

London South Bank University

MARCH 2005

Institutional audit

Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) exists to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education (HE) qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE. To do this QAA carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In England and Northern Ireland this process is known as institutional audit. QAA operates similar but separate processes in Scotland and Wales.

The purpose of institutional audit

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

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

Judgements

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

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

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

Nationally agreed standards

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

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

The audit process

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

The main elements of institutional audit are:

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

The evidence for the audit

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

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

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

From 2004, institutions will be required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 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.

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Contents

Summary	1		
Introduction	1	through distributed and distance methods	16
Outcome of the audit	1	Learning support resources	16
Features of good practice	1	Academic guidance, support and supervision	17
Recommendations for action	1	Personal support and guidance	18
Discipline audit trails	1	Collaborative provision	18
National reference points	2		
Main report	4		
Section 1: Introduction: London South Bank University	4	Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline audit trails	19
The institution and its mission	4	Discipline audit trails	19
Collaborative and distance-learning provision	5		
Background information	5	Section 4: The audit investigations: published information	24
The audit process	5	The students' experience of published information and other information available to them	24
Developments since the previous quality audit	5	Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information	25
		Findings	28
Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes		The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes	28
The institution's view as expressed in the SED	6	The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards	28
The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision	6	The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning	29
The institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards	8	Outcomes of discipline audit trails	30
Internal approval, monitoring and review processes	9	The institution's use of the Academic Infrastructure	31
External participation in internal review processes	10	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	31
External examiners and their reports	10	The institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards	31
External reference points	11	Reliability of information	32
Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies	12	Features of good practice	32
Student representation at operational and institutional levels	13	Recommendations for action	32
Feedback from students, graduates and employers	13		
Progressions and completion statistics	14	Appendix	33
Assurance of the quality of teaching staff, appointment, appraisal and reward	14	London South Bank University's response to the audit report	33
Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development	16		
Assurance of the quality of teaching delivered			

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited London South Bank University (the University) from 7 to 11 March 2005 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

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

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

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

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

Outcome of the audit

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

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

Features of good practice

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

- the achievement, in the light of a re-evaluation of the University's educational role, of a corporate commitment to becoming a teaching-led institution, placing the student experience at its heart and emphasising diversity and employability
- the empowerment of students to identify and enhance their skills through embedding the Core Skills Policy in the curriculum and developing a set of effective, innovative and attractive personal development planning materials

- the institution of an influential committee dedicated to enhancing the student experience, with direct access to the Board of Governors and the Academic Board

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:

- develop appropriate procedures to ensure a central overview of faculty practices in order to ensure the comparability of the student experience across the institution
- invite the Academic Board to monitor and review validation panels' decisions in respect of new programme proposals, in order to maintain institution-wide consistency
- monitor across all programmes the use of, and support given to, hourly-paid lecturers
- ensure that all postgraduate research students undertaking teaching duties receive appropriate preparation, training and support.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- ensure the effective reporting on collaborative arrangements to the Annual Monitoring Event, so that good practice can be shared and common problems identified and addressed
- ensure, in collaboration with the Students' Union, that student representatives are appropriately prepared for their role.

Discipline audit trails

Engineering; English; Law; Sociology, Social Policy and Politics

The audit team looked at the following areas of provision: Engineering; English; Law; Sociology, Social Policy and Politics, to establish how well the University's systems and procedures were working at the discipline level. The University provided the team with documents, including student work, and the team spoke to staff and students. As well as confirming the overall confidence statements given above, the team considered that the standard of student achievement in the four discipline areas was appropriate to the title of the awards and their place in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The team considered the quality of the learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to those awards.

National reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings the audit team also investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the audit suggest that the University has responded appropriately to the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements, programmes specifications and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, published by QAA.

In due course the institutional audit process will include a check on the reliability of the information set published by institutions in the format recommended in The Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) documents, HEFCE 02/15 and HEFCE 03/51. The findings of the audit are that, at the time of the audit, the University was alert to the requirements set out in HEFCE 02/15 and to the implications of HEFCE 03/51 and, although it had some way to go, was addressing its responsibilities in this respect.

Main report

Main report

1 An institutional audit of London South Bank University (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 7 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 academic standards of 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; reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study leading to those awards; and for publishing reliable information. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, the audit included consideration of an example of institutional processes at work at the level of the programme, through discipline audit trails (DATs), together with examples of those processes operating at the level of the institution as a whole. The scope of the audit encompassed all of the University's provision and collaborative arrangements leading to its awards.

Section 1: Introduction: London South Bank University

The institution and its mission

4 The University's origins lie in the Borough Polytechnic Institute, founded in 1892. In 1970 a merger with three colleges specialising in building and engineering studies led to the formation of the Polytechnic of the South Bank (later South Bank Polytechnic), which became South Bank University in 1992. The incorporation of major providers of nurse education in Essex and East London, beginning in 1994, involved significant further expansion, with the consequence that today some 30 per cent of students are in receipt of National Health Service (NHS) funding. The University's

adoption of its present title in 2003, emblematic of a developing identification with its locality, is also associated with the aim of placing teaching and learning at the heart of its mission.

5 Related also to this, following the appointment of the present Vice-Chancellor, with effect from September 2001, the University reshaped its executive and deliberative bodies with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of communication between the two, enhancing managerial transparency and accountability, and achieving concomitant cultural changes. Reflecting this shift of emphasis, the University's current mission statement emphasises access and opportunity and the provision of a high-quality learning experience and programmes relevant to students' employment needs and aspirations, with consequential benefits to London and the surrounding boroughs. It stresses the centrality of high quality teaching and an increasingly selective approach to research.

6 Following site rationalisations, with the exception of the Health Service training at Harold Wood and Whipps Cross, the University is located on a single campus in Southwark. The current student population of over 20,000 comprises some 8,000 full-time and 8,000 part-time undergraduates, 1,500 full-time and 3,000 part-time taught postgraduates and 300 research students. The Strategic Development Plan emphasises the University's strong commitment to a diverse student body, a commitment evident in the fact that only 20 per cent of the current student population had GCE A-Level or similar qualifications on entry, 66 per cent were aged over 25, and over half are from ethnic minority communities.

7 The Vice-Chancellor chairs the Senior Management Team (SMT), the University's senior decision-making body, which comprises the three pro-vice-chancellors, the executive deans, the University Secretary, the Director of Finance, the Director of External Relations and Communications, and the Project Director for the Strategic Development Plan. The Committee structure gives a central role to the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC), to which 10 other committees report, and which itself reports directly to the Academic Board, the University's senior internal committee.

8 Academic provision is organised into four faculties: Engineering, Science and the Built Environment; Arts and Human Sciences; Business, Computing and Information Management; and Health and Social Care. Each is managed by an executive dean assisted by two pro-deans, and comprises a minimum of five departments, each with its own head.

Collaborative and distance-learning provision

9 Collaborative arrangements, which are included in this audit, are currently very limited, though the University envisages future expansion taking place. The University has nine Foundation Degree programmes delivered by partners in the further education (FE) sector, only one of which has thus far attracted significant student numbers. It has some 20 overseas and a smaller number of home-based collaborative arrangements involving articulation or franchise agreements. Distance-learning provision comprises a small MA programme and some nurse training.

Background information

10 The published information initially available for this audit included the report of the continuation audit (January 2002) and reports of subject reviews of Politics (November 2000) and English (June 2003). The University provided QAA with an institutional self-evaluation document (SED), four discipline self-evaluation documents (DSEDs) and supporting documents for the areas selected for DATs. At the briefing visit the audit team was given access to all documentation referred to in the SED, and all further documentation requested was provided promptly and efficiently.

The audit process

11 Following a preliminary meeting at the University, QAA confirmed that four DATs would be conducted during the audit. QAA received the SED in November 2004, and on the basis of this and other published information the audit team confirmed that the DATs would focus on Engineering, English, Law, and Sociology, Social Policy and Politics. The DSEDs were received in January 2005. The SED and DSEDs were written specifically for the audit, the latter being based in part on internal reviews and monitoring reports.

12 At the preliminary meeting students of the University were invited, through the Students' Union (SU), to submit a separate document commenting on the student experience and identifying matters relevant to the quality of programmes and the standard of awards. In the course of preparing this document the SU and its Student Advice Bureau designed questionnaires and analysed the resulting data. The students' written submission (SWS) was received in November 2004 on a non-confidential basis. The audit team is grateful to all those involved in preparing it.

13 The audit team visited the University on 2 to 4 February 2005 to explore with the Vice-Chancellor,

senior members of staff and student representatives matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the SED, SWS and other documentation available to the team. At the end of the briefing visit the team identified the further documentation required and agreed with the University a programme of meetings for the audit visit. The team did not select any area for thematic enquiry.

14 The audit visit took place on 7 to 11 March 2005 and included meetings with staff and students, both centrally and in relation to the four DATs. The audit team comprised Professor J Beeby, Professor T Dugdale, Professor C Green, Professor N Keeble, Professor G Taylor, auditors, and Miss J Strong, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor R Harris, Assistant Director.

Developments since the previous quality audit

15 The University underwent a QAA continuation audit in 2001, which commended its monitoring and validation procedures and the care it gave to its collaborative activities. It advised the University to address its arrangements for ensuring and enhancing the quality of the student experience; to tighten the reporting lines within the committee structure; to formalise the role of deans and other faculty staff with quality responsibilities; to strengthen its use of external reference points in respect of academic standards; to develop institution-wide systems for assuring academic and pastoral student support; and to ensure the recording, communication and implementation of decisions for action relating to quality assurance.

16 In response to these suggestions the University's Action Plan was designed to achieve synergy between QAA advice and the priorities specified in its own Strategic Development Plan. In particular, the Action Plan informed QAA of its new Learning Experience Strategy, intended, among other objectives, to achieve improved implementation of the Core Skills Policy; the appointment of executive deans as members of the SMT and with devolved responsibility for faculty level academic standards and learning and teaching; a more systematic approach to student evaluation and representation; and greater attention to committee reporting lines and to recording and implementing quality-related decisions, not least by producing guidelines requiring a formal evaluation of actions taken.

17 In 2003-04 the Academic Board undertook a major review of the committee structure, leading to a new structure designed to address acknowledged weaknesses in the former system. This became operational at the start of academic year 2004-05.

QSC is now charged with receiving all relevant committee reports; the Registry has been disbanded, with responsibility for standards and quality reallocated to the Quality Unit and that for research and research students to the Research and Business Development Office, a change which, the University claims, has improved the administration of research degrees and support for research students. In 2004 the University established the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit and the Equality and Diversity Unit to, inter alia, strengthen central support for the Learning Experience Strategy, while the appointment of an additional pro-vice-chancellor in 2004 has led to a division of SMT roles between the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching), with responsibility for the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit and the Equality and Diversity Unit, and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students and Quality), responsible for the Quality Unit.

18 Since the 2001 audit, the University has undergone academic reviews in English, Architecture, Accountancy and Computing, and in all cases reviewers expressed confidence in the academic provision. The SED acknowledged the recurrence of a number of issues in both academic and subject review, but claims that in all such cases appropriate responses have been made. For example, concern relating to the moderation of assessed work and variable feedback to students has been addressed through faculty plans; concern about the operation of the personal tutoring system through focusing on first year students and establishing faculty student information centres; concern about student progression through introducing more flexible regulations; and concern about the lack of an overarching strategy to support learning through revised reporting lines and the appointment of a Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching).

19 The major changes to the philosophy, management and operation of the University since 2001 appear to build on pre-existing strengths and to have begun to develop new ones. The change process appears to the audit team to have been competently managed and, while aspects of the new structures require further development, the overall impact has been beneficial for the University and its students.

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

20 In its SED the University claimed to have made 'great progress' since 2001, becoming an increasingly

reflective educational community with a quality system which will encourage staff to engage fully with the quality agenda. It claimed that the driving force for change has been the commitment, expressed in the revised mission, to make students the focus of all processes. It identified the immediate task as ensuring that the new procedures become fully embedded, such that they can provide the information necessary for further enhancement to be achieved.

21 Key to the system is QSC, successor to Academic Standards Committee and designed as the fulcrum for quality and standards issues. Central to the new system are annual programme monitoring reports, which reflect on the evaluations of both external examiners and students, and which typically report areas such as staff development activities and features of good practice. Annual programme monitoring reports are reviewed by faculty academic standards committees, which provide feedback to programme leaders in a form submitted to QSC's Annual Monitoring Committee (see paragraph 27 below) and thence to QSC itself. Overall, the University claimed, on the basis of evidence from external examiners and other sources, that the systems now in place for setting and maintaining standards are effective.

22 In its SED the University explained that both student and staff experiences are being enhanced through the Learning and Development Centre, through improved access to learning resources and through an institutional commitment to staff development. So far as students are concerned it cited improvements in retention, progression and attainment, and high graduate employment and earnings levels as evidence of this. In terms of staff experience it claims success for the Staff Experience Strategy of rewarding excellence in teaching, while frankly acknowledging a need for the continuing development of aspects of its appraisal and staff development systems.

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

23 The central responsibility for managing academic standards and the quality of the student experience rests with the Academic Board, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, and which, following its restructuring in the wake of a review undertaken in 2002-03, now comprises 37 members (with an elected majority), including three SU representatives.

24 As indicated previously (see paragraph 17), on completing this review of its functions and

membership Academic Board undertook a major review of the institutional committee structure. Whereas under the previous structure separate committees had been responsible for academic standards and academic development and learning, these responsibilities now fall to QSC, which, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students and Quality), has strategic responsibility for all matters relating to academic quality. The fact that QSC has a less operational orientation than had its predecessor committees inevitably places additional responsibility on its subcommittees, but the audit team formed the view that these bodies' terms of reference reflect this shift, and that the adoption of a common minute structure and format for presenting issues offers less scope for slippage than was hitherto the case.

25 One subcommittee of QSC, Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC), has responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, receiving and approving faculty learning and teaching plans and disseminating good practice. Consideration of proposals for new and revised programmes, both within the University and among collaborative partners, is now the responsibility of the Curriculum and Collaborations Committee (CCC). Faculties report annually to QSC itself on such matters as the management of collaborative arrangements, communications and the dissemination of good practice.

26 Another subcommittee of QSC, the Quality and Standards Implementation Committee, designed as a forum for sharing good practice and introducing cross-faculty consistency, serves as a conduit between the faculties and the University's Quality Unit. The Committee is chaired by the Head of the Quality Unit; its members include the chairs of all the faculty academic standards committees (FASCs); and its terms of reference include the consideration of matters raised by FASCs, the preparation of papers for consideration at QSC, developing implementation strategies for policies approved by QSC, and scrutinising changes to regulations or internal quality management and enhancement systems.

27 The Annual Monitoring Committee is a large and significant deliberative body whose membership comprises all members of QSC together with those members of the Wider Management Group (a group of senior and middle managers) who are not already QSC members. Its work is encompassed in an annual day-long monitoring event at which it considers a range of annual monitoring reports: from faculties, on collaborations, from student facing service departments and, from 2006, on service level agreements from relevant administrative

departments. It also makes use of the results and implications of the Student Satisfaction Survey, the First Destination Survey and the annual summary of external examiners' reports.

28 The committee structure within faculties varies somewhat, but broadly reflects the institutional level structure. Each faculty has a management committee, chaired by the executive dean and including the pro-deans and heads of department among its membership, to facilitate the flow of information between university committees and the SMT on the one hand and departments on the other. Each faculty also has an academic standards committee (FASC), chaired by the executive dean's nominee and with heads of department among its membership. FASCs' wide-ranging terms of reference and delegated powers include overseeing the faculty-level implementation of institutional quality and enhancement policies as well as reporting annually to QSC on other quality and standards issues. Each faculty also has a learning and teaching committee (or in one case an academic development committee which includes this area in its remit) which reports to LTC and mirrors its responsibilities at faculty level.

29 The audit team, while impressed by the conscientious and professional approach taken by many of these committees, noted that faculties exercise considerable flexibility in dealing with the quality management processes delegated to them. Such flexibility presents a challenge to institutional oversight and to the University's commitment to ensuring a comparable student experience across the institution. The University may, therefore, consider it advisable to keep the balance between conformity and flexibility under continuing review in the area of quality management.

30 In July each year the University approves a new handbook setting out the academic regulations for the forthcoming academic year. This is a useful compendium covering such topics as awards of the University and of academic credit, the combined honours scheme, admissions, student responsibilities and three detailed sections on assessment. The audit team also studied a draft of the potentially very helpful Handbook on Quality Management and Enhancement (HQME), which is about to replace its five-year old predecessor. In addition to an overview, setting out the quality and standards aims of the University and the responsibilities of the staff at various levels, the manual lists the procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review, admissions, assessment and student feedback, together with appropriate explanations. It includes an extensive section on collaborative programmes,

covering the development of proposals, what to look for in the profile of a prospective partner institution, the University's policies on franchising and articulation agreements, the monitoring of collaborative provision and the need for additional reports on franchised programmes not delivered on campus.

31 The audit team noted that the oversight of collaborative programmes is moving rapidly towards a position of effective equivalence to that applied to University-based programmes, with validation panels similarly constituted and following the same procedures. These procedures are augmented as appropriate by site visits by academic staff to ensure the suitability of teaching resources and the comparability of the student experience, including remote access to the University's virtual learning environment (VLE), but do not extend to a formal panel visit, with external representation, in the case of programmes already validated by the institution. All programme monitoring reports are now required to discuss issues relating to any collaboratively delivered provision, and the University envisages making additional efforts in future to ensure that the monitoring of collaborative provision, which at present is nonetheless adequate, will be increasingly thorough and of greater benefit to faculties.

32 The remit of the former Academic Standards Committee included the University's use of the Academic Infrastructure. Within the new structure QSC has responsibility, among other things, for implementing the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, with the exception of sections which fall naturally within the ambit of the Research Degrees Committee (RDC). The Academic Board receives an annual report on the University's alignment with the *Code of practice*. The audit team learned, however, that these formal responsibilities are significantly augmented by heads of department and key quality staff, who are expected to play a major part in propagating knowledge of the *Code*. Programme specifications and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)* are considered at validation and review panels and all members of academic staff are expected to be aware of subject benchmarks.

33 The Academic Board delegates responsibility for research policy to Research Committee, a sub-committee of the Board, which is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. RDC, now also a subcommittee of the Academic Board but with an additional reporting line to Research Committee, has responsibility for the standards of research degrees, the experience

and progression of research students and the implementation of relevant policies and regulations.

34 In the view of the audit team the new central committee structure has been introduced with great care and appears, at this early stage of operations, fit for purpose and effective. Overall, the team is of the view that the University now has in place the basis of a suitable framework for the management of quality and standards, but that there remains room for the oversight of faculty-level structures to be developed in such a way as to enable the University to be confident that student experiences are comparable across the institution.

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

35 The University's Strategic Development Plan emphasises its commitment to enhancing all aspects of the quality of the student experience, increasing its reputation for pedagogic, research and scholarship standards relevant to its mission, furthering its reputation for empowering its staff and helping them develop, and achieving the best possible working environment for students and staff. These objectives are underpinned by a set of key and supporting strategies, notably the Learning Experience Strategy, the Research Strategy and the Enterprise and Innovation Strategy. The audit team found these strategies aspirational and in line with the Strategic Development Plan, but in general lacking sufficient specificity of outcomes and targets to permit precise monitoring.

36 A student satisfaction survey has been in place since the early 1990s, but a more detailed survey, designed and introduced in 2002-03, permits results to be broken down in a number of ways including faculty, campus and mode of study; and the University has made the detailed results available on its website. The survey includes many questions concerning students' perceptions of the quality of learning and teaching and the accuracy of information received. The latest sweep elicited 1,600 responses. The results of the survey are presented to both the Academic Board and the Board of Governors, and the SED offered evidence of the impact of the survey on faculty plans for quality enhancement.

37 A specific initiative to support teaching enhancement has been the creation of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit, which aims to support staff across the University in enhancing all aspects of their professional practice, to raise the profile of learning and teaching as core activities, and to facilitate collaborative working within and across faculties, disciplines and external partners.

38 In addition, the audit team learned of other initiatives designed to highlight and disseminate good practice. The SED referred to enhancement activity based on staff appraisal and development; a scheme introduced in academic year 2002-03 offers opportunities for promotion to teaching fellow, reader or professor based on excellence in teaching (see paragraph 86); the practice, newly enshrined in the annual monitoring system, of bringing all faculty reports together for away day discussion by the Wider Management Group offers significant enhancement opportunities (which would be even greater if collaborative provision were separately reported there); the regular Meeting of Pro-Vice-Chancellors and Executive Deans; and the annual Learning and Teaching Conference. More broadly, as indicated above (paragraph 17) the new committee structure has the potential to offer further support to the Academic Board in the discharge of its quality and standards responsibilities.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

39 The University sets the academic standards of programmes at the time of validation and requires them to be confirmed in periodic review. Outline proposals for new programmes are first presented to the appropriate FASC which, when satisfied that a proposal is sound, forwards it to CCC for consideration of its academic integrity and marketability. The SMT, acting as the Planning and Budgeting Committee, then considers the resource implications and, if the proposal is taken forward, a validation panel is established.

40 This panel, chaired by an experienced, trained senior staff member and selected by the Quality Unit under the authority of the Chair of QSC, normally contains two members external to the University. The HQME sets out the full operational procedures, particularly charging panels with addressing standards, quality management and enhancement, learning outcomes and the use of external reference points. Panels have delegated authority to approve programmes, which can commence immediately on approval, with responsibility for confirming that conditions have been met being delegated to chairs. An annual overview of panel decisions drawn up by the Quality Unit, which services all panels and files all reports, is presented to QSC.

41 While the SED argued that the procedure is robust, and the audit team agrees that it is well defined and carefully managed, the practice of selecting a different panel for each new proposal and assigning it authority to approve a new

programme without reference to a higher body does not, in the view of the audit team, provide an appropriate assurance of consistency across the institution. This view is strengthened by the team's consideration of some panel reports in the course of the DATs, which suggests that not all panels pursue all aspects of their remit, particularly in relation to the Academic Infrastructure, in equal depth.

42 Until very recently the University operated two programme review processes: broad review, the operation of which is similar to validation and which takes place at no more than eight year intervals; and focused review, which considered specified aspects of a programme or group of programmes but which has now been superseded. Broad review, which is now the only institutional vehicle for this purpose, includes a critical review of the previous three years of the programme and an evaluation of operations, including data on student enrolment, progression and achievement since the last review. The audit team notes that the withdrawal of focused review was not accompanied by any increase in the required frequency of broad review, which continues, formally, to take place on an octal basis. While the team appreciates that in practice broad review occurs more frequently than this, the University may consider it prudent to synchronise the regulation with current practice.

43 The SED explained that the existence of QAA subject reviews was a primary cause of the lack of an internal review procedure above the level of a cluster. However, recognising the need for a higher-level review, a subject review procedure using 13 subject groups guided by JACS codes and based on a SED prepared by the subject team and a two-day visitation by a panel with external representation, was agreed and implemented in 2004. Panel reports, together with an action list, are considered by QSC; reviews take place on a three-year cycle and the timetable for the first three years has already been confirmed. The audit team scrutinised the reports of the first two of these reviews, which appeared generally sound and thorough.

44 As noted above (see paragraphs 25 and 31) collaborative programmes leading to awards of the University are dealt with by the same validation and review procedures. Programmes designed to facilitate entry to the University are not subject to validation or review, but institutional consideration focuses on the ability of the partner to prepare students for higher-level study, including, where appropriate, competence in English.

45 The SED stated that monitoring is an essential aspect of the work of QSC, and that faculties (through FASCs, reporting to QSC) have primary

responsibility for programme monitoring. The use of programmes as the primary monitoring unit dates back only as far as 2003, when it replaced the monitoring of groups of programmes. HQME describes the main purposes of monitoring as the evaluation of the student experience and a continuous process of reflection and action. Hence the University intends that monitoring reports should be more reflective and evaluative than descriptive.

46 Monitoring is based on a thorough review of each unit at the time of delivery, on the basis of outcomes, student results, take-up, student satisfaction, assessment and indicators of good practice. Results are summarised using an institutionally prescribed template, and heads of department are responsible for ensuring that reviews do indeed take place - a significant and explicit responsibility since the SED acknowledged that in the past unit reviews were not uniformly carried out. This duty, alongside the introduction of the new report template and unit evaluation questionnaire, is intended to improve uniformity. The audit team established that, with limited and specific exceptions, the annual monitoring process encompasses both programmes delivered within the University and those based at collaborating institutions and leading to an award of the University.

47 Since 2004, all unit reports contribute to a detailed report on the programme of which they form a part, normally prepared by the programme or course director concerned, on the basis of HQME guidelines. Reports, which include all associated collaborative activity, are discussed with the relevant head of department, approved by the Course Board and submitted to the chair of FASC. Faculties use a review process to consider reports and ensure they are suitable for purpose, and submit a summary report on the faculty's programmes to the Annual Monitoring Committee.

48 Integrating collaborative provision into programme reports has an obvious logic but means that common problems arising within such programmes or associated with a particular partner may not become apparent. Clearly it is important that care be taken to ensure that the quality of learning and teaching is maintained and enhanced, and including dedicated collaborative provision report among the documentation submitted to the annual monitoring event would help achieve this.

49 The audit team considers the University operates a detailed and generally effective annual monitoring procedure, which could, however, be improved if annual monitoring paid more explicit attention to collaborative provision. While approval, monitoring and review procedures appear strong

overall, for the University to have complete confidence in the consistency of decision making it would be advisable if, rather than delegating programme approval to ad hoc validation panels which appear to discharge their duties in a slightly variable manner (see paragraph 41), the Academic Board itself, or an appropriate subcommittee, were to retain final decision-making responsibility.

External participation in internal review processes

50 External members of validation and review panels, normally two in number and including one with direct experience of delivering higher education in the UK (although experience of relevant industrial or professional requirements is also encouraged) are proposed by programme teams and selected by the Quality Unit. Where appropriate, provision is also made for the representation of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs).

51 The University regards external participation in institutional procedures as essential if effective use of the Academic Infrastructure, especially in relation to standard setting, is to be made. The role of external members includes assessing comparability with similar programmes offered elsewhere and the match between the programme outcomes and relevant subject benchmark statements, and ensuring that all such statements and the FHEQ level descriptors are appropriately addressed.

52 Overall, the University's selection and deployment of external members in approval and review procedures appear appropriate, though it may wish to consider ensuring that committees are given oversight of the range of external members of review panels.

External examiners and their reports

53 External examiners, regarded by the University as critical in standard setting and maintenance, are fully involved in its two-tier system of examination boards under which unit marks are determined at the first tier, and award and progression decisions at the second. The duty of external examiners to scrutinise all assessments contributing to an award involves their confirming both the appropriateness of the level of assessment to the learning outcomes approved at validation and that the standards required are comparable to those at other institutions. They are also asked to comment on student attainment in relation to the level descriptors of the FHEQ, on the knowledge and skills detailed in all relevant benchmark statements and to do so in the context of the *Code of practice*. The SED provided evidence of a high level of confirmation in academic years 2001-02 and 2002-03, although the

audit team also noted the comment of some external examiners on the wide disparity between the highest and lowest achievement levels, and on some students' poor English and standard of literacy.

54 The document Information for External Examiners, supplemented as appropriate by information from individual faculties, sets out the University's expectations. While appreciating the care with which this issue has been addressed and the overall clarity of the information provided, the audit team also noted that, exceptionally, there is evidence of uncertainty among a minority of external examiners as to aspects of institutional procedures. The team assumes that the University will wish, in the light of this, to review the effectiveness of the means by which it communicates its procedures to external examiners.

55 The University's revised committee structure contains an External Examiner Nominations Subcommittee which oversees a system which the University claims is very rigorous. The University recognises the need to prepare external examiners for their role and indicates the level of experience sought, and where such experience does not exist the nominee is expected to join an experienced team. In the DATs the audit team was able to explore the operation of the induction process, which it confirmed is thorough and constructive. The team also noted that administrative staff involved in supporting student assessment are also appropriately trained and prepared for their role, both in face-to-face workshops and by means of the University's VLE.

56 External examiners' reports, as well as being sent to faculties to inform their monitoring and review processes, are scrutinised by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students and Quality) and the Head of the Quality Unit, who prepares an annual overview report for QSC and the Academic Board. The audit team was provided with examples of the operation of central oversight, managed by a senior member of staff, and how it is exercised in respect of external examiners' comments, and considers the procedure generally robust.

57 The audit team was informed of the existence of faculty protocols as to what information should be sent to external examiners and on what issues they should be consulted. For example all new or revised units of study have to be approved by external examiners as well as by the relevant FASC. Faculties are required to respond formally to external examiners when their reports indicate that standards are lower than elsewhere or which raise serious issues, detailing the responsive action they are taking. In addition, all faculties are required to inform external examiners of the outcomes of their consideration of reports and

any actions being taken. The SED reported that over a two-year period no external examiner had reported non-receipt of such comments.

58 In other respects, however, the audit team found evidence of variable faculty responses to external examiners' reports. Internal documentation made available to the team notes a number of issues relating to external examiners' role in relation to assessed work. The documentation available to the team presented a slightly confused picture as a result of the ambiguous wording of the questions on the form although this has since been clarified; but it is clear that by no means all external examiners have had the opportunity to comment on all, or in some cases even some, draft examination papers, a matter identified by the University as a 'very serious failing' on the part of course teams and which requires remedial action. The team concurs with this view and anticipates that the University will wish to ensure that the responsive action is closely monitored at institutional level.

59 The SED described the role of RDC and its responsibility for ensuring that the procedures for research degrees are consistent with the *Code of practice*. As indicated elsewhere (see paragraph 33) RDC is responsible for the standards of research degrees, the experience and progression of research students and the implementation of relevant policies and regulations. It also considers examination arrangements, including the qualifications and experience of external and internal examiners. In response to the continuation audit report it provides the Academic Board with full minutes and a list of research degrees conferred.

60 In the view of the audit team, the claims made in the SED are accurate and, subject to the specific qualifications described above (see paragraphs 54 and 58) the University's procedures for the maintenance of standards are generally appropriate and consistent.

External reference points

61 Among the points identified at continuation audit as requiring attention was the University's use of external reference points in the maintenance of academic standards and the management of quality assurance systems. Similarly, the Engineering subject review (December 2004) noted some inconsistency of faculty practice in respect of the *Code of practice* in particular. The University responded to this at institutional level by strengthening the periodic review process as a means of ensuring that all programmes, from unit level upwards, meet the requirements of the *Code of practice*. In the case of Engineering, a response to the review was the

formulation of a faculty assessment strategy to achieve the same objective at faculty level.

62 The HQME confirms the use of external reference points at the time of the validation of programmes to ensure comparability with awards made elsewhere. The SED claimed that evidence from external examiners and other sources such as professional body accreditations gives further support to this claim, although the audit team noted that specific reference to the FHEQ does not appear in all validation reports.

63 The University considers the involvement of external panel members, usually drawn from other universities or professional bodies, essential components of programme validation and periodic review, as a means of ensuring that the programme under consideration is comparable with similar programmes offered elsewhere, that it addresses the expectations of external reference points (including relevant professional body requirements) and that its curriculum facilitates the attainment of its specified outcomes.

64 External examiners are asked to comment upon student attainment in relation to level descriptors of the FHEQ, and the audit team's review of external examiners' reports indicates that they are responding to this request. With one exception, where an external examiner commented adversely on examination standards falling short of FHEQ expectations, the audit team is satisfied that the knowledge and skills detailed in relevant benchmark statements are being appropriately used.

65 The University, as a result of its vocational orientation, has received many PSRB accreditation visits and reviews since continuation audit. In all cases the outcome has been approval or continued accreditation, albeit conditional in some cases. The SED specifically noted that the NHS Workforce Development Directorate, which monitors provision in the health area, found all aspects of development and delivery excellent. PSRB reports are considered at faculty level, and the University acknowledged to the audit team that it is only now moving towards achieving consistent central involvement in such reviews, from preparing for visits through to monitoring responses to recommendations and conclusions.

66 The audit team accepts the claim in the SED that evidence from external examiners, professional bodies and other sources justifies the conclusion that it has in place effective systems for setting and maintaining standards, and that the standards required to gain the University's awards are comparable to those existing elsewhere.

67 The SED referred to the work of the Careers and Student Employment Unit, citing its attainment, in 2004, of the matrix standard for information, advice and guidance organisations as providing evidence of the quality of service provision. The University's Equality and Diversity Policy Statement (June 2004) includes operational codes and procedures to take account of changes in legislation, in particular the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000; as well as internal requirements specified by the University, including the use made of the Core Skills Policy. The audit team received a range of documents available to students and staff relating to Core Skills, which had in turn resulted from a review of the University's Core Skills Policy in 2000. These documents were considered by the team to constitute evidence that the Core Skills Policy is a feature of good practice.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

68 The SED acknowledged that in some subjects the University achieved lower scores in QAA subject review than the sector average, citing as contributory factors an initial slowness to appreciate the reviews' significance and, possibly as a consequence of this, the inadequate preparation of subject teams. Certainly in later rounds the scores were considerably more encouraging; and all four academic reviews carried out in 2003-04 reported confidence in the academic standards of the provision.

69 As indicated previously (paragraph 18) the University responded to concerns expressed in subject review reports by introducing reforms to assessment procedures, feedback to students, learning resources and the personal tutor system, although it acknowledges that there is some way to go before all issues raised in subject and academic review can be said to have been fully addressed. In response to concerns about student progression and achievement, several approaches to increasing support for non-traditional entrants have been implemented, and regulations which determine degree classifications have been revised in order to reduce the inflexibility which, it was believed, contributed to the relatively low proportion of good degrees.

70 The University's programmes are accredited by many PSRBs at levels from HNC to MSc. The SED noted that all visits have resulted in the granting or continuation of accreditation, although with conditions attached in some instances. In previous years accreditation reports have been considered by faculties but not always at University level, although

the SED explained that a strengthened link to QSC is to be introduced for the present academic year. However, the audit team learned in discussions with staff that at the time of the audit visit (in March 2005) no central register of accreditation visits existed, and that such reports were not routinely discussed at QSC, albeit that issues arising from FASC discussion of accreditation documentation could be raised there.

71 Overall the audit team concludes that the University has responded generally effectively, if sometimes rather slowly, to subject review reports, but that procedures for addressing reports by PSRBs, which are variably considered by faculties, continue to require further consideration.

Student representation at operational and institutional levels

72 The University's committee structure permits student representation at every institutional level. Both formal and informal relations between SU officers and senior management appear effective, with monthly meetings taking place and a standing opportunity for the President to contact the Vice-Chancellor as needs arise.

73 At faculty and sub-faculty level students are represented on course boards, and an arrangement whereby 12 members of the SU Council are chosen from among course board representatives gives the Council the potential to become a forum for discussion of common experiences. Nonetheless, the audit team found that these arrangements do not always operate effectively and, in the course of the audit visit, in more than one student meeting no-one present had heard of the Student Council. The SU has found it difficult to recruit representatives to Council, and the University, acknowledging the challenge involved in securing adequate student representation on course boards, has in the past attempted to ameliorate the situation by delegating a member of staff to work with the SU to improve representative support and training, and introducing an annual social event for representatives attended by a member of the SMT. Nonetheless, administrative and communication difficulties between the University and the SU have meant that these initiatives have had only limited success.

74 The Student Affairs Committee is a high-level and influential body reporting directly to the Academic Board and the Board of Governors, whose papers and minutes demonstrate its capacity to address student issues in great detail and its ability to shape University policy in a student-friendly direction, achieving, for

example, a significant policy change in respect of library opening hours. The audit team noted that the structural location of this Committee as well as its achievements mark it out as a significant contributor to the University's goal of placing the student experience at the heart of its activities.

75 Nonetheless, the audit team heard conflicting accounts of the period of service of course board representatives and those chosen to serve on the SU Council. Some representatives were unclear about their term of office and did not understand how to access training, provision of which had not, it was agreed by University and SU representatives alike, been a success in the current academic year. Appointment procedures for representatives are variable and, in a situation where limited student enthusiasm poses problems for democratic elections, frequently depend on the circumstances of courses and the inclinations of staff. The team noted that in many cases students bypass the system, raising issues directly with staff on an ad hoc basis; those who have referred matters to representatives have not always received feedback on the outcome. In the view of the team, further work will be necessary if communications are to be improved, representatives given further encouragement, training assured and student representation to work more effectively.

76 The audit team heard that the institution of student-staff consultative committees is at the discretion of faculties. Since such committees do not duplicate course boards but offer a particular opportunity for students to raise issues across programmes, the team considers that there is a compelling argument that the existence of such a committee would be beneficial in all faculties, not least as a means of contributing to ensuring the comparability of the student experience across the institution.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

77 The University regards the collection and analysis of student feedback as an essential component of monitoring. Annual student satisfaction surveys collect data on the student experience generally and, at a more specific level, reports deriving from the unit evaluation questionnaires completed at the end of modules of study feed directly into programme monitoring reports. The audit team, while noting the value of this practice and also that opportunities exist for student representatives to report their constituents' experience of programmes to course boards, notes nonetheless the absence of any direct student input

into programme monitoring, and suggests that thought might usefully be given to ways in which such an input might be achieved.

78 The University has for some time recognised that the flow of data through these mechanisms has not always been sufficiently full or consistent to ensure optimal quality management, and has recently taken steps to improve the situation. In particular, the standardised Unit Report Form and the partially standardised unit evaluation questionnaires introduced in 2004-05 will for the first time permit robust comparative analysis, facilitating both targeted remedial action and quality enhancement through the dissemination of good practice. While it would be premature to offer an opinion on the likely effectiveness of these changes, the audit team believes they have the potential to contribute to improvements in institutional policy and practice in relation to learning and teaching.

79 The introduction, in the academic year 2002-03, of new procedures for the completion of a revised student satisfaction survey questionnaire has so improved the response rate as to permit the collection of statistically reliable data that can be analysed by variables including faculty, study year, programme, mode and location of study, age and gender; in future years the data generated will enable trend analysis to be undertaken. The evidence of the two detailed reports submitted to the Academic Board and the Board of Governors in the last two academic years bears out the University's belief that these measures will greatly improve senior management's understanding of the student experience. There remains, however, some doubt as to student confidence in the effectiveness of these procedures, since the audit team heard from some students that they are unclear about what happens to the feedback they provide and about how to learn what actions were taken in response to it.

80 So far as feedback from employers is concerned, the audit team learnt that the University does not have an employers' forum or liaison committee at institutional level, though a number of departments inform themselves of employers' needs and opinions through their own joint committees. As the University is committed to ensuring high rates of employability for students, it may wish to consider whether such a forum would provide a useful focus for discussions. Nor does the University currently receive routine feedback from graduates, and the team suggests the University give thought to whether such feedback, if collected, would contribute to its enhancement agenda.

Progression and completion statistics

81 The University acknowledges that, in good part as a result of the deployment of an outdated database, the maintenance of student records has for some time presented significant problems, and a commercial system which registers students at the level of individual units has been introduced in stages since academic year 2003-04. The introduction of the new system was not trouble-free with, for example, many students not being tied into the correct course units in the first year of operation and results for the earlier years of continuing students still being held on the old system. Difficulties such as these led to the institution of an Information Strategy Board reporting direct to the SMT, the Academic Board and the Board of Governors, and of a team of staff associated with the implementation and review of underlying processes. The new system is scheduled to have completely replaced its predecessor by the end of the current academic year, and the University believes that increasing exploitation of its versatility will significantly improve the tracking of student performance and progress, particularly of those who make full use of the flexibility so central to the University's philosophy and approach.

82 The University has for some time made detailed quantitative information on progression and completion available to programme teams, but in a form perceived by some as complicated and difficult to interpret. The introduction of the new system has provided an opportunity to consult on the format of the data to be provided, both generally and in the context of the University's legal obligations to monitor ethnicity data and its aim, expressed in the Diversity and Equality Policy Statement, to monitor age and gender. User-friendly course-level data are now available simply by entering the course code, and course teams are expected to discuss and comment on them as part of the annual monitoring cycle. The document Guidelines for the Preparation of Programme Monitoring Reports includes information about the kind of data to be considered, and reports scrutinised by the audit team demonstrated that such discussion has indeed taken place in most cases. The team noted in particular the practice in one faculty of offering course teams assistance with data interpretation.

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

83 The University's common appointments procedure for academic and non-academic staff appears to the audit team effective and fair,

although the team notes that it does not extend to the appointment of hourly paid personnel. All new staff are offered an induction programme, and full-time academic appointees with little or no experience of teaching in higher education are required to join the University's Programme for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, progression on which appears satisfactory, 26 staff having successfully completed the programme in academic year 2003-04. Staff with experience of the programme who met the audit team reported that it had been well presented and useful.

84 The University's appraisal system dates back to 1992, but the present system, introduced in 2004, incorporates all permanent full and part-time academic staff, and temporary staff who have worked more than a year in the University. Again, however, it excludes hourly paid staff. The audit team had the opportunity of reviewing the system, which makes explicit links to institutional and faculty objectives and centrally involves heads of department. Staff with experience of it advised the team that it is fit for purpose and an improvement on its predecessor.

85 The University's peer observation system is mandatory for full-time academic staff but not for those who are hourly paid or on fractional contracts. The scheme is, however, currently scheduled for review, the SMT having identified a number of weaknesses, particularly concerning its capacity to facilitate the sharing and dissemination of good practice. Nonetheless, a number of staff who met the audit team indicated that they had found the process beneficial, both as observers and when observed.

86 The Staff Experience Strategy outlines ways in which the University has, since academic year 2002-03, increasingly sought to reflect its teaching-led policy by rewarding excellence in teaching through a scheme offering opportunities for promotion to teaching fellow, and reader or professor of educational development. Teaching fellowships, of which two are in principle reserved for staff in partner colleges teaching on programmes which lead to the University's awards (although no applications have been received), permit the fellow to undertake a specific teaching and learning project, carry a remission of other duties and obtain a grant of £5,000.

87 The University makes considerable use of hourly paid staff, normally appointed on semester-long contracts by heads of department within budgets allocated by the executive dean. While some hourly paid staff are practitioners providing specific input to vocational programmes, others provide more

general lecturing and tutorial support, in some areas amounting to a significant proportion of the student experience. While the audit team was advised that the qualification for appointment as an hourly paid lecturer is identical to that expected for full-time staff, the curricula vitae of hourly paid staff made available to the team demonstrated that this was not always the case. The team was also advised that as much as 20 per cent of a faculty staffing budget could be allocated to hourly paid lecturers, although it was unable to ascertain whether this was institutional policy or merely custom and practice.

88 Hourly paid staff have the option of joining the Programme for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education and other staff development events. Support beyond this is variable, ranging from the minimal to the practice in one faculty of assigning mentors to hourly paid staff, involving them in the peer observation scheme and providing a welcome pack including useful information about the role and a list of contacts. A paper presented to the Meeting of Executive Deans and Pro-Vice-Chancellors in 2004 recommended that faculty procedures for induction, appraisal and staff development should include and apply to those hourly paid lecturers delivering all, or the majority of, a unit either alone or as part of a teaching team. Although agreed at the meeting, this recommendation does not feature in the document Employment Procedures for Hourly Paid Lecturers and Occasional Lecturers, and is not in general practice. The audit team, acknowledging the different levels of commitment hourly paid lecturers are able or willing to give, considers it nonetheless advisable, given the extent of their current use by the University, for the institution to monitor across all programmes the use of, and support given to, hourly paid lecturers.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

89 The University's commitment to staff development is demonstrated by its policy of accrediting all departments to the Investors in People standard. At present two faculties have achieved the standard and others are preparing for assessment according to an agreed schedule.

90 The Staff Experience Strategy outlines a comprehensive programme for staff development, including the creation of a Coaching Academy, the provision of a Leadership Development Programme and the running of bespoke programmes for specific groups of staff. The Staff Development Unit offers a range of short courses and events for all staff, including those employed by partner colleges, covering topics related to teaching skills,

management and leadership and personal development. Other courses provided by competent groups within the institution are publicised in part by an annual booklet listing all such opportunities. For example, the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit has offered a range of activities, including workshops on using the University's personal development plan booklets and a six week course to support the introduction of the VLE; and the Learning Support Unit provides training in disability issues.

91 An inaugural one-day internal teaching conference was held in January 2005, comprising two external speakers, both well-known for their work in pedagogic development, and workshops facilitated by University staff designed to highlight aspects of good practice. Over 120 staff attended all or part of the day, and staff who met the audit team expressed enthusiasm for the event. The University currently plans to repeat this successful formula on at least an annual basis and to explore the viability of less formal workshops throughout the year.

92 The audit team noted two initiatives for staff from overseas collaborating colleges to help ensure that the experience of students taught for part of their programmes in those institutions was comparable to that of their London-based peers. In both cases staff from the overseas institution were invited to the London campus for periods of four weeks in order to observe the approach taken to teaching and supporting learning in specific modules.

93 Nonetheless, hourly paid staff include a number of research students undertaking teaching duties, in respect of whom no staff development requirement exists. While the audit team was advised that they often work alongside a supervisor or as part of a laboratory team, and that preparation is therefore informal, the research students who met the team did not appear to have been well-prepared for the role, and in one case indicated a lack of knowledge of University assessment regulations. The team advises the University to ensure that all postgraduate research students undertaking teaching duties receive appropriate preparation, training and support.

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

94 As indicated previously (see paragraph 9) the University delivers very little teaching through distributed and distance methods. Its distance-learning provision in particular comprises only a small MA programme and some nurse training. In the case of distance-learning students the University requires there to be opportunities for on-line

interactive dialogue and feedback. While the audit team is not able, on the basis of its enquiries, to comment on the efficacy of this teaching, at no time were problems with it brought to its attention.

Learning support resources

95 The adequacy and deployment of resources for learning support and, in particular, the lack of a learning resources strategy, have provoked adverse comment in external reviews. In 2003 the University responded by commissioning an educational consultant to review and report on its learning support provision. His extensive analysis of the work of the Learning and Information Services, Learning Resources Centre, Learning and Development Centre and faculty support services made 40 recommendations for action. This report was quickly followed by a Phase II report produced by the University's Steering Group for the Review of Learning Support Services, which targeted action points at specific sections of the University. The audit team was advised that these recommendations and action points were being progressed and were demonstrably enhancing support services provision, that progress was being carefully monitored at senior levels, and that an imminent Phase III report would be addressing the organisational relationship among the University's main learning support services. The team considered that this level of activity demonstrated a significant institutional commitment to the enhancement of support services.

96 In particular, the SED pointed to considerable recent investments, particularly but not exclusively in technology; a significant increase in the budget for book purchases; extended library opening hours; the accessibility of catalogues and other sources through the University portal; a programme of refurbishment to the main library, completed in 2003; the fact that remote access to the University network is now available to all students with a computer; and further recent and projected estate developments, all of which, the University claims, have significantly improved the quality of learning support and hence of the student experience.

97 Currently, the Learning Resources Centre has 450 open-access workstations and three computer-equipped teaching rooms, with support staff available to assist in accessing databases and using software. There are also various faculty-based information technology (IT) facilities with dedicated support staff, about which students who met the audit team were very complimentary.

98 The University has, in the view of the audit team, taken reasonable steps to ensure that these

improvements extend, as far as possible, to the Essex and East London campuses. In the former, the University opened a new 150-seat classroom in 2004, refurbished other classrooms as well as staff and student accommodation and opened new clinical skills and computer laboratories. The East London campus will benefit from a major redevelopment due to commence in 2005, when the current accommodation will be replaced by new and much improved facilities.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

99 The combined effect of the University's commitment to the centrality of the student experience and its distinctive mission to serve the people of London is that its student body manifests great diversity in character and need. The University welcomes this diversity, and is committed to providing access and opportunity for those for whom the more traditional routes of entry are unlikely to be available. It follows that enhancing the student experience is central to the University's institutional strategies and action plans, and the University has developed a range of strategy documents, aspirational as well as operational, with the main aim of providing students with the appropriate support and opportunities to succeed.

100 All students receive a student handbook, programme guide, and unit guide for every unit for which they are registered. Programme guides are monitored by faculties to ensure that they are clear and comprehensive; unit guides are prepared by unit coordinators on the basis of an institutional template to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness. Students told the team that they did, indeed, receive this documentation and that it was found full and informative.

101 Non-subject specific academic and personal guidance is provided by the Learning and Development Centre, whose wide-ranging and helpful documentation is available electronically and as hard copy. The Centre details its extensive range of student services in a Tutoring Handbook, issued to all academic staff. These services include pre-sessional courses, workshops, one-to-one sessions on study skills, English language courses, personal development advice, careers and employment advice and disability support. The Handbook advises staff on how to refer students to external services as well as internal ones, as well as on personal development plans and the role of the senior tutor. In the view of the audit team the Tutoring Handbook is a thorough and clear document, an excellent resource for those charged with all aspects of student guidance.

102 The Core Skills Policy, developed by the Learning and Development Centre, is now embedded in all undergraduate programmes, its implementation being a criterion for approval and validation. Approved by the Academic Board in 2000, the policy commits the University to diagnostic testing of new entrants; literacy and numeracy support; training in IT, communication and career management; and helping students engaged in part-time employment extract maximum benefit from the experience. The audit team notes that the continuation audit report remarked that the University would wish to assure itself that what was then a new policy was comprehensively implemented, and confirms that, with the exception of diagnostic testing which is not yet universal, this is being done. Noting the consonance between this policy and the University's mission of realising the potential of all students to develop their skills to the full, the team now considers this a feature of good practice.

103 Another way in which the University develops self-aware learning is through personal development planning (PDP). The University introduced the PDP initiative in 2001 with the on-line provision of a year one planner, followed with year two and year three planners and those for foundation year students and taught postgraduates, now available also in very attractive booklets. In the view of the audit team these wide-ranging packages, which, it was advised, are much appreciated by students, are prompting and guiding them to reflect upon and address their developmental achievements and needs. In their careful conception, focused structure, informativeness and relevance they stand as a feature of good practice. The University, led by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit, is now working to embed PDP in the curriculum, such as to incorporate it into the next revision of programme specifications.

104 The Learning Support Unit, located within the Learning and Development Centre, is dedicated to promoting inclusiveness and accessibility, in particular offering advice and support services for the 900 students who have disclosed a disability (of whom over 500 are dyslexic). The audit team was given convincing evidence that students' needs are being identified and that appropriate and timely referrals are made; on the basis of meetings with students the team can confirm the high opinion in which the Learning and Development Centre's services are held; the team also notes that the relevant website provides extensive and accessible information on support services.

105 In 2001 the incoming Vice-Chancellor established a number of policy groups, one of them

charged with developing a model of student support review, recommended the creation of faculty based student information centres (SICs) to provide an accessible local source of focused and informed guidance and a referral point to the University's support and administrative services. SICs were subsequently instituted in the Essex campus and in each faculty on the Southwark campus, so students now have single location access to guidance on such matters as enrolment procedures, financial benefits and loans, academic regulations, complaints and appeals. The SICs are a recent innovation and their role is still evolving, but the audit team heard evidence from students that they are establishing themselves as a local source of advice and guidance, and a point of referral to other services.

Personal support and guidance

106 The Student Support Policy provides the institutional framework within which personalised support is delivered. Its essential requirement is that students should know to which designated members of staff they should turn for support. The role of personal tutor integrates pastoral support and academic advice, and tutors, aided by the Tutoring Handbook, (see paragraph 101) are accordingly charged with promoting both academic and personal development.

107 The University recognises that personal tutoring has attracted adverse comment, and has responded to this by devolving responsibility to faculties. This policy has created both benefits and challenges, as faculties have responded variably to the need to create the arrangements most suited to their students. In 2002 it was decided to introduce a senior tutor system whereby trained members of academic staff were to be allocated to a group of students whom they would advise throughout their programme. It did not, however, appear to the audit team that the system had been generally adopted, and from its meetings with students it became clear that personal tutor support is inconsistently available across the institution, that many students are unclear about what to expect, and that some do not know whether or not they have a personal tutor. In the view of the team it would be appropriate for the University to give further consideration as to how best to secure effective institutional oversight of faculty-based personal tutoring, in order to ensure the comparability of the student experience across the institution.

108 As indicated previously (see paragraphs 101, 102, 104) the Learning and Development Centre offers a range of personal support services. In the absence of an institutional counselling service the

Personal Development Advice Unit (PDAU) provides advice and guidance on a range of issues - residential, cultural, financial - and on personal and skills development, normally through one-to-one sessions or workshops. The Careers and Student Employment Unit provides employment-related advice, while its Jobshop helps students in pursuit of part-time employment. A Multi-Faith Centre provides a quiet room and offers confidential, non-judgemental pastoral care. Christian ministers, a Jewish rabbi and a Muslim imam attend, but work as individuals rather than as members of a team. A subsidised on-site nursery with a capacity of 50 is available for students and staff, but has a waiting list. Overall, students whom the team met spoke well of the resources available to them.

109 The recently appointed International Student Adviser has taken a number of initiatives to support and integrate the University's 2,500 international students from 90 countries. In particular, he appears to have handled the distressing consequences of the tsunami disaster promptly and effectively. International students spoke positively about the support offered them, both centrally and departmentally and, although it is not in a position to comment on the comparability of international students' experiences across the institution, the audit team noted some departmental initiatives developed where large numbers of such students are likely, designed to integrate them into the social and intellectual life of the University.

Collaborative provision

110 The University, after a period in which collaborative arrangements were not encouraged, now has formal collaborative links with home and international partners, although the student numbers involved are less than 600. It has 17 collaborations within the UK and Channel Islands, of which the majority are Foundation Degree arrangements with local FE colleges and, in one instance, a local authority, or collaborations with colleges in the delivery of taught programmes not in competition with University provision. Internationally the University has articulation or partial franchise arrangements with ten institutions, of which four are in Germany and four in the People's Republic of China.

111 At present, new programme proposals and proposals for collaborative links are considered by a working group of the University's QSC, although a new Curriculum and Collaborations Committee is to be established shortly. The audit team saw evidence of the application procedure for new collaborative links, and confirms that it reflects the appropriate

section of the *Code of practice*. The University claims to enter collaborative arrangements on the basis of clear criteria. It acknowledges that it retains overall responsibility for the quality of the student experience and the academic standards of provision, that all awards made in its name must be of equivalent standard, that approval and validation arrangements must mirror those covering on-campus programmes and that the quality of the student experience must be equivalent to that provided for on-campus students. Partner institutions are expected to have in place fora for staff-student dialogue comparable to course boards at the University and to follow comparable procedures for collecting student feedback. The University defines the responsibilities of faculties and Student Administration in respect of the review of collaborative arrangements. These responsibilities include operational matters such as student induction, the effectiveness of communications between partners, the dissemination of good practice and access to the University's learning resources and staff development systems, which are open to staff and students in partner institutions.

112 The audit team was given examples of the appointment of external examiners to institutions validated by the University. The SED claimed that the standards of collaborative programmes leading to awards of the University are set by the same procedures and to the same level as for internal validations. Evidence to support this claim can be found in the Handbook for External Examiners, which also explains the sequence and timing of franchised programmes and confirms that the validation process covers both the standards of the programme itself and also the ability of the partner institution to deliver it. The maintenance of quality is addressed in programme monitoring reports, which now require discussion of issues relating to collaboratively delivered provision, together, where possible, with a comparison between student performance at the University and a partner institution, and between students who did and did not join the University through an articulation agreement.

113 The adequacy of learning resources is a condition of approval and validation of the delivery of programmes by partner institutions. A site visit always takes place, even in cases where a previously validated programme is concerned, in order to ensure that appropriate facilities and learning support are in place; though these do not normally include members external to the University. The University considers visits by members of its own staff to partner institutions complement more formal procedures, and an informal way of ensuring that

the student experience at other sites is comparable or equivalent to that of students at Southwark campus. While the team considers that the University exercises proper oversight of its collaborative arrangements, it believes this oversight would be strengthened by the inclusion of external members on all validation panels, irrespective of whether provision of the programme in question has already been validated at another location.

Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline audit trails

Discipline audit trails

Engineering

114 The DAT for Engineering covered all Engineering programmes offered within the Faculty of Engineering Science and the Built Environment, including HNC/HND, honours degrees, master's degrees and research awards. The Faculty comprises five departments, three of which (Applied Science, Electrical, Computer and Communications Engineering, and Engineering Systems) include Engineering programmes in their portfolios. The DSED was based on a document prepared for an internal subject group review; all relevant unit and programme handbooks, programme specifications and annual programme monitoring reports were provided, together with samples of assessed work in unit boxes. The audit team noted that while the DSED provided a clear description of provision it offered little analysis or evaluation, that some unit boxes were incomplete, and that both these issues had been commented on in the subject group review.

115 All programme specifications examined were informed by the *Subject benchmark statement* for engineering and the University's Academic Regulations. Due consideration had been given to the University's Core Skills Policy, and programme specifications were laid out using the institutional template.

116 Engineering was among the first discipline areas to undergo the new subject review procedure, and both the review report and the Faculty response to it were available to the audit team. The action plan, on a number of occasions, anticipated responding to recommendations by discussion, and it would be helpful for the plan to be updated when the discussion is complete. Annual programme monitoring reports included a review of the previous year's action plan, discussion of progression data (which did not, however, exploit all opportunities made available by the new student record system) and a new action plan. It was not always clear how

these reports had been informed by unit reports, the variability of which also attracted comment by the subject group review. The team studied two recent programme validation reports, and confirms that in both cases institutional procedures were followed.

117 A three-year run of external examiners' reports was made available to the audit team, and the large majority of reports indicated that standards are appropriate to the award. Programme monitoring reports noted that an appropriate response is made to all issues raised by external examiners.

118 Where appropriate, programmes are accredited by the relevant member body of the Engineering Council as meeting the educational requirements for incorporated or chartered engineer status. Recent accreditation reports confirmed standards and that institutional policy encouraged engagement with the requirements of professional bodies is being followed.

119 The Faculty offers collaborative programmes at home and overseas. It follows institutional validation and review procedures, although the subject group review report noted some inconsistency in the monitoring of collaborative provision. More positively, the team noted an instance in which academic staff from an overseas collaborating institution had been invited to spend four-week periods in London to observe learning and teaching styles. It also learned, from course committee minutes and from students from partner institutions who had progressed to University-based courses, that the Faculty offers additional support to overseas staff and students.

120 Students who met the audit team had received handbooks, knew where they could seek information about complaints and appeals processes, were generally satisfied with the resources available to them and were complimentary about new laboratory facilities. They confirmed that the course representative system is in place, albeit that not all students are aware of the identity of their representatives, and indicated also that they can easily interact informally with staff in connection with issues as they arise.

121 Students reported varying experiences concerning feedback on assessed work. At its best such feedback was timely and useful, but in a minority of instances it had not been received, or had been received too late to inform future assessments. Some staff appeared unsure of the turnaround time for assessed work, and, while this may reflect different practices in different departments, some claimed that the extension system made requirements impossible to meet since no work could be returned until all papers had been received. The team believes such

variations potentially detract from the student experience, and that greater faculty-level consistency and improved institutional oversight of the timeliness of feedback would be helpful. It also noted that the completed feedback sheets made available to it were of variable quality, and, while the DSED claims that in some cases feedback is oral rather than written, the team was not able to confirm whether in all cases students receiving limited written feedback had also received oral comment.

122 The Faculty employs hourly paid lecturers at all levels of activity, some without previous experience of teaching in higher education. While in most cases hourly paid staff are appropriately qualified for their duties, the fact that in at least one case this was not so suggests a need for more careful monitoring. In particular, a substantial proportion of mathematics teaching in Engineering Systems is taught by such staff, and, given that examiners have noted problems with some students' grasp of the subject, the Faculty may consider it appropriate to review the effectiveness of its current implementation of this practice, including hourly paid lecturers' training and support requirements.

123 The audit team met a research student employed as a demonstrator, who had completed the laboratory exercises as a masters student but had not had formal training. While the team has no reason to question this student's skills or ability, it notes that the Faculty does not at present ensure that postgraduate research students undertaking teaching duties receive appropriate training and support.

124 Arrangements for the monitoring, progression, support and supervision of research students are in line with University regulations. Research students who met the team spoke positively of their experiences, reporting no difficulties in accessing members of their supervisory teams. Nonetheless the Faculty will wish to review the absence of compulsory training in research methods or personal development in the light of the University's intention to meet the precepts of the revised section of the *Code of practice* concerning research students.

125 On the basis of the available evidence the audit team concludes that the quality of the learning opportunities and the standard of achievement in Engineering are suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

English

126 The DAT for English covered the BA (Hons) English, in full and part-time mode, and the BA (Combined Honours) field in English Studies, offered, following the University's recent academic

restructuring exercise, in the Department of Arts, Media and English, located within the Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences. A new English, Creative and Performing Arts Scheme, involving a distinctive English provision addressed to the needs of the cultural industries of London, was validated in 2004 in accordance with institutional regulations. The DSED was written especially for this audit; handbooks, programme specifications and annual programme monitoring reports were provided, as well as samples of assessed work. The programme specifications were clear, followed the institution's template and were informed by the *Subject benchmark statement* for English and the University's Academic Regulations.

127 The QAA subject review report on English, undertaken in May/June 2003, expressed confidence in the academic standards of programmes and the quality of teaching and learning. Nonetheless, it expressed concerns relating to areas including the increasingly heavy reliance on hourly paid lecturers following the loss of full-time academic staff and student retention and attainment levels. Further staff losses have occurred subsequently, and in this context the DSED described English as a 'threatened subject', an observation with potential implications for the quality of the student experience. In July 2004 an external examiner's report noted as 'a matter of some concern' the volume of teaching carried out by part-time staff, and at the time of the audit visit staff shortages and student recruitment difficulties had necessitated the withdrawal of optional units, notification of which did not reach all students concerned in a timely fashion.

128 The Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences issues guidelines for hourly paid lecturers, and the Department has also evolved a thorough set of guidelines governing their appointment, induction and support, augmented by regular meetings designed to ensure their competence and facilitate their integration. In consequence there is evidence that hourly paid lecturers, who currently deliver up to 40 per cent of all teaching in English, are well qualified, effectively inducted and well supported. Nonetheless, the University has responded to the concerns of previous external reviewers and external examiners at the extent to which hourly paid lecturers are currently used within the discipline. Noting that reductions in the permanent staffing complement have been associated with a few communication problems, including a failure to inform students in a timely fashion of the withdrawal of some option modules, the University advised the audit team that it intends to redress the balance as circumstances permit.

129 The DSED acknowledged the need to reassure and inform students during this transitional period, and the audit team's meetings with students indicated that this need has been addressed conscientiously and effectively. Students confirmed that the Faculty Welcome Guide enabled them to orientate themselves, and in the team's view the Faculty Course Guide for English is clear and accessible, providing students with all immediately relevant information in relation to their programme, progress requirements, regulations and available learning and personal support.

130 Students, particularly but not exclusively international students, spoke positively of their academic and personal support, provided by teaching staff, the Faculty Administrative Office and the Faculty Student Information Centre. The audit team also noted students' relatively high levels of awareness of institutional provision. The students were aware of the course representative system, which did not, however, bear centrally on their experience, since they were more likely to pursue issues directly with staff than to pass them to course representatives. They were not aware of receiving feedback from representatives on issues raised through them, though course board minutes do show regular student representative attendance. Students expressed uncertainty about the role and identity of personal tutors, and were unaware of either the SU Council or the existence of Student Staff Consultative Committees.

131 The audit team, having reviewed a number of annual monitoring reports, confirms that they constitute an effective monitoring procedure, that action plans are precise and time-limited and that responsive actions are appropriately recorded. The team also notes, however, that the rate of return of unit evaluation questionnaires is only slightly over 50 per cent, and encourages the Department to explore ways of increasing this. In the view of the team, academic staff have a clear understanding of how subject-level monitoring processes relate to those at faculty and institutional level.

132 The audit team read a selection of external examiners' reports, which were overwhelmingly positive, confirming in particular that the academic standards applied are comparable to those in other higher education institutions and appropriate to their levels in the FHEQ. The assessed work seen by the team showed that students receive detailed, constructive and pertinent feedback.

133 Comments on learning resources from staff and students were generally positive, partly in consequence of a recent increase in the funding of library stocks in English, students particularly

commending the level of IT provision in the Learning Resources Centre. Academic staff were appreciative of staff development opportunities, and particularly of the competitive learning and teaching fellowships which were seen as contributing to the enhancement of the Department's learning and teaching culture.

134 On the basis of the available evidence the audit team concludes that the quality of the learning opportunities and the standard of achievement in English are suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

Law

135 The DAT for Law covered all three programmes offered by the Department of Law: a full and part-time LLB; a BA Combined Honours Law field; and the Graduate Diploma in Legal Studies/Common Professional Examination (CPE), which enables non-law graduates to qualify for the practice course for intending solicitors and barristers. The relatively brief DSED, written for this audit, was accompanied by substantial programme monitoring reports, programme specifications and programme guides. The programme specifications, developed with reference to the *Subject benchmark statement* for law, the FHEQ and the requirements of the professional bodies, offer a thorough analysis of how the benchmark skills and outcomes map on to curricula and assessment. Programme guides were clearly written and offered evidence that skills were mapped on to outcomes and also provided pertinent generic marking descriptors which go beyond those in the benchmark statement. The DSED adequately explains the location of the Graduate Diploma as an honours level programme within the FHEQ.

136 The Monitoring Report for academic year 2003-04 provides full progression profiles by ethnicity, gender and age. It offers national comparisons, supplies a commentary which notes the steps taken to improve year one progression rates through the Legal Skills Foundation Unit, and notes the need to give further consideration to the reasons for performance differentials. Annual monitoring reports contain extensive analyses of progress in relation to learning and teaching, assessment, academic guidance and general student support, along with progression data and profiles. They identify new action points, report on progress made in respect of the preceding year's points and highlight examples of good practice, which in turn are disseminated through events organised by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit. Annual monitoring reports are reviewed by the Faculty Academic Standards Committee, whose Chair provides full feedback to the author of the Report.

137 The audit team reviewed a three-year run of external examiners' reports. These expressed positive views about the standards set for awards, student achievement and the fairness of decision-making procedures. The Department considers the reports carefully, responding to recommendations in a timely and appropriate manner and including the responses in the following year's monitoring report. The team also notes that the Department makes use of external examiners' attendance at the University to conduct unit reviews with the teaching teams, and regards this as a rigorous process assisted by the use of a well-designed Unit Report pro forma.

138 Assessment strategies have been designed to take account of the University's Core Skills Policy; assessment practices are consistent with institutional procedures. The audit team's sampling of coursework and examination marking verified that moderation and double marking occur as claimed. Appropriate feedback on performance is provided, and students whom the team met expressed satisfaction with it. Though both the DSED and the institutional SED noted that the phased introduction of a new student information system created problems for the 2004 awards and progression boards, departmental staff supported the institutional claim that these problems have now been resolved.

139 The audit team was provided with examples of assessed work from all programmes included in the DAT. It was satisfied that the nature of the assessment and standard of achievement meet the expectations of the programme specifications, including those concerning the *Subject benchmark statement* for law, and were appropriate to the awards to which they led. The team saw all departmental programme guides, which were generally clear and helpful. Students advised the team that they appreciated the accessibility and quality of the information they received.

140 The audit team saw evidence to support the Department's claim that there have been steady improvements in the teaching environment and library resources in recent years, but the DSED acknowledged there has until recently been a need for more effective student usage of the VLE. The team saw current statistics showing high student usage of the VLE, which is now compulsory for level 1 units, and was advised by departmental staff that the Department is committed to developing a more creative use of it. Students expressed strong satisfaction with the library, electronic resources and the help of the law librarian. They considered departmental staff accessible and approachable, and particularly valued the Year 1 personal tutoring system. Both staff and

students highlighted the effective links which exist between the Department and the Learning and Development Centre.

141 In the context of enhancement, the DSED noted that the Department, working with central support, organised a number of staff development events. The audit team received a detailed report on the wide range of development activity undertaken by law staff, much of it relating to the enhancement of teaching quality.

142 The DSED notes that full-time staffing resources have improved, with a consequent reduction in reliance on hourly paid lecturers to the target level of 20 per cent, and it was confirmed by hourly paid staff that they are increasingly integrated into the Department, for example, by payment for attending course meetings, encouragement to participate in staff development activities and engage with the appraisal scheme, and the provision of mentors. Students who met the team expressed satisfaction with the quality of hourly paid teaching and the accessibility of the staff concerned.

143 The minutes of course boards form part of the evidence base of the monitoring reports. These minutes were made available to the audit team and demonstrate that the attendance of student representatives is generally good, that boards discuss a range of issues raised by students and that decisions are followed through. Students advised the team that the system is an effective means of providing them with influence on course-related issues of concern to them.

144 On the basis of the available evidence the audit team concludes that the quality of the learning opportunities and the standard of achievement in Law are suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

Sociology, Social Policy and Politics

145 The DAT for Sociology, Social Policy and Politics covered all degree schemes delivered by the Department of Social and Policy Studies at undergraduate single and joint honours level. These comprised the Social and Policy Studies Undergraduate Scheme, with pathways in International Politics, European Policy, Citizenship, Sociology, Sociology, Social Policy and International Social Policy; undergraduate programmes in Criminology and Early Childhood Studies; masters' level provision in European Public Policy, European Politics, Social Research Methods and Development Studies; and a number of collaborative programmes with European HEIs. The DSED derived from internal documents, including minutes of undergraduate and

postgraduate management meetings and curriculum meetings, annual monitoring reports, periodic review reports, and Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) commentaries.

146 All programme specifications, including those for combined honours degrees, were included with the DSED and informed by relevant subject benchmark statements. Explicit reference was made to the FHEQ at undergraduate and postgraduate levels; PSRB requirements were addressed where relevant.

147 The University's commitment to recruiting students with non-standard entry qualifications is reflected departmentally, where consideration of recruitment issues has led to a level 3 collaborative arrangement with Pole Universitaire in France, and to replacing part-time evening provision with a more flexible approach to the main programme. Retention and progression problems identified in the Combined Honours Scheme as a whole, and some fields in particular, have been addressed following analysis of the relevant data at departmental as well as institutional level. For example, annual monitoring reports led to the creation, in 2001-02, of the present shared degree framework, with the addition of new pathways, each of which is now offered as a combined honours field, as well as to greater unit sharing.

148 The DSED distinguished between retention and progression rates, noting that, in spite of the lack of many students' recent educational experience, some who do not progress immediately nevertheless continue on the programme, albeit over a longer time period. In this they are aided by the University's regulatory changes (see paragraphs 18 and 69) and the consequent modification of the assessment programme, and are well supported by central services. While the longer term impact of the regulatory changes has yet to be fully assessed, the Department is optimistic that it will be positive, pointing both to the fact that progression rates have remained high at all levels for master's programmes and to steady improvements in graduates' employment and postgraduate registration levels. Overall the audit team believes the Department follows institutional recruitment, retention and progression policies and can justifiably claim to be contributing to the University's enhancement agenda.

149 The University's validation and periodic review policies appear to be followed within the Department, and staff partially attribute enhancement in relation to work placement, skills assessment, equality and diversity, widening participation and retention (particularly of combined honours students) to these policies. Annual monitoring is conducted at

programme, departmental and faculty levels, with student representatives involved throughout; and departmental staff confirmed to the audit team that issues identified in annual monitoring are identified and addressed robustly. This takes place both in an away day and through the appropriate committee structure, from programme to departmental to faculty to institutional level, with Quality and Standards Committee ultimately endorsing an action plan.

150 The DSED identified instances where external examiners' comments have contributed to minor changes being made at programme and unit levels. The audit team studied a range of external examiners' reports, noting that overviews had taken place at departmental, faculty and institutional levels, and that comments had been carefully addressed. Nonetheless, staff acknowledged to the team that, while it is good practice to consult the relevant external examiner before making programme modifications, such consultation does not invariably occur. In addition, the team noted that, while staff claimed that external examiners receive full documentation, evidence from some reports indicates that this is not always so.

151 The audit team reviewed assessed work at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and across the range of marks, and considers that the work it saw is appropriate to the relevant awards and their location in the FHEQ. The Department uses feedback forms for commenting on student work, which, in the view of the team, facilitate the production of appropriate and relevant feedback.

152 The audit team reviewed a range of student handbooks, and students who met the team demonstrated a strong awareness of University regulations in key areas, such as ethical procedures in research, relating to their own rights and responsibilities. The team is satisfied that students' voices are heard by means of end of unit feedback, course boards and personal communications with staff. While the team noted that none of the student representatives it met had received training for their role (albeit that they thought training might be available) the availability of less formal channels of communication diminishes the impact on the student experience of any limitations in the representative system.

153 Research students receive regular supervision and appear to receive timely and helpful feedback. Nonetheless not all postgraduate students employed to teach undergraduate students have been prepared for the role by staff development programmes or the use of an experienced mentor. While no specific

problems with the teaching of such students were identified, any lack of training and support can potentially be detrimental to the quality of the student experience and, given that training in assessment is not compulsory, to the maintenance of standards.

154 Overall, however, students who met the audit team appreciated the quality of their learning experience and the support they received, particularly though not exclusively in relation to overcoming learning difficulties (even though the team noted the absence of a systematic assessment of individual learning needs within the University framework). Students especially welcomed the high quality of teaching and the vibrancy of a culturally diverse student community.

155 On the basis of the available evidence the audit team concludes that the quality of the learning opportunities and the standard of achievement in Sociology, Social Policy and Politics are 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

156 Students made varying observations to the audit team about their experience of published and other information. An observation in the SWS that students were not always well informed about appeal procedures was supported by SU officers but not by other students, who advised the team that, while not knowing the detail of complaint and appeal procedures, they knew where to seek it and how to obtain support in using it. Again, while some students indicated that they had encountered difficulty in obtaining programme and module information others pointed out that it was almost invariably available on the University's website. In the light of these varying comments the University may wish to confirm that information relevant to their learning and other needs is clearly accessible to the student body as a whole.

157 The audit team confirms that materials provided for the audit demonstrated the general availability of programme and unit handbooks, that student groups whom it met in the discipline audit trails indicated that they had encountered no difficulty in obtaining them, and that the student satisfaction survey rates the availability and usefulness of programme and unit handbooks quite highly.

158 While University regulations require assessed work to be returned to students with appropriate feedback, there is no single policy concerned with the expected timescale for such feedback, though the audit team was informed that such policies were available at faculty level. In one case the team found that policy is clearly stated in the Faculty Staff Handbook, in another it is part of a set of assessment protocols, while in the remaining two faculties guidance is at programme level. Formal timescales for the return of work vary between three and six weeks, but the team learned that these are not always met, and students reported cases in which work, or comments on it, had not been returned at all. The team notes that the student satisfaction survey also highlights problems with the speed of feedback, although the quality of feedback was perceived rather more positively. The University is advised to develop appropriate procedures to ensure a central overview of faculty practices with respect to the provision of timely feedback on assessed work in order to ensure both that written commitments are adhered to and also the comparability of the student experience across the institution.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

159 Senior staff within the University recognise the complexity of student progression and retention data within an institution that offers varied and flexible provision. The new student record system, when fully operational, is expected to provide reliable information at the level of individual units and to allow direct access to reports from anywhere in the institution. Some teething problems were reported to the audit team, including inaccuracies in published results in academic year 2004-05, though it is anticipated that improved data entry and checking will significantly reduce such errors in future.

160 The recent appointment of a Director of External Relations and Communications has led to the introduction of a formal signing-off procedure for all material for which his office is responsible. This includes all advertising, and, although the audit team was informed that in some cases publicity material is still released without the appropriate checks, the team accepts that when this occurs those concerned are reminded of the appropriate procedures, noting also the current attempt to improve communications between the University centre and faculties in order to address this and any related issues. Staff from partner colleges who met the team indicated that they understood the procedure, though no formal protocol exists.

161 At the time of the audit no specific procedures were in place to ensure the accuracy of material placed on the University's website. A web manager has, however, recently been appointed, a web policy is being planned, the home page has been redesigned in corporate style and this is now being 'rippled down' to faculties, the University is currently considering how programme specifications might be linked to the on-line prospectus, and it intends to enhance its web team for a six month period to review the site as a whole.

162 The development of programme specifications was initiated in academic year 2000-01; since the following year all new programmes and those undergoing review have been required to be presented in this form; and since the end of academic year 2002-03 all existing programmes have been required to have programme specifications in place. These deadlines were largely met, though maintaining and updating the specifications has occasionally presented challenges. It is now a requirement to attach the programme specification to annual monitoring reports, however, and, while the University believes the prescriptive nature of the programme specifications makes them of only limited use to students, it claims now to have structures in place to encourage faculties to ensure that their specifications are up-to-date and accurate.

163 The provision of qualitative and quantitative information required in connection with HEFCE 2003/51 is the responsibility of the Head of the Quality Unit. It was confirmed to the audit team that all data have been loaded and that statistical results are an accurate reflection of the data submitted to the Higher Education Statistics Agency in November 2003.

Findings

Findings

164 An institutional audit of London South Bank University (the University) was undertaken during the period 7 to 11 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 United Kingdom degree-awarding body. As part of the audit process and reflecting protocols agreed with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals and Universities UK, the audit included consideration of examples of institutional processes at work at the level of courses through discipline audit trails (DATs), together with examples of these processes operating at the level of the institution as a whole. This section of the report summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged during the audit, and making recommendations to the University for action to enhance current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

165 The University has reviewed and significantly restructured its committee system during the last three years. The membership of the Academic Board has been revised, in part to reflect the reduction to four of the number of faculties, and the Board has reviewed its effectiveness and agreed revised ways of managing its business. The subcommittees reporting to the Board have also undergone substantial change, most significantly through the creation of a Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) with overarching responsibility for the management of the standards and quality of taught programmes and of learning and teaching.

166 QSC receives reports from subcommittees, both centrally- and faculty-based, on issues including annual monitoring, learning and teaching, external examiner nominations and collaborative arrangements. The Committee operates predominantly at strategic level, with its sub-committees discharging operational responsibilities formerly devolved to QSC's predecessor committees. QSC appears an effective means of overseeing the University's quality framework.

167 In spite of a standardised structure for certain key faculty committees, faculties have considerable flexibility in how they exercise their delegated powers, and the level of oversight to which they are subject makes possible some inconsistencies in the quality of the student experience across the institution. The University is accordingly advised to

develop appropriate procedures to ensure a clearer oversight of faculty practices.

168 New programme proposals are subject to a two-stage process. The first entails consideration of the strategic suitability of the proposal and its resource implications; the second, detailed consideration by a review panel with appropriate external representation designed to ensure both the comparability of standards with national expectations and the programme's alignment with the Academic Infrastructure. The Academic Board delegates powers to validation panels to accept or reject proposals and to impose and sign off conditions. This delegation to a range of differently constituted panels raises the possibility of inconsistency of decision-making, and, both for this reason and to strengthen its oversight of the process generally, the University is advised to reconsider the wisdom of this approach.

169 All programmes, whether delivered on-campus, through distance or distributed methods or through collaborative partners, are monitored annually at both programme and unit level and, after close consideration at faculty level, are further considered, in summary form, at an annual monitoring event which in turn reports to QSC. While the merit of integrating the consideration of collaborative programmes is appreciated, a possible side-effect of doing so is that common problems and issues emerging there escape detailed consideration. For this reason it would be desirable for the University to enhance its annual monitoring of collaborative programmes.

170 The University requires that all programmes be reviewed and revalidated at least once every eight years, although in practice reviews take place more frequently than this. In addition, it has recently introduced a series of subject reviews based on subject groupings guided by JACS codes, to be undertaken on a three-year cycle. Though it would be premature to comment on the effectiveness of this dual review system it appears sound in principle.

171 The University has taken detailed note of the reports of QAA subject reviews and acted upon them. Scores have steadily increased from a relatively low base. The report of the continuation audit in 2002 has also been carefully considered, and an accurate analysis of the outcomes was made available to the audit team.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

172 The University considers external examiners critical in standard setting. Their appointment, induction and support appear satisfactory, as does the

manner in which their reports are responded to and acted upon; though not all of them currently have the opportunity to comment on examination papers - a matter which the University is addressing. External examiners are charged with confirming both the appropriateness of the level of assessment to the learning outcomes approved at validation and the comparability of the standards required to those at other institutions. They are for the most part complimentary about student attainment, though a minority have commented on the disparity between the highest and lowest achievement levels and on some students' poor English and standard of literacy. In addition, a small minority appears not to be wholly familiar with institutional examining procedures, though there is no evidence that this has had a detrimental effect on the integrity of the process.

173 Validation panels normally include appropriate external representation, usually from other universities or professional bodies. The University's vocational orientation means that it has extensive and frequent contact with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, and while in all recent cases the outcome of reviews by such bodies have been positive, a more systematic institutional scrutiny of PSRB reports in the future would help ensure the comparability of the student experience. Overall the University has in place effective systems for setting and maintaining standards.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

174 The University has in place arrangements to enable student opinion to be represented at every institutional level, though the processes of election and representation do not function equally effectively. At their best, these arrangements are appropriate, and the audit team regards the institution and work of the Student Affairs Committee which, reporting directly to the Academic Board and the Board of Governors, is able to facilitate prompt action on points of student concern at the highest level of the University as a feature of good practice. Nevertheless, the University recognises that difficulties exist elsewhere, and the team recommends that it continues to address them, giving consideration to the most effective way of ensuring students involvement in discussing cross-programme issues at faculty level.

175 The University considers the collection and effective use of student feedback essential to monitoring, and has recently instituted standardised unit evaluation questionnaires and report forms which permit comparative analysis across the institution and

across time. The annual student satisfaction survey provides data for full and detailed reports to the Academic Board, which is consequently in a position to be confident that it has reliable information on the quality of the student experience.

176 The University's aim to be a student-centred institution with academic and personal support and guidance critical to its mission is reflected in its Learning Experience Strategy. Following recent academic restructuring, responsibility for learning support resources has been placed within the remit of a single pro-vice-chancellor, ensuring that issues of concern are brought to senior management attention. The Learning and Development Centre, the key agency for both academic and personal support, is very highly regarded by students, and has developed a Core Skills Policy that commits the University to embedding the development of core skills within the curriculum. The team regards this initiative as a feature of good practice, noting also the high quality of the University's provision for personal development planning, the materials developed to support students in this area constituting a model of good practice. In addition, the University is currently undertaking a major review of its learning support services, and the audit team saw evidence that developments thus far have already contributed to the enhancement of provision.

177 At faculty level student information centres have been established, and these are valued by students as accessible and helpful local centres of guidance and advice. The audit team also noted the recent appointment of an International Student Adviser and the innovative ways in which he has eased the transition to UK higher education for overseas students. Nonetheless not all aspects of faculty and sub-faculty-level student support appear to work so effectively. Devolved responsibility for the personal tutor system has led to considerable variation in implementation, and this has clear implications for the comparability of service provision. The team recommends that the University give thought to ways in which it might ensure effective institutional oversight of faculty-based personal tutoring in order to reduce these disparities.

178 Aided by a well-established mentoring system and a requirement that newly-appointed academic staff with little or no experience of teaching in higher education take part in the University's Programme for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, the University's procedures for appointing and inducting full-time academic staff appear robust. An appraisal system is in place for all full-time and fractional academic staff, and has been recently revised to ensure that staff development resulting from

appraisal is appropriately aligned with institutional objectives. The new process, which culminates in the production of faculty staff development plans, links to an extensive, responsive and well-publicised range of staff development activities.

179 The situation is, however, very different with hourly paid lecturers, some of whom deliver significant proportions of the curriculum, but where no requirement exists either that they be appraised or attend the Programme for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. While the audit team understands the need for realism about what can be offered to, or demanded of, such staff, it notes the non-implementation of the recommendation of a report that hourly paid lecturers delivering all or the majority of a unit should be included in induction, appraisal and staff development procedures.

180 The team noted particular weaknesses in the preparation of research students employed to teach, and advises the University to monitor the use of, and support given to, hourly paid lecturers across all programmes, and in particular to ensure that all postgraduate research students undertaking teaching duties receive appropriate preparation, training and support.

181 The audit team identified a number of recent initiatives designed to facilitate the spread of good practice in learning and teaching, including an annual conference and new promotions criteria permitting a career path to chair level based on excellence in teaching, and including teaching fellowships, of which two are reserved for staff from partner colleges teaching on the University's programmes.

Outcomes of discipline audit trails

Engineering

182 From its study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and professional body accreditation reports, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team concludes that the standard of student achievement in Engineering is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). Programme specifications demonstrate the use of the *Subject benchmark statement* for engineering and fit within the University's regulatory framework. Courses are adequately resourced, particularly with respect to laboratory provision, handbooks are available at programme and module level, a representative system is in place and students know where to find information on complaints and appeals. Research students are satisfied with the

support provided by supervisory teams, though training in research methods is not mandatory.

183 There is variable intra-faculty practice in respect of annual monitoring and the provision of feedback to students. Some of these issues have been noted by the recent subject group review report, and the action plan resulting from this should lead to greater consistency.

English

184 From its study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and the annual monitoring process, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team concludes that the standard of student achievement in English is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. Programme specifications are available, demonstrate the use of the English benchmark and fit within the University's regulatory framework.

185 English has been significantly affected by institutional restructuring, and is now a component of a multidisciplinary department. Students have been kept generally abreast of changes affecting their experience, though there is evidence that communication problems have occurred as a result of reductions in the permanent staffing complement. Programmes are adequately resourced in terms of learning support, and facilitated by wide-ranging and user-friendly handbooks, a course representative system and appropriately close informal relationships between students and staff, a high proportion of whom are currently hourly paid lecturers, who currently deliver up to 40 per cent of all teaching within the discipline.

Law

186 From its study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports, the annual monitoring process and professional body accreditation reports, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team concludes that the standard of student achievement in Law is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. Programme specifications are available, demonstrate the use of the *Subject benchmark statement* for law and fit within the University's regulatory framework.

187 Students are very positive about the quality of the teaching and support delivered by departmental staff, the Learning and Development Centre and the Learning Resource Centre. The audit team accepts the department's claim that its staff play a significant role in nurturing students, have a good understanding of student needs and show confidence and enthusiasm in the delivery and development of programmes in Law.

Sociology, Social Policy and Politics

188 From its study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and the annual monitoring process, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team concludes that the standard of student achievement in Sociology, Social Policy and Politics is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. Programme specifications are available, demonstrate the use of the appropriate benchmarks in combined as well as single honours programmes, and fit within the University's regulatory framework.

189 Students are very positive about the quality of the teaching and support delivered by departmental staff and about the quality of the central support available to them. The audit team particularly notes that the Department demonstrates a strong commitment to the University's diversity and enhancement agendas, to both of which it can justifiably claim to be making a useful and constructive contribution.

The institution's use of the Academic Infrastructure

190 The Quality and Standards Committee and, as appropriate, the Research Degrees Committee, have responsibility, among other things, for the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, and Academic Board receives an annual report on the University's alignment with the *Code*. Programme specifications and the FHEQ are considered at validation and review panels, and all members of academic staff are expected to be aware of subject benchmarks. The evidence from all DATs conducted in the course of this audit is that the Academic Infrastructure is fully engaged with by the University, and that minimal expectations are sometimes exceeded. In Law, for example, programme guides provide generic marking descriptors which specify descriptors for a starred first, and compensatable, non-compensatable and irredeemable fails.

191 The Handbook on Quality Management and Enhancement confirms the use of all external reference points at the time of programme validation to ensure comparability with awards made elsewhere. External examiners comment conscientiously on student attainment in relation to FHEQ level descriptors, and the knowledge and skills detailed in relevant benchmark statements are appropriately used. Overall the University engages willingly and often imaginatively with the Academic Infrastructure.

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

192 The SED provided a useful description of the University's main committees, procedures and key personnel as they apply to the management and enhancement of quality and the assurance of standards. It included the University's reflection on its framework for managing quality and standards, which has been strategically developed since 2001. The SED emphasised throughout the University's re-evaluation of its mission as a teaching-led institution, placing the student experience at its heart and emphasising diversity and employability. The audit team found the mission and emphasis of the SED fully reflected in the audit meetings with staff and students. The SED supported confidence in the University's capacity for reflection and self-evaluation.

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

193 The SED expressed the University's commitment to quality enhancement in the form of specific corporate objectives within its Strategic Development Plan. These objectives are underpinned by a set of key and supporting strategies such as the Learning Experience Strategy, the Research Strategy and the Enterprise and Innovation Strategy. Some of these are, however, aspirational in nature and would benefit from the inclusion of further measurable objectives and targets.

194 The University has completed a review of its key deliberative committees and a new committee structure is now in place. Although it is as yet too early to assess the effectiveness of this, it should, as it becomes established, and provided steps are taken to ensure institutional oversight of validation and review processes, lead to an improved information flow, enhancing the ability of the Academic Board in particular to discharge in full its responsibilities with respect to both the maintenance of standards and the enhancement of quality.

195 Information concerning student experience is gathered in part through the recently revised student satisfaction survey, and fed into the deliberations of both the Academic Board and the Board of Governors. The University argues that staff performance is a key to the enhancement of the student experience, and both the institution of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit and the closer alignment of the appraisal system and staff development provision reflect this view.

Reliability of information

196 The University's recent appointment of a Director of External Relations and Communications has led to the implementation of improved procedures for monitoring and signing off published information, both electronic and printed. This includes marketing and advertising material and relevant materials produced by partner colleges, although at present no formal protocol is in place for the latter.

197 An improved student record system is currently close to completion, and though the limitations of the present system mean that data are not invariably reliable, the situation is expected to improve as the new system beds in and data collection processes and procedures are updated to make full use of its flexibility.

198 Although the students' written submission identified some areas of concern, the audit team's discussion with groups of students, combined with student satisfaction survey data, suggested that students were for the most part satisfied with the availability and reliability of information. The one exception to this was the speed of receipt of feedback on assignments, where policy and practice vary considerably across the institution and published commitments are not invariably honoured. The team advises the University to monitor faculty practices in this area, to ensure both that published commitments are adhered to and the comparability of the student experience.

199 The audit team confirms that programme specifications are in place, that the University is currently on target to make available the information required by HEFCE 03/51, and that quantitative information accurately reflects that submitted to the Higher Education Statistics Agency.

Features of good practice

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

- the achievement, in the light of a re-evaluation of the University's educational role, of a corporate commitment to becoming a teaching-led institution, placing the student experience at its heart and emphasising diversity and employability (paragraphs 5, 19 and 86)
- the empowerment of students to identify and enhance their skills through embedding the Core Skills Policy in the curriculum and developing a set of effective, innovative and attractive PDP materials (paragraphs 67, 101, 102 and 103)
- the institution of an influential committee dedicated to enhancing the student experience, with direct access to the Board of Governors and Academic Board (paragraph 74).

Recommendations for action

201 The University may wish to consider the advisability of:

- developing appropriate procedures to ensure a central overview of faculty practices in order to ensure the comparability of the student experience across the institution (paragraphs 29, 34, 71, 76, 107, 121 and 158)
- inviting Academic Board to monitor and review validation panels' decisions in respect of new programme proposals, in order to maintain institution-wide consistency (paragraphs 40, 41, 49 and 52)
- monitoring across all programmes the use of, and support given to, hourly-paid lecturers (paragraphs 88, 89, 122 and 128)
- ensuring that all postgraduate research students undertaking teaching duties receive appropriate preparation, training and support (paragraphs 93 and 123).

202 The University may wish to consider the desirability of:

- ensuring the effective reporting on collaborative arrangements to the Annual Monitoring Event, so that good practice can be shared and common problems identified and addressed (paragraphs 47 and 48)
- ensuring, in collaboration with the Students' Union, that student representatives are appropriately prepared for their role (paragraphs 73 and 75).

Appendix

London South Bank University's response to the audit report

London South Bank University welcomes the outcome of the institutional audit and the audit team's judgement of broad confidence 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. The University appreciates the professional and courteous manner in which the audit team conducted all meetings with staff and students.

The University considers this outcome as an endorsement of its explicitly stated mission and educational role, and acknowledgment of the ownership of these by the University community. We are particularly pleased that the audit team identified as a feature of good practice the corporate commitment to placing the student experience at the heart of the institution and emphasising diversity and employability. The highlighting by the audit team of the contribution to empowering students made by the Core Skills Policy and the effective, innovative and attractive Personal Development Planning materials was most pleasing.

The audit team's acknowledgment that the major changes to the University since 2001 have been competently managed is most welcome, as too is the point that the overall impact has been beneficial for the University and its students. We believe that we are now at the stage in the University's approach to embedding change where can build on this strong foundation and bring about enhancements as recommended by the audit team. In particular these will focus on the comparability of the student experience across the institution. The findings of the audit will thus consolidate the University's approach to quality management and plans for future development.

The University will be responding positively to the report's findings and will address not only the suggestions for further action, but other areas identified as being in need of enhancement. Some are already in hand in particular in respect of increased support both to research students undertaking teaching and to hourly paid lecturers, which the University regards at least in part as overlapping matters.

