

# **University of Northumbria at Newcastle**

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APRIL 2005

## Preface

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

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

## The purpose of institutional audit

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

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

## Judgements

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

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

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

## Nationally agreed standards

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

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

## **The audit process**

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

The main elements of institutional audit are:

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

## **The evidence for the audit**

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

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

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

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

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*Printed copies are available from:*

Linney Direct  
Adamsway  
Mansfield  
NG18 4FN

Tel 01623 450788

Fax 01623 450629

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

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## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Northumbria at Newcastle (the University) from 18 to 22 April 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, 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 academic award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK.

Academic quality is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate 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:

- innovations in student-centred assessment and learning

- the engagement of schools and central departments in sharing good practice across the institution, especially the work of the Enhancement Groups
- the extent and quality of staff development
- the use made of electronic communication systems, particularly the virtual learning environment to support flexible and blended learning and communicating with students, and Desktop Anywhere
- the priority given by the University to the quality of the student experience, particularly international students, students with disabilities, students progressing from Foundation Degrees and students on placements.

### Recommendations for action

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

It would be desirable for the University to:

- further embed good practice in the identification of plagiarism
- continue to enhance the provision of library resources
- continue the development of the Virtual Graduate School as a means of integrating the graduate research student experience across the schools.

### Outcomes of discipline audit trails

In the course of the audit five discipline audit trails were conducted in Accounting and Financial Management (BA (Hons) Accounting, BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance and MA Global Financial Management); Applied Social Work (BSc (Hons) Social Work, BSc/Postgraduate Diploma Childcare Social Work and MSc Health and Social Care (Generic and Research Methods)); Computing and Business Information Systems (BSc (Hons) Computing for Business, BSc (Hons) Business Information Systems, BSc (Hons) Computer Science, HND Computing for Business, MSc

Computing and MSc Applied Computing Technologies); English (BA (Hons) English; BA (Hons) English and Film Studies; and MA Creative Writing); and Sport Sciences (BA (Hons) Sports Studies, BSc (Hons) Sports Management and MSc Sports Management). The audit found that the standard of student achievement in all the awards named above was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), published by the QAA, and that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was 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 to define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the audit suggest that the University's response to the publication of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements are appropriate and timely.

In the future, institutional audit will consider the University's published information set, including the recommended summaries of external examiners' reports and of feedback from current students for each programme. The audit indicated that the University is working towards meeting this expectation. The University is awaiting the outcome of the development of the proposed national graduate survey before attempting to gather feedback from recent graduates for publication.

# **Main report**

## **Main report**

1 An institutional audit of the University of Northumbria at Newcastle (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 18 April 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), and has been endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills. For institutions in England, it replaces the previous processes of continuation audit, undertaken by QAA at the request of UUK and SCOP, and universal subject review, undertaken by QAA on behalf of HEFCE, as part of the latter's statutory responsibility for assessing the quality of education that it funds.

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

## **Section 1: Introduction: the University of Northumbria at Newcastle**

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

4 Established in 1992, the University defines its identity as a broad-based University focusing on programmes which are vocational and practice-based. Its forerunner, Newcastle Polytechnic, was established in 1969 following amalgamation of the Rutherford College of Technology, the College of Art and Industrial Design, the Municipal College of Commerce, and the City of Newcastle and the Northern Counties Colleges of Education. In 1995 the University merged with Bede, Newcastle and Northumbria (BNN) College of Health Studies.

5 The University has recently consolidated onto two campuses: the main campus is located in the centre of Newcastle, and a second campus at Coach Lane, some 3.5 miles away, supports over 6000 students in the Health, Community and Education Studies School (HCES). The University has recently announced ambitious plans for a large new extension adjacent to the main campus in order to facilitate growth plans and ease pressure on present facilities through new buildings to house three of the current schools.

6 The University, which has full degree awarding powers, employs over 2,500 staff and offers over 400 modular and credit-rated award programmes at all higher education (HE) levels. In October 2004 there were 23,337 students on non-franchised awards, and a further 3,855 on courses franchised or validated elsewhere. Among the core students, 29 per cent were part-time; 81 per cent were undergraduates; 17.5 per cent were registered for taught postgraduate awards, while 1.6 per cent were postgraduate research students; 57 per cent were mature, 21 per cent were from low participation neighbourhoods; 55 per cent were from the North East and 18 per cent were from outside of the UK.

7 Following a review which aimed to realign its academic provision 'to ensure the right mix of attractive, high quality programmes in subjects that reflect market needs' and 'to rationalise delivery to ensure viable and cost effective operations' the University restructured. The five faculties have been replaced by nine schools, each school is headed by a dean. The schools are: Applied Sciences (1,310); Arts and Social Sciences (3,167); Built Environment (1,767); Design (1,000); Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences (2,993); HCES (6,139); Law (1,942); Newcastle Business School (3,915); and Psychology and Sport Sciences (950). Following agreement with HEFCE, the University's interests at Carlisle will be transferred to the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan). All students registered up to September 2004 are now UCLan students but will receive University of Northumbria at Newcastle awards.

8 The SED has a particular emphasis on blended learning in its programmes, with face-to-face tuition backed by extensive use of the virtual learning environment (VLE), coupled with flexible provision for student computer access through wireless provision on campus and remote access through the internet.

9 The Vice-Chancellor renewed and refocused the University's mission simultaneously with changes to management shortly after his appointment with the aim of achieving corporate objectives shared across schools. The self-evaluation document (SED) stated that the University's overall future vision is 'to become one of the world's leading teaching and learning Universities, renowned for its innovative and research-based practice and exercising its regional, national and international role through an extensive network of locations and partnership'. In pursuing this vision, the University defines its core mission as being 'to meet the diverse needs of an international learning community and to contribute to society and its economic development through research, excellent teaching and high quality student support'.

10 In October 2004, 3,855 students were registered on University franchised and validated

programmes both in the UK and overseas. The University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision in 2005-06.

## Background information

11 The audit team had access to the following publicly available information:

- undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses
- the Quality Audit Report published by QAA in 2002
- subject review reports published by QAA
- the University's submissions to the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website.

12 During the audit, much highly comprehensive and accessible information was made readily available to the audit team by the University. This included the SED and the discipline self-evaluation documents (DSEDs) for the DATs, and a number of professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) reports. The team considered that the standard and scope of this documentation, much of which was also available through the University's intranet, was very good. The team also had access to the students' written submission (SWS) submitted by Northumbria Students' Union (NSU) and two Developmental Engagement (DE) reports produced by QAA.

## The audit process

13 A preliminary meeting was held between representatives of the University and an officer of QAA in June 2004. Following this meeting, the University was informed that the audit would include five DATs. The initial reading of the University's SED, which was received in December 2004, led the audit team to confirm that the audit would include DATs in Accounting and Financial Management, Applied Social Work, Computing and Business Information Systems, English and Sport Sciences. The five DSEDs were received by QAA in January 2005.

14 Members of the NSU Executive who attended the preliminary meeting were invited to submit a SWS expressing views on the

student experience at the University, and identifying any matters of concern or commendation with respect to the quality of programmes and the standard 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 on standards and quality were taken into account by the University. The SWS was received by QAA in December 2004. It had been prepared by members of the NSU, and was based upon a questionnaire survey and focus groups. During the briefing visit the NSU stated that the SWS had been shared with institutional staff and that there were no matters within it that would require the audit team to treat it with any level of confidentiality greater than that normally applying to the audit process. The audit team is very grateful to the students for preparing this valuable document to support the audit.

15 The briefing visit took place on 9 and 10 March 2005. The purpose of the briefing visit was to explore with the Vice-Chancellor, senior members of staff and student representatives matters relating to the management and enhancement of quality and standards raised by the SED and other documentation provided for the audit team, and the SWS. At the close of the briefing visit, a programme of meetings for the audit visit was developed by the team and agreed with the University.

16 The audit visit took place between 18 and 22 April 2005 and included a number of meetings with staff, and meetings with students registered on the programmes included in the DATs.

17 The audit team comprised Mr A Castley, Professor K Bonnett, Dr J P Campbell, Professor M G Stewart, Professor C Turner, and Dr N Zafiris as auditors, and Mr D C Attwood as audit secretary. Dr A J Biscoe coordinated the audit on behalf of QAA.

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

18 The findings of the 2001 Continuation Audit supported 'a high level of confidence in the University's ability to discharge the responsibility

for the academic standards of its awards and for the quality of education provided in its name'. The audit team commended the University for the proactive role of the Quality Committee (now the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (ULT)), the work of the Registrar's Department (now Academic Registry), the comprehensive system and processes for quality assuring collaborative provision, and the comprehensive and integrated system of students' support and guidance.

19 The audit report recommended the following actions to be advisable: implementing its plans to establish a greater institutional oversight of reports from professional and statutory bodies; carrying out as soon as possible its planned review of the newly devolved responsibilities and processes associated with Faculty Research Committees; ensuring, as a matter of urgency, that the University's established procedures for the approval of articulation agreements with overseas partners are followed in all aspects; and developing a comprehensive policy for the employment and training of part-time teaching staff, including postgraduate students. In addition, the audit team identified the following actions as desirable: devising appropriate arrangements to ensure institutional oversight of the range of conditions set in the process of course validation; continuing to give positive consideration to the reintroduction of periodic review; encouraging the systematic University-wide approach to the monitoring of the reasons for student non-completion; considering ways in which the Quality Improvement and Academic Standards committee can establish a more informed overview of the pattern of external examiner appointments determined at faculty level; and considering ways in which the professional qualification in teaching and the wider enhancement of the teaching role can be supported.

20 The University has responded to a number of recommendations primarily by embedding responsibilities into the remits of new committees and through updating its quality assurance processes. The ULT, which was established in

2002 and replaces the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Quality Improvement and Academic Standards Committee, approves external examiner appointments thus enabling easier monitoring of appointments, considers the conditions set for programme approval, the outcomes of periodic reviews and PSRB reports. ULT also monitors adherence to validation conditions. The University has established a new system of periodic review, and is currently working through a schedule of review.

21 The University now requires schools to examine completion rates as part of annual and periodic review. The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy 2003-06 has increased retention as one of its objectives, and the Student Well-Being Strategy is also geared to providing specific support. In response to the desirable recommendation that the University consider 'ways in which the professional qualification in teaching and the wider enhancement of the teaching role can be supported', a working group reported to ULT's predecessor, and is currently being progressed by a joint Learning and Teaching/Research Committee Task Group, and a new continuous professional development framework will be introduced in September 2005.

22 Postgraduate Research now has more effective organisation through the establishment of the University's Graduate School, and the Virtual Graduate School. The University has enhanced its internal communication strategy, though it has not acted on the recommendation to introduce a staff survey, preferring other means of communication.

23 The SED stated that the University welcomed the contents of the audit report. The report was initially considered by ULT's predecessor, and subsequently ULT has monitored implementation of the agreed actions.

24 The University underwent two DEs between 2002 and 2004. In both cases the teams expressed confidence in the academic standards achieved for programmes and in the quality of learning opportunities supporting students. Suggestions were made for further improvements

in periodic internal review processes, and in timely, effective feedback to students. In addition, a significant proportion of University provision is subject to scrutiny by PSRBs. School Learning and Teaching Committees (SLTCs), supported by Learning and Teaching Support (LTS), are responsible for initially receiving and responding to external reports. They produce an action plan that is considered by ULT.

25 The University's link with the Università Degli Studi de Parma, Italy was audited by QAA as part of an audit of UK institutions links with Italian partners in 2003. The report concluded that 'the University has in place effective procedures to assure the standards and quality of all its overseas arrangements'.

26 The audit team noted the careful way in which the University had responded to the findings of the 2001 Audit Report and other external reports. The team considered that the changes made to the University's quality framework in response to the 2001 report were appropriate, and particularly welcomed the increased role given to ULT in maintaining academic standards. The team also considered that local responsibility for both the assurance and the enhancement of quality had been effectively embedded at school level. Specific school committees and posts (associate deans, school registrar) contributed to this, while cross-school membership of committees and task groups facilitated the sharing of good practice. These changes, while inevitably creating some instability had not, in the team's view, had a significant adverse impact on the student experience.

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

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

27 The SED stated that the key procedures within the University's quality framework 'to secure and assure quality and standards are approval of the delivery of programmes and

modules; Annual Review of clusters of cognate taught programmes and of postgraduate research activity; Periodic Review of disciplines on a six-year cycle; monitoring and evaluating student performance; appointment of external examiners; and external accreditation, review and audit'.

28 The SED explained that in line with the University's managerial framework and the philosophy of responsibility for quality resting at the point of delivery, schools are responsible for the day to day operation of procedures except when an aspect of quality and standards is high risk or requires a University overview to safeguard consistency.

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

29 The Academic Board (AB) has delegated its responsibility for the management of quality and oversight of academic standards to ULT, the Research Committee (RC) and the Student Affairs Committee (SAC). The SED stated that 'these committees oversee the relevant strategies and University-wide policies, systems and frameworks, monitor standards and enhance quality'.

30 ULT, which is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) Learning and Teaching, has delegated responsibility for all taught programmes. Its terms of reference, which the audit team considered lacked clarity, include promoting and ensuring high standards, an ethos of continuous improvement, approving and monitoring the operation of University regulations, frameworks and procedures for the approval, delivery, review and improvement of taught programmes, appointing external examiners' and considering their reports, reviewing, monitoring and evaluating student attainment and considering outcomes of internal and external review. The External Examiners Appointments, Programme Approvals Scrutiny, and Teaching Innovations Grants are sub-committees of ULT.

31 In order to take forward the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2003-06, ULT has established

ten Enhancement Groups: Work-based Learning, Assessment, Innovative and Independent Learning, e-learning and Distance Learning, Foundation Degrees, Pedagogy for Diverse Student Needs, International Collaboration, Personal Development Planning and Transferable Skills, Flexible and Lifelong Learning, Research and Teaching. ULT also establishes time-limited Working Task Groups to deal with specific issues.

32 The University annually reviews the operation of the assessment processes contained in the Assessment Regulations and Guidelines for Good Assessment Practice. The audit team regarded the Regulations as comprehensive, and noted the University's commitment to keeping the Regulations and Guidelines under review through creation of the above mentioned ULT Enhancement Group and recent amendments to the Regulations as indicative of this. Innovations in assessment, which the team regarded as a feature of good practice, were reflected in the University's recent successful bids for the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning and the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) awards that focused on assessment practice.

33 Deans are responsible for ensuring that the quality framework is in place and the elements operate effectively. The SED stated that SLTCs, which are chaired by the school associate dean for learning and teaching, 'support the day-to-day operation of the framework in terms of standards maintenance and quality assurance and enhancement'. As members of both ULT and SLTCs, associate deans provide important vertical links between school and University committees. ULT nominates members of SLTCs to serve on other committees to enable horizontal integration. The SED stated that this 'peer review system aids communication, safeguards consistency and adherence to common principles, ensures mutual awareness of relevant issues, and enables the identification and sharing of good practice'. School registrars, who sit on SLTCs, work closely with associate deans and play a crucial role in ensuring that University policies

and procedures are implemented. Associate deans meet regularly as a separate group and school registrars meet regularly as part of the Registrar's Senior Management Group. The audit team concluded that this, along with the creation of ULT Enhancement Groups, was a feature of good practice.

34 Through its reading of University and school level committee minutes and in discussions with a wide range of academic and administrative staff, the audit team was able to consider the extent of horizontal and vertical integration across the University. It became apparent to the team that there was a good degree of cohesiveness between the various committees. The team considered that the engagement of schools and central services in sharing good practice across the institution, especially the work of the Enhancement Groups was a feature of good practice.

35 The Graduate School Committee (GSC), which is a sub-committee of the RC, is responsible for formulating, reviewing and developing the regulations, frameworks and procedures for research degrees. School Research Committees (SRCs), are responsible for assuring the GSC that school-based postgraduate research student activity takes place within the University's approved mechanisms and that the student experience is supported and provided for, by means of local monitoring and regular reports.

36 The terms of reference for SAC, which is chaired by the PVC for Student Affairs, includes promoting and ensuring high standards of the student experience, formulating and monitoring the Guidance and Learner Support, Widening Access and Participation and Lifelong Learning strategies, and encouraging employability and placement opportunities for students.

37 The audit team recognised that the University has recently undergone a period of significant structural change, and noted that many processes have been put in place relatively recently. However, the team concluded that the University has established a committee framework which is appropriate for

the level of devolution of responsibility for quality and standards to schools, and that from the evidence available to it that this was working effectively. The team encourages the University to continue to monitor the workings of its committee structure, and to consider the range and weight of business which it routes through ULT.

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

38 The SED stated that preparations for audit had enabled the University to not only take stock of the significant changes initiated in recent years but to identify where further action is needed. The SED listed areas warranting particular action as:

- refining the planning process to ensure that the implementation of the core and enabling strategies and the shift to an enhancement focus is progressed holistically
- embedding the Communication Strategy to facilitate communication and information flows and to support staff in times of change
- ensuring that staff and students have easy access to information sources via clearly defined and easily accessible web enabled routes
- implementing the replacement student record system and making sure dependent processes such as information provision and timetabling work effectively
- maintaining data accuracy
- ensuring feedback to and from students is effective, and that all students have the opportunity of being represented in relevant fora
- embedding further the use of the Virtual Learning Environment to ensure it appropriately supports all students' learning, and ensuring the necessary facilities and training are provided for staff
- further developing the Graduate School and support for research activity

- further refining the quality framework to ensure procedures facilitate the planned growth, especially in distance learning and overseas collaborative activity, whilst not compromising on robustness.

39 The SED also outlined a number of developments related to the University's quality framework. These included a review of the programme approval process, keeping the Internal Periodic Review (IPR) process under review; production by LTS of an overview of the findings of PSRB reports; reviewing format of the external examiner seminar and reviewing the arrangements for the review of collaborative programmes.

40 The audit team welcomed the University's frank assessment of the progress it had made with recent developments to its quality framework and its willingness to identify areas for further development. The team considered that these were appropriate developments and would likely further strengthen the University's quality framework. At the time of audit, the work of the Enhancement Groups was still developing and their impact on the University was yet to emerge. However, the team considered that their establishment reflected the University's commitment to enhancing the quality of student learning opportunities.

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

### **Programme approval and validation**

41 The University's procedures for the validation and approval of new programmes and approval of major changes have been revised, and a new Programme Approvals Handbook produced. Proposals for new programmes normally arise in schools with the formulation of a programme proposal and business plan. Using the University template SLTCs are expected to ensure that the proposal aligns with subject benchmark statements and the University Awards Framework. These are authorised to proceed to full development after consideration by the ULT Programme Approvals Scrutiny (LTPAS) sub-committee and a member of the University Executive.

42 If a proposal is approved by the SLTC an approval panel is established, the chair of which must be external to the school sponsoring the programme and nominated by LTPAS from a list of ULT approved chairs. The panel must also contain a subject specialist external to the University. The panel scrutinises the programme specification and module descriptors for new modules, and considers the delivery and learning arrangements. The SLTC considers the panel's recommendations and confirms to LTPAS before the start of the programme that conditions of approval have been met.

43 Additional procedures apply to new programmes involving collaboration with other institutions. In addition to the initial scrutiny at school level, legal aspects are examined and for new partnerships a partnership review process is established. LTS, on behalf of LTPAS, establishes the approval panel, whose recommendations are considered by ULT and AB.

44 There is no definitive University-wide policy on what constitutes a minor change to a programme. The audit team learnt that schools have different interpretations, and that this is currently being discussed with schools. The team encourages the University to resolve this anomaly as swiftly as possible so that different practice between schools does not erode standards and the quality of provision.

45 The SED stated that the programme approval processes reflects the precepts in the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, Section 7: *Programme approval, monitoring and review*, published by QAA, and 'are robust'. However, the University continues to strive to make them more effective and fit for purpose, including a major review of the collaborative approval process and the need to verify consistency across the University.

46 The audit team tracked the operation of the programme approval process for a number of programmes. The team found that the process worked as intended, taking full advantage of external peer involvement, and was thorough and effective. Supporting

documentation was thorough and the procedures were rigorously implemented.

47 The audit team concluded that the programme approval and modification processes were well designed, and saw evidence that procedures were effectively operated. However, the team would encourage the University to set a timetable for ensuring that the definition of what constitutes a minor change is agreed, and that when agreed this is consistently implemented.

### **Annual monitoring**

48 The procedures for annual programme review (APR) and annual module review (AMR) are set out in the Northumbria University Internal Review Handbook. The Handbook and associated templates are also available on-line. Annual monitoring is intended to provide a check on the quality of all University provision and to ensure continual enhancement. A University standard template, that requires analysis of a range of programme data, student feedback, student progression, graduate employment and external examiners' comment, is used to monitor each programme or cluster of programmes: the template is completed by the Programme Director. These procedures also apply to programmes that include distance learning and collaboration with another institution.

49 The chair of SLTC is responsible for signing off the APR, and for ensuring that required actions are completed. SLTCs are required to provide ULT with a holistic overview of issues arising from their school's APRs. APR templates may also include a number of University-level questions set by ULT to allow for annual thematic audits. Recent examples of this include monitoring progress of the introduction of personal development planning (PDPs) and giving students feedback on their assessed work.

50 The audit team considered that the APR template was systematic in giving a clear requirement for action and outcome, and created a common framework which could be locally adapted by the Programme Director. As part of the DATs, the team saw a number of

APRs and AMRs and associated documentation. The team also saw evidence of consideration and onward reporting of APRs by SLTCs. The team concluded that the University's procedures for annual monitoring enabled it to be assured that there was appropriate monitoring of standards and quality at the programme level, and that relevant matters were reported upwards by means of SLTCs to ULT. The team welcomed the flexibility inherent in the APR process that allowed ULT to undertake annual thematic enquiries.

### **Periodic review**

51 In response to the 2001 Audit Report recommendation, the University has reintroduced a system of periodic review. Commencing in 2003, IPR operates on a six-year cycle with a three-yearly Interim Review. Details of the process are located in the Northumbria University Internal Review Handbook and there are University reporting templates and guidance to support the process. The re-approval of courses is not involved in periodic review. IPR is designed to assure the quality and standards of the learning process within programmes and to identify the extent to which students are able to achieve the desired learning outcomes. The procedures for IPR involving programmes that include collaboration with other institutions are largely the same. The SED stated that IPR 'takes an overt student perspective in evaluating provision and uses the programme specification as a key resource'.

52 IPR requires a DSED and students are encouraged to provide a SWS. IPR panels are chaired by a senior academic from another school and contain at least one subject specialist from outside of the University approved by ULT. The IPR panel reports through a University report template, and the process is supported by LTS. ULT receives the report, follows up proposed actions, and receives a follow up report one year later.

53 Interim Review takes place every three years and is considered by the institution to be 'an extremely positive procedure enabling

preparation for Periodic Review and for good practice to be shared across the school'. A transitional version of Interim Review has been in place since 2003 so that all subject areas had had some experience of periodic review prior to spring 2005.

54 The SED stated that the University is keeping IPR under review. A report to ULT in autumn 2004 highlighted two issues: the size of the discipline defined for review and the adequacy of the process for collaborative provision. The audit team learnt that these matters are currently being addressed.

55 As part of the DATs, the audit team read four recent IPR reports and one transitional Interim Review report, and supporting documentation. Each review included an SED and SWS, and the team was able to track consideration of the reports and action plans through the relevant school and University committees. The team welcomed the prevalence of SWSs, and would encourage the University to include a SWS in all institutional reviews, including Interim Review. The team considered that the IPR process was not only well designed but from the evidence available to it, that the procedures were operated in accordance with University expectations. The team did note that the quality of the IPR SEDs varied, especially in their consideration of progression and completion statistics. Nonetheless, the team noted the improvement across time of the SEDs and the willingness of the University to respond to University-level recommendations.

56 Overall, the audit team considered that the University's arrangements for programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review were fit for purpose. The team noted that the application of IPR was still bedding down, but appreciated the University's willingness to continue to review these procedures and monitor their application.

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

57 The University seeks external input into its processes in a number of ways. There are generally two opportunities for the University to

gain external input to the programme approval process. Usually external advice is sought informally in the initial stages of constructing a programme. It is a University requirement that there is an external subject specialist on the panel for programme approval and validation. APRs include summaries of external examiners' comments. Periodic review panels include at least one external subject specialist. Interim Review procedures also require an external member of the panel. The University considered that these procedures reflected the principles of externality set out in the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme approval, monitoring and review*.

58 The audit team concluded that the University's procedures for ensuring external involvement in its programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review procedures were well designed. The team saw substantial evidence in the DATs that the procedures were effectively implemented and that the external advice was used constructively.

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

59 SLTCs are responsible for scrutinising the nominations of external examiners. ULT's External Examiner sub-committee is responsible for appointment of external examiners, requests for re-allocation of examiners' duties, and any requests for an extension of office. On appointment, schools provide external examiners with an induction pack including the Examiners' Handbook, and they, together with existing examiners, are invited to an annual introductory day-long seminar.

60 The University operates a two-tier system of examination boards for all taught programmes. At modular examination boards (MEBs) the focus is on moderating the standards of student achievement of the modules belonging to a particular subject group or division. The SED stated that programme award boards (PABs) focus on 'ensuring consistent and fair application of the University's regulations to determine ability to progress within and to attain the award'.

61 External examiners' reports are submitted on a standard template. Reports on MEBs ask

for comment on a range of issues including assessment processes, modules examined and student performance. Reports from PABs ask for comment on operation of the examination board and student performance. In meetings with senior staff the audit team heard that, to ensure subject external examiners have an input into overall student performance, there is provision for the MEB to convene informally before the PAB to make recommendations to it about progression and awards issues. The team heard that the proportion of students considered for the totality of their performance varies among schools from about 50 to 90 per cent. The team considered that this was a viable procedure in a modular scheme, and accorded with the revised section of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*.

62 External examiners' reports are received by school registrars, and are distributed to relevant subject staff in the schools and a copy is read by the PVC (Learning & Teaching). The SLTC chair is responsible for ensuring that reports are responded to, and that action taken is fed back to the examiner concerned. External examiners' reports are formally considered as part of the APR process and actions taken are reported to ULT via the school's summary APR report. A summary report detailing generic issues and based on all reports is also prepared annually by LTS and presented to ULT. The SED stated that the report from LTS for 2002-03 was sent to ULT in February 2004 and confirmed overall standards and that the processes for the assessment, examination and determination of awards were sound and fairly conducted. The report identified a number of good practices and an extensive number of recommendations. The audit team also saw the summary report for 2003-04 ULTs response, and how SLTCs had responded. The team was reassured by the detail and frankness of both the report and the responses. This report noted that 'some reports were complimentary' about the way that examination boards had dealt with cases of plagiarism. However, it was also suggested that the regulations could be difficult to interpret and that the seriousness of the offence should be more prominent. It was

pointed out that the absence of 'case law' in some schools could mean inconsistencies in levels of punishment. The provision of electronic versions of written work and the need to promote greater student awareness of the issues was suggested. One external examiner advocated greater use of plagiarism software which had been used to great effect in one module and was supported by students. The team concluded that it would be desirable for the University to further embed recognised good practice in the identification of plagiarism.

63 The SED stated that the University believes that 'the external examiner system is crucial to maintaining, sustaining and enhancing standards, and has confidence in its operation'. Moreover, the University considers that the appointment process is transparent and rigorous, and the processes for inducting external examiners and for responding to their reports are effective. The process of approving appointments enables a University-wide overview to be maintained.

64 As part of the DATs the audit team read a number of external examiners' reports, and tracked the way in which the subject teams responded to the reports. The team also viewed the examiners' reports posted to the TQI website. From the evidence available to it, the team largely concurred with the University's evaluation of the operation and security of the external examiner system. The team considered that the formal and informal arrangements for the consideration of individual students' performance at MEBs and PABs worked reasonably well, and noted no concerns about its operation in recent external examiners' reports read by the team.

### **External reference points**

65 The SED stated that the University has engaged constructively with the Academic Infrastructure and 'regarded it as a useful resource'. The University considers that its Quality Framework 'aligns with all elements' of the Infrastructure 'and ensures that standards are set appropriately'.

66 The SED stated that the *Code of practice* is 'regarded as a source of good practice, to be used for regular review of our approach, and against which to benchmark our practices, rather than as a set of rules set in stone'. The process of embedding the *Code's* principles in the University's frameworks has been to consider each section of the *Code* as it is published. ULT has maintained an overview of the University's response to the *Code* by receiving regular progress reports from the working groups established to review sections of the *Code*. The audit team learnt that ULT is already considering recent revisions to the *Code*. Through its reading of progress reports to ULT and through reading a number of University documents the team concluded that the University's approach to the *Code* had been rigorous.

67 The University's Modularised Framework was aligned to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) published by QAA in 2002, and schools were required to revise programme structures by the end of 2003-04. The SED stated that 'most adjustments' were required in the area of graduate level and lower level awards in linked postgraduate programmes, and 'have been completed'. The programme approval process explicitly requires that subject providers have ensured that new programmes are appropriately located in the FHEQ. APR and IPR reports seen by the audit team demonstrated that the University has an effective mechanism to monitor the location of awards.

68 APR and IPR require that programme specifications make explicit reference to subject benchmark statements published by QAA and, where appropriate, to those produced by PSRBs. Through the DAT documentation the audit team saw evidence that subject providers make good use of benchmark statements.

69 The SED stated that the University 'had found it difficult to ensure that the programme specification can be multi-purpose'. For this reason the University has adopted a staged communications approach. The institutional website and prospectus provide what the University feels are fit-for-purpose levels of

information for intending students. Students are then referred on to the department itself for both module and programme details, which contain module and programme learning outcomes. However, the University has decided that programme specifications should be accessible documents and has produced a standard template. At the time of writing the SED the University was confident that all programmes should now be using programme specifications'. The audit team learnt during the audit visit that all programmes have now produced programme specifications.

70 The audit team concluded that the University has responded appropriately to the Academic Infrastructure and made good use of benchmark statements produced by PSRBs.

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

71 The SED stated that the University has active engagement with 34 PSRBs, in addition to the programmes accredited by external bodies in the Standing Conference of Heads of European Studies. Outcomes of external reviews at the subject level are initially considered by the appropriate SLTC. An action plan is produced and, along with the original report, is sent to ULT. It is proposed that in future LTS on behalf of ULT will produce an overview of good practice and recommendations for wider distribution across the University.

72 The University experienced two QAA coordinated DEs. In both cases the DE teams reported confidence in the academic standards set for and achieved by students and the quality of learning opportunities. The reports endorsed the University's periodic review process. The reports also made a number of recommendations with both recommending a more consistent and timely approach to giving students feedback on their assessed work. In response to this recommendation ULT added a question to the APR template for 2003-04 which focussed on student feedback.

73 The audit team read a number of reports from external bodies and tracked their consideration through school and University

committees. The team noted the careful consideration given by ULT to the reports, and encouraged the University to progress its intention for LTS to produce a summary of outcomes for wider dissemination.

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

74 At the University level student representatives sit on the Board of Governors, AB, ULT, and SAC. The SED stated that their input is 'welcomed and valued'. The President of the NSU also meets regularly with the PVC Staff and Student Affairs. A good example of the University and NSU working together is the recent revision of the student complaints procedure. Students were active members of the Task Group which resulted in a procedure which was more student friendly, and fit for purpose.

75 At school level, student representatives sit on SLTCs and SRCs. Many schools have also had staff-student liaison committees (SSLCs) for some time. Programme Committees have been the main way in which subject teams have acquired feedback from students on their learning experiences.

76 The audit team learnt that students generally felt that the level of representation was sufficient, especially in the higher-level committees. The SWS noted that while 60 per cent of students were aware of course representatives, 37 per cent did not understand the role of representatives. The SWS also noted that course representation varied 'dramatically' from 'high involvement' of representatives in the Law School to 'no awareness' of these in Business & Management and Applied Sciences and 'purely for show' on the Sport Studies and Computing Networks degrees.

77 The SED stated that the University regards 'student representation as intrinsic to ensuring the quality of its operation and the principle of providing students with the opportunity to raise matters of proper concern to them within the Committee structure'. In the past the University was satisfied that its levels of representation were appropriate, and in general were effective in capturing the student voice. However, the

University has now concluded that it has not been as effective as it might be. In response to concerns that students were not always receiving feedback on module evaluation questionnaires and the fact that many schools were successfully operating SSLCs, ULT has decided that SSLCs should be formalised and systematised across the University. With the support of the University, the NSU has appointed, a full-time Membership Manager to coordinate student representation. A pilot training programme in 2002-03 for student representatives has been extended in recent years, and is now delivered jointly by the University and the NSU. In addition, SAC has recently approved guidelines on the selection, role and expectations of the student representatives.

78 The audit team concluded that, overall, the level of student representation was adequate and welcomed the University's recent initiatives to address remaining weaknesses and enhance the effectiveness of the operation of the various levels of representation.

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

79 Beyond the systems of representation described above, student feedback is obtained mainly using questionnaires. A machine-readable questionnaire is available for module tutors to use and students are encouraged to make qualitative comments as well as to complete the 'objective' sections of the questionnaire. A similar questionnaire supports APR. Student support services also gather systematic feedback on the services provided, usually through questionnaires. The module review form includes a requirement for a summary of student feedback, and this in turn feeds into APR.

80 The outcomes of feedback on modules and programmes, and school or University responses are conveyed to students in a variety of ways. Good practice noted in the SED was the posting of responses on the school VLE, while other subject teams use the following year's module handbooks to convey responses to student feedback.

81 The SED stated that there was some evidence of student fatigue with questionnaires. ULT, in consultation with SAC, has asked for this to be assessed. ULT has recognised that the process for informing students of actions taken in response to their feedback, including that from module questionnaires, is not always fully effective.

82 The SED stated that although the procedures for obtaining feedback from graduates and employers are in place, they 'are not systematised'. Graduate feedback is largely gathered from alumni, and the University is preparing to introduce the National Student Survey. Feedback from employers is gathered in a number of ways including through employer forums, especially in subject areas accredited by PSRBs or involving placements, and the audit team saw evidence that this is used in the design and revision of curricula.

83 The SED stated that recent IPRs have confirmed that appropriate procedures are in place to enable the gathering of student feedback. ULT has the responsibility for ensuring that an overview is maintained. Nonetheless, the University remains committed to further improving feedback to students. The Learning and Teaching Strategy has this as one of its main aims. Moreover, the University has set up a Task Group to look into this area.

84 In reading the APRs and IPR reports as part of the DATs the audit team saw summaries of the issues raised by students in evaluation questionnaires, and how the subject teams had responded to matters raised. The team concluded that these processes were generally effective, although not always consistently applied. The team considered the use of the VLE to summarise feedback and responses as a welcome feature in the feedback process. The team noted that the collection of feedback from graduates and employers was not systematic or uniform. However, the team recognised that the extensive contacts maintained with these two groups was informally gathered and used to inform curriculum development.

## **Progression and completion statistics**

85 The Information Unit in the Finance Department 'provides a full set of statistical information for each programme using the data held on the Student Administration System (SAS)'. This includes information on applications, enrolments and targets, entry qualifications, progression and completion rates, and results. It is converted into a more user friendly Excel spreadsheet, supplemented by tables of comparative HEFCE and UCAS data, and supplied electronically for each programme through a public folder accessible to designated staff.

86 The APR template requires programme teams to engage with the centrally provided data and to comment on key programme performance indicators, evaluating these against sector benchmarks and previous performance. The analysis covers data on retention and on outputs, and the template requires an action plan if the monitoring of progression or other elements shows problems. It is possible, therefore, to assess the position both at the end of each cycle and to plot longitudinal trends over time against national norms. In addition, overview reports on the analysis of student performance, based on marks stored in the University's marks recording system, are periodically produced by LTS for ULT. These allow comparison of performance between subjects as well as between forms of programme delivery and modes of assessment, so enabling trends to be plotted and actions taken to enhance performance if appropriate. IPR requires that progression and completion data is considered through reviewing APRs. DSEDs read by the audit team revealed variations as regards comment on statistical information in IPR reports across areas of provision. The team also noted that data limitations were on occasion the subject of comment by IPR panels and ULT reports.

87 The SED stated that the University is making good use of the present student records and related systems, notwithstanding their limitations. The systems provide statistics summarising student progression for APR. The main limitation recognised here is the apparent inability to produce genuine 'cohort statistics',

tracing the progress from start to finish of specified groups or individuals in the system, as opposed to, for example, passes among those enrolled on level 5 in a session. However, for MEBs summary results are classified by student course of origin, useful for analysing module suitability for particular programmes. Student profile data are also available from module level results to better inform MEBs in anticipation of the proceedings of PABs.

88 The SED stated that analysis of data as part of APR 'is an essential tool for enhancement'. It also stated that while improvements have been made in response to requests from staff to make them more reliable and more usable by programme leaders 'there are still problems in producing fully comprehensive and reliable information sets for all our students' particularly those on flexible or non-standard programmes.

89 The audit team learnt that the University has set in train a number of initiatives to ensure improved management information data is available to subject staff. The Data Management Project focused on cleansing existing data, improving links between systems and changing practices and procedures to ensure data is maintained appropriately. More comprehensive training for administrative staff has been put in place and the accountabilities and responsibilities of all staff in maintaining accurate information have been articulated. In addition, the University has decided to replace SAS with a Strategic Information Technology Services (SITS) system.

90 The audit team appreciated the University's frankness in outlining the successes and problems it is experiencing with using statistical information in the management and enhancement of standards, and its plans to enhance its activities in this area. In particular, the team welcomed the University plan to introduce SITS.

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

91 The University has a clear Human Resources Strategy which is overseen by the Human Resources Committee (HRC). The

Human Resources Service (HR), which is responsible for developing and supporting the Human Resources Strategy, and reports to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Staff and Student Affairs), is leading on implementing the Strategy. The SED stated that changes to the HR framework 'are being progressed to the timescales set out in the strategy'.

92 The SED stated that while much responsibility for staffing is devolved to schools there is 'a comprehensive framework' which sets requirements for appropriate and fair advertising, short listing and interviewing processes. In order to provide assurance of consistency, the HR Service is planning an annual HR audit tool from 2004-05.

93 The University has an induction programme in which all newly appointed staff are expected to take part involving both institutional and school level activities. The SED stated that the University had some concerns about the consistency of local induction practices which will be considered in the annual HR audit. The audit team heard that the Vice-Chancellor was auditing the process by way of sandwich lunches with newly appointed staff. The team saw evidence of extensive and detailed documentation at school level to allow newly appointed staff to monitor their induction with either their manager or their mentor. This process was aided at times by co-locating new staff with more experienced staff in offices that ensured good levels of acculturation. The University has recently set up an induction programme for part-time teaching staff and postgraduate teaching assistants. It is now a contractual requirement that new staff attend and this is encouraged by the payment of a fee. There is a standard probation period of 12 months for academic staff with no HE experience. The University has no formal requirement for mentoring, but the SED stated that it does occur locally.

94 The University has a Staff Development and Appraisal Scheme, which applies to all academic staff. It is not linked to promotion or reward. Deans and service directors are responsible for ensuring that academic staff appraisals are

conducted annually. Staff development needs are then reported to HR. The SED stated that in some schools appraisals were less effective in contributing to the determination of staff development needs and work-load planning. The audit team learnt that appraisals were taking place amongst academic staff that it met and the University's Training and Development Manager was meeting with school management teams to discuss development strategies for approval by the HRC.

95 The University has an Applauding and Promoting Teaching (APT) awards scheme of some £70,000, originally funded by the Rewarding and Developing Staff Round 1 monies which is consolidated into core funding - and now supported by the HEFCE Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund which is used to support innovation and dissemination of good practice in all forms of teaching, learning and assessment activity. There are a variety of levels of award that range from £1,000 - £5,000. As part of the computing DAT the audit team heard that the awards were significant in embedding learning and teaching issues amongst academic staff and that 56 have been allocated for 2005-6.

96 The University has set up a new promotion scheme at Personal Chair, Reader and Teaching Fellow levels which aims to provide more promotional opportunities for academic and research staff in both teaching and research. The audit team saw evidence that academic staff were indeed applying for these new internal appointments in some numbers, and that the University was applying the new criteria rigorously, with a number of successful outcomes.

97 The University has recently clarified its expectations of research and scholarly activity, highlighting the need to align outcomes to the school's academic needs. A key requirement is that RSA should 'enrich and strengthen the development of the subject and the learning experience of the students'. The audit team learnt that discussions of RSA, which are conducted as part of the appraisal process or separately, have represented a significant culture change in some schools. The new Academic Workload Model, which is being piloted during

2004-05, and which the SED claimed will 'help in planning and monitoring this activity', was understood by staff that the team met.

98 The SED stated that the University considered that 'its systematic approach to the recruitment of staff, and its promotion and reward mechanisms, backed by a clear and comprehensive HR Strategy, provide a sound framework'. The audit team concluded that this framework laid a sound basis for the appointment, appraisal and reward of teaching staff. It considered APT a feature of good practice, and that the HR framework should enable the University to address inconsistencies recognised in the SED.

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

99 The SED stated that there 'are a number of agencies working in partnership to provide academic staff development' including HR, LTS, Materials and Resource Centre for Education and Technology (MARCET) and the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PCAP) team. It was stated that their activity is coordinated through the Training and Development Manager to ensure a strategic overview. Part-time academic staff have full access to all staff development programmes.

100 The Corporate Training and Development Programme (CTDP) is designed to integrate individual staff development needs with the University's aims and strategic objectives. The CTDP is an extensive programme, open to all staff, that is coordinated by the Staff Development and Training Manager and the audit team heard evidence of its effectiveness.

101 The staff development programme run by LTS as part of the CTDP provides several annual conferences, including the Northumbria Conference, and weekly seminars and workshops for teaching and learning support staff. The events provide a range of issues around quality assurance and teaching enhancement, and are related to the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The 'Northumbria Conference', which is in its fourth year, is a

major vehicle for dissemination of innovation in teaching and learning. It provides opportunity for staff, including APT award holders, to demonstrate their work to their peers.

102 MARCET supports all University staff development activity and gives particular emphasis to strategic activity to enhance teaching, learning and assessment and the development of information technology (IT) skills. The SED stated that it is 'a well used resource'. Amongst other things it produces the Red Guides, a series of good practice publications, which are intended to stimulate discussion and initiate action.

103 Funds are allocated to schools to support staff training and development needs linked to annual local objectives. Bids are submitted each year to the Training and Development Manager to provide and support Away Days, school conferences and events provided by LTS.

104 The University has instituted a pedagogic research network: Researching the Challenges in Academic Practice. This is a network of colleagues including academic, research and support staff who are actively engaged in research into teaching, learning and/or assessment. The audit team heard evidence of this impacting on the learning and teaching culture of the University and in discussion with the Director of the Assessment for Learning CETL heard of the relationship between the work of the Learning and Teaching Co-ordinators, the APT awards and ULT's Enhancement Groups.

105 Completion of the PCAP is required for newly appointed lecturers without a relevant teaching qualification and with less than two years' full-time experience. The University now requires that participants on this programme are released from teaching one full day a week and have a 20 per cent reduction in their normal teaching load. The first two modules of the PCAP provide a shorter Effective Teaching in Higher Education programme, suitable for part-time lecturers, learning support staff and research staff. Both programmes are accredited by the Higher Education Academy. PCAP is part of the University's new continuous professional

development framework for teaching staff. The framework provides linked awards starting with PCAP and progressing to a professional doctorate qualification. The Continuing Professional Development Task Group will monitor progress of the framework on behalf of ULT.

106 Peer observation of teaching is well established in many schools. There are University guidelines to support it, but it is not universal. The SED stated that IPR is intended to report on the benefits of peer observation as a performance and developmental tool. The audit team heard from staff how PCAP was making peer observation a more commonplace feature in many schools.

107 In recognition of the myriad of providers and streams of staff development activity the SED stated that the University has recognised that there was a 'need for better coordination of the contributors'. Accordingly, the University has recently established a teaching staff development focus group which will also seek to improve linkage of staff development provision to needs identified in schools. The SED stated that the fact that staff development and training is now being coordinated by HR 'should ensure a consistent approach and standards of service in the organisation of events'.

108 The audit team concluded that the University's many initiatives in staff development represented a feature of good practice. The team welcomed the University's recent initiatives to coordinate staff support and development activities across the University, but considered it too early to comment on the effectiveness of this new structure.

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

109 The SED stated that the University has 32 awards that involve some element of distance learning, and that these are reviewed as an 'integral part' of the APR and IPR. ULT has established an e-Learning and Distance Learning Enhancement Group to promote planned growth in this area.

110 The University has established a number of initiatives to facilitate the development of pedagogically robust approaches to distance learning. These include MARCET's Red Guide: Flexible Learning, and some schools have established groups to support the development of distance learning materials. Mechanisms for sharing good practice across the University include the work of the Distance Learning/e-Learning, Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator, the Online Service academic advisory team and an e-Learning newsletter. Staff development in this area is coordinated by the e-Learning Staff Development Task Group which has been established as a sub-group of ULTs e-Learning and Distance Learning Enhancement Group.

111 The SED stated that subject teams 'use a range of methods for supporting distance learning students, including: face-to-face contact; email; telephone contact; together with announcement; discussion board; messaging; student communities; and virtual classroom functions within Blackboard'. At the time of the audit an e-Learning and Distance Learning Enhancement Group was considering how to develop the specific service for part-time, distance and full time learners. The aim is to embed the use of VLE and to provide blended learning support for conventional learners as well as students on placement abroad or distance learners off campus.

112 The e-Learning and Distance Learning Enhancement Group, which is primarily intended to enhance current provision, disseminate good practice and support future developments, will present preliminary findings of a survey of current e-learning & distance e-learning provision to the next Northumbria Conference. The Red Guide on Flexible Learning noted above, encourages good practice in embedding e-learning within standard courses. It gives clear advice on establishing educational aims and deciding realistic learning outcomes, in addition to providing instructions on how to construct user-friendly modules. The audit team considered that the Red Guide is a very practical effort to encourage tentative staff to

move towards a blended learning approach in their teaching methods.

113 The audit team learnt that student views on e-learning and distance learning activity had been gathered as part of a wide ranging project to embed e-learning as a tool to support conventional programmes. The University aims to use the VLE to develop 'blended learning' within the institution and is addressing problems with student access to the system. The further embedding of this has been identified as one of the key tasks for the ULT enhancement group.

114 The University has also instituted the Northumbria e-Tutor Awards 2004-2005 which will recognise excellence in teaching on-line or by means of e-learning. Award winners will receive a small prize and will be encouraged to go forward for the national e-Tutor of the Year competition.

115 The audit team learnt that the University was in the process of considering whether to introduce special quality management arrangements for flexible or distributed learning, rather than relying on the current annual monitoring and review procedures utilised in conventional programmes as at present. With the planned expansion of e-learning and distance delivery of programmes as part of a move towards greater use of blended learning, the team welcomes the University's intentions to review its procedures in the light of publication of the revised *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

### **Learning support resources**

116 Learning support resources are largely provided by the University Library and Learning Service (ULLS) and the Information Technology Services (ITS). The SED stated that they aim 'to provide staff and students with access to a fully integrated learning environment to support and meet the diverse needs of the learning community'.

117 ULLS provides multi-site library and on-line information services, learner enquiry/support services, open access IT facilities and a programme of information and IT literacy skills

delivered flexibly and available on-line through the Skills Plus programme on the VLE. The SWS stated that more than 70 per cent of students were more than satisfied with the services provided. Students greatly appreciated the recent increase in library opening hours. Students' concerns focused on increased access, and the number and availability of up to date texts. However, they greatly appreciated the efforts made by the University to address their concerns which included an increase in library opening hours, renovations to the library building, and the introduction of computer loans and wireless networking facility in the library. However, in meetings with students the audit team learnt that there remained subject areas where the availability of core texts remained an issue for students. The team considered that it would be desirable for the University to continue to enhance its provision of library resources.

118 ITS provides a high-speed network infrastructure, communication technologies, centralised server infrastructure and application software and technical support for classrooms and audiovisual services. It works closely with Estates Services in the provision of non-specialist classroom facilities. VLE and Desktop Anywhere have been introduced to the benefit of both staff and students, although the audit team learnt that use of the former is uneven both across the campuses and within subject areas. The SWS indicated that IT provision is much appreciated by students; although some concerns were expressed about some back-up facilities. Students told the team that Desktop Anywhere is particularly useful to students working off-site (including distance learning students) who can access the library and hence on-line electronic journals. A most useful facility has been the introduction of wireless hot spots around the University, in libraries, public areas, classrooms and lecture theatres, and in individual rooms in some halls of residence. The use of VLE is also greatly appreciated by students, although they note some inconsistent use of it by lecturers regarding the uploading of lecture handouts. The team learnt from staff and DAT students that increasing use was being made of the VLE both in accessing support

services and in academic study. Students may also use the VLE as a conference site to discuss assignments and issues on their courses and these features are of particular interest to distance learning students. Although there is some unevenness on use of the VLE across the University it is an important information and learning resource with up to 9,000 individual log-ins on weekdays. A recent University survey reported that over 90 per cent of staff and 75 per cent of students use it on a regular basis. In addition, there is a facility to obtain loan laptops in libraries so that students can take the laptops to where they are accessing books and journals. The team concluded that these developments demonstrated the University's commitment to using electronic communication systems to enhance student learning, and was a feature of good practice.

119 The SED stated that the level and quality of library resource provision is 'adequate to support current needs but the University will reconsider provision in the context of the University's Growth Strategy'. It also stated that 'robust, workable and effective quality assurance mechanisms are well established in ITS and ULLS'. Both services set, publish and monitor annual service standards and performance indicators. The SED stated that user surveys and feedback, liaison groups, specific reviews, and the outcomes of the APR process 'provide rich monitoring and planning data and enable the overall quality of the service to be assessed and trends to be tracked'. University level committees receive summaries of feedback regarding library resources, while the ITS School Liaison Groups and the ITS University Services Liaison Group receive feedback on IT usage. Through its reading of APR reports and the minutes of relevant committees, the audit team concluded that the University's mechanisms for assuring the quality of its learning support resources were effective.

120 The audit team noted the University's positive approach to the provision of up to date electronic communication systems, and recent extensions to library opening hours. Students' views recorded in the SWS and conveyed

during meetings with the team confirmed high satisfaction ratings of the provision of electronic resources, but the team considered that it would be desirable for the University to continue to enhance the provision of library resources. The team concluded that the University's mechanisms for ensuring that adequate levels of learning support resources are provided were appropriate.

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

121 Academic guidance, support and supervision are an integral part of the University's Student Well-Being Strategy which conceptualises a three-phase 'student journey': becoming a student, being a student and the graduating student. SAC has recently reviewed performance in each phase, which has led to the updating of the University's Policy for Guidance and Learner Support.

122 The Policy applies to all students. The SED stated that the Policy 'reflects the University's belief that guidance is a central part of the academic staff role and that guidance should be firmly and explicitly integrated with on-course delivery of teaching and learning'. The University has asked schools to ensure they provide support to at least the minimum standard set out in the Policy included in the Handbook for Guidance Tutors. All students are allocated a guidance tutor at enrolment, whom they are obliged to meet three times in the first year. Guidance tutors are available as required to help sort out any issues and problems which students may experience. The responsibilities of the guidance tutor are set out in the Handbook. Schools are required to have a tutorial adviser who oversees operation of the school's provision of guidance tutoring.

123 School-based induction covers issues such as learning resources, regulations, use of the VLE and student support. The University has a Study Skills Centre which provides resources to help with study skills, writing skills, numeracy and exam techniques. The Centre has co-produced the useful Your Guide to Effective Study. A new VLE information literacy course 'Skills Plus',

developed by ULLS in association with Student Services, is designed to help all students acquire the skills required to complete successfully their studies and equip them to become lifelong learners. It can be incorporated into existing skills modules and the reflective elements meet the needs of PDPs. Progress and take up will be monitored to assess its effectiveness.

124 The University was quick to respond to the progress files initiative. In 2001 it determined that PDPs needed to be an integral part of the academic experience. The 2002-03 APRs indicated that with very few exceptions, programmes had implemented the new framework. The audit team noted that the University has not been complacent on this matter, and that through the ULT Enhancement Group has sought to encourage further development of PDPs.

125 The University takes great care over supporting student placement learning and the Framework for Student Exchanges contains rigorous guidelines concerning finding, managing and evaluating placements. These guidelines reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 9: Placement learning*. Recommendations for guidance and support of distance learners are set out in Procedures for Developing and Approving Arrangements for Distance Learning and Distance Delivery Courses.

126 General academic guidance for postgraduate students is published within the University Research Degrees Handbook, and is supplemented by advice published by schools. Postgraduate students met by the audit team confirmed that supervisory arrangements were good. There are regular meetings between PhD students and supervisors. The effectiveness of the arrangements is monitored by SRCs through APR reports. There is a formal University training programme for postgraduate students which aligns with research council requirements. It includes generic/transferable skills training organised by the Graduate School Office, and school-based subject-specific skills training. Building on an earlier pilot, the Graduate School has now launched the first version of PDPs for postgraduate students, and

in meetings with the team postgraduate students confirmed that PDPs were useful in support of their studies.

127 Following a review of postgraduate research student activity in 2001-02 the University decided to establish a Virtual Graduate School to address some of the matters contained within the report related to the relative isolation of some research students. It is planned that this website will develop into a single gateway to information and discussion on all matters to do with research student support. The audit team appreciated that these arrangements were still being embedded, but considered it desirable for the University to continue the development of the Virtual Graduate School as a means of integrating the graduate research student experience across the schools.

128 Students met by the audit team considered that the arrangements for academic guidance, support and supervision were effective in meeting their needs. Students were positive as to the accessibility of staff, and considered that staff were able to respond adequately to their concerns or direct them to a University central service that could provide assistance or advice.

129 The Policy for Guidance and Learner Support stated that the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Student and Staff Affairs has overall responsibility for management of academic guidance, support and supervision. Schools are required to manage the effective operation of the policy. In future, schools will be required to report to SAC evaluating their provision of guidance and support.

130 The students met by the audit team stated their general satisfaction with the quality of academic guidance, support and supervision, especially at the school level. Through its reading of documents at the DAT level, the team concluded that academic staff are committed to the success of their students, and the fact that University retention levels are high was testimony to this. The team welcomed the University's decision to take a number of developments in this area, including schools providing SAC with an overview.

### **Personal support and guidance**

131 As part of the Student Well-Being Strategy the University provides an extensive range of personal support and guidance services including counselling, disabilities, international student support, student welfare, English language support, a student jobshop and advice on careers. These are mainly provided by Student Services, sometimes in association with the NSU.

132 Meetings with students confirmed the effectiveness of these support mechanisms. These ranged from a scheme to assist and advise students suffering from financial hardship to language support for international students through the University's English Language In-Sessional Support programme which was highlighted on a number of occasions as an important, key service with clear benefits. There is a summer English language course, but students have to pay for this facility. Particular effort is made to support international students with induction courses and there is a 'Meet and Greet' system when students arrive in Newcastle. Accommodation is guaranteed in halls in first year for international students. The University has paid special attention to the pedagogical needs of disabled students with a report intended to bring to the attention of teaching staff the barriers to learning that many disabled students encounter. Meetings with students reported that the assistance given to disabled students was an important factor for choosing the University. The audit team considered that the priority given by the University to the quality of the student experience for international and disabled students was a feature of good practice.

133 The SWS noted that approximately 60 per cent of students are aware of how Student Services can help them while 27 per cent are unsure of the services they provide. 38 per cent of students believe that Student Services is well advertised. Students met by the audit team were generally satisfied with the extent of the services available to them and found that they were of good quality when they were accessed.

134 The audit team considered that the Student Well-Being Strategy promised to be a comprehensive system of student support. Implementation is being monitored by the SAC, and it will conduct a fundamental review of the process in 2006.

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

#### **Discipline audit trails**

135 In each of the selected discipline audit trails, appropriate members of the audit team met staff and students to discuss the programmes, studied a sample of assessed student work, saw examples of learning resource materials, and studied annual module and programme reports and IPR reports relating to the programmes. Their findings in respect of the academic standards of awards are as follows:

#### **Accounting and financial management**

136 The DSED was based around the documentation for the 2003 internal periodic review. The DSED included programme specifications for the following named awards which were the focus of the DAT: BA (Hons) Accounting, BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance and MA Global Financial Management. The programmes are offered by the Division of Accounting and Financial Management which is part of the Newcastle Business School.

137 The programme specifications reflected engagement with the FHEQ and the Subject benchmark statement for Accounting, although this was not always explicit. The BA (Hons) Accounting programme specification also reflected the requirements of a number of PSRBs. Exemptions from a number of professional qualifications are largely on a module-by-module basis. There are plans to seek accreditation of the BA in Financial Services (which has a common first year with BA Accounting) from the Institute of Financial Services.

138 Progression and completion statistics are centrally provided. The DSED contained

extensive statistics and comment on the statistics for 2002-03. The IPR report noted that the extensive data included in the SED could have been better explained and used to create a more informed text. Nonetheless, the audit team saw evidence that the statistics were used effectively to monitor student progression and achievement in APR reports and MEBs. Progression rates on degrees with a professional emphasis are lower than others, while performance on the postgraduate programme exceeds Business School and University averages.

139 The DSED included the IPR SED, a SWS, IPR report, discipline action plan approved by ULT and subsequent progress report (February 2005). The audit team concluded that the IPR had been operated in accordance with University expectations, although the format of the reporting and comment on it had given the Panel some difficulty. The Panel also commented on the use made of management information data, recording that it could have been 'explained better and used to create a more informed text'.

140 External examiners on the whole reported satisfaction with the standards achieved and the quality of the students' preparation for assessment. Some reports contained high praise for the quality of feedback to students and internal moderation of assessment. Problems mentioned included the occasional late receipt of assessment materials before the relevant exam board meeting and one examiner commented there was insufficient evidence of the second marker's contribution. There was recognition of the Business School's efforts to ensure consistency of marking standards.

141 The DSED stated that the Division's assessment procedures conformed to the University's Guidelines for Good Assessment Practice and the Newcastle Business School Strategy. The audit team reviewed a sample of assessed student work and noted that there were appropriate requirements for second marking; although there was some variation in the extent to which these were evidenced, and that a wide range of assessment tools are used. The team saw evidence of careful feedback on

marked work. The team concluded that the standards achieved by students on the above named awards were appropriate for their location in the FHEQ.

142 Students are provided with a good range of information including course handbooks. Students met by the audit team considered that the information provided offer students reliable guidance on what is expected of them. All new and returning students are provided with induction sessions. The MA Global Financial Management has an extended induction arrangement to avoid over-reliance on printed documentation at the outset. Consideration is being given to using programme specifications as multipurpose communication vehicles in due course.

143 Students met by the audit team outlined their general satisfaction with the level of learning resources provided to support them on their programmes. There was a dedicated computer laboratory for PGs. The Division has a good working relationship with the library; subject librarians attend the SLTC and are invited to attend programme review committees. The team saw that extensive and systematic use was made of specialist computer assisted learning packages, and a range of financial databases were available in the library. VLE sites for modules visited by the team covered a good range of lecture material and references.

144 The audit team saw considerable evidence of the extent of staff development activity by subject staff. Most staff in the Division possess professional qualifications, and a number of staff are currently working towards PhD (registered in other institutions) or DBA (at the University). Since the IPR the School has introduced a peer review system.

145 In meetings with students the audit team learnt that they were aware of the pastoral and academic counselling available. The personal tutor is usually not the same throughout a student's course of study but someone with another role as well, for example thesis supervisor for postgraduates or placement tutor for undergraduates.

146 Student feedback is gathered in a number of ways including module questionnaires and representation on programme committees and SSLCs. Students met by the audit team regarded the SSLC as important and accessible. The team saw evidence of timely and appropriate response to student concerns. For example, students recently made representations on the relevance of the Research Methods module for master's students, as it was felt that this did not cover enough material for the needs of financial research. The team noted that this was promptly addressed with the inclusion of sessions more relevant to finance students.

147 The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities provided for students was appropriate for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

#### **Applied social work**

148 Applied social work provision is based in the School of Health, Community and Education Studies. There are a wide range of undergraduate, postgraduate and professional development courses, all of which are designed and delivered in partnership with social work providers and professional bodies, and some with a partner University. More recently, service users and carers have also been provided with an opportunity to comment on common concerns.

149 The DSED was clear and comprehensive, and was primarily based on the documentation for the 2004 IPR. The DAT focused on the following named awards: BSc (Hons) Social Work (accredited by the General Social Care Council as a qualifying award), BSc/Postgraduate Diploma Childcare Social Work (a part-time specialist programme for practising social workers offering alternative awards according to qualifications and experience which is delivered jointly with Durham University) and MSc Health and Social Care (Generic and Research Methods).

150 The DSED included programme specifications for the above awards which the audit team considered were detailed, systematic and comprehensive. They gave a precise account

of the structure and requirements of each programme along with clear descriptions of the various skills to be developed. Learning outcomes were well mapped, and variations from University assessment regulations were specified. Explicit references were made to key external reference points including the *Subject benchmark statement* for social policy and administration and social work, the Code of Practice for Social Care Workers, and the National Occupational Standards for Social Work. Standards of awards and progression were clearly specified in ways consistent with FHEQ.

151 Progression and completion data derived from University-wide data were presented systematically in APR reports. The audit team read a number of APR reports produced by programme leaders using the University's template. The reports provided varying amounts of analysis, though accredited programmes also submitted parallel Annual Quality Assurance returns to the professional body, the General Council for Social Care. The best reports gave clear summaries of issues from the year, along with actions and outcomes. While staff gave strong support to individual students considering withdrawing, rather less attention was paid to analysing overall patterns of progression and completion rates.

152 The 2004 IPR was rigorous, at the same time as being constructive and developmental. The team was provided with the SED, a SWS, the IPR Report, the discipline action plan approved by ULT in May 2004 and a progress report dated January 2005. The panel report found that this was a strong provision with no major shortcomings, and an established commitment to enhancement. The report noted the complexity of working in partnership with a large number of external bodies and agencies and noted this as a distinctive strength of the discipline. Panel recommendations included ensuring that flexible help to some students did not compromise equity for all; improving the consistency of information in student guides and handbooks; more monitoring of the external examiner's moderation of assessment tasks; ensuring that post-qualifying Child Care

awards are specified in ways consistent with FHEQ; and resolving means for terminating the training of students who prove to be unsuitable during practical placement.

153 The 2005 progress report suggested that areas requiring action had been implemented successfully, for example differentiating learning outcomes and assessment criteria for differing awards and establishing procedures for terminating studies where necessary. Some actions, such as ensuring data quality, were dependent on wider University strategies, but the School outlined its engagement with implementing such measures.

154 Learning and assessment strategies are shaped by the centrality of professional skills and practice, with associated norms of behaviour and values; yet align with the University's procedures. This has led to some distinctive and creative approaches, such as the formative workbook exercises that help develop interpersonal skills in the Level 4 module of that name.

155 External examiners' reports for 2002-03 and 2003-04 read by the audit team confirmed the standards of the awards and the soundness of assessment processes. Some specific issues were raised, for example some particularly flexible re-assessment arrangements for some students. Programme leaders gave informative written responses to reports from their external examiners, including explanations or proposed actions as necessary. Reports from the General Council for Social Care, including accreditation of new programmes also provide clear evidence of the standard of student achievement and the appropriateness of the curriculum.

156 The audit team reviewed a sample of students' assessed work. They found that the work demonstrated good student achievement, and noted the willingness of markers to use a fair range of marks, including fails. Marking was found to be rigorous and consistent. The team concluded that the standard achieved by students on the above named awards was appropriate for their location in the FHEQ.

157 Handbooks and guides are used extensively, sometimes combined with

workbooks. Handbooks were well produced and increasingly consistent in the range of content. Students expressed strong confidence that they understood assessment criteria expectations and they valued the emphasis on skills outcomes for particular modules. Students were particularly positive about the information and individual guidance they received before entry to their course. According to students met by the audit team placements were 'very well managed' with full observance of the necessary codes to protect both the students and the social care clients. Termination procedures were now in place to deal with poor student practice while on placement. The team concluded that the relationship between assessment tasks and learning outcomes was both clear and creative.

158 Auditors met a representative range of students including mature undergraduates and qualified practitioners studying part-time. They were all extremely positive about the commitment to student support within the discipline, feeling that staff placed student care as their highest priority. Guidance tutors were consistently used by students, including when they were on placement. Students on placement felt very well supported and they knew how to get help if problems arose. Students valued feedback on their assessments and received it within the expected time of 28 days. They felt able to seek individual feedback from tutors and the VLE was increasingly being used to post generic feedback.

159 The audit team learnt that students were generally satisfied with the level of learning support resources. Students did report a perception that University student support services were slower to respond at the Coach Lane campus, with long waits for learning skills sessions. Part-time students greatly valued remote access to library resources and services through Desktop Anywhere.

160 Students felt very confident that their voice was heard, regarding this as a strong part of their discipline culture. They used both formal and informal means of feedback, speaking directly to staff but also using module

feedback questionnaires, contacting student representatives on the programme committee, or taking part in SSLCs. Students have tutorial groups of nine. One student from each group acts as a programme representative from each, and thus there are frequent opportunities for expressing feedback. Programme leaders are normally responsible for actions and communicating feedback to students. An example of the responsiveness of the subject team was a first year module which students felt needed revision. Modifications were made for the new entrants, and the previous students were informed as they began their second year. The team also noted the involvement of students in quality assurance processes in that IPR included an option for a SWS.

161 The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities provided for students was appropriate for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

### **Computing and business information systems**

162 The DSED was based around the documentation for the 2004 IPR in Computing and Business Information Systems and submission for British Computer Society (BCS) accreditation in October 2003. The DSED included programme specifications for the following named awards which were the focus of the DAT: BSc (Hons) Computing for Business, BSc (Hons) Business Information Systems, BSc (Hons) Computer Science, HND Computing for Business, MSc Computing and MSc Applied Computing Technologies. These programmes are offered by the School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences which has a total of 3120 students and 145 academic members of staff.

163 The programme specifications clearly set out the intended learning outcomes. The programmes had been redesigned in 2003, and the specifications reflected extensive engagement with the relevant subject benchmark statements and BCS expectations. The learning outcomes have been mapped against the FHEQ.

164 The DSED stated that 'there is a fundamental problem with the availability, accuracy and timing of University data for

modules which has an adverse impact on module review'. The audit team heard that progression data are regularly interpreted and responded to through School Executive discussions, meetings of the programme team and the process of programme review. The team also heard that subject staff recognised that while there were a few remaining areas of inconsistency or omissions, the majority of records were now accurate and complete.

165 The AMRs read by the team in relation to the Computing DAT showed that the computing staff were monitoring the programmes appropriately, although with an emphasis on the quantitative rather than necessarily a full range of qualitative inputs.

166 The audit team found that the 2004 IPR was conducted in accordance with University procedures, and noted that ULT commended the SED as an example of good practice. The DSED enabled the team to review the process from submission of the SED to the January 2005 progress report on the action plan. The IPR also included an extensive SWS. The IPR report commended a number of matters including the mutually beneficial collaboration with industry, the value of the placement experience and the work of the Educational Development Group (EDG). The report contained a number of recommendations including measures to ensure consistent practice across the School and reviews of the aims and learning outcomes. There were also three recommendations to the University.

167 Feedback from the BCS accreditation panel visit in 2003 was positive with a majority of programmes obtaining accreditation, including exceptionally a distance learning programme. However, three undergraduate programmes have yet to receive accreditation. The DSED stated that the relevant programme teams 'are seeking to rectify the perceived problems in order to obtain BCS accreditation'.

168 The DSED stated that the School's Assessment Strategy and Guidelines 'attempts to align assessment practices in the School' with the *Code of practice* and the University's Guidelines

for Good Assessment Practice. The audit team learnt that the subject team has attempted to reduce the summative assessment load by means of programme redesign and revised assessment strategies, by designing more efficient assessments and using innovative techniques in assessment which makes the assessment more interesting and authentic for students.

169 The audit team read the external examiners' reports for 2002-03 and 2003-04 which consistently confirmed the standards set for and achieved by students. The reports suggested that there is a suitable range of assessment types and that the nature of assessments was well suited to the nature of the subject-specific skills which each module was trying to develop. External examiners commented favourably on the quality of the School's internal moderation processes and the quality of marking. The team saw evidence that issues raised in external examiners' reports are discussed in the relevant School Executive, subject meetings, programme committees and in module team meetings. Feedback to external examiners, and planned actions are recorded as part of the annual monitoring process.

170 The audit team saw a range of assessed student work from a number of modules at each level. The team concluded that the student work matched the expectations set out in the programme specifications and that student achievement reflected the location of the named awards within the FHEQ.

171 The audit team was provided with a range of module and student handbooks. All such documentation was readily available through the VLE. It was clear to the team that these were designed with students in mind. Students met by the team confirmed that the handbooks were useful, provided details about the patterns of the courses, the types of assessment and key information for students, including details of the complaints and appeals processes.

172 The School seeks to use the VLE as an interactive teaching tool and not just as a repository of lecture notes. The audit team saw extensive evidence that the VLE is used by the

subject teams, and encouraged the School to ensure even greater use of it to enhance student learning opportunities.

173 Academic staff in the School are committed to shared principles of guidance tutoring. Each student is allocated to a tutor at enrolment. The audit team heard from students that the School's provision of academic guidance and support was valuable. The team noted that the School had recently appointed a Recruitment and Retention Adviser who was responsible for gathering student attendance data and follow-up communication with students who appeared to be at risk. Placements are an integral part of the programmes in the School. Students met by the team were supportive of the role of placements, particularly the support that they received during their placements from academic staff.

174 The School has taken the innovative step of setting up an EDG. Its role is to enhance learning and teaching through developing a supportive academic culture. EDG normally meets once a month during term time and is open to all academic members of the School. The School also has an Educational Forum which evolved out of the success of the EDG and uses poster displays as a means of sharing best practice; the forum takes place once a month and normally has a theme such as e-learning, assessment, innovative teaching practices and research and scholarly activities.

175 The School was host to the The Joint Information Systems Committee project on plagiarism detection and continues to work closely with colleagues in the plagiarism detection service. The audit team found that the subject team makes every effort to ensure the reliability, integrity and veracity of assessment, and indeed external examiners have commented favourably on the School's use of University Guidance notes to students on good academic practice.

176 The School is taking a lead in the University on the integration of PDPs into the curricula and has hosted national workshops and produced conference papers on PDP activities. The audit team learnt that the subject team has integrated some elements of PDP into the curriculum by

way of specific modules in the first year. The team heard that students were appreciative and supportive of these developments.

177 The DSED stated that students are regarded as an integral part of the School's quality assurance processes. Views are gathered by means of student representation on the SLTC, programme committees and SSLCs, and through student questionnaires (for modules and programmes) and informal feedback to guidance tutors. Students considered that their voice was heard in the School.

178 The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities provided for students was suitable for the programmes of study leading to the above named awards.

### English

179 The DSED was based on the IPR conducted in May 2004. The DAT focused on the BA (Hons) English; BA (Hons) English and Film Studies; and MA Creative Writing. The programme specifications included in the DSED were drawn up in accordance with the University's expectations and made appropriate reference to the *Subject benchmark statement* for English and the FHEQ.

180 The audit team learnt that recruitment and first destination statistics are buoyant, and that in-line with University policy the Division has recently increased its entry requirements. Progression and completion data are centrally provided to MEBs and PABs. In accordance with standard University reporting requirements, the department reports at programme level on recruitment, progression, achievement and first destinations.

181 The audit team read a number of APR reports as well as AMRs for a selection of modules within these programmes. Issues were reported upwards as appropriate. For example the department has revised its curriculum in response to external examiners' encouragement to broaden the range of literary texts studied, and has reported the staff's and the students' concern at ever larger seminar groups.

182 The DSED included the SED for IPR, a SWS, the IPR Report, a discipline action plan and progress report on the plan. The audit team

concluded that the work of the IPR panel was thorough. The panel reviewed all aspects of provision and applauded the department on a number of issues, including its curriculum, research into teaching, its assessment of students, peer observation of teaching. On this occasion the panel had four recommendations, all of which were followed up and reported to ULT. The subject team took the opportunity of the IPR to modify and re-validate its entire undergraduate provision, partly at the encouragement of the external examiner. This led to a broadening of the curriculum.

183 The audit team read external examiner reports for 2002-03 and 2003-04. The reports conformed to University requirements. The team was able to track consideration of the reports through APR and SLTCs. In general the reports were characterised by positive comments on standards and on approaches to supporting learning. One external examiner recommended a broadening of the range of texts to be studied, while another noted the 'heroic' work of members of the department in a context of rising student:staff ratios.

184 The Division's assessment strategy is in line with that of the University. Its record in assessment is particularly strong, having led an Assessment FDTL project, and is now involved in an Assessment CETL project. Particular strengths in the department lie in the student-centred strategies of student self-assessment, self critique, and formative assessment; additionally external examiners' reports commend the staff for the variety of assessment strategies used. Particularly noteworthy is the Assessment Guide provided by the Division for its students. The audit team considered this is a detailed yet accessible document, setting out a wide variety of information and advice for students.

185 The audit team reviewed a sample of students' assessed work from a number of modules, across the performance range. Helpful feedback was provided throughout, and evidence of the policy of sampled double marking was manifest. The team concluded that student achievement reflected the location of the named awards within the FHEQ.

186 Students met by the audit team confirmed that module handbooks were helpful and comprehensive. Information contained in the handbooks was complemented by information posted on the VLE. In response to student feedback that more use could be made of the VLE, staff have undertaken training and have begun to use it to convey administrative information. The team would encourage the subject team to make greater use of the interactive potential of the VLE than is currently the case, but respect their argument that it cannot replace seminar discussions.

187 Students also told the audit team that library resources were by and large adequate. The library had responded positively to earlier feedback from English students in respect of customer service. Students were equally satisfied with the access to IT, quoting Desktop Anywhere as a case in point. The team noted some pressure on rooms; examples were provided in respect of film projection in connection with the BA Hons in English and Film Studies. The team also noted relatively high staff:student ratios.

188 The audit team heard from students that Divisional staff are highly accessible. The guidance tutor system operates on the basis of scheduled meetings and when requested by students. Students confirmed that access to academic and pastoral guidance was good and appropriately flexible. Two of the current seven staff members had recently gained the University's teaching award.

189 Both students and staff confirmed that a variety of formal and informal feedback mechanisms exist. These include a standard multiple-choice questionnaire at module level. The students were emphatic about the approachability of staff, and had no concerns about the student voice being heard through feedback channels. The APR and IPR reports read by the audit team demonstrated the systematic way in which the subject team recorded, analysed and responded to student feedback. Students told the team that as part of a range of feedback and representation mechanisms the SSLCs were effective.

190 The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities provided for students was suitable for the programmes of study leading to the above named awards.

### **Sport sciences**

191 Sport sciences is one of two divisions located in the School of Psychology and Sport Sciences. The DSED was based on an internal transitional review carried out in 2004. The DAT focused on the following named awards: BA (Hons) Sport Studies, BSc (Hons) Sport Management and MSc Sport Management.

192 Programme specifications for the above awards provided clear evidence that the hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism benchmark statement had been drawn upon to construct the curriculum. Curriculum maps were also provided, which indicated the relationship between the programme learning outcomes and the specific modules available for each programme.

193 The audit team read the undergraduate and postgraduate APR reports for 2002-03 and 2003-04 which had been completed in accordance with University guidelines. These contained some analysis of the centrally provided progression and completion data.

194 Consistent with institutional policies, all assessments are approved and moderated by the Divisional Assessment Panel. A broad range of assessment modes are utilised across the provision, so students experience a multitude of assessment tasks. An appropriate sample of assessed work was seen by the audit team. It was noted that marks were verified by a second marker and the student answers in the papers demonstrated achievement appropriate to the standard expected in such programmes.

195 The audit team read the external examiners' reports for 2002-03 and 2003-04. The reports were generally favourable about standards set for and achieved by students and assessment processes, although there was some negative comment about the transparency of the marking standardisation process from new examiners. Adverse comments from examiners included the 'relatively poor level of English from some students, even native English

speakers'. At postgraduate level examiners praised the excellent feedback from tutors on assignments, and the use of literature and vocationalism built into the programmes. Overall, the team concluded that the student achievement reflected the location of the named awards within the FHEQ.

196 The undergraduate and postgraduate student handbooks contained a wealth of information including the range of University services available, and a clear outline of the role of guidance tutors. The marking policy and marks necessary to obtain the various grades were explained in some detail with helpful advice on what was expected to achieve each of the grade classifications. In its meeting with students the audit team heard that both undergraduate and postgraduate handbooks were accurate and helpful in describing the programmes and the University and its range of provisions. Students also expressed satisfaction with the guidance tutor arrangements, adding that they also made use of the informal open door policy that was operated in the School.

197 Students reported that lecture rooms, libraries and sports rooms, and IT facilities were fit for purpose. Students on placements were able to contact subject staff by email and telephone. Students evaluated their placements experience highly. Indeed, one reason for the relatively low completion rate on the master's course was that students were often employed by their placement provider.

198 A considerable effort is made to ease the progress of students from one level to the next, with short courses used to prepare students for the forthcoming year. Conversion handbooks describe in some detail the programmes and modules available and advise students on how to make informed choice of modules for future study. Of particular note is the Foundation degree-bridging element which is designed to help students progress from the Applied Sport Studies Foundation Degree at Newcastle College to an Honours programme at the University. This has a number of phases starting with a conversion booklet, Progression from Foundation Degree to the degree of BA (Hons) Sport Studies

2005/6, and then meeting with personal tutors, followed by application for a place and finally, if accepted, a two-week bridging course on completion of the Foundation Degree. As a result of the work to produce this bridging degree element an APT award was given to a member of staff in Sport Sciences. The audit team considered this focus on easing the path of Foundation Degree students was a feature of good practice.

199 Student feedback on modules is summarised and made available through group meetings and on the VLE so that students can see a synopsis of comments, responses by staff, and action taken. The audit team heard from student representatives that they meet regularly with staff in SSLCs to discuss any issues or problems. Students stated that they were generally satisfied with the learning and teaching in the Division. Student representatives are members of Divisional Course Committee. They considered that issues raised recently concerning teaching accommodation, facilities and text books had been listened to and dealt with, and actions reported in an appropriate and timely manner.

200 Overall, the audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities provided for students was suitable for the programmes of study leading to the above named awards.

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

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

201 The SED stated that the University's publication policy is to use paper publications to attract attention and to persuade and direct individuals to the website for more detailed information. The University has set out in a paper responsibility for different types of publications, with overall responsibility resting with the PVC Student and Staff Affairs. The audit team learnt that the Vice-Chancellor regularly samples publications for accuracy.

202 The External Relations Service is responsible for corporate communications and produces undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses, the Student Handbook, Your Guide to Induction and Enrolment, Your Guide to Effective Study, Cite Them Right and the International Students Handbook. Students met by the audit team said that the combination of prospectus and web information pre-entry, backed by access to tutors for purposes of enquiries was useful in helping them decide to join the University. They also appreciated the fact that the Student Handbook and other University-wide documents were available on-line.

203 Responsibility for programme level information including programme handbooks and module handbooks and programme details held on the web are the responsibility of school deans and the school registrar. There are standard guidelines for what information should be contained in programme handbooks, and further advice is available from LTS. A new procedure for updating and regularly verifying content has been introduced for implementation during 2004-05 to provide greater security and a clearer link to the academic approval process. The audit team learnt that students were generally satisfied with the programme level information provided, and considered that it included appropriate details of assessment regulations and the complaints and appeals procedures.

204 The audit team heard from students that they had no concerns about the fullness, accuracy, frankness or reliability of the information provided to them by the University.

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

205 The SED stated that the University believes 'that it fully meets the requirements for the publication of teaching quality information'. The University hosts Higher Education and Research Opportunities in the UK, and was one of the six institutions to pilot TQI in January 2003. A TQI implementation Group chaired by the Head of LTS, reporting to ULT, has overseen the development of internal preparations.

206 The external examiners' report template was revised in 2002 to include the TQI report at Part A. SLTCs have responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of the reports. External examiners were briefed in advance, and at the time of the audit summary reports from all external examiners for 2003-04 had been placed on TQI.

207 The IPR template was revised with the requirement to publish a summary report on TQI. A summary of all IPR reports produced since January 2003 has been uploaded to TQI. It is intended that publication of Programme Specifications on the web will extend the range of information available.

208 The SED stated that because the University's two-tier examination board system 'does not easily lend itself to the provision of one report per programme', the University has decided to publish all reports.

209 Overall, the audit team felt that the University had engaged extensively with the TQI agenda and that progress was being made towards full implementation.



# Findings

## Findings

210 An institutional audit of the University of Northumbria at Newcastle was undertaken during the week 18 to 22 April 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility as a UK degree-awarding body. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals and Universities UK, five audit trails were selected for scrutiny at the level of an academic discipline. This section of the report of the audit summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and recommendations to the University for enhancing current practice.

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

211 The underpinning principle of the University's procedures for assuring the quality of programmes is that 'quality is everywhere', and thus responsibility for the maintenance of standards and quality is shared across the University. Programme directors/leaders are regarded as the natural location for much responsibility for the quality of their programmes. They are aided in this role by a number of University-wide policies, templates, handbooks, systems and frameworks for programme approval, monitoring and review and other quality procedures. School Learning and Teaching Committees (SLTCs), chaired by the school's associate dean for learning and teaching, play a key role in ensuring that programme directors/leaders adhere to the University's policies and procedures, and report up to University committees on the school's action in the area of quality assurance. SLTCs report up to the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (ULT).

212 ULT, Research Committee (RC) and Student Affairs Committee (SAC) are the recipient of powers delegated by Academic Board (AB). The

SED stated that 'these committees oversee the relevant strategies and University-wide policies, systems and frameworks, monitor standards and enhance quality'.

213 The terms of reference of ULT are extensive and include approving and monitoring the operation of the University's regulations, frameworks and procedures for the approval, delivery, review and improvement of all taught programmes. It is aided in this role by a number of subcommittees including external examiners, programme approvals scrutiny and teaching innovations grants. During the audit the audit team was reminded of the resulting work-load of ULT, and encouraged the University to reflect further on the appropriateness of this situation.

214 Associate deans are members of both ULT and SLTC. Associate deans are also appointed by ULT as a member of another SLTC. School registrars are members of SLTC. The audit team considered this cross representation an effective mechanism to ensure both vertical and horizontal integration, especially in the dissemination of good practice. ULT has sought to reiterate the University's commitment to enhancing the quality of its programmes by creating ten enhancement groups, each chaired by an associate dean. The team considered this University-wide approach to sharing, good practice involving both schools and central bodies to be a feature of good practice.

215 School research committees (SRCs) have responsibility for most aspects of research students' experience other than relevant frameworks, examinations and awards which are in the remit of the Graduate School which reports to RC. Monitoring of individual programmes is through oversight of Initial Progress Approval and Mid Point Progression Approval while the effectiveness of arrangements is monitored through the Annual Programme Review (APR) by SRCs.

216 The University's procedures for annual monitoring include Annual Module Review (AMR) and APR. The University produces extensive guidance and templates to assist

Programme Directors in annual monitoring. Internal periodic review (IPR) has recently been reintroduced by the University, and is similarly supported by a number of University handbooks and templates. IPR occurs on a six-year cycle; it is supplemented by Interim Review every three years. The audit team read a number of periodic review reports and supporting documentation, including student written submissions (SWSs), as part of the discipline audit trails (DATs). They concluded that in general the arrangements for periodic review were not only well designed but that the procedures were operated in accordance with the University's expectations. They noted the prevalence of SWSs and the increasingly comprehensive nature of the self-evaluation documents (SEDs) and panel reports.

217 The SED stated that the University regards 'student representation as intrinsic to ensuring the quality' of its programmes. The audit team learnt that students generally regarded the level of representation as sufficient, especially on University level committees. However, both the University and the student body have recently raised issues with regard to the effectiveness of student representation at the programme level. The team welcomed the University's recent initiatives in this area including the guidelines produced by SAC for the selection, role and expectations of student representatives and the decision to establish staff-student liaison committees (SSLCs) in addition to programme committees in each school. Feedback from students is also gathered through questionnaires, particularly at the module and programme level, and by central service providers such as the library. A variety of mechanisms are used by schools to feedback to students, including the virtual learning environment (VLE). APR and IPR report templates require consideration of student feedback, and this helps keep ULT and SAC informed of students' views.

218 The findings of this audit confirm that broad confidence can be placed in the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes.

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

219 The SED outlined the institutional procedures for securing the standards of its awards which included the common assessment framework, use of external examiners, external participants in the University's approval and review processes, professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) reports and assessments and analysis and evaluation of performance against University and sector norms. Effective operation of University monitoring and review processes provides assurance that standards were maintained.

220 On behalf of AB, ULT is responsible for maintaining standards. However, in line with the University's devolved managerial framework and the philosophy of responsibility for quality resting at the point of delivery, schools are normally responsible for the maintenance of standards. Where an aspect is high risk, such as for collaborative programmes or requires a University overview to safeguard consistency, ULT takes the leading role.

221 The University's programme approval process requires a careful checking of the standards set for a new programme. This is achieved by involving external subject specialists in the approval process, and requiring reference to relevant subject benchmark statements, the requirements of PSRBs, the University Modular Framework and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

222 The SED stated that the University 'has confidence' in the operation of its external examiner system. ULT's External Examiners sub-committee is responsible for the appointment of external examiners who, when appointed, are provided with a copy of the Examiners' Handbook. There is a University template for external examiners' to submit their reports, which are considered as part of APRs. ULT receives a summary of the findings of all reports from LTS. From its reading of a number of external examiners' reports and reports of

summaries received by ULT, the audit team learnt that examiners were generally content with the operation of the examination system and the standards set for and achieved by students. The most recent summary report noted that the provision of electronic versions of written work and the need to promote greater student awareness of the issues related to plagiarism was suggested. One external examiner advocated greater use of plagiarism software which had been used to great effect in one module and was supported by students. The team concluded that it would be desirable for the University to further embed recognised good practice in the identification of plagiarism.

223 Consistency of assessment is secured by the operation of common assessment regulations. The regulations apply to all programmes ensuring parity; any exceptions (usually for professional courses) must be approved by ULT. The University operates a two-tier examination board system which applies to all areas apart from Law. Module Examination Boards (MEBs) have a crucial role in ensuring that arrangements for assessment and for moderating standards are appropriate. Progression and Awards Boards (PABs) operate at school level. Consistency of the assessment regulations is achieved through their applicability across the University and through the attendance of Academic Registry representatives at examination boards. To ensure that external examiners have an input into overall student performance there is provision for the MEB to convene informally before the PAB to make recommendations to it about progression and awards issues. The audit team heard that the proportion of students considered for the totality of their performance varied among schools from approximately 50 to 90 per cent. The team considered that this was a viable procedure in a modular scheme, and was in accord with the revised section of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 4: External Examining*, published by QAA.

224 The audit team saw a number of examples demonstrating the University's commitment to reviewing its assessment processes. The team

also noted significant innovations, including successful bids for the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning and the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning awards which focused on student assessment. The team considered innovations in student-centred assessment and learning seen by it as a feature of good practice.

225 Management information data is gathered at the University level. Schools are required to use the data as part of both APR and IPR. The SED was candid in outlining the University's successes and problems of gathering and using the data, and setting out the measures it had taken to address these problems. In particular, the University has opted to introduce Strategic Information Technology Services as its preferred system for managing the data.

226 The audit team was able to see extensive evidence of the workings of the University's procedures for securing the standards of its awards. The team considered that in general these systems were well established and functioning effectively.

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

227 The SED stated that the level and quality of learning resources is 'adequate' to 'support current needs', but that the University will continue to monitor provision in the light of the University's plans for growth. The SWS indicated that the great majority of students were satisfied with the level of learning resources available to them. The audit team learnt of some students' concerns about the extent of library resources. While the team welcomed the University's initiatives in this area it considered it desirable for it to continue to enhance the provision of library resources.

228 The audit team learnt that the University's VLE is increasingly used as a means of communication with students, but in a number of subject areas it is being used as an aid to teaching, learning and assessment. Remote access using Desktop Anywhere enables off-campus access by staff and students

alike, and is especially useful for distance learners. The provision of wireless hotspots around the University, and short term lending of laptops to students in the library, has been very helpful in easing access to on-line journals. The team concluded that the University's commitment to the use of electronic communication systems to facilitate student learning was a feature of good practice.

229 The University's recently launched Student Well-Being Strategy encompasses the University's approach to student support. During their studies, students have access to a guidance tutor, and the Policy for Guidance and Learner Support sets a minimum standard of support that all schools have been asked to provide. The Strategy also encompasses the University's extensive range of personal support and guidance services which are provided by Student Services, often in conjunction with the Students' Union. The audit team considered that the University's commitment to enhancing the quality of the student experience reflected in the Student Well-Being Strategy, and particularly the support for international students, students with disabilities, students progressing from Foundation Degrees and students on placements was a feature of good practice.

230 The University has recently taken initiatives to coordinate better the provision of staff development activities. Currently, there are a myriad of actors and initiatives in this field including the Corporate Training and Development Programme, the work of Learning and Teaching Support and the Materials and Resource Centre for Education and Technology, the Applauding and Promoting Teaching scheme and new guidelines to encourage peer observation. While the audit team welcomes the University's decision to coordinate these services it considered that overall the extent and quality of staff development was a feature of good practice.

231 A recent review of its postgraduate provision highlighted among other matters a lack of integration between postgraduate students in the various schools. To address this matter the University has taken a number of

initiatives including the creation of a Virtual Graduate School. The audit team welcomed this development but encouraged the University to continue the development of this project as a means of further integrating the graduate research student experience across the schools.

232 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University had effective procedures for supporting learning, and noted a number of features of good practice in this area.

## **Outcomes of discipline audit trails**

### **Accounting and financial management**

233 The DAT focused on the following named awards: BA (Hons) Accounting, BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance and MA Global Financial Management. The programme specifications reflected engagement with the FHEQ and the Subject benchmark statement for Accounting and, where appropriate, relevant PSRB requirements. External examiners' reports seen by the audit team were generally positive, although one raised concerns about the contribution of second markers. The team reviewed a sample of assessed student work and noted that there was some variation in the extent to which second marking procedures were evidenced. However, in general the team noted that a wide range of assessment tools are used and it saw evidence of careful feedback on marked work. The team concluded that the standards achieved by students on the above named awards were appropriate for their location in the FHEQ.

234 The audit team noted that extensive use was made of specialist assisted learning packages, and some use of the VLE to post lecture notes. Students who met the team were generally positive about the learning resources and arrangements for personal support. They also commented on the accessibility and importance of the SSLC as a mechanism for feeding back on academic matters. The team saw evidence of a prompt and appropriate response to matters raised. The team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable to the programmes of study leading to the above named awards.

### **Applied social work**

235 The DAT focused on the following named awards: BSc (Hons) Social Work (accredited by the General Social Care Council (GSCC) as a qualifying award), BSc/Postgraduate Diploma Childcare Social Work and MSc Health and Social Care (Generic and Research Methods). Explicit reference was made in the programme specifications to key external reference points including the *Subject benchmark statement* for social policy and administration and social work, the Code of Practice for Social Care Workers, and the National Occupational Standards for Social Work. External examiners' reports and reports from the GSCC were generally positive. The sample of assessed student work reviewed by the audit team indicated a willingness to use the full range of marks, including fail, and that marking was rigorous and consistent. The team concluded that the standards achieved by students on the above awards meant that they were appropriately located within the FHEQ.

236 Students met by the audit team were very positive about student support within the discipline, feeling that staff placed student care as their highest priority. This was particularly the case when students were on placement. They expressed general satisfaction with the level of learning support services, although they reported a perception that student support services were not so rapidly available on the Coach Lane campus as the main campus. The team saw extensive evidence of the willingness of staff to listen to and respond to issues raised by students through either representation mechanisms or evaluation questionnaires. The team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable to the programmes of study leading to the above named awards.

### **Computing and business information systems**

237 The DAT focused on the following named awards: BSc (Hons) Computing for Business, BSc (Hons) Business Information Systems, BSc (Hons) Computer Science, HND Computing for Business, MSc Computing and MSc Applied Computing Technologies. The audit team considered that the programme specifications

clearly set out the intended learning outcomes, and that these reflected the expectations in the *Subject benchmark statement* for computing and the FHEQ. Students informed the team that they were clear about assessment expectations and marking criteria, and the sample of assessed student work seen by the team included helpful feedback. External examiners' reports commented favourably on the quality of internal moderation processes and the team saw evidence that the reports were responded to appropriately. While the British Computer Society Accreditation report was generally positive, and exceptionally accredited a distance learning programme, some programmes are still awaiting accreditation. Overall, the team concluded that the standards achieved by students on the above awards was appropriate to the awards' location within the FHEQ.

238 The audit team saw considerable evidence of the VLE being used as an interactive teaching tool, and encouraged the subject team to consider further developments in this area. Placements are an integral part of the programmes offered and students considered that they were well-supported during their placements. The team noted the innovation of the School's Education Development Group in aiding staff development and establishing a supportive academic culture. The School has also taken the lead on the integration of PDPs into the curricula. The team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable to the programmes of study leading to the above named awards.

### **English**

239 The DAT focused on the following named awards: BA (Hons) English; BA (Hons) English and Film Studies; and MA Creative Writing. The programme specifications were drawn up in accordance with the University's expectations and made appropriate reference to the Subject benchmark statement for English and the FHEQ. The sample of assessed student work seen by the audit team indicated helpful feedback was provided by subject staff and that University assessment regulations were being followed. The team was able to track the

Division's response to external examiners' reports, and noted a number of cases where they had positively responded to suggestions. The team concluded that standards achieved by students on the above awards were appropriately located within the FHEQ.

240 Students met by the audit team expressed general satisfaction with the learning opportunities available to them and the levels of support. The team was made aware of staff and student concerns about the staff:student ratio. The team also learnt of general student satisfaction with the operation of mechanisms to hear their voice on the quality of learning opportunities. The team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable to the programmes of study leading to the above named awards.

### **Sport sciences**

241 The DAT focused on the following named awards: BA (Hons) Sport Studies, BSc (Hons) Sport Management and MSc Sport Management. The programme specifications for these awards evidenced consideration of the hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism *Subject benchmark statement* in the design of the curriculum, and detailed a range of assessment modes. From its review of a sample of assessed student work and reading of recent external examiners' reports the audit team concluded that the awards were appropriately located in the FHEQ.

242 Students met by the audit team stated that they were generally satisfied with the quality of learning opportunities and support available to them. In particular, the team learnt of the quality of the Foundation Degree Bridging initiative that was developed to assist Foundation Degree students converting to an honours degree. Students expressed satisfaction with the level of resources available and considered that the Division was responsive to their views on teaching accommodation, facilities and text books were listened to, dealt with and actions reported back. Overall, the team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for the taught programmes of study leading to the above named awards.

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

243 The SED stated that the University regarded the Academic Infrastructure as 'a useful resource', and the University considered that its quality framework 'aligns with all elements' of the Infrastructure.

244 The University regards the *Code of practice* as 'a source of good practice' and its approach to responding to the section has been to establish working groups to deal with the different sections as they were published. ULT has maintained an overview and received progress reports from the various working groups. During its work the audit team formed the view that the University had been rigorous in its approach to considering the various sections of the *Code*, and in adjusting its policies and procedures.

245 The University's Modularised Framework was realigned to the FHEQ in 2002, and schools were instructed to ensure that all programmes were modified where appropriate. The University assured the audit team that through the APR and IPR processes that it was now confident that all programmes were appropriately located within the FHEQ. The team confirmed that this was so for the named awards in the DATs.

246 The procedures for programme approval ensure that all proposed programmes make appropriate reference to both the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements. It is also a requirement that new programmes proposals include a programme specification. APR and IPR are used to monitor that existing programmes make appropriate reference to the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements.

247 Overall, the audit team saw extensive evidence of the University's engagement with the Academic Infrastructure. It concluded that the University had approached the Infrastructure with an open and positive mind, and had realised that its own procedures were often already in line with good practice elsewhere in the sector.

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

248 The SED was generally structured to reflect the format of an institutional audit report, and contained a number of appendices and a list of supporting documentation. The SED usually contained sufficient description to enable readers to gain a good sense of the operation of the University's quality framework, while not being overlong or repetitive. Importantly, the SED also contained a reasonable amount of evaluation of the operation of this framework, with which the audit team largely agreed. The team welcomed the evaluative nature of the SED and considered that it reflected the University's capacity to reflect upon its own processes and procedures.

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

249 The SED outlined how preparations for audit had enabled the University to identify areas that needed further development. These included refining the planning process, replacing the student record system and further refining the quality framework to ensure that procedures facilitate anticipated growth while not compromising the current robustness of the framework. The University has recently established ten Enhancement Groups which report to ULT which are intended to further the University's enhancement agenda.

250 The audit team welcomed the University's frank assessment of the progress it had made with recent developments to its quality framework and its willingness to identify areas for further development. The team considered that these were appropriate and would likely further strengthen the University's quality framework. At the time of audit, the work of the Enhancement Groups was still developing and their impact on the University was yet to emerge. However, the team considered that

their establishment reflected the University's commitment to enhancing the quality of student learning opportunities.

### **Reliability of information**

251 The University publishes a wide range of documents and handbooks to support students throughout their journey from application to graduation. The University is committed to making this information, and indeed much other information including policies and procedures related to the quality framework, available to staff and students electronically. The audit team welcomed this development and noted the University's progress in this matter. Students were also appreciative of this development and the team learnt that they had no concerns about the fullness, accuracy, frankness or reliability of published information.

252 The University hosts Higher Education and Research Opportunities in the UK and was one of the institutions to pilot the uploading of teaching quality information (TQI) in 2003. ULT established a TQI Implementation Group to oversee internal preparations on meeting the requirements of HEFCE 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*. As part of its preparations the University has amended the templates for IPR and external examiners' reports, and because the two-tier examination board system does not lend itself easily to the provision of one report per programme, it has decided to publish all external examiner reports.

253 From the evidence available to it the audit team concluded that the University has ensured that it is meeting the requirements of HEFCE 03/51, including the production of accurate statistical information and the development of external examiner summaries, and the outcomes of periodic review.

### **Features of good practice**

254 The following features of good practice were noted:

- i innovations in student-centred assessment and learning (paragraphs 32 and 185)

- ii the engagement of schools and central departments in sharing good practice across the institution, especially the work of the Enhancement Groups (paragraphs 33 and 34)
- iii the extent and quality of staff development (paragraphs 96, 101-106, 111 and 115)
- iv the use made of electronic communication systems, particularly the virtual learning environment to support flexible and blended learning and communicating with students, and Desktop Anywhere (paragraph 118)
- v the priority given by the University to the quality of the student experience, particularly international students, students with disabilities, students progressing from Foundation Degrees and students on placements (paragraphs 132 and 198).

### **Recommendations for action**

255 It would be desirable for the University to:

- i further embed good practice in the identification of plagiarism (paragraph 62)
- ii continue to enhance the provision of library resources (paragraph 117)
- iii continue the development of the Virtual Graduate School as a means of integrating the graduate research student experience across the schools (paragraph 127).

## Appendix

### **The University of Northumbria at Newcastle's response to the audit report**

Northumbria very much welcomes the judgement of broad confidence in the quality of its programmes and in the academic standards of its awards, the points of good practice highlighted and the other positive comments made in the report. It regards audit as a process of enhancement and has included points from the audit in its existing schedule of enhancement actions collated whilst preparing for the audit. Progress on actions and their impact will be monitored by the University's Learning and Teaching Committee (ULT). The following action has already been taken with respect to the three desirable recommendations.

- Further embed good practice in the identification of plagiarism.

Northumbria is host to the Plagiarism Advisory Service and the Plagiarism Detection Service, both national JISC projects. In May 2005, ULT extended the University's use of the detection service, allowing Schools to screen selected modules as well as using the service for formative purposes and in our academic misconduct process. This will significantly expand the use of the service in 2005/6. Northumbria has also agreed with the Detection Service to provide a case study to assist in national dissemination.

Additionally, ULT has set up a Task Group to review the University's regulations and procedures for dealing with plagiarism during 2005/6.

- Continue to enhance the provision of library resources

Library resources and levels of provision are monitored during the annual University planning process to ensure that School/student needs and planned growth can be met, that inflation and liability to VAT is accounted for to sustain the overall provision and availability of core texts, and that any issues identified in the annual (and where relevant) periodic internal reviews of academic provision are addressed. The Library benchmarks against various groups drawn from SCONUL member libraries, aiming to position itself within the 75th percentile of the new University Group. The April 2005 exercise forecast a decline in spend and benchmarking which was evidenced in the feedback from students to the Institutional Audit and in the Student Written Submission (December 2004). The University Executive has therefore increased the Library materials budget for 2005/6 by 20% and allocated 3% of this increase to the existing 2004/5 budget. This action will ensure the benchmark position is maintained and the enhancement of provision.

- Continue the development of the virtual Graduate School as a means of integrating the graduate research experience across the Schools

The Graduate School Committee commissioned a Stakeholder Analysis to identify areas for development to improve services to customers. Services have been ranked, with the highest ranking given to frameworks for safeguarding satisfactory academic progress and standards across all Schools. Best practice and actions for improvement have been identified. The Research Staff Training programme for 2005/06 includes sessions for Associate Deans for Research, PGR Supervisors and PGR Administrators, and a PGR Conference, to facilitate implementation of University-wide procedures and processes.

