University of Newcastle upon Tyne

MARCH 2005

Institutional audit

Preface

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

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

The purpose of institutional audit

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

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

Judgements

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

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

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

Nationally agreed standards

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

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

The audit process

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

The main elements of institutional audit are:

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

The evidence for the audit

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

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

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

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

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk

Contents

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Newcastle upon Tyne (the University) from 14 to 18 March 2005 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of awards offered by the University.

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 documentation relating to the way the University manages the academic aspects of its provision.

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

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

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

Outcome of the audit

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

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

Features of good practice

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

- the role of the Academic Audit Committee in evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of University procedures, and identifying matters needing action
- the effectiveness of representative committees at the school and University level to capture and respond to students' concerns
- the articulation between the Performance and Development Review process and identification of staff development needs

- the institutional focus on the development of guidance and support for students, including postgraduate research students and international students.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- complete the early updating of the University's credit and qualifications framework to a fixed timetable
- enhance the external element of the programme approval process.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- ensure central oversight of the consistency and use of management information, especially at the cohort level
- ensure the consistency and implementation of University policies and practices at the local level.

Outcomes of discipline audit trails

In the course of the audit, five discipline audit trails were conducted: Agriculture, Biosciences, Chemical Engineering, Modern Languages and Planning. The audit found that the standard of student achievement in all the awards named below 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), 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 to help to define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the audit suggest that the University has responded appropriately to subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, published by QAA, and is in the process of consolidating its work on programme specifications and the FHEQ.

From 2005, the audit process will include a check on the reliability of the information about academic standards and academic quality published by institutions in a standard format (see the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*). The published information set will include the recommended summaries of external examiners' reports and of feedback from current students for each programme. The University is working towards meeting this expectation.

Main report

Main report

1   An institutional audit of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 14 March 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 five discipline audit trails (DATs), together with examples of those processes operating at the level of the institution as a whole. The scope of the audit encompassed all of the University's provision including the collaborative arrangements leading to its awards.

Section 1: Introduction: the University of Newcastle upon Tyne

The institution and its mission

4   The University has its origins in the School of Medicine, established in 1834, which became the Medical School of the University of Durham in 1852. Following the addition of a second College in 1887 the two colleges became formally constituted as the Newcastle Division of the University of Durham in 1908. In 1963 the University was established with degree awarding powers. The University expanded during the 1970s and 80s to include a new Dental School, the Robinson Library and a new Medical School. The University operates primarily on a

45-acre campus near the city centre. Also within the city are two research stations, facilities located at three hospitals and the Centre for Life. Outside the city boundaries, facilities include two farms in Northumberland and a marine biology station.

5   In 2003-04, 16,963 students were registered for degree programmes, an increase of 24 per cent since the last audit. Of these, 76 per cent were registered for undergraduate programmes, 15 per cent for postgraduate taught programmes and 9 per cent for postgraduate research programmes. Overall 93 per cent of students study full-time. In 2002-03, 11 per cent of students were mature, 14 per cent came from outside of the EU and 4.5 per cent of students declared a disability.

6   In 2004-05 the University offered over 250 named undergraduate degrees including single honours, joint awards and combined studies degrees. At postgraduate level, over 200 taught programmes were being offered including MA, MSc, and LLM. Students could also register for the research awards MRes and MPhil, professional doctorates including EdD, DEdPsy and DClinPsy, and research doctorates of PhD and MD. The University also awards higher doctorates.

7   The supreme governing body of the University is the Council, which oversees the University's strategic direction, finances, staffing and estate. The Senate, which is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, is the supreme authority on academic matters and is responsible for regulating and directing the academic work of the University. Following a review in 2001-02 a number of new committees, including the Executive Board and the Strategy Board, now report to both Council and the Senate. The Executive Board is responsible for oversight of the University's continuing business. It is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, and includes the University's senior management team: the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning, Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research, pro-vice-chancellors for each of the faculties, the Registrar and Bursar. The Strategy Board was established to provide integration between the University's senior academic officers and senior lay officers. It comprises Executive Board members, three lay members of the Council, a member appointed by the Senate and a student representative appointed by the Union Society (US).

8   Since the last audit in 2002 the University has undergone significant restructuring. The University's educational provision is now organised into three faculties: Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS), which comprises nine schools; Science, Agriculture

and Engineering (SAgE), which comprises 10 schools; and Medical Sciences, which comprises eight schools. In 2003-04, 56 per cent of students were studying for degrees in HASS, 23 per cent in SAgE and 21 per cent in the Faculty of Medical Sciences.

9   At the same time as faculty reorganisation in 2002, the University introduced a common Academic Infrastructure. Each faculty is now led by a Pro Vice-Chancellor assisted by a faculty executive board, and the committee structure of each faculty has been harmonised. Each faculty has a faculty Teaching and Learning Committee (FTLC), which reports to the University Teaching and Learning Committee (UTLC), and there are consistent reporting lines for boards of studies to the FTLCs. Each faculty contains a graduate school, which the self-evaluation document (SED) stated is responsible for 'admission, monitoring formal progress, training of all postgraduates and all postgraduate activity'. Graduate school committees are chaired by deans of postgraduate studies, who report regularly to the UTLC. Their relationship with the FTLCs varies (see paragraph 34).

10   The SED stated that the University's mission is to 'be a world class research-intensive University, to deliver teaching of the highest quality and to play a leading role in the economic, social and cultural development of the North East of England'. Key strategic objectives for the University include attaining excellence in learning and teaching activities, increasing intake of students from less privileged backgrounds, and those registered with disabilities; increasing full-time student numbers from 14,500 in 2002-03 to 18,000 by 2007-08; and increasing the number of international students to 4,800 by 2010-2011. The emphasis on increasing the number of students led the audit team to focus on the impact of this growth, particularly on the teaching and learning experience of students, the provision of pastoral and academic support for all students, staff development and quality of learning resources and learning support.

11   The University has a limited portfolio of collaborative provision. There are no collaborations that involve another institution delivering a University of Newcastle upon Tyne award. Collaborative provision comprises two articulation arrangements, one local and one overseas; one joint award with a UK university and three 'hybrid' arrangements with Engineering schools in a range of UK universities where modules taken at other named universities count towards a Newcastle named award. Because of its limited size, consideration of the University's collaborative provision was included as part of this audit.

Background information

12   The audit team had access to the following published documents:

- undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses
- quality audit report, July 2002 published by QAA
- subject review reports for the University published by QAA
- publications on the University's website
- the University's submissions to the teaching quality information (TQI) website.

13   The audit team was also provided with an institutional SED and appendices; a follow up to QAA's audit report 2002 and action plan; discipline self evaluation documents (DSEDs) for the five disciplines included in the DATs, which included relevant programme specifications; the confidential reports resulting from the four developmental engagements with the University undertaken by QAA; and the US's students' written submission (SWS).

14   During both the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was given access to a range of the University's internal documents. The University has a well developed website with all key documents related to academic standards, quality assurance and learning and teaching easily accessible. The team was provided with full access to these documents electronically through the internet.

The audit process

15   A preliminary meeting was held between representatives of the University and a QAA officer QAA in July 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 October 2004, led the audit team to confirm that the audit would include DATs in Agriculture, Biosciences, Chemical Engineering, Modern Languages and Planning. The five DSEDs were received by QAA in January 2005.

16   At the preliminary meeting the student body were invited, through the US, to submit an 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. In October 2004, the US submitted the SWS to QAA. It had

been prepared by members of the US, and was based on evaluation questionnaires and focus groups. During the briefing visit the US indicated 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.

17   The audit team undertook a briefing visit to the University on 10 and 11 February 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 team, and the SWS. During this visit, the team signalled a number of themes for the audit visit. At the close of the briefing visit, a programme of meetings for the audit visit was developed by the team and agreed with the University.

18   The audit visit took place from 14 to 18 March 2005 and included further meetings with staff and students of the University, both at central level and in relation to the selected DATs.

19   The audit team comprised Dr C Alder, Dr P Garnsworthy, Mr C Griffiths, Ms M Heycock, Professor D Phoenix and Dr J Scott as auditors and Mr G Clark as audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr A J Biscoe, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

20   The 2002 quality audit report commended the University for the support it provided to staff with responsibilities relating to quality and standards; the care with which it was approaching restructuring; the PARTNERS programme initiative as evidence of the University's genuine engagement with its regional mission; and its proactive approach to developments in virtual learning environments.

21   The report also contained a number of recommendations. The University was advised to consider 'establishing a central means for ensuring consistency in the manner and format in which departments and faculties consider and respond to external examiners' reports, and securing an appropriate central overview of the matters raised in such reports'. The University has taken a number of measures in response including revising the external examiner's report form to make it easier for overview reports to be compiled, and external examiners to

provide fuller reports; FTLCs have been provided with a checklist to help improve consistency of upward reporting; and, in addition to faculty and school arrangements for summarising external examiners' reports a senior member of staff in the Academic Quality and Standards Section (AQSS) now reads all the reports, identifying and acting upon any potentially serious issues at an early stage, and provides UTLC with a University-wide overview of recurring issues to enable appropriate action to be initiated at University level.

22   The University was also advised to continue 'to give active consideration to the internal calibration of academic standards and, in so doing, ensuring that the associated terminology is used consistently'. The University has responded by revising the terms of reference of boards of studies and through the new system for annual monitoring and review (AMR) requiring comparison of degree classifications over time, although the SED noted that comparative data at the more detailed subject level was not yet available. AMR also requires more specific review of the standards of programmes and the quality of learning opportunities and, in particular, confirmation that *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and subject benchmark statements have been taken into account. A University-wide methodology for determining honours degree classification was approved by the Senate in January 2003 for all students registering for the first time in September 2002.

23   The audit team noted that the University, through its Qualifications and Credit Working Group, set up in spring 2005, was in the process of resolving issues related to the volume of credits or number of modules of a given level that may be studied at any one stage within a programme. The University has yet to tackle a subsidiary issue in that some modules can be taken by either single or combined/joint honours students at either stage 2 or 3 of their studies and that the weighting of such modules may vary. Although the extent of such variation is limited by University guidelines, the team saw evidence to the effect that the weighting for the same module may vary for individual students, dependent either on the stage at which they are taking it, or on the degree programme for which they are registered. The team considered that the lack of consistency for students on these modules may have an impact on the motivation of individual students. The University has put back its deadlines for resolving this issue and now intends to address it through an Assessment Working Group to be set up in the summer of 2005.

The team advises the University to complete the early updating of the University's credit and qualifications framework to a fixed timetable.

24   The University was encouraged to consider the desirability of 'ensuring consistency in the arrangements for contracting, training, and monitoring the work of the significant number of postgraduate students involved in teaching and demonstrating'. Since the last audit training has been organised in all faculties for postgraduates undertaking teaching duties and, based on its meetings with students, it is the view of the audit team that this is being carried out effectively. Training for postgraduate students undertaking teaching duties is now coordinated through the Staff Development Unit (SDU). Graduate schools, in liaison with directors of postgraduate degree programmes, ensure that the training takes place.

25   The University was also encouraged to continue to 'reflect on the ways in which it might achieve wider dissemination of its many collated examples of good practice'. Consequently, responsibility for the wider dissemination of good practice was placed primarily with the Centre for Academic Development (CAD), which was formally established in January 2003. The SED indicated that UTLC considers points for commendation arising from internal reviews with the intention of drawing them to the attention of FTLCs for wider circulation. Other activities included a University learning and teaching conference held in July 2004 attended by over 130 staff from across the University, which identified a number of areas that are currently being taken forward at both University and faculty level.

26   Since the last audit there have been four developmental engagements carried out by QAA. All expressed confidence in the academic standards set and in the quality of learning opportunities that support students in achieving the academic standards of the awards. In general the developmental engagement reports were positive about the quality of the programmes. However, there were also a number of recommendations in the reports, some of which appeared in more than one report. Recommendations included processes related to external examiners; AMR processes; mapping of intended learning outcomes (ILOs) to programme aims; clarity in the processes of resource allocation and quality of teaching accommodation; and the effectiveness of the committee structure at school level. In one report it was recommended that the University should consider introducing a formal external input into programme approval.

27   The audit team read the University's detailed action plan that resulted from the previous audit report. The team noted that the plan had clear deadlines for reporting, and that, except for matters relating to some aspects of the internal calibration of academic standards, the University had taken timely and effective action in response to matters raised.

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

28   The SED stated that the University's quality management framework consists of 'a range of policies and procedures which aim to assure and enhance the academic standards of awards and the quality of its educational provision'. The framework has been developed 'to take account of the academic infrastructure', and importance is attached to the quality of the academic staff, the role of external examiners in maintaining standards and working with students at all levels to improve their learning experience. The SED stated that the following principles underpin the University's approach to quality management: primary responsibility lies with the academic staff involved in delivering programmes; this responsibility is exercised in the light of an agreed institutional framework, but is one which allows for some variation of practice; peer review by peers from within and outwith the University; and input from students.

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

29   For taught programmes, including those involving an element of distance learning or collaborations with other institutions, the assurance and enhancement of the student learning experience and the maintenance of standards of the awards is the responsibility of the degree programme director (DPD), who is assisted in this role by a board of studies. In some cases, a board of studies may be responsible for a number of programmes. The boards normally comprise the DPD, the head of school, representative teaching staff involved in delivering the programme and student representatives. Amongst other things, the board of studies is responsible for producing an AMR report that is sent to the relevant FTLC. FTLCs, which are chaired by the faculty dean of undergraduate studies, have overall responsibility for curricular and teaching matters, including quality

assurance for both undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. FTLCs report to the UTLC, which is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching).

30   The Senate has 'delegated its responsibility for all quality and standards matters' to the UTLC. Hence, it is UTLC that is responsible for enacting University quality assurance procedures such as programme approval and reapproval following internal subject review (ISR) and the appointment of external examiners and consideration of their reports. The UTLC is also responsible for the development and monitoring of implementation of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-2007 and thus maintains a strategic overview of teaching, learning and enhancement matters as well as quality assurance.

31   The University's current Learning and Teaching Strategy sets out the background to the education provision, with particular emphasis being placed on widening participation and focuses on 'improving the efficient management of our programmes, strengthening our capacity to undertake business development planning, and addressing income generation'. The University is in the process of updating the strategy.

32   Administrative support for the UTLC is provided by AQSS, which is part of the Academic Office. AQSS is also responsible for providing advice on quality issues and maintains administrative oversight for key quality management procedures such as preparing a University overview of recurring issues in external examiners' reports, implementation of programme approval and ISR, the AMR process and mapping University procedures against the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*), published by QAA.

33   The University's quality assurance procedures are contained in a series of web-based documents that together constitute an on-line 'Quality and Standards Handbook', which the audit team learnt is valued by academic staff. This contains details of procedures, guidance notes for staff and forms for all the main quality assurance procedures including programme approval, internal subject review, approval of collaborative provision and distance learning and the AMR process. The SED stated that '[f]urther work was required to ensure that quality assurance procedures are communicated to the appropriate areas of the University so that they are put into practice in a timely way'. The team endorsed the recognition by the University in its SED that there was inconsistency (see paragraphs 50, 76,

92, 95, 103 and 114) and considered it desirable that the University ensure the consistency and implementation of University policies and practices at the local level.

34   Responsibility for postgraduate research programmes lies with the faculty graduate school committee which is chaired by the faculty dean of postgraduate studies. The relationship between the graduate schools and FTLCs with regard to postgraduate taught programmes varies between faculties, but ultimate responsibility is with the FTLC. The SED stated that these differences in reporting procedures had been the subject of recent internal debate and at the time of the audit was being reconsidered. The audit team encourages the University to clarify this relationship.

35   The management of the quality assurance and standards for collaborative provision is delegated to the Collaborative Provision Standing Committee, a subcommittee of the UTLC. The policies and procedures for the quality assurance of collaborative provision contains detailed guidelines for collaborative provision incorporating initiation of collaborations, mechanisms for approval of partner organisations, which may include a site visit, programme approval and arrangements for monitoring (see paragraphs 148-151).

36   In 2002-03, the University created the Academic Audit Committee (AAC), with the remit 'to act as an independent committee in order to audit all University mechanisms and processes that contribute to the quality of the student learning experience and the standard of awards.' AAC reports annually to the Senate and makes recommendations to the UTLC. This committee undertakes an agreed schedule of audit activity: recent examples include operation of the procedures for collaborative provision, the processing of external examiners' reports and programme approval. The audit team was able to track the path of the audit of the procedures for considering external examiners' reports, amongst others. The AAC report noted problems regarding the timeliness of the operation and produced recommendations which were taken up by the UTLC and resulted in the production of more detailed guidance and regulatory control for the processing of external examiners' reports. The team concluded that the AAC affords a valuable addition to the University's quality management structure, which enabled it to evaluate the effectiveness of implementation of its procedures and identify action points for consideration by the UTLC, and as such considered it a feature of good practice.

37   The University requires that all examiners mark student work in relation to faculty promulgated or faculty approved descriptors of attainment. In order to communicate the marking descriptors to students, the University has provided within its guidelines for degree programme handbooks, a requirement that the descriptors be included in degree programme handbooks. The University has common marking scales for its undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, except the Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) and Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) in the Faculty of Medical Sciences which are general degrees and which have their own marking scales. The University has Undergraduate Examination Conventions to ensure that decisions relating to awards are arrived at by common procedures. These specify the constitution and procedures of the boards of examiners, including the treatment of non-standard cases and mitigating circumstances. The Regulations Subcommittee has recently produced a Guide for Boards of Examiners to assist with the implementation of the Undergraduate Examination Conventions. There is a University-wide methodology for determining honours degree classification. External examiners are required to monitor that the examination process has been conducted in accordance with the conventions and report on this matter to the University. Similarly, the external examiner reports to the University on whether the standards set by providers and the standards achieved by students are comparable to those in similar programmes in other higher education institutions.

38   The audit team concluded that the University framework for managing quality and standards is sound. During the audit visit the team read and heard evidence that confirmed that the framework operated as intended. In particular, the team considered the role of the AAC in evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of University procedures, and identifying matters needing action to be a feature of good practice.

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

39   The SED outlined the following areas where the University planned enhancement to its procedures: a focus on disseminating good practice in learning, teaching and assessment; reviewing the teaching and learning strategy; enhancing the newly established annual monitoring and review processes; consolidating the system for considering the external examiners' reports; embedding University policies and procedures at programme level;

improving the supply and analysis of management information. The audit team learnt that the University is also planning enhancement in other areas including work on updating the University's credit and qualifications framework, and reviews of Performance and Development Review (PDR) and induction processes and a new policy on capturing the student voice. Many of these initiatives are considered elsewhere in this report.

40   The SED stated that the University believes that enhancement of quality and standards occurs naturally through the professionalism of academic staff and since the last audit it has strengthened the formal support available to inculcate this. The SDU and CAD have to date played a key role in this development, and are set to continue to enable academic staff to achieve high quality teaching, learning and assessment practices.

41   It was the view of the audit team that the University is committed to developing its learning and teaching strategy and a particular example of this commitment was a review of the strategy that was conducted in July 2004 by a senior member of staff from the University of Manchester. The report is regarded by the University as timely in helping the new Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) to focus on emerging enhancement issues and it is intended to develop the strategy so that the teaching and learning experience becomes more central to curriculum development, and is linked explicitly to assessment.

42   A new strategy for e-learning was approved in February 2004 and a working group has been set up to develop and oversee its implementation. Implicit in the e-learning strategy is the development and use of the virtual learning environment (VLE).

43   The University intends to use the results of a University wide student satisfaction survey to inform improvements to the student learning experience. A survey was piloted to test the methodology in three schools during 2003-04. In the light of the pilots it is intended to roll this out across the University in 2005-06.

44   The University believes that opportunities for identifying good practice are already present in the AMR and ISR processes. Both FTLCs and the UTLC have regular agenda items which record evidence of identified good practice, arising, for example, from ISR. In an effort to ensure that good practice is not only identified but also disseminated and acted upon the audit team welcomed the fact that this was one of the responsibilities of the recently established Quality and Standards Committee,

reporting to the UTLC. The subcommittee will also consider any proposed changes to University policies and procedures arising from updates of the *Code of practice* and make recommendations to the UTLC.

45   The audit team concluded that the University was committed to an enhancement strategy. However, the team was not in a position to evaluate the effectiveness of many of the developments identified in the SED and other documents, as many had not been in place long enough. The team concurs with the University when it states that although its enhancement strategy is in its early stages, many of the elements of such a strategy are in place.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

46   The procedure for programme approval is set out in the University's on-line Quality and Standards Handbook: Guide for the Approval of new Programmes and Major Revisions to Existing Programmes. The document was revised in 2001 in light of publication of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme approval, monitoring and review.* The procedure is divided into three parts: initial faculty approval (Part 1), full faculty approval (Part 2) and UTLC validation. The SED stated that Part 1 is designed 'to establish whether there is a case in principle for the development of a new programme or for the substantial revision of an existing one'. It involves the submission of an outline proposal setting out the rationale for the programme including a business case; the ILOs; the compatibility of the learning outcomes with the relevant level descriptors within the FHEQ; evidence of demand for the programmes; the resources required to support it and their availability; and accessibility to students with disabilities. The FTLC is required to satisfy itself that these conditions have been met. The guidelines also state that 'wherever appropriate, FTLC should seek external views on the proposal from subject specialists outside the university, appropriate employers or professional bodies'. There are additional requirements for programmes that include placement learning contained in the University's Policies and Procedures for Assuring the Quality and Standards of Placement Learning.

47   Following initial approval, the proposer is required to develop a full proposal, including a programme specification set out on the University's template making reference to benchmark statements and module outlines. However, it is not yet a requirement that explicit reference is made to the FHEQ at this stage; a matter that the University says will be redressed as part of its qualifications

framework. This proposal is evaluated either by the FTLC or a subcommittee of the relevant FTLC against a set of criteria relating to aims and learning outcomes, resources, curriculum and assessment, and should include a statement of output standards. It is expected that the outcomes of these deliberations are recorded in FTLC minutes. Assuming approval by the FTLC, the proposal is considered by a panel of two members of the UTLC. External input to the subcommittee is achieved by including academics from other faculties within the University. The panel is charged with 'establishing whether due process has been followed, whether documentation is complete, and whether the proposal complies with the University Business Plan'.

48   The procedures for the approval of new programmes including distance learning and collaborative agreements are similar but require the proposer to meet the additional criteria set down in the University's Guidelines for the Approval of Distance Learning Programmes and Policy and Procedures of Collaborative Provision, respectively. For collaborative provision, for example, these include demonstrating that the proposed aims and standards are congruent with those of the University and that the partner institution has the necessary infrastructure, including staffing, to deliver the programmes.

49   Changes to programmes involving more that 25 per cent of the programme, as identified by the outcomes in the programme specification, require full programme approval. Below 25 per cent, changes are approved by the FTLC and reported to the UTLC through FTLC minutes. It is up to the FTLC after taking advice from AQSS to judge whether the change requires a full approval or not.

50   The SED stated that the University's view is that 'its system for programme approval is rigorous and effective'. AAC reviewed the operation of the programme approvals process in 2003 and reported that the procedures were effective. However, the report noted that the University's procedures were not always followed and AAC questioned 'whether the procedures should be strengthened to require inclusion of evidence (for example emails) of consultation with external bodies and discussion about resources'.

51   The audit team was provided with documentation relating to the programme approval for the MA in British History, and found that the documentation was detailed and largely matched the University's requirements. It also considered the programme approval process through reading FTLC minutes related to recent new programme approvals. The team discussed the absence of

independent external input beyond Part 1 approval with senior staff and were informed that they considered that the arrangements were appropriate, and that they accorded with the *Code of practice.*

52   The audit team concluded that the programme approval process was generally well designed. However, the team considered that while there was adequate input from external subject specialists at Part 1, there was not at Part 2, which is the most significant part of the process in terms of curriculum development and the assurance of standards and quality. This meant that programme proposers were potentially not availing themselves of an opportunity to assure and enhance programme design.

Annual monitoring

53   Since the last audit the University has moved from a biennial to an annual programme monitoring system: AMR. Introduced in 2003-04, AMR covers 'Operation of Programmes, including progression and completion data, "Quality of Programme, including comments arising from student evaluations, SSCs and internal and external reviews, and Standards of Programmes", including comments arising from external examiners' reports and Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). Composed by the board of studies, AMR reports are considered by the FTLC. A sample are scrutinised in detail and a summary of these reports are incorporated into a report for the UTLC. Additional requirements for programmes, which include placement learning, are contained in the University's Policies and Procedures for Assuring the Quality and Standards of Placement Learning.

54   The SED noted that following the first year of operation and comments from FTLCs that some AMRs were rather sparse, the ULTC had reconsidered the detailed requirements for the nature of reports from boards of studies. Accordingly, the UTLC determined that from 2004-05, AMR reporting should be comprehensive rather than based on the principle of exception reporting. In addition, extra training has been provided for secretaries of boards of studies to ensure that the supporting documentation for each AMR includes a record of discussion by the relevant board of studies.

55   At the time of the audit, the annual monitoring process had only completed one full cycle and was part way through the second. As part of the documentation supporting the DATs the audit team read a number of AMRs. These reports generally contained consideration of the required programme indicators, including programme specifications, student recruitment and progression and teaching

quality, based on external examiners' reports, student evaluations and minutes of Staff Student Committees (SSCs). On this basis, the team was able to confirm satisfactory operation of the reporting pathway from the board of studies to the FTLC and thence to the UTLC. The team noted that points for action were identified by FTLCs and there is a procedure for monitoring that these are implemented. However FTLC minutes read by the team indicated that this new process is taking time to become fully embedded. The team noted that there has been some variability in the information provided and depth of reflection on issues arising. The team also noted the AMR report template currently lacks a section for comment on action taken arising from the previous year's report.

Periodic review

56   The details of the University's periodic review system, ISR, which also incorporates a process of reapproval, are set out in the Interim Policies and Procedures for Subject Review. ISR requires undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes to be reviewed against a set of criteria including reference to the FHEQ, the *Code of practice* and subject benchmark statements. The review panel comprises members of the University outwith the subject area under review and also at least one member external to the University, all of whom are invited to undergo a half-day training programme. The review panel undertakes scrutiny of an SED and supporting documents, as well as meetings with academic and support staff, students and other stakeholders. The reviews are nominally scheduled to occur every five years. This schedule was disrupted by the restructuring and some areas, for example, the School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (SAFRD), have experienced much longer intervals between reviews.

57   ISR reports include statements of confidence regarding the quality and standards of the programmes, recommendations for improvement and commendations of good practice. The report is then considered by the subject providers who in turn prepare an action plan that, along with the report, is submitted to the FTLC. The FTLC reports the outcomes to the UTLC, including any issues for University-wide consideration. The FTLC is responsible for monitoring implementation of the action plans. Both the FTLCs and the UTLC have standing agenda items regarding the potential for dissemination of good practice arising from ISR reports.

58   Programmes incorporating special features, such as collaborative arrangements, distance learning or

placements are reviewed under the same process but the providers are also required to indicate compliance with relevant University policies contained in the Policy and Procedures of Collaborative Provision, the Guidelines for the Approval of Distance Learning Programmes and the Policies and Procedures for Assuring the Quality and Standards of Placement Learning.

59   In the SED the University expressed significant confidence in the operation of its periodic review procedures, stating that '….they are sufficiently robust to be at least as effective as QAA subject review'. Nonetheless, the SED stated that AAC is to undertake an audit of the operation of ISR in 2004-05.

60   During the audit visit the audit team was able to explore the operation of ISR through the two DSEDs that were presented in the form of recent ISR reports and follow-up responses. From this evidence, and from the minutes of the FTLCs and UTLC, the team concluded that ISR was indeed a rigorous process and that action points were followed up appropriately through the FTLCs and boards of studies. However, the team was unable to find significant advantage being taken of the opportunity to disseminate good practice across the rest of the University arising from ISRs. The team welcomed the University's establishment of the Quality and Standards Subcommittee as a subcommittee of the UTLC. The remit of the subcommittee includes the identification of good practice in teaching and learning and, therefore, has the potential to address this issue of dissemination more effectively.

61   Overall, the audit team was satisfied that the University's arrangements for annual monitoring and periodic review were fit for purpose, and that evidence seen by the team confirmed that the procedures were working as intended by the University. The team considered that the programme approval process was generally well designed; however, they remained unconvinced by the University's decision not to include independent subject experts during Part 2 of the approval process (see also paragraphs 64 and 65 below).

External participation in internal review processes

62   Programme approval requires that the 'proposers and FTLC consult with persons and bodies external to the University, such as external examiners, subject specialists, Public and Statutory Bodies, and potential employers, wherever the consultation will promote additional confidence in the quality and standards of the programme'. This occurs at Part 1 of the approval process, approval in principle (see paragraph 46). Consultation external to the University is not required for the approval of the full proposal in Part 2.

63   The University expressed full confidence regarding the level of external input for programme approval, stating that '[T]he view is that sufficient external advice is achieved through a requirement that programme proposers engage with appropriate external experts as part of the curriculum design process at the "approval in principle" stage'.

64   The audit trail for the approval of the MA in British History seen by the audit team indicated that, although the Part 1 proposal had been sent out to independent subject specialists for comment, these comments had not been available to the FTLC at the time of approval. The team learnt that confirmation of external consultation took the form of an oral statement from the proposer to the FTLC, positive comments had been received and these had been filed.

65   The audit team also considered the degree of external involvement at Part 1 in the approval of a number of other new programmes, and noted significant variability in the level of formality and range of external comment. They ranged from detailed external academic input of high quality to absence of recorded and traceable comment. The team concluded that the level of external involvement had the potential to put standards and quality at risk and advises the University to enhance the external element of its programme approval process.

66   The process of periodic review incorporates a strong element of externality. External members are full members of the review team and must be drawn from other institutions; external examiners and recent employees are not permitted to undertake this role. The audit team noted that a number of subject areas had chosen to have two or more externals contributing to the process in order to cover the spread of the academic areas. From the DSEDs that were provided in the form of ISR reports, the team concluded that the University had taken account of the suggestions of external panel members.

External examiners and their reports

67   Nomination of external examiners for taught programmes are usually made by DPDs or another subject specialist, but must be approved by the Faculty Dean of Undergraduate Studies. The Senate has delegated responsibility for appointment to FTLCs. An annual list of appointments is presented to the Senate through the UTLC. For programmes delivered in collaboration with another institution,

external examiners are appointed on the same basis and treated as other external examiners. In such cases, the fine detail of the appointment and role of external examiners are embedded in a Memorandum of Agreement, with some additional safeguards, for example, in the case of the language of assessment not being English. For joint and combined honours, an external assessor is appointed who undertakes a role analogous to that of an external examiner on single honours, programmes in regard to matters concerning the reliability and integrity of the degree awarding process. The full details regarding the external examiner system are set out in the Policy and Procedures for External Examiners of Taught Programmes, which also includes the range of documentation that should be sent to external examiners. New examiners also receive the final report from their predecessor, and receive a briefing from the school.

68   External examiners for taught programmes undertake a wide range of duties related to curriculum design and assurance of standards, the assessment of student work contributing to degree results, and the processes leading to award. A required outcome of their activities is the production of an annual report using a University form. In general, the audit team considered that the forms were fit for purpose. External examiners are required to provide a final written report upon termination of appointment. Examiners may supplement the form with detailed comments and send an additional, confidential, report to the Vice-Chancellor.

69   Reports are received on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor by the Examination Office. Thenceforth, the reports take two parallel routes to the UTLC: centrally, through AQSS, and another including the boards of studies and the FTLC. As part of the former route the Senior Assistant Registrar in AQSS is able to draw early attention to any matters of concern to ensure that they are promptly addressed.

70   The system has built on previous practice in response to a number of drivers including the latest revisions to the Code of practice, Section 4: External examining, a recent developmental engagement report and in response to the HEFCE information requirements for summary reports. However, the SED acknowledged that responses to external examiners may not always be timely and work is underway to improve the process further. AAC audited the process for external examiner report consideration and found that it was generally working well.

71   The SED stated that the University 'has confidence in its management of external examiner's reports'; but

it wished to further enhance its procedures. The AAC report and changed procedures referred to above are the outcome of that enhancement. External examiner reports seen by the audit team were generally very supportive of the quality and standards achieved. The inclusion of matters raised by external examiners in AMRs was further evidence of the role of external examiners in the assurance of quality and standards. Overall, the team concluded that the use made of external examiners by the University was appropriate, and that it had effective procedures for responding to their reports.

External reference points

72   The University's approach when developing its framework for quality management has been to develop policies and procedures to take account of the Academic Infrastructure including the FHEQ, programme specifications, subject benchmark statements and the Code of practice.

73   The Code of practice has been addressed by embedding its precepts in the University's quality assurance procedures, rather than wide dissemination of the Code. Individual sections of the Code have been considered by a variety of administrative officers, special working groups, and relevant committees according to the structures in place when each section of the Code was published. Subsequent recommendations for amendment of the University's processes have been made to the UTLC (or its predecessor body). Summaries of action were provided to the ULTC in June 2000, November 2003 and August 2004. The latter document gave a succinct summary of the key responses to each section of the Code.

74   The audit team reviewed a number of developments and read a number of new policies, procedures and handbooks that had been published in response to various sections of the Code of practice. These included several relating to research students, the Policy and Procedures for External Examiners of Taught Programmes, Policy and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Placement Learning. The team considered that the University generally maintained serious and sustained engagement with various sections of the Code of practice.

75   The University has been incorporating programme specifications into the definition of programmes since 2001-02. Part 2 of the programme approval process requires a programme specification. According to the SED, programme specifications 'now provide the essential basis' for ISR and AMR. ISR teams are required to specifically

consider the level of programmes against the FHEQ. A similar requirement forms part of AMR reports, where there is also a need to demonstrate engagement with subject benchmark statements. The SED stated that the University was working towards publication of all programme specifications on the Higher Education Research Opportunities in the UK (HERO) website by December 2004. At the time of the audit approximately 90 per cent of programme specifications had been uploaded.

76 Through its reading of DAT documentation, the audit team became aware of the variable clarity and content of programme specifications. Moreover, the SED noted that there is as yet no requirement for programme specifications at Part 2 of the programme approval process to make explicit reference to the FHEQ. The team were assured that this matter would be addressed during 2004-05 once the University, through its Qualifications and Credit Framework Group, had finalised its qualifications framework and specified the minimum volume of credits at the various levels.

77 The ILOs of proposed programmes are required to meet the requirements of PSRBs with output standards that meet or exceed their expectations. For programmes intending to achieve professional accreditation, proposers must provide evidence, at the Part 2 stage, that the requirements of the PSRB have been taken into account.

78 The audit team considered that the University's engagement with external reference points, including the Academic Infrastructure, was generally appropriate. The team saw good evidence that the University had carefully reflected on all sections of the *Code of practice*, and amended its processes as and when necessary. The team noted the progress made with introducing programme specifications, including publication on the HERO website, but encouraged the University to expedite its work on its qualifications framework so that the level of new programme specifications at Part 2 of the programme approval process could be more robustly considered against the FHEQ and to ensure equity of experience and standards for students on different programmes.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

79 Since the last audit, in 2001, the University has undergone six subject reviews and four developmental engagements with QAA. The University's performance in subject review was consistently strong, particularly student progress and achievement, learning resources and student support and guidance. The lower scoring aspects were quality management and enhancement and teaching, learning and assessment, though no score was less than 3. Subject review reports were initially considered by the relevant boards of studies, which responded to the FTLC, which, in turn, reported on the response to the UTLC. Action points were monitored by FTLCs. In the SED, the University stated that it 'is satisfied that the recommendations have been addressed appropriately, usually at the level of the Board of Studies'. Where issues were identified that had institution-wide implications, these were addressed by the UTLC. An example, given in the SED, is that of the establishment of the Joint and Combined Honours Working Party, to address issues relating to programmes involving more than one department or faculty, and the designation of subject coordinators who are responsible for coordinating all aspects of provisions that spread across different subject areas.

80 In 2002-03 and 2003-04 the University was involved in four developmental engagements. The subsequent reports were predominantly complimentary, and the SED stated that the University felt that the developmental engagement reports 'have been helpful in identifying where more attention needs to be paid'. Developmental engagement reports, as with PSRB reports, are dealt with in the same way as subject review reports. In the case of developmental engagements, FTLCs reported to the UTLC on the outcomes and the UTLC took action on issues relating to institutional level procedures, for example by amending the procedures for appointing external examiners. One developmental engagement report recommended that consideration might be given to introducing a formal external input into programme approval; however this recommendation has not been adopted.

81 Through the minutes of the FTLCs and the UTLC and the tracking of identified action points, the audit team were able to see a number of instances of the discussion of external reports within the University, and confirm that appropriate action was planned and implemented at the subject level in response to the recommendations arising from the reports. The team also saw instances of issues of wider significance being considered at FTLC and UTLC level. Both the FTLC and the UTLC have regular agenda items for such reports, which includes consideration of elements of good practice for wider dissemination. Good practice is also disseminated by the Teaching and Learning Conference and seminars organised by CAD. However, despite external reports including a number of points of commendation, the

team found few instances where such points had been identified for dissemination, thereby depriving the University as a whole of the opportunity of fully benefiting from reported good practice.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

82   The SED stated that the University recognises that the US 'is a major contributor to the quality of the student experience at Newcastle'. This view was reflected in the SWS which acknowledged the US's aim to collaborate with the University in providing necessary support and services to students.

83   The 2002 audit report concluded that the University had done much since the previous audit to enhance its arrangement for student representation and to ensure the proper working of SSCs. The SED stated that the University 'is aware that feedback was not occurring consistently, particularly in those areas most affected by the restructure'.

84   Students are well represented on major University committees, including two students on the Council, four on the Senate and two on the UTLC. There are also student representatives on the AAC, the Equal Opportunities Committee, and its Disability subcommittee, Library Advisory Committee, Strategy Board and Student Financial Assistance Committee. There are monthly meetings between the Vice Chancellor, the Pro Vice-Chancellor, (Teaching and Learning), the Academic Registrar and US sabbatical officers in the Student Advisory Group (SAG). SAG is intended to enable the University to deal more promptly with policy and operational issues. In addition, US representatives meet informally in the Student Experience Group (SEG) with the Academic Registrar and heads of services to consider University-wide student support initiatives. The SED also stated that close operational links are maintained between the heads of student services and sabbatical officers. US representatives told the audit team that both the formal and informal structure of representation at the University level worked effectively.

85   The SED stated that at programme level all boards of studies for taught programmes are required to have 'as many student representatives as necessary to cover all programmes and as many stages as is practical to ensure adequate representation'. At school level it is a University requirement that there is an SSC; although in larger schools there are in practice often more than one SSC. SSCs consider matters relating to the quality of the student experience, and offer a forum for consultation about changes to programmes. Boards of studies consider

the minutes of SSCs, and provide formal feedback to students on matters raised. Issues raised by students in SSCs are also reported on in AMRs. Research students are represented on faculty graduate school committees. Students met by the audit team expressed considerable satisfaction with regard to the degree of representation at this level, although they thought that it could sometimes be variable.

86   The SED acknowledged that students on joint honours and combined studies programmes could feel somewhat isolated without a single school home. Thus, students are represented on the faculty boards for co- and multidisciplinary studies and the associated faculty SSCs which were established in 2003-04.

87   There is no requirement for students to be represented on FTLCs. Student representatives told the audit team that they were satisfied with this arrangement as they felt well represented on boards of studies and SSCs which had greater scope for influencing their learning experience. However, the team did learn that student representatives do sometimes attend faculty away days.

88   Through its reading of the SWS and during meetings with students, the audit team learnt that student representatives on SSCs use them as a forum for honest and constructive discussion where they can air views they have solicited from their class mates, and in at least two DATs the team noted these meetings were chaired by the students. The team noted that while in some faculties student representatives were provided with some training, this was not the norm, although the US hopes to work with the University to initiate a more formal training and support package.

89   The audit team saw evidence that the staff treat the student views seriously and where possible will act on student concern; for example students studying Agriculture had requested greater provision of computers and had subsequently received greater access to facilities. Similarly in Modern Languages, in response to queries regarding staff accessibility, details of office hours were put on doors so students would know when a member of staff was guaranteed to be there. Feedback to students regarding discussion in SSCs was often undertaken using the VLE to reinforce the effectiveness of the student feedback process and students generally commented that the University was responsive to their requests.

90   Overall, the audit team considered that the University's arrangements for student representation on committees concerned with the quality of the student experience, was extensive. The operation of SSCs, some of which are chaired by students, and

whose discussions are reported at boards of studies with significant issues recorded in AMR reports, and student representation on boards of studies ensure that the students have an effective means of communicating with schools and of feeding into the deliberative structures of the University. Overall, the team saw considerable evidence of the effectiveness of mechanisms to capture the student voice, and the University's responsiveness to issues raised that, although this was not uniform across the University, it considered this to be a feature of good practice.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

91   The SED stated that 'the University is committed to the principle of obtaining feedback from students and acting on the information to improve the learning and teaching experience'. It also stated that although 'there is no explicit policy on the feedback sought from students, the expectation is that providers should seek feedback from students on all taught programmes, wherever and however delivered'. This should occur not only through student representation on boards of studies and SSCs, but through evaluations obtained at module level.

92   The SED reported that the University had become aware that at programme level, feedback was not being obtained consistently. However, the SED stated a number of initiatives should ensure that in future, student opinion is effectively captured and fed into the quality and enhancement procedures of the University. These include revisions to the business schedules of the boards of studies, the requirements within the new processes of AMR and ISR, which specifically require the consideration of student opinion either through module evaluation in the case of AMR or face-to-face meetings in the case of ISR. The adoption of the University's Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes, which requires faculty graduate schools to establish systems to collect and evaluate feedback from postgraduate research students.

93   Following widespread consultation across the institution, the UTLC has adopted the principles of a student feedback policy to encourage dialogue between students, academic staff and service providers. Operational details are still in the process of development, but the SED suggested that the AAC may undertake an audit against the new policy once it has finally been agreed and begun to be implemented. In addition, following a pilot in three schools during 2003-04, the UTLC has agreed that the Institutional Student Satisfaction Survey should be rolled out across the University in 2005-06 in order to better capture the full student experience.

94   Student feedback on library and information and communication technologies provision is collected on a regular basis and at present is carried out by the individual providers. The results of evaluation feed into their annual planning reports.

95   The SED stated that schools are encouraged to engage with their alumni for a variety of purposes, including the currency and relevance of their degrees for employment. The audit team saw little evidence to suggest that such activity was systematically carried out by schools, or that it had been used to inform changes to the curricula.

96   The SED stated that employers make a 'rich contribution…to the development of the curriculum and to the enhancement of the learning experience' of students. This is achieved in part by the fact that many programmes are accredited by external bodies and as a consequence occupational and professional standards inform the curriculum. The University has particularly strong local, regional and national links with the NHS. In addition, the audit team saw evidence of many subject areas making use of advisory boards where employer input into curriculum design is actively sought. Employer input is further promoted by CAD, through research undertaken by specialist staff and links between students and employers are facilitated in a number of ways, including the 'Learning from Work' programme, which is available to students as a credit-rated module.

97   The audit team formed the view that feedback from students was being effectively gathered by the University, but welcomed the declared plans to improve both the quality and the scope of the feedback, for example through the institution-wide student satisfaction survey. The team concluded that module evaluation, although subject to variation, was generally operating appropriately and the views of students thus gathered are properly considered through the AMR and ISR processes. It was clear to the team that students felt a real sense of involvement in the operation of all aspects of the institution and that this was fostered and supported by the care with which the University took, especially at school level, to feedback its responses and share its deliberations with the student body. However, while links with a range of employers clearly contributes to the development of the curriculum in a number of subject areas, the team concluded that the University could usefully consider the extent to which graduate input could be better harnessed to inform changes to the curricula.

Progression and completion statistics

98   The SED stated that the University's Management Information Unit (MIU), based in the

Executive Office, is responsible for compiling key statistical indicators; ensuring effective use of them in planning and management processes; and providing computer modelling to assist the University in the planning of student numbers. The MIU also produces annual statistics for all taught programmes which include entry profile, student profile, progression and completion, student attainment and first destination data.

99   Boards of studies, as part of their AMR reports, are required to consider and monitor MIU produced data. Extensive guidance to staff as to how MIU data should be reported in AMRs, forms part of the pro forma. The audit team saw evidence that the usefulness of such data is recognised by some DPDs although their level of engagement demonstrated some variability of practice. Data with respect to examination and module profiles is generated in schools rather than by the MIU for discussion at boards of studies, and while examples seen by the team were comprehensive, the University will want to consider how it can assure itself that the data is compiled in a consistent manner. FTLCs are responsible for monitoring AMR reports, including trends arising from the analysis of data, and report on any significant matters to UTLC. The SED noted, however, that this was difficult for programmes with small numbers of students.

100 The new ISR process requires review panels to consider progression and completion data. However, the SED noted that this 'had raised an issue about the way in which information about student progression is compiled and, in particular, that it does not supply cohort data'. Commentaries prepared for ISRs seen by the audit team provided information regarding cohort data generated at the school level; however this was limited in scope. The University has introduced a new student record system and it is expected that this should provide an effective resource in aiding staff in cohort analysis and ensuring commonality of data within the institution. The team was also told that the University had recently appointed a Director of Planning. One of his roles will be to ensure that the key management information derived from the system, and used in the annual monitoring process by faculties and schools, is accessible and of high quality.

101 The audit team recognised that the University was aware of the problems related to its collection and use of progression and completion statistics. The team considered it desirable for the University to gain central oversight and use of management information, especially at the cohort level. However, the team noted that the University had not been complacent on this matter and considered that if

the measures taken to date had the intended effects then the University should be in a significantly better position to deliver its strategies in 2005-06 than at the time of the audit.

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

102 The SED stated that the University 'is confident that the staff it appoints meet its expectations regarding the quality of their teaching'. For new appointments, chairs of selection panels must have completed training in selection policies and procedures, and it is intended that in future all panel members should have completed similar training. Short-listed candidates are invited to visit the school and make a presentation to academic colleagues, and may also be asked to provide evidence of their teaching skills and effectiveness.

103 Induction of new staff takes place at institutional, school and programme level. At school and programme level, the head of school is responsible for ensuring the smooth integration of new members of staff into the activities of the school. Guidance notes and an induction checklist are available on the human resources (HR) website to assist heads of school. The University is aware that local induction is not sufficiently consistent across the University and a member of the HR team is reviewing the whole induction process.

104 Academic staff who have not had appointments confirmed in another UK or other recognised University are normally subject to a three-year probationary period, and inexperienced teachers are required to undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PgCertAP) (see paragraph 112). New members of staff are normally allocated a mentor, who may be the head of school or a senior experienced member of staff. Staff taking the PgCertAP are allocated one of three faculty liaison officers who act as advisers and assist probationers in preparation of teaching and learning materials; provide guidance on assessment; advise on lecturing, research and practical techniques; and provide advice on any other problems encountered during the probationary period. The University's Probation Committee considers reports from the head of school after 12 and 22 months of probation. Reports are countersigned by the probationer's adviser who can alternatively submit a separate report. The Probation Committee has authority to confirm appointments, to extend probation or to terminate appointments. Where progress, including progress relating to teaching, is unsatisfactory, the Probation Committee informs the

probationer and indicates action to be taken. The audit team saw no examples where progress had not been satisfactory.

105 All staff are appraised through the PDR process which, following a number of successful pilots, was introduced University-wide in 2002-03. Details of the operation of the scheme are found in the comprehensive PDR: Guidance Notes and forms. Training is mandatory for reviewers and recommended for those being reviewed. Some reviewers have not yet been trained, and so at the time of the audit some areas of the University had not been through a cycle of the scheme. Staff who met the audit team reported overwhelming support for the new scheme; they saw it as a positive and helpful two-way process.

106 Criteria for promotion of academic staff have been recently revised with the aim of rewarding excellence in activities which contribute to the University's objectives and particularly to ensure that excellent teachers were rewarded appropriately. Currently, candidates for promotion must demonstrate proven ability or success in three of four areas: learning and teaching; research; income generation or third strand activities; and administration and management. Monitoring by the University of the last two rounds of promotion indicated that candidates were using the broader range of criteria and that there was evidence that excellence in learning and teaching was being recognised more readily than previously. Staff who met the audit team confirmed that there was a general perception that teaching ability was now given higher weighting in promotions to senior lecturer and professorial levels. Since 2003-04 the recognition of excellence in teaching has also been undertaken through the award of Teaching Fellowships in all faculties. In addition, some schools make awards for teaching; for example, the team heard that in the School of Chemical Engineering and Advanced Materials there had been two awards, which in part had been allocated on the basis of student input through the SSC.

107 The University has several mechanisms for maintaining an institutional overview of staff appointment and reward. The major channels are through reports by HR to the Staff Committee, the UTLC and the Executive Board. The University's strategy on staffing is embodied in its HR Strategy, which is kept under review by the Staff Committee. The Staff Committee monitors and reviews performance against the HR Strategy and Business Plan. Major changes to strategy, policy or practice are considered by the Staff Committee and passed to Executive Board for approval.

108 The audit team noted that the University had undertaken a number of initiatives in recent years in the areas of staff appointment, appraisal and reward. Many of these initiatives were contained in the Business Plan of May 2002, such as training of people involved in staff recruitment and selection; introduction of the PDR scheme; and recognising and rewarding excellence in teaching and learning as well as research. The team concluded that the new policies and procedures in the University's HR strategy, teaching and learning strategy, and extended investment plan, have already led to enhancements and, when fully rolled out, should assist the University in achieving its key strategic objectives.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

109 The SED stated that the Staff Training and Development Policy 'sets out clear objectives, principles, responsibilities, mechanisms and requirements for evaluation and review'. The University provides training and development opportunities for teaching staff on an individual, school, faculty and institutional basis. At the institutional level this is provided by the SDU and the CAD. The audit team was told that the working relationship between the two bodies is that the SDU provides development opportunities related to enhancement of the individual, while the CAD provides opportunities related to enhancing the curriculum. Although the SDU is managed by HR and the CAD by External Relations, the SED stated that there is a close working relationship between the two with the SDU providing an initial point of enquiry for all staff.

110 A key outcome of PDR is that heads of school or their delegates in collaboration with individual staff identify training needs. The PDR form contains sections that outline an individual's progress against previous objectives, objectives for the next 12 months, and training and development needs relating to these objectives. A person is nominated to be responsible for actioning the development needs and a target date is set. Each school has been asked to produce a school staff development plan at the end of the first round of PDRs. This working document is placed on the SDU website and helps the head of school to plan, prioritise and budget for staff development activities. It also highlights where help, advice and funds can be sought over the coming 12 months. The school staff development plan read by the audit team contained a comprehensive list of development activities that was tailored to each individual member of staff. Heads of school and recipients of PDR who met the audit team

expressed overwhelming support for the PDR system, particularly the opportunity to identify staff development needs. The SDU maintains a central oversight of staff development needs; the needs and, importantly, activities are recorded on a database maintained by the SDU, which is also accessible by heads of school. The audit team considered the articulation between the PDR process and identification of staff development needs as a feature of good practice.

111 In addition to PDR, training needs are identified as the result of systematic visits to heads of school by the Assistant Director of HR (Development). The Director of the CAD identifies further needs and opportunities through faculty teaching and learning committees, which she attends. This has generated a significant agenda for professional development during 2004-05, including to develop a systematic approach to training research postgraduates, to develop distance learning materials and to further develop e-learning through VLE.

112 New staff with teaching roles, taken to mean at least 30 hours contact or equivalent per year, are required to take the 60-credit PGCertAP over one or two years. The Certificate is also open to part-time teaching staff and research associates who teach. PGCertAP is accredited by the Higher Education Academy. Successful completion of the programme, or exemption from it, is a requirement for all such staff with a three-year (cumulative) contract. Staff on a two-year contract are required to complete the introductory module. Probation Committee monitors completion of PGCertAP. The PGCertAP Board of Studies is currently reviewing the requirements of the Certificate in response to feedback from staff over the heavy workload involved.

113 The audit team was told that review of the PDR outcomes showed that although provision of development needs for new lecturers was good, for example through the PGCertAP scheme, more needs to be done to meet the development needs of experienced teachers. This need will be addressed by using professional standards funds to provide targeted workshops and coaching following a structured approach. Tailored provision for part-time teachers is being delivered by the SDU on a school basis. Staff have been identified, schools approached and a programme of activities is now being created.

114 There is no mention of peer observation of teaching in the SED. Through the DATs the audit team learnt that some observations are conducted, but the University has not addressed this issue at the institutional level, other than to 'encourage' peer observation. Discussions with staff confirmed that

operation of peer observation schemes is variable; but that there is good practice in some schools. For example, in the SAFRD, peer observation is mandatory. The team heard from staff who had participated, that the process was beneficial in identifying and disseminating good practice. The team would encourage the University to reflect further on its policy on peer observation.

115 The University organises training in all faculties for postgraduates who teach and demonstrate. In addition, module leaders are expected to induct, orientate, monitor and support postgraduate students who assist them with demonstrating and teaching. The conditions under which postgraduates teach or demonstrate are clearly articulated in the Good Practice in Provision for Doctoral Students. The majority of postgraduate demonstrators who met the team confirmed that they had received generic and module-specific training, but at least one had only received generic training.

116 Institutional overview of staff support and development is undertaken by the Assistant Director of HR (Development), as Head of the SDU. She maintains University-wide training records and reports to the Director of HR, to Staff Committee and to the UTLC.

117 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University has generally developed an active approach to identifying and responding to staff support and development needs, particularly through PDR. The team noted the inclusion of part-time staff and postgraduate research students who teach or demonstrate in the remit of the SDU. The team would encourage the University to reflect further on its policy on peer observation.

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

118 The University has only one course that is delivered entirely by distance learning (DL) methods: the MSc in Oncology & Palliative Care, This is achieved predominantly through the medium of the University's VLE. There are also a very limited number of programmes that deliver individual modules by DL methods.

119 In 2001, the University published an Essential Handbook for Distance Learning which set out a statement of the University's thinking regarding the pedagogy and management of DL teaching and which incorporated developmental guidance based on QAA guidelines published at the time. The Handbook also outlines the future position of DL in the implementation of the University's plans to

improve the student learning experience. To this end, the CAD runs a number of training courses on the use of VLE, incorporating pedagogic as well as operational considerations. Recent examples include courses on formative assessment and feedback through the VLE, the use of discussion boards and supporting groups.

120 The University offers a very limited master's level provision of programmes that are delivered overseas by staff from the University. These are structured such that the students overseas receive the same level of face-to-face tuition and supervision as home students. The University has agreements in place with local representative organisations, for example, the British Council, to ensure appropriate resource provision and the students have on-line access to all of the University services. The quality arrangements, in terms of AMR and ISR are the same as for campus-based programmes.

121 In 2003 the University undertook an audit of the use of VLE across the University, and ascertained that 38 per cent of modules had been created on the VLE. This had risen to about 60 per cent by the time of the audit visit. The University's audit also identified that 'usage of the system for delivering learning and teaching was often relatively unsophisticated'. Subsequently, an E-learning Strategy Group has been established to oversee the development and implementation of the outline e-learning strategy that was published in February 2004. The strategy has the key aims of embedding e-learning within the curriculum and developing its usage from the current relatively superficial level to advanced styles of e-learning, supported by a recently established Blackboard Operations Group. The Group, which will report to the UTLC by means of the E-Learning Strategy Group, has been tasked with providing more in-depth training for staff on using VLE to support learning and teaching.

122 The University is in the process of developing its approach to DL. The audit team considered that the CAD had played an important role in the assurance of the quality of teaching delivered by DL in both developing the technical skills of academic staff and encouraging reflection on the pedagogic aspects of using e-learning as a teaching tool. The team concluded that the University's e-learning strategy, while still very much in its early stages of development, has the potential to provide a good basis for developments in this area.

Learning support resources

123 The library and Information Systems and Services (ISS) are the main providers of learning support resources. The two services liaise closely with each other, especially in the provision of electronic resources. Both the library and ISS produce an annual plan as part of their budget submission in which they flag key performance indicators, main objectives and risks as well as information concerning the budget. These plans are based on extensive consultation with users through FTLCs, boards of studies and through user surveys conducted by the Library. It is the responsibility of liaison librarians, who sit on FTLCs, to forward the developing requirements of schools for library resources, as and when necessary.

124 The Library provides services to students on three sites. In addition to the physical stock, the range of electronic resources has been significantly increased in recent years as a major strategic development. The Robinson Library is open 79 hours per week in term time while hours at other sites vary, in line with identified need. Access to all university libraries in the North East is available under reciprocal arrangements and the library is a member of the UK Libraries Plus scheme to enable the use of other libraries for DL and part-time students.

125 Liaison librarians are responsible for working with nominated library representatives at school level and sit on FTLCs and either sit on or receive the minutes of relevant boards of studies and SSCs. Procedures for new programme proposals require schools to consult the library to ensure that appropriate resources can be made available.

126 The SED stated that Library '[m]onitoring of performance and the extent to which users' needs are being met are carried out in a number of ways'. A detailed Priority Research Survey, providing data down to school level and covering a range of services is undertaken every four years. The last such survey was undertaken in 2003 and a summary of user feedback with responses by the library is available on the library's website. 93 per cent of students considered that the library provided them with a good service, and 87 percent indicated that they were content with customer service. Additionally, the library continues to invite user comment through a 'Tell us what you think' facility, easily accessible on the intranet. In recognition of its user-led focus the library has been successful in achieving Charter Mark status on three occasions. Reporting on library resources also forms part of ISR. There is a Library Advisory Group which contains two student representatives. The Group offers advice on the development of provision of services and comments on the annual plan which feeds into the University's budget setting process.

127 Central IT facilities for learning and teaching are provided through ISS including public student computer clusters (some with 24-hour access) and an extensive server, network and printing infrastructure to support them. For new programmes there is a requirement to consult ISS about the learning resources required to support the programme as a condition of the proposal going forward for consideration. The former University Computer Service conducted a User Survey in 2003, shortly before its incorporation into ISS, and this was considered at the UTLC. The survey indicated several areas of concern, but was of particular use in identifying user priorities and has in part been responsible for shaping recent major developments in IT provision, such as better access to the University network through the provision of 'docking points' for student laptops, data points in student bedrooms in halls of residence and a wireless network across the campus.

128 The SWS stated that students were generally very pleased with the service provided by the Library, although it also voiced some concerns about the adequacy of learning resources provided in the Library, in terms both of the stock and of study space, and asserted that they were under some pressure due to heavy demand. The SWS also suggested that support provided through ISS was sometimes overstretched. During the audit visit the audit team discussed these concerns as part of the DATs and read the reports emanating from the University's monitoring of library and IT provision. It learnt that the concerns listed in the SWS were not regarded by students to be of great concern and that the University had responded appropriately in recent years.

129 Some students also expressed concern about the state of some of the teaching accommodation. The SED stated that there was in hand a programme of refurbishment to which £500,000 had been allocated for both 2003-04 and 2004-05. During the audit visit the team was informed that this programme had already resulted in the provision of teaching accommodation of a high standard in certain areas, and that a further £3.3 million would be spent in 2005-06 and 2006-07.

130 The audit team learnt that students welcomed the growing use of the University's VLE both to support learning and teaching and as a means of communication with students. In particular, part-time students found the ability to access learning and teaching materials at times to suit themselves particularly useful, but agreed with other students that the use of the facility could be adopted more uniformly across the institution as a whole.

131 Through the SWS and in meetings with the audit team, students generally expressed high levels of satisfaction with the level of learning support resources available to them. The team concluded that student learning was being effectively supported by the provision of appropriate and well-managed learning resources. The University is careful both to ensure that such provision is responsive to user needs through regular user satisfaction surveys and other monitoring processes and, through the UTLC, maintains a clear overview of the contribution of the resources to student learning.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

132 Details of guidance, support and supervision for students is located in a number of handbooks, published by the University, including the Student Handbook, International Students Handbook, Policy and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Placement Learning, and the Handbook for Research Students and Research Supervisors. In advance of their arrival at Newcastle, all students receive the Student Handbook which includes brief information on advice and support services and makes reference to the procedures for complaints and academic appeals. Students are encouraged to complete a questionnaire identifying any special needs that they may have prior to arrival.

133 New undergraduate students attend an induction session, organised on a faculty basis, which includes input from staff from central University support services, including Student Welfare. Students are provided with programme handbooks at school induction. The University encourages schools to provide induction for returning students.

134 The SED stated that it is University policy that 'every student on a taught programme should have a named personal tutor who is responsible for advising them on academic and non-academic matters and on their overall relationship with the University'. In the SWS it was reported that some students found that the personal tutoring system worked effectively, but that there were other instances where the details of the scheme needed better explanation, that students had not met their personal tutor and that its effectiveness was variable.

135 The SED stated that the University 'is aware that, as student numbers have increased and demands on staff have multiplied, the personal tutor system has come under considerable pressure', and that at time of writing the SED, the policy on personal tutoring was under review. Following pilot schemes to explore

differing approaches to student support in a range of schools, the UTLC has recommended the adoption of a new set of principles governing the academic support and guidance of undergraduate students. The new principles acknowledge that the current system which seeks to combine academic with more general support and guidance, has inherent positive features. However, heads of school are invited to consider the future model of tutorial support that is most appropriate to the needs of their school, providing that each student, including joint honours and combined students, has a named individual responsible for his/her academic support and more general support. These roles could be combined in one person, as is the most common model at present, or could be separated into two distinct functions, as in some of the pilot schemes. Importantly, the student handbook for each degree programme should set out how a student can access effective academic and pastoral support. Where changes are proposed FTLCs are to be informed. It was not clear to the team, however, either what responsibilities FTLCs were to be given to review proposed changes to the system, or how in the future the University intended to assure itself that the systems of support and guidance for students were operating effectively in line with institutional expectations.

136 Support and guidance for international students has been a major focus for the University for a number of years. The audit team considered that the International Students Handbook, which is sent to new students before they set out for Newcastle, was comprehensive and relevant. On arrival, all students whose mother tongue is not English must undergo an English language competency test. Students needing further support with their English, both at registration and later in their studies, are referred to the Language Centre. One school in the HASS Faculty is piloting the use of second year native English speakers acting as mentors to new international students.

137 The University has recently reviewed its guidelines on Placement Learning against the *Code of practice, Section 9: Placement Learning.* Consequently, it has adopted a policy that will only approve or re-approve degree programmes that conform to the principles laid out in its policy document. For existing programmes with placements, the AMR process will in future address relevant issues including communication with students and placement providers. The audit team saw evidence that the AMR procedures relating to placement learning were effective. Students met by the team expressed general satisfaction both with the organisation of placements and the support they received from placement organisers.

138 In line with its objectives in both the learning and teaching strategy and the widening participation strategy, the University has introduced specific initiatives to encourage progression from state schools and colleges in the region. The principal initiative in this respect is the PARTNERS programme which has been running since 1999. The programme offers a range of awareness and aspiration raising pre-entry activities with an alternative entry route which enables participants to demonstrate potential for success in higher education by completing an Assessed Summer School. Students who enter the University through the PARTNERS Programme continue to benefit from support from the Student Recruitment Office during their first year. The audit team learnt that this programme, with which all schools are engaged to varying degrees, was greatly appreciated by those who had participated in it. The team formed the view that it had prepared students effectively for entry into higher education.

139 Research students receive academic advice and guidance from their supervisory team. Staff new to research supervision are required to undertake appropriate training, usually as part of the PgCertAP. Both supervisors and students are made aware of their respective roles and responsibilities through the comprehensive Handbook for Research Students and Supervisors, which also includes information about regulations, financial matters, facilities and services, and University policies and procedures. All postgraduate students can seek independent pastoral support from directors of postgraduate studies in schools, deans of postgraduate studies and the faculty postgraduate tutor. Research students who met the team confirmed the effectiveness of the arrangements in place for them, and commented positively on the role of the newly established faculty graduate schools, both in providing a physical resource to support their research, and in promoting a sense of belonging to a community of scholars.

140 The audit team heard of much good practice in relation to the support and guidance offered to students, especially for research and international students. The team welcomed the University's recent review of personal tutoring and its evident wish to ensure that the support and guidance offered to students was as effective as possible. It noted that the policy specifically sought to ensure that joint honours and combined studies students were more effectively catered for. The team also noted the new Institutional Student Satisfaction Survey would include questions around tutorial support. Overall the team concluded that the University's student-focused approach to student support and guidance constituted a feature of

good practice, but would encourage the University to ensure that the operation of the system is also subject to formal monitoring and evaluation through institutional quality processes.

Personal support and guidance

141 The University promotes general personal support for students through WelNet, an integrated student welfare support network which is an informal combination of the services provided by the US, the Chaplaincy and the University itself. There is targeted support for particular groups such as students with disabilities, mature students and students with childcare needs. In addition, more general support services such as careers, counselling and financial advice are available. There is also a Student Advice Centre, operated by the US and located in the Union building, which offers support and advice to students on a range of issues, and provides the only point of contact for visa advice for international students in the institution. Representatives of the central support services liaise with colleagues in the faculties to offer advice on the support of targeted groups of students, and offer training on specific and general issues on request.

142 International students, who have full access to all student support facilities, are further supported through the International Office which coordinates a range of activities including the provision of pre-arrival information, a welcome team for new arrivals in Newcastle and an induction programme for international students. International students benefit from English language support provided by the Language Centre through both credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing modules, and international support coordinators in schools provide additional on-going general support.

143 The Director of Student Welfare is responsible for all aspects of student welfare and counselling and holds monthly meetings with representatives of the WelNet services to promote consistency of practice across the services and to aid communication at practitioner level. The Welfare Officer of the US also attends these meetings.

144 Evaluation of the University provision for student support is at present carried out by the individual providers and the results of evaluation feed into the annual planning reports, that are submitted to the Registrar by the heads of service. In addition, the SEG chaired by the Academic Registrar and attended by heads of service and the Welfare Officer of the US, provides a high-level forum for those responsible for the delivery of student support services, to discuss

issues of common interest, to develop institution-wide student support initiatives. Although the future role and status of SEG have not yet been decided, the team considered that it provided a valuable forum for the discussion of student support issues at a strategic level, and this view was confirmed by the members of SEG that the team met during the audit.

145 The SWS expressed high regard for the quality of support available. However, it suggested that awareness of the services on offer was low amongst both academic staff with responsibilities for student support and the student body as a whole.

146 Although few students who met the audit team had availed themselves of support from the centrally-provided services, apart from the careers service, all were aware of the existence of such services and in particular of the support and advice that was available through the Student Advice Centre. Members of academic staff with responsibilities for student welfare who met the team, were fully conversant with the additional support that was available to students and confident in their ability to refer students appropriately.

147 The audit team concluded that the University provides a good range of welfare support services, especially for international students, and that, although few students met by the team had used them, students were generally very complimentary about the quality of the services. The team learnt of plans to bring together a full range of welfare support services in a centrally located building, and noted the various ways in which the University evaluated the services, particularly the role of the Student Experience Group.

Collaborative provision

148 The University has a limited portfolio of collaborative provision. There are no collaborations that involve another institution delivering a University of Newcastle award. Collaborative provision comprises two articulation arrangements, one local and one overseas; one joint award with a UK university and three 'hybrid' arrangements with Engineering schools in a range of UK universities where modules taken at other named universities count towards a Newcastle named award.

149 In 2001 the University produced its Policy and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision which took account of the recently published *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning),* but largely focused on procedures for establishing collaborations. In order

to test the effectiveness of the new arrangements, the AAC undertook an investigation of the operation of the policies and procedures in 2003. The SED stated that the AAC's report indicated that the University's procedures 'were not working entirely as intended in a number of areas'. In part this was due to some of the collaborative arrangements being established before the new procedures came into effect. The University amended its policy and procedures to require that, in future, changes in partners were subject to approval, clarified its definition and typology of collaborative provision and provided guidance and examples for academic and administrative staff on what is or is not collaborative provision. The University has established a Register of approved collaborative provision and requires that only provision which is contained on the Register should be authorised for purposes of publicity and delivery to students. These requirements have been incorporated in revised policy and procedures for collaborative provision which were approved by the UTLC in September 2004. The University intends to once again review its collaborative policies and procedures in light of publication of the revised *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning).*

150 Principles underlying the quality assurance of collaborative programmes include that academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities and experiences must be equivalent to those of comparable awards delivered by the University. Programme approval arrangements for collaborative programmes are similar to those of other programmes, but include a number of features (including at Stage 2) that the FTLC should reassure itself that the University procedures for approving the partner institution have been adhered to. Also, the opinion of an external expert in the subject area who is independent of both the University and the partner organisation should be consulted. UTLC's Standing Committee on Collaborative Provision reviews the application, and the UTLC must take the final decision on approval. Annual monitoring of programmes that include collaboration with another institution are much the same as for other programmes except that the FTLC will also receive and, where appropriate, act upon the external examiners' reports. Periodic review is undertaken as part of ISR. At the end of the five year period, UTLC's Standing Committee on Collaborative Provision reviews the agreement permitting the collaboration against a set of agreed criteria. The University expressed confidence that the procedures were now effective.

151 The audit team noted the significant developments in recent years in the University's arrangements for the quality assurance of collaborative programmes. The team were provided with an example of how the new procedures had recently led to the termination of a collaborative arrangement. Overall, the team considered that these arrangements were rigorous and robust.

Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline audit trails

Discipline audit trails

152 In each of the selected DATs, 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 periodic school reviews relating to the programmes. Their findings in respect of the academic standards of named awards are as follows.

Agriculture

153 Agriculture is one of the subject areas provided by the SAFRD (the School) in the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering (SAgE). There are currently 365 students enrolled on taught programmes, and 49 postgraduate research students. The School comprises 34 full-time staff and seven part-time staff who are supported by seven technical and six administrative staff. The following named awards (with numbers of students currently enrolled) were included in the DAT:

- BSc Food & Human Nutrition (58)
- BSc Agriculture (and options) (91)
- MSc International Agriculture & Food Marketing (IAFM) (six).

154 The DSED was purpose written, and programme specifications for the above named awards were appended. The programme specifications provided evidence that the ILOs for each programme had been carefully mapped against the FHEQ and relevant subject benchmark statements. These mappings were reviewed by boards of studies in February 2005 and forwarded to the FTLC for approval. It is intended that mappings should be reviewed annually within the AMR report.

155 Data on admissions, progression, achievement and employment are collated within the School and the audit team saw evidence that the data was used in AMR and monitored by the boards of studies. Progression rates vary from degree to degree but

overall remain fairly consistent at around 88 per cent between Stage 1 and 2 and 94 per cent between Stage 2 and 3. In the past three years all students entering Stage 3 have graduated. In recent years the monitoring of the distribution of degree classes by the Board of Studies across the Schools' programmes has highlighted the low proportion of firsts in all subjects except Food and Human Nutrition. New Faculty marking guidelines have been introduced which are expected to balance degree classifications across the School. In general, the team concluded that the School effectively used progression and completion data to maintain and enhance standards.

156 There has been no University internal subject review of Agriculture and related subjects since the last external review in 1998; the School is scheduled for review in 2007. The audit team was told that this was in line with University policy as the new ISR process was only introduced in 2003. IAFM was accredited by the Chartered Institute of Marketing in July 2004, and the Food and Human Nutrition programme has applied for accreditation from the Nutrition Society.

157 The audit team read a number of AMRs produced in accordance with the University template. They were considered by the FTLC, which identified areas of good practice and areas for concern, and then generated action points for boards of studies and the UTLC. Progress towards completion of action points will be monitored by the boards of studies and FTLC. The FTLC identified some inconsistencies in reporting, but the team concluded that once these have been overcome the AMR procedure should provide an effective means of internal monitoring.

158 The audit team read external examiners' reports for the last three years. These contained evidence that the system for responding to external examiners' reports worked effectively at the level of individual degree programmes and the Board of Studies. However, the team noted a degree of inconsistency at faculty level in that the FTLC did not always minute discussions or report to the UTLC on recommendations contained in external examiners' reports. One external examiner commented on the low number of First class degrees over the four years of his office (despite First class performance in vivas) and three external examiners (in different boards of studies) commented on reluctance by markers to use marks at the top of the range. Staff who met the team confirmed that the low proportion of Firsts had been discussed at the FTLC, but this discussion was not reported for consideration by the UTLC. The issue of First class degrees was discussed at the UTLC, however, when identified during institutional overview of external examiners reports. The team

concluded that local and institutional monitoring of external examiners' reports was effective, but the FTLC overview and reporting procedures in SAgE could be improved.

159 The audit team reviewed a range of assessed student work, and noted evidence of some markers rewarding First-class work with relatively higher marks, in line with suggestions from external examiners and the new marking scheme introduced in 2004-05; but that this was by no means universal. There was widespread use of feedback cover sheets, although the feedback they contained was somewhat variable. Notwithstanding the above comments, the team concluded that the assessed work matched the expectations set out in the programme specifications and confirmed that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the awards and location within the FHEQ.

160 Degree programme handbooks seen by the audit team largely adhered to the University guidelines except they did not contain details of procedures relating to complaints and appeals. In case of problems, the handbooks advise students to contact their tutor, module leader, lecturer or DPD. Students who met the team said that they found the degree programme handbooks useful throughout their degree programme.

161 Students met by the audit team confirmed that the School's resources were adequate and were used to support learning. They also confirmed that centrally-provided library and IT facilities were good. They praised the remote access to the VLE, although they told the team that some specialised software was not available remotely.

162 Students who met the audit team were very positive about the level of pastoral and academic support provided through formal and informal systems. Many personal tutors were considered to be proactive, especially those of taught postgraduate students. The team was told that most staff had an open-door policy, and that extra support was provided for international students and students with special needs. Placement students receive support and guidance before and during their placement from the School Placement Tutor and through bespoke modules and facilities on the VLE. The team learnt that placement students particularly appreciated the VLE discussion group (accessible by students only) that enabled them to share experiences.

163 The School has fully embraced the new PDR system and staff confirmed that it has led to more effective identification of staff development needs. The School has recently introduced a mandatory

system of peer observation by employing trios with three-way observations rather than pairs. The audit team would encourage dissemination of this good practice to other schools.

164 Student feedback is gathered for most modules using the University questionnaire service. Summary statistics are produced for each module to feed into the AMR report. Students who met the audit team were aware of some changes in response to formal student feedback, but generally did not know what happened to module evaluation forms or what actions were taken. Students surmised that this was probably because most changes would affect the following cohort rather than the students who provided the feedback. The team was satisfied that student feedback was gathered and used effectively, but encouraged the School to review its feedback strategy.

165 SSCs meet at least once per semester to raise issues about modules, and programme design and delivery. Through its reading of SSC minutes the audit team learnt that the majority of issues raised in SSC meetings were specific to individual modules, and actions and responses were recorded in the minutes. More general issues were referred to the boards of studies or the School Teaching and Learning Committee (STLC). An example of the effectiveness of SSC was that STLC responded to comments about variability of feedback on assessments by producing a School Policy for the return of feedback and a pro forma. The students who met the team confirmed that the new policy had improved the timeliness and value of feedback to students on assessed work.

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

Biosciences:

167 The School of Biomedical Sciences is located in the Faculty of Medical Sciences. The Biosciences DAT focused on the following named awards (student numbers in brackets):

- BSc Physiological Sciences (70)

- BSc Biomedical Sciences (226)

- BSc Medical Microbiology & Immunology (73)

- MRes Biomoloecular Sciences (38).

There are separate boards of studies for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Each contains a student representative. There are also seven SSCs, one for the postgraduate programmes and one each for the undergraduates programmes offered by the School.

168 The DSED was based upon the documentation provided for the ISR in January 2004, and updates on subsequent actions following internal consideration of the ISR report. The DSED included detailed programme specifications for each course which demonstrated that intended outcomes were mapped on to the curricula. Additionally the programmes were designed with reference to the FHEQ and to the *Subject benchmark statement* for Biomedical Sciences. An exception to this being that the BSc Biomedical Sciences does not lead to accreditation by the Institute of Biomedical Sciences as the research emphasis of the programmes does not permit an accreditable curriculum.

169 There were limited data presented in the DSED on student admission, progression and achievement, however, more detailed information was available at the audit visit. The audit team, through reading the minutes of boards of studies and recent AMRs, saw evidence that the School was using progression and completion data to inform programme annual monitoring. Data on examination performance and progression was generated at a local level and there was clear evidence this was feeding into discussion at boards of studies level. An analysis of data for 2002-03 revealed satisfactory student progression and achievement by year although the systems were currently unable to provide cohort analysis.

170 The audit team saw examples of AMR reports for 2003-04, and was able to follow the passage of the reports through the FTLC and the UTLC. The reports contained data on standards achieved by students and the comments of external examiners, and it was clear that the views of students, as expressed in the minutes of SSCs, were included in the reports.

171 In 2004, Biosciences was subject to an ISR. This was undertaken by a panel comprising two external academic advisers and three internal members, two of whom were external to the Faculty, and nominees of the UTLC. The panel's report was comprehensive and clear, listing a number of commendations and recommendations for action. Through its reading of the School's initial commentary, the subsequent report and the responses to the report produced by the boards of studies and the FTLC, the audit team considered that the ISR was a thorough exercise that provided the School with a report that would be beneficial to its efforts to maintain and enhance quality and standards. Furthermore, the responses to the process from the FTLC and boards of studies confirmed the rigorous nature with which the Faculty and School had engaged with the review process.

172 The audit team saw a range of external examiners' reports which were constructively critical and generally positive. The examiners were satisfied that the courses were at an appropriate level and gave a range of positive feedback. There was evidence through the ISR and the AMR process that external examiners' comments were taken seriously and responded to in a timely and effective manner.

173 The School's assessment strategy follows University guidelines and, therefore, reflects the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students.* Summative and formative modes of assessment are used to good effect within the School across all programmes. There was evidence of clearly thought through teaching and learning strategies which integrated with, for example, the research standing in the department. A good example being the development of student skills in early years in preparation for the final year project report, which was prepared in the format of a peer reviewed paper.

174 The audit team saw a range of assessed student work from a number of courses at each level. The team confirmed 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.

175 The audit team reviewed a number of handbooks provided to students by the School. These included degree programme handbooks and module handbooks. Programme specifications are not in the handbooks, but are available to students by means of the University intranet. Details of the academic aims and outcomes of the programme are contained in the degree programme handbooks, and these were found to map directly onto those in the programme specification. Degree programme handbooks also contain details of assessment requirements and regulations, although the level of information available at the module level was variable. Students reported that the handbooks were accurate and useful.

176 The boards of studies identify resource requirements in relation to teaching and their recommendations are then considered by the Head of School. The liaison librarian for the School attends both undergraduate and postgraduate SSCs and the FTLC. The School has experienced considerable expansion in student numbers over recent years. However, the audit team were reassured by comments from both staff and students that learning resources remained appropriate to the support of students learning.

177 The School identifies staff as its core learning resource in the DSED. The use of mentors and the requirement for new staff to undertake the University PgCertAP provide mechanisms for enhancement of teaching practice. In addition to general training, the School also briefs demonstrators in relation to the sessions they will cover and provides a handbook for demonstrators. Peer observation is a relatively new development within the School and has not been fully embedded within its systems.

178 The School has a number of mechanisms through which it offers support and guidance to students. All applicants have the opportunity of attending an 'open day' to meet staff and are supplied with information regarding their area of interest prior to enrolment. New students participate in the School's induction programme during which they are welcomed by the Head of School and given advice on study skills by the Faculty Study Skills Advisor and meet their personal tutor. The personal tutor can access tutees results through a school web based system to enable them to monitor student progress throughout their course of study. For returning students, there is a one week induction prior to the start of term to enable staff to highlight issues for the coming year and provide careers advice. Postgraduate research students have a specific induction programme and are now assigned supervisory teams although the focus for support remains with the main project supervisor. In addition, the School has a Student Support Officer and provides second year mentors for mature first years. The audit team considered that there was substantial evidence of a strong and supportive approach to student welfare and development by the School.

179 Students are engaged with quality assurance and enhancement through formal and informal means at the School level. Formally, student opinion is sought through module evaluation questionnaires (MEQ). The audit team saw a range of individual and summarised MEQs and noted the generally high level of student satisfaction. Where issues of concern were raised there was clear evidence of discussion at boards of studies with minutes providing a summary of how issues would be dealt with for the following session. Student concerns are also discussed more informally in the SSCs which also review MEQ data. Minutes from these meetings, including action taken, were posted on the VLE to ensure feedback to students. Students who met with the team were confident that through these processes they had ample opportunity to raise concerns, and that issues raised were dealt with promptly.

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

Chemical Engineering

181 Chemical Engineering programmes are offered by the School of Chemical Engineering and Advanced Materials, which is part of SAgE. The DAT covered the following named awards (student numbers in brackets):

- BEng Chemical and Process Engineering (44)

- MEng in Chemical and Process Engineering with Honours Options (67)

- MSc Clean Technology (CT) (16)

- MSc Applied Process Control (APC) (10)

- MSc Process Analytics and Quality Technology (PAQT) (13)

- MSc Process Automation (part of the EPSRC/UK Engineering Portfolio of Integrated Graduate Development Schemes - IGDS) (37).

All programmes except APC and PAQT are accredited by one or both of the Institution of Chemical Engineers (IChemE) and the Energy Institute (EI). A number of these programmes include placements.

182 The DSED, which was written specifically for the audit, was largely descriptive and included only limited self-evaluation of internal processes and practices. Programme specifications for all the programmes were appended. In the case of the undergraduate master's, there was a single programme specification covering the complete suite of titles. Structurally, programme specifications followed the standard University template, but they differed somewhat in their style of presentation and usefulness. For example, there was minimal difference in the enumerated aims and intended learning outcomes of the bachelor's and undergraduate master's programmes. Nonetheless, the programme specifications did make reference to both the FHEQ and the *Subject benchmark statement* for Engineering.

183 The audit team read the 2003-04 AMRs for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and tracked their progress to date through faculty level committees. The AMRs included consideration of the reports from external examiners, and were considered by the FTLC. The undergraduate AMR report included consideration of a variety of data, reflecting the questions in the guidance to the boards of studies, and largely focused on the demographics of the student population and the degree classifications achieved. The team noted that actions raised in the undergraduate AMR had been acted on, including matters relating to student induction. The DPDs told the team that the first year of operation had been helpful, and that they expected the second year to be somewhat easier to undertake. The team was satisfied that the AMR process for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes had operated in accordance with University expectations.

184 At the time of the audit the School had not yet experienced an ISR, although it was scheduled for 2004-05. However, in 2004 the undergraduate programmes were subject to an accreditation visit from IChemE and the IE. The report resulting from this visit was largely satisfactory and often complimentary and the audit team noted that the School had responded to the few action points expeditiously.

185 The audit team read a sample of external examiners' reports from the previous three academic years, and noted that the boards of studies were careful to respond to the issues raised, and to report these onwards to the FTLC. In general, the reports were complimentary and provided an overall impression of high quality provision coupled with high standards of student achievement.

186 Assessment methods operated by the School are in line with the University's assessment guidelines, and therefore reflect the *Code of practice*. Programme specifications contain the details of the assessment methods for each programme, and are communicated to students through module outline forms which the DSED noted are not always consistently presented. A range of assessment modes is employed, as appropriate to the module learning outcomes and consistent with University guidelines. The boards of studies maintain oversight of programme assessment regimes. Students met by the audit team were clear that they understood what was required of them in order to achieve the standards set.

187 The audit team reviewed a sample of assessed student work, including examination scripts and project reports. The team considered that the range of achievement of students was appropriately differentiated by the marking process, with some students performing to a very high level. The reports of professional and statutory body accreditors, and those of external examiners, affirmed the attainment of appropriate standards. Much coursework was annotated with sometimes detailed feedback, but there was little and inconsistent use made of the School standard structured feedback sheets. Notwithstanding this variation, students met by the audit team were satisfied with the feedback on assessed work, which they said had recently been improved in response to student requests. Students

also felt able to obtain feedback on examination performance should they want it. On the basis of the evidence seen by the team, it concluded that the standards set for and achieved by students on the named awards was appropriate for their location in the FHEQ.

188 Taught postgraduate students are issued with a comprehensive programme handbook on entry. Undergraduate students receive a stage handbook. In general terms, the handbooks seen by the audit team reflected the University guidelines and contained much useful information and guidance, but there were detailed departures and variations. For example, the handbook for the MSc in Clean Technology has a helpful thorough mapping between the FHEQ and individual modules, but that for applied process control did not. The undergraduate stage handbooks do not contain the relevant programme specifications, but abbreviated digests only. One consequence of this is that undergraduate students are not provided with handbook documentation, detailing the relative weightings of each year of study, until they enter the final year of their programme of studies. Handbooks contained brief standard references to appeals and complaints procedures. Undergraduate students met by the team were unclear about formal complaints and appeals procedures, but were aware of a hierarchy of staff from whom help and advice might be sought, from their personal tutor upwards.

189 Pastoral care for students is extensive, and includes personal and stage tutors, a senior tutor and an overseas student advisor. The School has recently returned to a policy of not requiring weekly meetings between a student and their tutor, because the 'open doors' policy is regarded by staff and students as sufficiently effective and is in line with University requirements. Students were complimentary about the support provided when choosing placements and subsequent support when on placement. Staff development remains a focus of the School. New staff are required to complete the PgCertAP and are assigned mentors. At the time of the audit visit the School was putting into place procedures for peer observation, and all staff had been involved in PDRs. Students spoke very highly of the IT facilities, including specialised software, available to them; either campus-based on a 24-hour basis, or by means of the network from home. In recent years there has been significant investment by the University to improve facilities, although the DSED acknowledged that problems existed with regard to some undergraduate and postgraduate teaching accommodation.

190 In their meetings with both staff and students, the audit team learnt that there is a shared sense that the newly revised representative bodies are effective in allowing students to make an impact. The SSC system is built upon the student Chemical Engineering Society and students chair both undergraduate and postgraduate committees. New chairs receive induction and mentoring by staff and previous post-holders. Student representatives from the SSCs also sit on boards of studies and are thus able to contribute to a wide range of academic debates. Examples of School responses to issues raised by students ranged from extending the opening hours of the general office through to curricula re-arrangements in connection with separation processes and the provision of the new design suite. Nominations for the recently introduced Teaching Awards were based upon student feedback in the SSCs.

191 Overall, while noting concerns about the quality of some teaching accommodation, 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.

Modern Languages

192 The School of Modern Languages in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences currently provides some twenty four-year, joint and single honours undergraduate programmes all of which include a compulsory year spent in the country (or countries) in which the target language (or languages) is/are spoken. Many of these programmes have taught modules in common, and transfer between them is possible. At postgraduate level the taught provision comprises a one-year MA in Film Studies (full or part-time), for which a significant proportion of the teaching is provided from outside the School, and a suite of programmes in Translating and Interpreting (T and I). The T and I programme comprises a common Diploma year followed by four possible MA programmes. The DAT focused on the following named awards: BA Modern Languages, BA Spanish and Politics, MA Film Studies and MA T and I.

193 Modern Languages underwent an ISR in November 2004. The documentation supplied for the DAT comprised the Subject Review Commentary prepared by the School for the purposes of the review, the Review Report itself and programme specifications for the named awards. The programme specifications reflected the subject benchmark statement for languages and related studies, where appropriate, but did not make clear links to the FHEQ. This was noted by the ISR panel,

and the subsequent report recommended that DPDs be asked to produce a matrix which maps the ILOs for their programmes against the FHEQ.

194 The School records student progression rates in the AMR reports, but reported that the small numbers on some programmes and the fact that students were able to transfer between cognate programmes, sometimes rendered cohort analysis based on centrally-provided data difficult, or undermined its usefulness. Progression rates were generally good, while the number of withdrawals was extremely low.

195 The audit team saw evidence that internal monitoring and review procedures were effective. The 2004 ISR included external participation in line with University expectations. The panel's report highlighted strengths, as well as making a number of recommendations both to the School and, where appropriate, to the University. At the time of the audit visit, the School was preparing a response to the report and drawing up an action plan. The team considered that the ISR process conformed to University expectations and had been conducted effectively.

196 There are two boards of studies: one for undergraduate programmes and one for postgraduate programmes. As part of annual review, individual modules at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels are subject to student evaluation on a rolling schedule and any low return rates or low scores on such evaluations are followed up by the School. Any issues raised by students through the evaluations, together with issues passed from the SSCs and external examiner reports, are considered at the appropriate board of studies as part of the AMR. The AMR reports seen by the audit team not only confirmed the thoroughness of the procedure, but also revealed a reflective and responsive attitude by members of the School to issues relating to teaching and learning. The School was shown to be highly committed to continually enhancing its provision and the effective role of the School Language Working Party and the regular Teaching Away Days in this process was apparent.

197 The external examiners' reports for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes read by the audit team were positive. From the evidence seen, the team concluded that the use made by the School of external examiner reports was sound and that responses were considered, timely and wholly appropriate.

198 The School has achieved a large measure of harmonisation of assessment practices across the range of languages taught. In other areas of the curriculum there is in use a varied diet of methods of assessment which are in line with the University's expectations, and therefore the *Code of practice: Section 6: Assessment of students.* Module Outline Forms (MOFs) clearly indicate to students the methods of assessment, which are aligned with the ILOs for individual modules. Feedback is provided on assessed work, and students met by the audit team confirmed that this was both full and helpful. However, the team learnt that opportunities for students to benefit from formative feedback, prior to the submission of what might constitute the sole piece of work for a particular module, although offered, indicated on MOFs and known to students, was only rarely taken up.

199 The audit team reviewed a sample of assessed student work. It found that the work produced by students was at a level commensurate with the expectations set out in the programme specifications. Overall, the team concluded that the standard of student achievement reflected the location of the named awards in the FHEQ.

200 Undergraduate and postgraduate students recognised the degree programme handbooks as important reference documents which contained an appropriate mixture of information and advice. The audit team considered them to be clear, although it noted that the undergraduate handbook contained no guidance to students on the appeals and complaints procedures. The team considered the MOFs generally informative and supportive of student learning. Year Abroad Handbooks not only provided useful practical information for students undertaking their period of study abroad, but also offered supportive guidance on cultural differences aimed at helping students settle in as quickly as possible.

201 Students who met the audit team reported that learning resources were generally appropriate, although some concern was expressed with regard to the supply of core texts for popular, or oversubscribed modules, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In subsequent discussions with the staff of the School, the team formed the view that a more active, or systematic approach to the matter of library provision could substantially resolve this type of issue, which was also noted in the ISR. Students considered computer provision to be good, and the use of the University's VLE to support modules was welcomed. The Open Access Centre (located within the Language Centre) was highly praised as a language learning resource and it was clear that this was used by a large proportion of students.

202 The School has recently piloted an alternative system of personal tutoring for undergraduate students whereby general welfare issues are principally

dealt with by a Pastoral Tutor and an Assistant Pastoral Tutor (one male and one female), with academic advice and guidance being delivered by DPDs. Students were largely satisfied with this arrangement. Students receive advice and help in preparing for the period of compulsory residence abroad and those students who met the team confirmed that these arrangements were satisfactory. It was pointed out to the team, however, that not all students received a visit during their period away, although students appeared confident that they would be able to receive necessary support, as and when the need arose.

203 The AMR process, representation of students on the boards of studies and an active SSC enabled students to feedback to the School on issues of concern. It was clear to the audit team that students were playing an effective role in the quality and enhancement process, and furthermore that students themselves were confident that their views were heard and responded to in an appropriate manner by the School.

204 Overall the audit team found that the quality of learning opportunities to support student learning provided by the School were suitable for the programmes leading to the named awards.

Planning

205 The DAT focused on the following named awards (student numbers in brackets):

- BA Town Planning (122)
- MA/Dip Urban Design (21)
- MSc Town Planning (51).

These programmes are offered by the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape which is located in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The DSED comprised the commentary for the forthcoming ISR scheduled for March 2005, and programme specifications for the above named awards. Placements, both in the UK and abroad are a significant part of the above named awards. Undergraduate provision was reviewed in 2001 to take into account the FHEQ, the subject benchmark statement and professional body requirements and postgraduate provision followed in 2002. The BA and MA in Town Planning are accredited by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI). All programmes provided by the School are covered by a single board of studies.

206 The programme specifications for the above named undergraduate award demonstrated appropriate engagement with the *Subject benchmark statement* for Town and Country Planning. They included clear ILOs and outlined briefly how teaching,

learning and assessment strategies enable students to achieve these outcomes. Although they did not contain explicit reference to the FHEQ the audit team learnt that the subject team annually reflect on the appropriateness of the levels of the awards.

207 Progression rates are good, and over the past three years have varied between 97 per cent and 100 per cent at each stage. Progression and completion data is generated locally from award board data and by the University's MIU. Employability statistics are provided centrally. The AMR report for 2003-04 seen by the audit team indicated that the Planning Board of Studies followed University guidelines and worked effectively to review admissions, induction, progression and completion data, degree classification and approval of new programmes.

208 The audit team read the 2003-04 AMR report, and tracked its progress through the board of studies and HASS FTLC minutes. The team considered that the AMR pro forma was completed comprehensively and found that the conclusions of the AMR report were carefully considered by both the board of studies and the FTLC. Issues raised in the AMR report included gender balance as, traditionally, fewer women than men apply for the programmes, and at undergraduate level, the progress of non-traditional students and continued monitoring of admissions criteria so as not to disadvantage them.

209 At the time of the audit visit the School had recently undergone its first ISR. The last accreditation visit by the RTPI was in 2003 and a mini-board visit took place in 2004 to accredit the new master's programme in 2003. The RTPI's assessment of these reviews was that they had been undertaken in a thoughtful manner and they considered the outcomes were sensible and effective.

210 DPDs send copies of their response to external examiners' reports to the board of studies and the FTLC. External examiners are expected to confirm in subsequent reports that actions have been taken as a result of their comments of the previous year. The audit team read reports from 2002-03 and 2003-04 and the responses of the DPDs, and concluded that staff take very seriously the comments of external examiners and respond in an appropriate and timely way.

211 The DSED stated that 'a major shift in assessment' resulted from the reviews in 2002 and 2003. Thus, there is now less reliance on formal examinations and there is more variety in the types of course work assessment methods. The audit team considered these important developments, and noted that the Schools assessment strategy was in line with the University's strategy.

212 The audit team reviewed a range of student work. A pro forma, which is designed to provide feedback to students, has recently been revised to make explicit the relationship between assessment and a level attainment descriptor. The team noted that whereas there was useful and evaluative comment on student performance, not all the sections of the assessment feedback pro forma were completed systematically. Overall, based on the evidence available, the team considered that the standards set for and achieved by students were appropriate to the above named awards and their location in the FHEQ.

213 Students who met the audit team confirmed that information provided to them at induction and in handbooks covered important information about the curriculum, assessment and student support. Students also welcomed the fact that the School used the VLE to communicate much of this information. The team noted some variation in information provided in the handbooks relating to the curriculum. Whereas two programmes provided comprehensive information clearly related to programme specifications, in the MSc Town Planning, course objectives and module descriptors were not easily related to the programme specification.

214 The School operates a pastoral tutor system alongside its 'open doors' approach which accords with the University's new policy. Students were clear who to go to for pastoral support and confirmed that pastoral care in the School worked effectively. The School has recently changed its policy on visiting all students while on placement, preferring to rely on frequent contact and feedback from students and employers to highlight any problems.

215 Planning 48 hours is an opportunity for staff to come together to review the year and systematically plan and manage the curriculum. Inputs into the days include student evaluations of modules, outcomes of meetings with students, external examiner reports, and SSC minutes. There is a particular focus on managing staff deployment, resource allocation, changes to the curriculum and programmes, and on innovative assessment. The audit team concluded that Planning 48 hours was an effective and systematic process of review. A Planning Advisory Group, which comprises local professionals who provide guidance and advice on local and regional planning activity and on educational developments in the profession, further enhances the curriculum.

216 The main focus of student involvement in the maintenance and enhancement of standards and quality of the programmes is the SSC, which meets once per term. Students hold meetings prior to committee meetings in order to have an effective

input into the delivery of their programmes, and a student acts as the chair. Actions arising out of meetings rely on student representatives informing the rest of the student body after the meeting. Students were satisfied that they were listened to and that changes were made as a consequence of their involvement.

217 In December 2004 the School piloted the use of the VLE for completing module evaluation pro forma and students confirm that this is a better process for increasing response rates. However, students told the audit team that they did not know what happened as a consequence of completing module questionnaires and would like to be informed of action taken as a consequence of their input.

218 Undergraduate and postgraduate students who met the audit team expressed satisfaction with the operation of the programmes and the level of personal and academic support offered by the School. Overall, the team considered that the quality of learning opportunities were suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

Section 4: The audit investigations: published information

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

219 For prospective students the University publishes undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses, both of which are available in hard copy and on the internet. Once enrolled there are a number of documents produced for students by the University including the Student Handbook, International Students Handbook, and the Handbook for Research Students and Research Supervisors. At the programme level it is a University requirement that a degree programme handbook is produced which must follow the UTLC approved Guidelines for Degree Programme Handbooks.

220 The responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of the information published in the prospectuses rests with the Student Recruitment Office which also monitors compliance with the University's corporate image. Degree programme handbooks and MOFs are normally produced by the DPD.

221 Students met by the audit team confirmed that the information they received both before admission and during their programmes was generally helpful and accessible. The team reviewed a variety of University and school publications as well as the website. Overall, the information provided to

students and seen by the team was full, accurate, frank and reliable, and the team identified no significant omissions. It was noted that while the University had clear guidelines for preparation of internal documents, such as degree programme handbooks, there were instances where staff had not complied with these templates leading to some handbooks not referring to advice on student complaints and appeals for example. The increasing use of the University's VLE for publishing minutes of SSCs, lecture notes and other module materials was regarded by the team as a welcome development.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

222 The SED stated that the University had taken a number of steps to address the requirements published in HEFCE 02/15 and HEFCE 03/51. With respect to the quantitative information set, the data is the same as that held by the Higher Education Statistics Agency for academic year 2002-03. The University has prepared a commentary on the statistics which will be published when the TQI website goes live. The University already make use of this data but further information on the student body will in future be made available through the SAP Campus Management System, which is in the early stages of implementation. The MIU which has primary responsibility for the quantitative information set and recent staff vacancies in the Unit are now being filled.

223 With respect to the qualitative information set, the University has already posted a summary of its Teaching and Learning Strategy on the HERO site along with the outcomes of the ISR reports which were conducted in 2003-04, a summary of employer needs and trends and a commentary on the structure of the external examiner reports. At the time of audit visit, 90 per cent of the programme specifications had been provided by schools and converted to PDF files with the URL of each programme specification being placed on the HERO website for undergraduate programmes. In addition, summaries of external examiners reports had been published for 74 of the 98 undergraduate programmes examined in 2004.

224 Based on its review of documentation and its meetings with staff and students, the audit team found the University's currently published information to be generally full, accurate, frank and reliable. Moreover, the team considered that the University had made good progress with meeting the requirements for publishing information, as defined in HEFCE 03/51.

Findings

Findings

225 An institutional audit of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne (the University) was undertaken during the week 14 to 18 March 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 discipline audit trails (DATs) were selected for scrutiny. This section of the report of the audit summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and recommendations to the University for enhancing current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

226 The procedure for approval of new programmes comprises three stages. In the first stage (Part 1), the proposers present to the faculty Teaching and Learning Committee (FTLC) a summary outline of the programme to establish whether there is a case in principle for the development of a new programme. This case should incorporate the aims and intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of the programme, its viability in market terms and resourcing and evidence of external consultation. Following initial approval of the proposal, full programme documentation is prepared including the programme specifications and module outlines (Part 2). The proposal is normally considered by a subcommittee of the FTLC prior to submission to a University approvals panel, which is appointed by the University Teaching and Learning Committee (UTLC). There is no external independent subject specialist consideration at Part 2.

227 The University has recently introduced a system of annual monitoring and review (AMR) of programmes which, at the date of the audit, was beginning its second cycle of operation. The process is based on completion of a detailed monitoring template requiring consideration of the programme specifications, student recruitment and progression and teaching quality, based on external examiners' reports, student evaluations and reports from staff student committees (SSCs). The AMR reports are submitted to the FTLC and action points are identified. The FTLC is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the action points and provides summary reports to the UTLC.

228 Periodic review takes the form of a five-yearly internal subject review (ISR) which requires existing programmes to be reviewed against a set of criteria including reference to the *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ); the *Code of practice for the assurance of acdemic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*), published by QAA; and subject benchmarks statements. This review incorporates consideration of the aims, learning outcomes, curriculum design and assessment strategy, student progression and resourcing. The review panel comprises members of the University outwith the subject area under review and also at least one member external to the University. The review panel undertakes scrutiny of the documentation as well as interviews with academic and support staff, students and other stakeholders. The report includes statements of confidence regarding the quality and standards of the programme, recommendations for improvement and commendations for good practice. The report is considered by the providers, who prepare an action plan for consideration by the FTLC. The FTLC reports the outcomes to the UTLC, including any issues for University-wide consideration, and is also responsible for monitoring implementation of the action plans.

229 In addition to these procedures, the University has recently established an Academic Audit Committee (AAC) with the remit 'to act as an independent committee in order to audit all University mechanisms and processes that contribute to the quality of the student learning experience and the standard of awards.' This Committee has undertaken a number of reviews including, for example the processes underpinning collaborative provision, responses to external examiners' reports and placement learning.

230 The University has in place a range of mechanisms for securing feedback on the quality of programmes from its students. At the level of the module, there is a regular system of evaluation by means of questionnaire feedback which is used to inform the AMR process. Students are involved in direct consideration of programme quality through the SSCs which report to the boards of studies and whose minutes are incorporated in the AMR reports. The SSCs also discuss the module evaluations. Students are also represented on the boards of studies, which take an overview of the programmes in their subject area. Other stakeholders also have input to the consideration of programme design and quality, in particular through the professional bodies that accredit a number of the programmes delivered by the University, and also through employer liaison groups that operate in some subject areas.

231 The University has very limited provision involving collaboration with other higher education providers or involving distance learning. Both areas of activity are covered by specific, institutional codes of practice, which address aspects such as the memoranda of agreement for collaborative programmes. In operational terms, both forms of delivery are monitored and reviewed through the same quality assurance mechanisms as on-campus programmes.

232 In its self-evaluation document (SED) the University expressed strong confidence in the robustness of its quality assurance procedures. For example, it considered that the ISR process is 'sufficiently robust to be at least as effective as QAA subject review' and that its strengths in terms of quality management are its systems for programme approval and ISR, supported by the Academic Quality and Standards Section, the faculties and the work being undertaken by the AAC.

233 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University's procedures for assuring the quality of its taught programmes were effective. In particular, the team noted the rigour and effectiveness of operation of the ISR process to date, and considered the role of the AAC in evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of University procedures, and identifying matters needing action as a feature of good practice. The AMR system is still becoming embedded into the operating procedures of the boards of studies and FTLCs. The evidence seen by the team indicated that the system is improving and that when fully operational it will contribute effectively to the quality assurance of programmes. The system will provide the programme teams with useful evidence on which to base developments for further enhancement of programmes. The team considered that the programme approval procedures are in general well designed. However, given the absence or paucity of external comment at Stage 1 of the programme approval process seen by the team, and that there is no role given to independent subject specialists at Stage 2, which is the most significant part of the process in terms of curriculum development and the assurance of standards and quality, the team considered that the level of external involvement had the potential to put quality and or standards at risk, and advised the University to reflect further on this element of programme approval. Meetings with staff and students and examination of the minutes of school and University committees all gave testament to the effectiveness of the way in which students are consulted and provide feedback with regard to the quality of the programmes delivered by the University.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

234 The SED set out the key principles which underpin the University's approach to the maintenance of the standards of its awards as the importance of scrutiny by external examiners, the contribution of committed, high quality, academic staff, and the necessity for internal scrutiny. The details of the polices and procedures employed to maintain standards have been subject to considerable evolution in the light of recent major re-structuring, the University's own internal audit mechanisms, and external influences such as the results of developmental engagements and the publication by QAA of the *Code of practice*.

235 In particular, there has been considerable enhancement in the documentation and robustness of the external examiner system. The procedures are set out in the comprehensive Policy and Procedures for External Examiners of Taught Programmes and the University Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees. These describe systems that ensure the appointment of suitably experienced and qualified examiners. For taught programmes external examiners are asked, by means of a thorough report pro forma, to comment on the standards of programmes with reference to 'the national subject benchmark statements (where appropriate), the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, the programme specification and (where appropriate) requirements of professional statutory bodies'. External examiners are also asked to comment on their involvement in the assessment process and are required to confirm that they are satisfied that methods and standards of assessment are appropriate and comparable with sectoral standards. The audit team saw many examples of external examiner reports praising the standards of teaching and learning achieved.

236 Taught programme external examiners' reports are responded to at board of studies level, with oversight by FTLCs. The latter provide annual summaries of issues for consideration by the UTLC. The Head of the Academic Quality and Standards Section also reads all external examiners' reports and draws attention of the UTLC to any matters of concern to ensure that they are addressed promptly. Deans of postgraduate studies provide faculty summaries to the UTLC for research degrees. External examiners' reports are also considered as part of the AMR report.

237 The University does not yet have a common framework for the credits required to determine eligibility for award that applies equally to all single, joint, and combined honours degree programmes.

The University is addressing this through a Qualifications and Credit Working Group set up in Spring 2005. The audit team consider that this group must complete its work with facility if inadvertent disadvantage to any student is to be avoided and equivalence of standards to be more robustly demonstrated.

238 AMR makes use of a variety of statistical data to inform considerations of admissions, progression, completion, and outcome. At present, such data comes from both local and central sources and analyses are not sophisticated. In particular, cohort analysis is generally not reported upon, although such analyses may occur at board of studies level. However, the institution is in the early stages of implementing a new student record system and the audit team were of the view that it has the potential to enable more uniform and extended consideration of data in the maintenance of standards. The team concluded that it would be desirable for the University to ensure central oversight of the consistency and use of management information, especially at the cohort level.

239 The SED stated that the University has confidence in its procedures for the management of external examiners' reports, although it did see scope to further enhance its procedures. The audit team concluded that overall, the University's procedures for the maintenance of standards were robust, but that it was desirable for the University to ensure central oversight of the consistency and use of management information, especially at the cohort level.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

240 The SED stated that the University believes it effectively supports learning through the provision of appropriate learning resources that are responsive to student needs, that individual learning is enhanced by effective and timely academic support and guidance, provided by well-qualified and trained staff who see teaching as an important part of their institutional role, and that general student welfare is supported by a range of services that deliver appropriate support to targeted groups and to the student body in general. Learning resources are principally provided by the University library and the ISS, and through an Estates Strategy that aims to develop fit-for-purpose teaching accommodation to match the growing expectations of all categories of student.

241 Students are provided with extensive opportunity to evaluate the provision of library and IT resources in the form of regular user satisfaction surveys, and to provide feedback through representation on programme institutional level committees on the adequacy of services provided. Library, IT provision and the quality of teaching accommodation are also reported on through AMR and ISR. During the audit visit the audit team learnt of students' generally high levels of satisfaction with the level of learning support resources available to them, and that the University was responsive to feedback on the resources. For example, the team learnt how the University had responded constructively to comments regarding IT matters and poor quality of some teaching accommodation. Students also welcomed the University's commitment to extending the use made of its virtual learning environment (VLE), although the team agreed with the statement in the SED that this was still at a fairly unsophisticated level.

242 The University provides a variety of support and guidance mechanisms for students. Personal support for students is provided through WelNet, an Integrated Student Welfare Support Network, which is an informal combination of the services provided by the Union Society (US), the Chaplaincy and the University itself. There is targeted support for particular groups such as students with disabilities, mature students and students with childcare needs. In addition, more general support services such as careers, counselling and financial advice are available. There is also a Student Advice Centre, located within and operated by the US which offers support and advice to students on a range of issues. The students' written submission commented that these services were generally of a very high quality, although they thought the University might do more to publicise them.

243 The University has recently reviewed its policy on personal tutoring and noted that the traditional system which aims to deliver academic and more general support for students through a single individual, the personal tutor, had inherent strengths. The University has concluded that the system has become subject to strain due both to the growing demands placed on staff time and the increasing diversity of the student population. Consequently, following a number of trials of different systems for offering both academic and personal support, schools are to be invited, if they so wish, to review the operation of the personal tutor system for their students. Additionally, and where appropriate, schools could adopt other models, providing that each individual, including joint honours and combined students, have a named individual responsible for pastoral support and a named individual responsible for academic

support. It is envisaged that these roles, unlike the current practice, could be separated into two distinct functions, but that in all cases it should be made clear in student handbooks for each degree programme how a student can access effective academic and pastoral support. Where changes are proposed, FTLCs are to be informed, but it was not clear to the audit team how the introduction and operation of the new system would be monitored.

244 The University's arrangements for the support of particular categories of students were of special interest to the audit team. Since the last audit the University has reconsidered its support for postgraduate research students, and this has been encapsulated in the comprehensive and clear Handbook for Research Students and Supervisors. Students from outside of the UK benefit from extensive support mechanisms, and especially the provision of information prior to arrival, including the International Student Handbook, the activities of the welcome team and induction which is coordinated by the International Office. The team welcomed the University's plans to build on and develop the existing systems of personal tutoring and considered that the institutional focus on the development of guidance and support for students, including postgraduate research students and international students, was a feature of good practice.

245 The SED stated that the University 'is confident that the staff it appoints meet its expectations regarding the quality of their teaching'. The University has introduced a number of initiatives related to staff development including training for interviewers, coordinated training for postgraduate students who teach or demonstrate, a review of PGCertAP, encouragement of peer observation and the introduction of performance development review (PDR). These activities are coordinated by the Staff Development Unit and the Centre for Academic Development (CAD), and the UTLC maintains an overview. Through the DATs, the audit team noted an inconsistent approach to peer observation ranging from highly embedded, in the School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, to recently introduced, in the School of Biosciences.

246 Staff met by the audit team were enthusiastic about the role of PDR, which was introduced in 2002-03. A key outcome of PDR is that heads of school in collaboration with individual staff identify training needs. Each school has been asked to produce a school staff development plan. The Staff Development Unit (SDU) maintains a central oversight of staff development needs: the needs and, importantly, activities are recorded on a database

maintained by SDU, which is also accessible by heads of school. The team considered the articulation between the PDR process and identification of staff development needs as a feature of good practice.

Outcomes of discipline audit trails

Agriculture

247 The following named awards were included in the DAT: BSc Food & Human Nutrition; BSc Agriculture (and options); and the MSc International Agriculture & Food Marketing (IAFM). The programme specifications provided evidence that the ILOs for each programme had been carefully mapped against the FHEQ and relevant subject benchmark statements. All programmes provide a range of summative and formative assessment methods, and assessment uses a standard marking scheme. Internal monitoring of standards is through the AMR procedure, which includes student feedback on modules. The audit team noted that the local and institutional monitoring of external examiners' reports was effective, but FTLC overview and reporting procedures in Science, Agriculture and Engineering could be improved. The team concluded that the assessed work matched the expectations set out in the programme specifications and confirmed that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the awards and location within the FHEQ.

248 Students who met the audit team confirmed that learning resources were adequate, that they understood the learning and assessment expectations of their programmes, that marked assessments were returned in a timely fashion, and that feedback on assessment was appropriate. Students' views are gathered through an effective SSC. Students were very positive about the level of pastoral and academic support provided through the tutorial and informal systems. The team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards within Agriculture.

Bioscience

249 The Biosciences DAT focused on the following named awards: BSc Physiological Sciences; BSc Biomedical Sciences; BSc Medical Microbiology & Immunology; and MRes Biomoloecular Sciences. Programme specifications for these programmes demonstrated that the ILOs were designed with reference to the *Subject benchmark statement* for Biomedical Sciences expectations of the Institute of Biomedical Sciences and the FHEQ. The audit team saw evidence that locally produced progression and information data was being used in recent AMR

reports. External examiners' reports read by the team were generally positive and confirmed that the standards set for and achieved by students were appropriate. The team read a range of assessed student work and concluded that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the awards and location within the FHEQ.

250 Details of the academic aims and outcomes of the programme are contained in the degree programme handbooks, and these were found to map directly onto those in the programme specification. Degree programme handbooks also contain details of assessment requirements and regulations, although the level of information available at the module level was variable. Students reported that the handbooks were accurate and useful. The team saw substantial evidence of a strong and supportive approach to student welfare and development by the School. The School has experienced significant increases in the numbers of students in recent years. However, the team were reassured to learn that both staff and students considered that learning resources remained at appropriate levels. The School has effective mechanisms for ensuring student engagement in quality assurance processes, and the team learnt of student satisfaction with the School's responses to their concerns. Overall, the team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

Chemical Engineering

251 The DAT in Chemical Engineering covered the following programmes: BEng Chemical and Process Engineering; MEng in Chemical and Process Engineering with Honours Options; MSc Clean Technology; MSc Applied Process Control; MSc Process Analytics and Quality Technology; and MSc Process Automation. The programme specifications were set out on the University template. Aims and ILOs were linked to the teaching, learning, and assessment strategies employed by programmes. Support provided to students and mechanisms for the enhancement of quality are described, and there is an appropriate relationship between the curriculum and the *Subject benchmark statement* for Engineering. From its study of students' assessed work, consideration of the most recent accreditation visit documentation, module descriptors and teaching materials, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the programmes was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

252 Student evaluation of the programmes was positive and students were complimentary about the extent and nature of support they received from staff and with the learning support resources provided. Students have a variety of ways of contributing to the maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards and thought that staff valued their input into the quality assurance processes. The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to awards in Chemical Engineering and cognate areas.

Modern Languages

253 The DAT in Modern Languages included the following named awards: BA Modern Languages; BA Spanish and Politics; MA Film Studies; and MA Translation and Interpreting. Programme specifications were full and clear and, where appropriate reflected the relevant benchmark statement. From the evidence seen by the audit team, including samples of student work, it was clear that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the level of the award and its location in the FHEQ. The range and quality of learning opportunities was good, including at undergraduate level, an appropriate opportunity to develop a substantial level of intercultural awareness through residence abroad. Assessment of student achievement was well conceived, varied in its range and appropriate to each stage.

254 Students met by the audit team were generally satisfied with the provision and clearly appreciated both the support and guidance received from the academic staff and the distinctive nature of some of the programmes offered by the School. Students clearly felt both that their views were listened to and that they felt able to effect important and significant change in a timely manner. The team concluded that the nature and quality of the learning opportunities offered to students was appropriate for the levels of the named awards. The School was committed to the on-going enhancement of its provision through critical self-evaluation and through a responsiveness to both external peer evaluation and the views of its own student body.

Planning

255 The DAT included the BA (Hons) Town and Country Planning, MSc in Town Planning and MA in Urban Design. Programme specifications provided clear detail on ILOs and, where appropriate, the requirements of the professional body. Teaching, learning and assessment strategies identified how students were intended to achieve these outcomes. Students are assessed fairly and consistently

according to clear criteria and confirm that marking and feedback is timely. Information gathered through annual monitoring and review is considered carefully by programme staff, who work effectively to review their programmes. Staff have a good understanding of the University's quality procedures, take seriously the comments of external examiners and respond in an appropriate and timely way. The team concluded that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

256 Students were positive about the information provided to them at induction and in handbooks. They benefited from effective working relationships between programme staff and the library. Students confirmed that pastoral care worked well and that changes were made as a consequence of their involvement. Undergraduate and postgraduate students who met the audit team expressed satisfaction with the operation of the programmes and the level of personal and academic support offered by the School. Overall, the team found that the quality of teaching and learning opportunities to be suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

The use made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure

257 The University has responded to the *Code of practice* by embedding its precepts in the University's quality assurance procedures, rather than wide dissemination of the *Code*. Individual sections were considered by a variety of administrative officers, special working groups, and relevant committees according to the structures in place when each section of the *Code* was published. Subsequent recommendations for amendment of the University's processes have been made to the UTLC. The UTLC has also received a number of progress reports on responses to the *Code*. The audit team saw extensive evidence demonstrating that the University had engaged seriously with the *Code's* precepts and anticipated that the establishment of the new Quality and Standards Subcommittee of the UTLC would be a further step in this process.

258 The University took advantage of its restructuring in 2002-03 to institute a transitional system of Degree Programme Review which incorporated the production of programme specifications. Programme specifications are not made available to students, but the audit team saw evidence that their content is communicated to students through degree programme handbooks. It was clear from the DATs that the content and clarity

of programme specifications varied, sometimes within schools. Training has been provided to assist faculties in mapping programmes to the FHEQ and the new processes of programme approval, AMR and ISR incorporate explicit checking that programmes match the FHEQ. Through the DATs the team noted that programme specifications routinely refer to subject benchmark statements, and that programme approval, AMR and ISR procedures also include reference to benchmark statements. The University is aware that it still has work to do in relation to its own qualifications framework and has established a working group to address this. The audit team welcomed this development and considered that the working group must conclude its work expeditiously. Similarly, the team noted the positive response of staff responsible for academic quality and standards to the further training being provided in relation to issues raised by implementing informed responses to the Academic Infrastructure.

259 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University has responded appropriately to subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice,* and is in the process of consolidating its work on programme specifications and the FHEQ.

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

260 At the time of the audit the University was in the process of completing the restructuring that had commenced in 2002-03, and was undertaking or about to commence a number of initiatives designed to enhance its procedures for the maintenance of standards and quality. The audit team learnt that many of the enhancement initiatives were still too immature to have been internally evaluated. As a consequence the SED contained much material that illustrated these changes. During the audit the team learnt that the University had become an evaluative institution. The team concluded that while the SED did not provide much evidence of the University's capacity to reflect on its strengths and weaknesses, it was committed to enhancing its procedures for maintaining and enhancing standards and quality.

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

261 The University's intention for the enhancement of quality and standards emphasises the importance of the professionalism of staff, and since the last audit it has strengthened the formal support

available. This enhancement activity is a mixture of staff development, formal monitoring of annual and internal subject review, sharing of good practice that arises out of the process of monitoring, and specific teaching and learning developments arising out of successful bids to Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL) and Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). In addition, there are a variety of internally funded projects that focus on the continued support of appointment of teaching fellows and the use of the website for networking and sharing practice.

262 The audit team concluded that generally the Centre for Academic Development (CAD), established in January 2003, which is supported by the Staff Development Unit (SDU) worked well in developing good relationships across the University. A review of the teaching and learning strategy by a senior member of staff from Manchester University, confirmed that there were clear lines of communication between the CAD and schools and faculties. In meetings with staff, academics confirmed that they had benefited from the work of CAD and SDU. CAD is to coordinate the enhancement projects and good practice arising out of annual monitoring and review.

263 The University has piloted a University-wide student satisfaction survey to inform improvements to the student learning experience. It is intended that actions taken as a consequence of this feedback will be monitored and followed up in subsequent surveys. The audit team has confidence in the ability of the University to use the questionnaire to improve the student experience, as the team found evidence of a consistent follow through of action in response to student feedback across schools and programmes.

264 As the audit team spoke to members of staff across the University, particularly in DATs, it also became clear that the work of the SDU alongside CAD played a valuable role in the enhancement of quality through PDR. Staff welcomed the opportunity to talk with heads of school and used the opportunity to identify development and training needs.

265 At a local level, the audit team found evidence that dissemination and sharing of good practice identified in boards of studies takes place. In some schools, although not part of the formal committee structure of the University, teaching and learning committees have been established specifically to share good practice. Away days take place at faculty and subject/discipline level and there is evidence that these are effective in enhancing quality. The University could consider building on these local developments. At the

University level, the dissemination of good practice has been identified as a weakness. The team anticipated that with the establishment of the Quality and Standards Sub Committee of the UTLC that this strategy of embedding good practice arising out of ISR will be more effective than in the past.

266 The audit team concluded that the University is well aware that much of its enhancement activity is recent and also concluded that the University was committed to an enhancement strategy. However, the audit team was not in a position to evaluate the effectiveness of many of the developments identified in the SED, and other documents as they had not been in place long enough. The team concurred with the University when it stated that though its enhancement strategy is in its early stages, many of the elements of one are in place.

Reliability of information

267 The University has posted a summary of its Teaching and Learning Strategy on the TQI site along with the outcomes of the ISR reports which were conducted in 2003-04, a summary of employer needs and trends and a commentary on the structure of the external examiner reports. At the time of audit visit, 90 per cent of the programme specifications had been provided by schools and converted to PDF files, with the URL of each programme specification being placed on the Higher Education Research Opportunities in the UK website for undergraduate programmes. In addition, summaries of external examiners reports had been published for 74 of the 98 undergraduate programmes examined in 2004.

268 Based on its review of documentation and its meetings with staff and students, the audit team found the University's currently published information to be generally full, accurate, frank and reliable. Moreover, the team considered that the University had made good progress with meeting the requirements for publishing information, as defined in HEFCE 03/51.

Features of good practice

269 The following features of good practice were noted:

i. the role of the Academic Audit Committee in evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of University procedures, and identifying matters needing action (paragraph 36)

ii. the effectiveness of representative committees at the school and University level to capture and respond to students' concerns (paragraph 90)

iii. the articulation between the Performance and Development Review process and identification of staff development needs (paragraph 110)

iv. the institutional focus on the development of guidance and support for students, including postgraduate research students and international students (paragraph 139).

Recommendations for action by the institution

270 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

i   complete the early updating of the University's credit and qualifications framework to a fixed timetable (paragraph 23)

ii   enhance the external element of the programme approval process (paragraph 65).

271 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

i.   ensure the consistency and implementation of University policies and practices at the local level (paragraph 33)

ii.   ensure central oversight of the consistency and use of management information, especially at the cohort level (paragraph 101).

Appendix

The University of Newcastle upon Tyne's response to the audit report

The University of Newcastle welcomes the very positive report from the audit team, including the overall judgement of 'broad confidence' in its management of quality and standards of provision at both institutional and discipline level. This outcome is regarded as an endorsement of the high level of commitment by University staff to provide a high quality student experience across the diverse provision which is offered in this research-led University.

The University is particularly pleased that the report recognises the care taken by the University to involve its students in the operation of all aspects of its activities, and that this is appreciated by students. The focus on the development of guidance and support for all students, including postgraduate research students and international students, is also commended and welcomed by the University.

The role of the Academic Audit Committee, established since the previous audit, was regarded as a feature of good practice in evaluating the effectiveness of University procedures and in providing a firm basis for further enhancement of the provision. The articulation between the review system for staff and the provision of staff development highlights the importance attached by the University in supporting its staff.

The University has already recognised the need to develop an explicit credit and qualifications framework and the recommendation in this area will assist this process. Consultation on a draft framework will take place in early 2005-06.

It is currently reviewing its process for programme approval and will look at ways in which it can enhance the external involvement in this.

Other matters highlighted by the audit team were already under discussion at the time of the visit. The recommendation to ensure consistency and implementation of University policies and practices will be particularly helpful in further embedding these at the programme level.

The University will ensure that all the issues raised in the audit report are addressed.