels, has, although in its early stages, attracted widespread student support.

187 The University's Teaching Quality Information website went live in August 2004, and it is confirmed that although work on the provision of a full array of data is still pending, the data on admissions, progression and achievement are on-line and that the University has made satisfactory progress towards meeting the requirements of HEFCE's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*.

Features of good practice

188 Of the features of good practice noted in the course of the audit, the audit team identified the following in particular:

i   the University's policies and practices in the field of staff development, training and support, in particular the work of the Centre For Academic Professional Development and the Teaching and Learning Technology Centre (paragraphs 33, 74)

ii   the University's active engagement in pedagogic research, and the contribution this makes to the enhancement of the quality of learning and teaching (paragraph 33)

iii   the University's strategic approach to addressing issues of retention, progression and achievement, as reflected in the innovative features of the undergraduate modular scheme (paragraph 36).

Recommendations for action

189   The University may wish to consider the advisability of:

i   undertaking a review of its committee structure, at departmental as well as institutional level, to ensure that the structure as a whole fulfils its regulatory and deliberative functions in an effective and economical way (paragraph 25)

ii   proceeding with its stated intention of establishing and embedding a holistic and streamlined quality framework which enables it to have complete confidence in the quality of the student experience across all areas of the institution (paragraphs 31, 36)

iii   continuing to review and refine its collection, analysis and dissemination of management information, particularly relating to students, so as to ensure that its implications are thoroughly understood and addressed such that they contribute optimally to the University's enhancement agenda (paragraph 40)

iv   ensuring that, throughout the institution, the reports of external examiners are fully and appropriately addressed, and that any consequential changes are communicated directly to the external examiners themselves (paragraphs 40, 48)

v   requiring that its monitoring, reporting and action planning arrangements ensure that realistic deadlines are set and procedures completed in a timely manner (paragraph 43).

Appendix

London Metropolitan University's response to the audit report

The University welcomes the conclusion of the Institutional Audit report that 'broad confidence' can be placed in the present and future management of the quality of its courses and the academic standards of its awards. It is also pleased to note the positive outcome of the audit team's investigation into the six discipline audit trails, which supports this overall statement of confidence. The University thanks the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education for the professional manner in which the audit team conducted its enquiries.

The University considers the results of the Institutional Audit as an endorsement of the hard work carried out by staff over the past three years since the merger that formed London Metropolitan University. This, principally, is what has maintained and enhanced the high standard of courses and services offered to students. It is particularly pleasing that the innovative work that has gone into the development of the Undergraduate Modular Scheme has been recognised by the audit team.

The University very much welcomes references to areas of good practice highlighted throughout the report and the recognition in the report's conclusions given to: the University's policies and practices in the field of staff development, training and support; the contribution that the University's active engagement in pedagogic research makes to the enhancement of the quality of learning and teaching; and the University's strategic approach to addressing issues of retention, progression and achievement.

The University also notes that the recommendations for action that have been identified in the audit report broadly endorse the University's own objectives, such as 'establishing and embedding a holistic and streamlined quality framework'. In this respect, it is glad that 'The audit found substantial evidence of the University's systematic and thoughtful approach to articulating its aspirations for an effective and efficient quality framework'. We believe we will be able to build on this.

Indeed, the majority of the audit team's recommendations for action were already being progressed at the time of the visit, and we are pleased that the report has given added impetus to these areas of development.