

**University of Bath**

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Institutional audit

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## Preface

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

## The purpose of institutional audit

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

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

## Judgements

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

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

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

## Nationally agreed standards

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

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

## The audit process

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

The main elements of institutional audit are:

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

## The evidence for the audit

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

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

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

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



## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) visited the University of Bath (the University) from 20 to 24 October 2003 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

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

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

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

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

### Outcome of the audit

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

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

### Features of good practice

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

- the quality of the University's engagement with its associated colleges; and
- the organisation and operation of central services for students undertaken by the Department of Student Services.

### 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:

- reflect upon the impact of the University's quality assurance systems on the students' experience, and the effectiveness of those systems for maintaining and enhancing the quality of that experience;
- reflect upon how changes in the structure and organisation of teaching, learning and assessment, and changes in student support mechanisms, might impact on the quality of the students' experience;
- continue to develop programme specifications as a means for clarifying and optimising constructive links between learning outcomes and students' skills and competences, and the learning and assessment methods that support them;
- consider introducing wider cross-faculty representation on degree scheme reviews and on faculty teaching and quality committees; and
- consider how to undertake the systematic collection of information at programme level to support the ability of the University to have a good overview of students' experience.

### **Undergraduate programmes in chemistry; undergraduate programmes in electrical and electronic engineering; MSc in Management; undergraduate programmes in social and policy sciences**

To arrive at these conclusions, the audit team spoke to staff and students, and was given information about the University as a whole. The team also looked in detail at the programmes listed above to find out how well the University's systems and procedures were working at programme level. The University provided the team with documents, including student work and, here too, the team spoke to staff and students. As well as supporting the overall confidence statement given above, the team was able to state that the standard of student achievement in these programmes was appropriate to the titles of their awards and their place in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. The team considered that the quality of learning opportunities available to students in each of the programmes was suitable for a programme of study leading to the named award.

### 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 the Agency has developed on behalf of the whole of

UK higher education. The academic infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The audit found that the University was making effective use of the academic infrastructure to inform its framework for the management of quality and standards.

From 2004, the Agency's audit teams will comment on the reliability of the information about academic quality and standards that institutions will be required to publish, and which is listed in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document 02/15, *Information on quality and standards in higher education*. The audit found that the University was preparing for the publication of the required information, and was awaiting further guidance on the exact form of the information required.

# **Main report**

## Main report

1 An institutional audit of the University of Bath (the University) was undertaken during the period 20 to 24 October 2003. 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 an awarding body.

2 The audit was carried out using a process developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) 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 the Agency at the request of UUK and SCOP, and universal subject review, undertaken by the Agency 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 academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study leading to those awards; for publishing reliable information; and for the discharge of its responsibility as an awarding body. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, the audit included consideration of examples of institutional processes at work at the level of the programme, through four 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 leading to its awards.

## Section 1: Introduction: the University of Bath

### The institution and its mission

4 The University, situated on a modern campus on Claverton Down two miles from the centre of Bath, was awarded its Royal Charter in 1966, although it can trace its history back to the Bristol Trade School of 1856. This became, in turn, the Merchant Venturers' Technical College and, in 1949, the Bristol College of Technology. In 1960, the name was changed to that of the Bristol College of Science and Technology when it became one of the 10 Colleges of Advanced Technology, administered by the

Ministry of Education. It secured university status as the result of the acceptance of the recommendations of the Robbins Committee. Although it has developed from this original base, it retains an emphasis on science and technology, and on links with industry as well as professional education. The University has full degree-awarding powers. It also has a licensing agreement with Edexcel.

5 The University has some 8,700 full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate students and some 2,400 FTE postgraduate students. There are over 1,000 international students registered at the University. The number of part-time undergraduate students is small, although with the University's plans for Foundation degrees and other forms of collaboration, the numbers may grow. About two-thirds of postgraduate students are studying part-time. A significant proportion of the undergraduate students are registered for the sandwich mode of study, including opportunities to work and study abroad. Accreditation by professional and statutory bodies (PSBs) is a significant feature of the University's academic programmes.

6 The University comprises 18 departments organised into three faculties. There are, in addition, three extra-faculty bodies; the Division for Lifelong Learning, the School of Management and the School of Health. Science and technology predominates, although the University has also developed its portfolio in the fields of management, health, social science and the humanities. The University has a presence in Swindon, and has longer-term plans to develop a new campus there on a green-field site. The University is engaging in collaborative provision with colleges of further education (FE) in the South-West region.

7 The University states in its Corporate Plan that its Mission 'is to advance knowledge through high quality research and teaching in partnership with business, the professions, the public services, the voluntary sector and other learning and research providers'. The University regards itself as 'a centre of academic excellence, where high quality research and high quality teaching are mutually sustaining, and where the context within which knowledge is sought and applied is international as much as regional and national. It recognises its role as a strategic partner in the South-West region, and therefore aspires to contribute to the region's economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability'.

## Collaborative provision

8 The self-evaluation document (SED) explained that the University has a small, but growing, amount of collaborative provision. The provision is concentrated on relationships with local FE colleges and a few overseas partners. Local collaborative partners include the City of Bath College, Salisbury College, Swindon College, and Wiltshire College. Overseas collaborative provision includes the Executive Bath MBA in Athens (Hellenic Management Association), the MSc in Construction Management by distance learning (the University of Hong Kong and the British Columbia Institute of Technology), the MSc in Sport and Exercise Medicine (the University of Hong Kong) and the MSc in International Development (Escuela para el Desarrollo, Lima). The University's collaborative activity includes Higher National programmes delivered at FE colleges by licence agreement with Edexcel.

## Background information

9 The published information available for this audit included:

- the information on the University's web site, including its undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses;
- the report of a continuation audit of the University, conducted in 1997 by the Agency, published in May 1998;
- reports of reviews by the Agency of provision at subject level, published since the 1997 continuation audit;
- its Quality Assurance Manual (QA Manual) and a wide range of information relating to the management of standards and quality.

10 The University initially provided the Agency with:

- an institutional SED and appendices;
- discipline self-evaluation documents (DSEDs) for the selected DATs;
- the Corporate Plan and Learning and Teaching Strategy documents;
- details of the governance structure, membership and terms of reference of key committees.

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

also provided the team with access to specified recent reports by PSBs as well as access to internal documents, including working documents and committee minutes.

## The audit process

12 Following a preliminary meeting at the University in February 2003, the Agency confirmed that four DATs would be conducted during the audit visit. The Agency received the institutional SED and supporting documentation in June 2003. On the basis of the SED and other published information, the audit team confirmed that the DATs would focus on:

- the programme leading to the award of MSc in Management;
- undergraduate programmes in electrical and electronic engineering;
- undergraduate programmes in social and policy studies; and
- undergraduate programmes in chemistry.

13 The DATs were aligned with the format of the University's internal periodic review, which is based upon programmes or groups of programmes. The Agency received the DSEDs, accompanied by their programme specifications, in September 2003. The DSEDs were presented in the form of recent internal review documents, updated for the information of the audit team.

14 At the preliminary meeting for the audit, the students of the University were invited through the University of Bath Students' Union to submit a separate document expressing views on the student experience at the University, and identifying any matters of concern or of commendation with respect to the quality of programmes and standards of awards. They were also invited to comment on the level of representation and influence afforded to them. The Students' Union submitted a detailed document to the Agency in June 2003. The report drew upon a number of sources of information including the analysis of questionnaires. The audit team is grateful to the students of the University for preparing this substantial and helpful written submission.

15 A briefing visit took place from 15 to 17 September 2003 with the purpose of allowing the audit team 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, the students' written submission (SWS) and other documentation provided to the team in advance. At the close of the briefing visit, a programme of meetings for the audit visit was

established by the team and agreed with the University. The team decided that it did not wish to pursue any thematic enquiries during the audit visit.

16 The audit visit took place from 20 to 24 October 2003, and included further meetings with staff and students of the University, both at university level and in relation to the selected DATs. The audit team consisted of Dr M Davies, Mr P J Devlin, Professor W Henderson, Professor J Masson and Dr J Owen. The audit secretary was Ms C Payne. The audit was coordinated for the Agency by Dr D J Buckingham, Assistant Director.

### **Developments since the previous continuation audit**

17 The Agency conducted a continuation audit of the University in December 1997, the report of which was published in May 1998. The report commended the University for a number of aspects of its work including ensuring that research actively supports teaching; the rigour of its review process; the responsiveness to the needs of professional practice; the effectiveness of its support for staffing; the monitoring of staff appraisal and its internal communication strategy with respect to quality assurance issues. Six points for further consideration were made: ensuring that all collaborative arrangements were secured by signed memoranda of cooperation; ensuring that students receive timely feedback; ensuring that the consent of mid-programme students is obtained when proposing changes to assessment regulations; ensuring that students are furnished with a complete set of course regulations; reviewing modular scheme regulations to ensure greater consistency in the treatment of mitigating circumstances; and clarifying the formal arrangements for approving publicity and promotional material. It was suggested that the University may wish to consider the desirability of: streamlining the quality assurance arrangements; clarifying expectations about placements; and making clear to all staff the criteria for promotion in the research-led University.

18 The University's SED explained the measures that had been taken to address the recommendations of the report of the 1997 audit. Quality assurance of collaborative provision is now within the framework established by the QA Manual, and signed memoranda of cooperation now exist; placements are carefully considered and expectations made clear; programme specifications and handbooks help ensure that students are aware of all programme requirements. The University links research and teaching in a twin mission, and this

raises different questions about promotion criteria than were addressed in the report of the 1997 audit. The audit team was satisfied that effective and timely action had been taken with respect to the recommendations of the continuation audit, although it noted that, while efforts were being made to achieve the improvement in the timeliness of student feedback, there was still work to be done in this respect (see below, paragraph 69).

19 Since 1998 the University has participated in 10 reviews by the Agency of provision at subject level. The University achieved a high aggregate grading in these reviews, including four subject areas which gained the maximum grade in all six aspects of review. A developmental engagement in 2003 in computer science achieved a 'confidence' outcome. The University participated in a survey of distance-learning provision in Hong Kong. The feedback on the survey indicated matters for further development relating to lines of communication, curriculum flexibility and localisation of case-study material. The University has addressed these matters.

20 The SED also outlined significant developments within the University since the previous audit. The University has expanded rapidly over the last five years, and the SED made clear that the Claverton campus was operating at the limits of its capacity despite investment in the Library and Learning Centre (LLC) and other facilities. The University semesterised in 1997 and, after five years' experience, is engaging in a review of the structure. At the time of the 1997 audit, the University was in the process of moving from a school structure to a three-faculty structure plus a School of Management. Faculty management functions and committee structures have been reviewed. The University has been engaged in developing its activities in Swindon, and is in the early stage of an ambitious project of expansion on a green-field campus there. In this context, the University recognised in its SED the need to ensure the 'quality and standards of its provision as a multi-campus operation'. The University has also been active in the development of its e-learning profile, making significant use of a commercial system as its preferred web-based learning environment. It has also started to address its information needs through the development of a new system for student record keeping. The audit team, in the course of its activities, explored aspects of all of these developments in relation to their impact on questions of quality, standards and enhancement of the student experience.

## Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

### The University's view as expressed in the SED

21 The University, in its SED, expressed the view that its quality strategy 'is a strength of the current system'. It states that the strategy is based on the three elements of:

- quality control - through the policies, guidelines and procedures set out in the QA Manual;
- quality assurance - verification of adherence to the policies, guidelines and procedures; and
- quality enhancement - a continuous process of identification, improvement and sharing of good practice across the institution.

22 The SED stated that 'departments have a certain degree of autonomy to devise their own quality management structures adapted to the professional and academic demands of their provision', and that both 'staff and students of the University have a responsibility to ensure that their actions promote quality education'. In respect of the QA Manual as the vehicle for setting out the procedures of the quality strategy, it recognised that 'further effort needs to be made to promulgate its logic and utility more widely among academic staff'.

23 The SED made clear that the quality strategy, and the means of its implementation, continued to develop and evolve, and it identified strengths and areas for further development of the current system. Strengths identified by the University in its SED included the development of the QA Manual, the 'representative, deliberative and accountable' nature of the committee system, the 'external participation in the decision-making processes and wider involvement in University life' process, the 'robust and reliable system of external examining', the 'well established procedures for dealing with student complaints appeals', and the governance of postgraduate degrees and of collaborative provision. Areas for further development included significant enhancement activities such as the implementation of a system of internal academic audit, the development of personal development planning (PDP) for students and the development of e-learning. Many of the areas identified by the SED as strengths and areas for development were explored by the audit team with students and staff of the University during the briefing and audit visits.

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

24 In the SED, the University outlined its quality strategy, stating that the implementation of the quality strategy is 'primarily the responsibility of academic departments,' but that it relied on placing responsibilities on individuals capable of their effective discharge. The SED went on to state that the University's committee structure was 'designed to provide an effective two-way channel of communication between practitioners and policy-makers'. The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), which reports to the Senate, has formal responsibility for the development and implementation of the quality assurance framework. At an operational level, the SED explained that 'responsibility for quality and standards is delegated to faculties and departments', and that 'all faculties must now have a teaching and quality committee'. Boards of studies are formally responsible for academic quality and standards, but this work is generally delegated to faculty teaching and quality committees, comprising directors of studies from each department. Directors of studies undertake much of the work of managing programmes, but all departments have a committee dealing with 'operational issues relating to teaching, quality and research'. The University monitors the effectiveness of these quality structures through annual and periodic reviews and its internal academic audit process.

25 The policies, procedures and guidelines of the University's quality assurance framework are set out in the QA Manual. The QA Manual is circulated widely to faculties, heads of department, directors of studies, departmental administrators and other key personnel. In some cases, the QA Manual provides requirements and a framework within which departments separately provide the details, such as assessment schemes and rules for progression, and additional guidance is provided for directors of studies on the University's web site. The University stated in its SED that the QA Manual 'does not have a status of a code of practice in itself...but attempts to clarify what must be adhered to and what is considered good practice'. The status of the QA Manual was identified in the SWS as being of some concern to students, reporting, for example, that not all departments complied with the provision relating to giving feedback to students on coursework. The audit team noted from QAC minutes that one faculty had sought to have this requirement relaxed, but had been advised that departments needed to comply.

26 In its SED, the University stated that it assured the standards of its awards via a 'robust assessment framework'. The QA Manual sets out requirements for marking and moderation of assessed work including examinations. All programmes of study are required to have schemes of assessment approved by boards of studies, and boards of examiners are responsible for the application of assessment criteria. There is common guidance relating to the treatment of mitigating circumstances, penalties for late submission and the role of examining boards. The audit team noted that there were differences between faculties in the weighting of the second year of study, and in progression and compensation rules, and that the University's Assessment Working Group was considering how greater standardisation might be achieved.

27 The University has a small amount of collaborative provision both within and outside the UK. It explained in the SED that it enters collaborations only if they are consistent with its Mission and Strategic Plan, and comparable with 'on-campus provision of a similar nature'. Following the publication of the report of the 1997 continuation audit, the University strengthened its procedures in respect of collaborative arrangements. The QA Manual now stipulates that validation, franchise or accreditation arrangements are required to have a formal legal agreement approved by the Senate. Proposals for new collaborative arrangements are additionally considered by QAC before approval. Local collaborations are managed by the Office of Associated Colleges, with link tutors taking responsibility for liaison between the college and the University.

28 From its study of the documentation provided by the University, and its discussions with staff, the audit team was satisfied that the University had established a satisfactory framework for managing quality and standards, comprehensively described in the QA Manual, and was using this effectively to secure the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards. The system places considerable reliance on directors of studies, both in relation to individual programmes and the monitoring of programmes within their faculties. There remain some important differences in the weighting given to parts of degree programmes, but the University is aware of this and is taking steps to introduce greater commonality in the interest of robust assessment practice and fairness to students.

### **The University's intentions for the enhancement of quality**

29 The SED stated the University's belief that 'quality enhancement is integral to all its quality assurance activities', and illustrated the connections between the QA Manual and documents relating to its strategies for learning and teaching, research, communications, human resources and the widening participation. Several of the initiatives outlined in the SED as areas for development included what the University saw as significant enhancement activities in quality management, teaching and learning and student support. Others, while significant, were considered by the audit team to be more routine activities, such as action to ensure the 'systematic completion of unit evaluations' or the establishment of 'more robust processes for identifying and rectifying issues relating to implementation of the QA Manual'. The SED was informative about the stage of development that the University had reached with respect to the implementation of the QA Manual, and in securing enhancement of student experience. To this extent, the SED gave a clear picture of what the University saw as the strengths and weaknesses of its approach to quality enhancement in a decentralised system.

30 It was less clear to the audit team, from the way in which the information was presented within the long lists of 'areas for development', what the University saw as being of key significance and what was of lesser importance. Nor was it always clear to the team of the University's proposed timeframe, since these sections of the SED referred variously to action that had already been taken, action yet to be taken, and temporary inaction. The team gained the impression of a significant level of activity, and a multiplicity of tasks undertaken, being undertaken or to yet to be done, but also of a lack of a sense of closure or prospect of closure of those activities and tasks. The team, therefore, had difficulty in understanding the priority that the University was assigning to different areas for further development. One aspect of the team's difficulty was a lack of reference in the University's documentation to appraising the impact of these areas for further development on the students' experience. The team would therefore encourage the University not only to underpin its approach to quality enhancement with a clearer sense of priorities and proposed timeframes for completion, but also to build into its enhancement projects assessment of their probable impact on students' experience.

## Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

### Approval

31 The University regards its procedures for programme approval as one of its strengths, and describes this system as 'a process approach rather than an "event" approach' which 'allows for continuous enhancement of the proposal throughout the approvals process'. It has a two-stage process for the approval of new programmes. The initial development of new programmes takes place within a department or group of departments in consultation with the Executive Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor and with the Director of Finance. An initial proposal must be formally approved by the relevant faculty board of studies (and by QAC if the proposal involves collaborations or cross-faculty provision), and by the Senate. Full approval necessitates the completion of a proposal document, a programme specification and a scheme of assessment, and similarly requires approval by the committees and the Senate. Subject benchmark statements and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)* are taken into account in the process as part of the University's template for programme specifications. Provision is also made for formal approval of changes to programmes and units by the relevant faculty board of studies, with major changes requiring the submission of a new programme specification and approval by the Senate.

32 From its study of documentation provided by the University, the audit team noted that the template for programme specifications did not indicate how the subject benchmark statements were addressed, and considered that it would therefore be difficult for committee members outside the subject area to be fully aware of how proposals aligned with benchmark statements. The way programme specifications are written does not make it easy to identify when a change in a unit might necessitate a change in programme specification. The team noted that necessary amendments to programme handbooks had not always been made in a timely fashion, although students explained to the team that they would normally be notified of changes in lectures.

33 The audit team noted from its discussions with staff some lack of clarity in the different categories of amendment of proposals, and about the requirements and timescales. The team also noted from the minutes that there had been cases where QAC had approved the quality assurance

arrangements for new programmes even though the documentation was incomplete. While the team accepted that benefits could be gained by facilitating enhancement during the approval process, it considered that these benefits would not be secured if approval could be achieved without a fully-worked proposal being submitted. On balance, however, the team was satisfied that the University was currently maintaining satisfactory oversight of the approval and modification of programmes.

### Annual monitoring

34 Annual monitoring of programmes was introduced by the University in 1999, and the procedures are set out in the QA Manual. Unit coordinators complete a report on their unit, taking account of student feedback and progression data. Currently, the statistical data used in annual monitoring have been provided by the departments and, because of the varying methodologies, have not allowed for reliable comparisons, but the new student record system should overcome this difficulty. Directors of studies make an annual report, which might take the form of a report on an individual programme or a single report for a suite of programmes. The QA Manual specifies that these reports should be discussed first at departmental level and then by faculty teaching and quality committees with a view to identifying good practice and areas for development. Annual reports provide information for the periodic review of degree schemes (see below, paragraph 37). Similar procedures apply in respect of collaborative provision.

35 The University considers that, when properly undertaken, annual review enables reflection on, and enhancement of, units. However, the SED recognised that completion of annual unit evaluations 'requires further development', and notes a perception among some staff that it is 'just a paper exercise' and a burden without a benefit.

36 The audit team discussed the annual monitoring scheme with staff, and read relevant documentation provided by the University, including samples of unit evaluation forms and annual reports. The team was informed by heads of department that staff reflected on units when preparing for the annual report, but such reflection was not necessarily recorded. The views expressed to the team during the DATs about the usefulness of annual monitoring were varied; annual monitoring was seen variously as a chore, as a means of collecting information for periodic review, and as a focus for discussion at a departmental meeting. It was clear to the team that directors of studies were hampered in providing reflective reports where the information provided to them about units

was itself unreflective, and where student feedback related only to units and not programmes. Annual reports are reviewed by faculty teaching and quality committees. Since directors of studies serve on their faculty's committee, the team considered that the directors of study themselves would determine the faculty's view of the level of analysis and reflection acceptable in annual reports. The team formed the view that, as presently operated, the annual monitoring system did not reliably ensure analysis and reflection, and as such its capacity to support the enhancement of programmes within or across departments was restricted.

#### **Periodic review**

37 Following recommendations in the report of the 1997 continuation audit, the University streamlined its processes to align its internal procedures with the requirements of external bodies such as the Agency and relevant PSBs. The University runs three distinct periodic review processes: degree scheme review (DSR), departmental review and internal academic audit. The process for DSR is set out in the QA Manual. DSR is usually held every five years, and QAC is responsible for setting the timetable for reviews. These reviews apply to all taught programmes leading to an award of the University, and therefore also cover the University's collaborative provision. The DSR process involves members of the relevant departments, external academics and employers, and views are sought of graduates and current students. It does not include academic staff from other departments or faculties of the University. Documentation supporting DSR includes annual monitoring reports, external examiners' reports and staff-student liaison committee (SSLC) minutes. Reports of DSRs are considered by the relevant faculty board of studies, and by the faculty's teaching and quality committee before being submitted to QAC for approval. Reports are published on the University intranet, and a progress report is submitted to QAC after six months.

38 Departmental reviews occur on a five-year cycle, and cover past performance and future prospects of departments or support services, stated in the QA Manual to be a 'constructive and developmental process'. The terms of reference for departmental review are established between the department concerned and the review chair, and normally concern teaching, research, management and administration and third stream funding/knowledge transfer. Reports from departmental reviews go to the Executive Committee, and the head of department prepares a plan of action for discussion and submission to the Quality Support Office. There

is a six-month follow-up procedure, where the head of department is invited to update the Executive Committee on progress made with the recommendations of the review.

39 Internal academic audit was introduced during academic year 2002-03, and potentially covers all academic departments, institutes and centres. Audits are undertaken in one department in each faculty with respect to an identified theme. The department to be subject to audit is nominated by the faculty before the theme is identified. Internal academic audit is undertaken by an audit panel comprising the chair of the faculty teaching and quality committee and staff from the Quality Support Office, and may include a representative from another faculty. The audit panel studies departmental audit trails and paperwork against the relevant part of the QA Manual, interviewing the departmental administrator, head of department and director of studies as necessary. The report from this process goes to the departmental committee and the faculty board of studies for consideration, and then to QAC with comments from the faculty board of studies, and with an action plan from the department.

40 In its SED, the University saw periodic reviews as providing the 'opportunity for a comprehensive scrutiny of the programme's performance', and considered them to be a strength and critical to its system of quality assurance and enhancement. The University uses both departmental review and internal academic audit to monitor the effectiveness of departmental quality management structures and processes. The audit team studied examples of reports of departmental reviews, and discussed the process with academic staff. It also looked in detail at those DSR reports which the University submitted for the DATs, discussed the process of compiling them during its meetings with University staff and read committee documentation relating to DSRs.

41 The audit team found that there was variation in the content, tone and reflective style of the DSR reports, and considered that the lack of participation of academic staff of the University from outside the departments responsible for the particular degrees limited opportunities to learn from the process. The team also noted that, where DSR had been combined with accreditation by a PSB, the information in the documentation appeared to be that required by the PSB rather than the broader consideration of issues and the 'developmental outcomes' expected of the DSR process. This limitation of PSB reports to substitute for DSRs had been recognised by some staff who discussed these matters with the team. Staff who met the team accepted that DSRs were sometimes

uncritical, and could provide few examples of enhancement generated through the process. The team noted that, during 2002-03, QAC had required some DSR reports to be rewritten because they lacked the required information or analysis. Nevertheless, it was clear from QAC minutes that the progress of recommendations was followed up by QAC, although the team considered that the need to chase up progress might indicate some lack of commitment at departmental level. The team concluded that the DSR scheme was capable of securing a regular periodic overview of the University's programmes, but that the scheme had not always operated reflectively to achieve its full potential to enhance practice within and across departments.

42 There is a possibility of overlap between aspects of the three periodic review processes, and between the PSB reviews to which many departments are subject. The audit team noted the potential for these processes to create a heavy regime of review, and a corresponding perception among some staff that the processes are burdensome. Internal academic audit had been in existence for less than a year at the time of the audit visit. Although internal audit has the potential to reveal both problems and good practice, it was not clear to the team how this process of themed audit by sampling would achieve improvement of practice beyond the departments involved, since the number of possible themes is large, and a long time could elapse before a theme is re-examined. The team recognised the ability of the thematic audit to explore themes which do not naturally fall within the remit of DSR or departmental review. It was, however, unclear about the extent to which the University was expecting internal academic audit to add value beyond its existing review processes if the existing processes have been implemented fully, as designed, to encourage reflection and the dissemination of good practice.

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

43 In its SED, the University stated that it puts 'considerable emphasis on external participation in decision-making processes'. Its revised programme approval process requires comments to be sought from an external examiner or another academic at a comparable institution. DSR panels must include at least one external member, and take account of the views of employers. Departmental reviews also include external members. The University has a long history of incorporating work placements in its degree programmes, and as part of the placement process employers are invited to comment on the

preparedness of students. The University has also attempted to increase its activities with employers through inviting visiting speakers. A Director of Knowledge Transfer has recently been appointed, whose role includes building relationships with regional and national stakeholders. The University regards the involvement of external academics and PSBs in its quality management processes as one of its strengths.

44 The University's claims to make substantial use of external participation in programme approval and periodic review were generally supported by the documents studied by the audit team. The team considered that the developmental approach to programme approval could result in an external reviewer having to comment on a programme not yet in its final form, limiting the usefulness of the external view (see above, paragraph 33). Only the early DSRs in 2001-02 had been undertaken without external representation on the panel, and the DSRs provided for the DATs all involved contributions from external examiners, and included academic staff from other institutions on the review panel. While it may be questioned whether the external examiner who has been involved assuring standards for a substantial part of the review period alone is sufficiently 'external' to the review process (see also below, paragraph 52), the presence of additional external representation on review panels satisfied the team that sufficient strong and scrupulous use was being made of externality in periodic review.

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

45 The University, in its SED, considered the external examining process 'to be one of the key strengths with respect to ensuring quality and standards' and 'believes it has a robust and reliable system of external examining'. The QA Manual sets out comprehensive and detailed procedures for the external examining of taught provision, and the examination of research degrees. External examiners for University degrees are appointed by the relevant faculty board of studies and noted by the Senate; those for HND awards are appointed by Edexcel. From the academic year 2003-04, the University has moved to a licence agreement with Edexcel, so the University will have more control over external examiners for HND awards.

46 Some academic departments invite a new external examiner to the University before the first examination board, to explain how University procedures work, to meet key members of staff and to view student work. Background information is also provided on the units and programmes to be

examined, the process of the examinations boards, and the expectations of the examiner's role. The University does not yet provide a central, formalised induction event, but recognises the need to consider this, and the SED commented that the University was 'awaiting further recommendations from the Agency following the recent round table discussions'.

47 External examiners for degrees and for HNDs complete a report form that is sent to the Vice-Chancellor. The external examiners for Edexcel complete the standard Edexcel report form. Although this does not provide the University with comparable information to that received for the degree awards, Edexcel also appoints a lead examiner who monitors the work of the external examiners and submits a report to the University. The standard report form for University degrees has been modified recently to include more open questions resulting, the SED explained, in 'more qualitative information being provided by the examiners that is of benefit to the department'. Each year, examiners are asked to provide feedback on the appropriateness of objectives and the structure of the programme, the appropriateness of assessment, marking and feedback, arrangements for receiving and reviewing assessment materials, the procedures followed at boards of examiners, comparability of standards with similar institutions, and the response of the department to suggestions made in the previous year. In their final year of tenure they are asked to provide an overview of their term of office which may be passed to the incoming external examiner.

48 All reports of external examiners are reviewed by the Vice-Chancellor and the Senior Assistant Registrar (Quality and Development). They are circulated to the appropriate dean, head of department and the Deputy Chair of the QAC. In the past, responses were made orally on occasions, but written responses from departments are now copied to the Deputy Chair of QAC and the Senior Assistant Registrar (Quality and Development). In some faculties, all the external examiners' reports are circulated and discussed as part of the faculty teaching and quality committee. An overview report is produced annually by the Quality Support Office, highlighting issues that may have an impact on institutional practice or warrant further consideration at an institutional level. This report is submitted to QAC and the Senate. It appeared to the audit team, from its discussions with staff, that the value of this University-wide overview was not fully recognised at departmental level, departments preferring to focus on faculty-level matters arising from external examiners' reports.

The team considered that the function of the overview report in providing an opportunity to 'join up' matters that apply more widely than to a single faculty could usefully be emphasised.

49 External examiners have commended many good practices, and confirm that the University's academic standards are comparable with, or exceed, those at institutions with which they are familiar. The majority of the issues raised by them concerned the academic detail of the programmes for which they were responsible, and consequently had been responded to by the department in question.

50 Recent issues raised by external examiners have included matters of inconsistency of the second-marking procedure, on the variability of the amount and usefulness of written feedback, on more appropriate assessment methods to reflect the learning outcomes, use of marking criteria and use of the full marking range. These issues had all been highlighted in the overview report, and the audit team noted that issues relating to the quality of feedback to students and assessment linked to learning outcomes had been raised by external examiners over a period of time. Issues raised by overview reports prompted the establishment of the Assessment Working Group in November 2000. A matter that has been raised by external assessments, and is also relevant to the effectiveness of the external examining process, is the 'articulation of assessment criteria'.

51 Reports from external examiners for research degrees are noted at faculty boards of studies, ensuring that a formal mechanism is available for matters to be raised by such examiners, and subsequently considered at faculty level.

52 The SED explained that the University 'tends to use the examiners for other purposes'. They are, for example, often used to support the approval of new programmes and in DSRs. The University may wish to reflect upon the extent to which external examiners are able to contribute fully to the externality of DSR panels where they may be put in the position of reviewing their own comments. Overall, the team formed the view that the use of external examiners at the subject level is strong, the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by the Agency, are observed and external examiners make a positive contribution to the security of the academic standards of the University's awards.

## External reference points

53 The University has adopted the precepts of the *Code of practice* into its own internal procedures, in the form of the QA Manual. Although the University's QA Manual was originally produced in 1997, it has, according to the SED, 'undergone significant revision to ensure observance of the precepts [of the *Code of practice*] and to allow further dissemination of good practice'. As each section of the *Code of practice* was published, the University undertook a mapping exercise to compare its own practice with that advocated by the *Code of practice*. For example, for the *Code of practice, Section 9: Placement learning*, although much was already in place, changes were made to the section of the QA Manual dealing with placements, and to the handbooks and briefings given to students before a placement. Other examples of changes made as a result of the mapping exercise include the production of a generic postgraduate handbook, the strengthening of procedures to approve a new collaborative partner, and the introduction of more open questions on the external examiners' report proforma.

54 The SED gave comprehensive coverage of the way that the University had addressed the *Code of practice*. It identified some areas in which the University acknowledges that greater consistency is needed, and recognised that further effort was needed to 'promulgate [the QA Manual's] logic and utility among academic staff'. While the audit team considered the QA Manual to be an excellent vehicle for promoting consistency in quality assurance and enhancement procedures, it endorsed the University's view that there could usefully be a better understanding among academic staff of those parts of the QA Manual that are requirements and those that are guidance.

55 The University has agreed a common format for student transcripts, and intends that students will receive a transcript from 2003 onwards. However, the University's new student and applicant management information system, SAMIS, will need to be provided with a full history of marks if this transcript is to be provided centrally in the short-term, as the University intends.

56 There is a central University template for programme specifications, containing the information in the Agency's guidance. Programme specifications are made available to students on the intranet, and different versions are presented appropriately for different years of entry. Programme specifications were written with the student audience in mind, but much of the information

within them is recast in the programme handbooks, which are used by students as the primary source of information about their programmes of study. When changes are made to the units that make up a programme of study, the impact on the programme specification(s) in which they appear is determined informally, relying on the knowledge of the faculty executive assistants. The audit team formed the view that a more formal method for determining the impact of changing a particular unit would be more reliable, since a change in a unit may not propagate the appropriate changes to all of the necessary programme specifications.

57 Subject benchmark statements and the *FHEQ* are considered 'where appropriate' during programme approval and review, but explicit references are not made to them in programme specifications as a matter of course. Nevertheless, examples of programme specifications seen by the audit team showed that, while the links are not always explicit, these aspects of the academic infrastructure have informed the design of the University's programmes.

58 A large number of the University's programmes are accredited by professional accrediting bodies. These include the majority of departments in the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Engineering and Design, and accreditation by the General Social Care Council (GSCC), the British Psychological Society and the Association of MBAs. Accreditation is normally given for the maximum period of five years, except in the case of new awards in particular departments, where the maximum possible of two years is awarded. A number of departments have either successfully achieved, or are in the process of applying for Investors in People.

59 The Quality Support Office has coordinated an effective analysis of the sections of the *Code of practice* as they have been published by the Agency, and improvements have been made to University procedures as a result. The University acknowledges that these need to become embedded more widely across the institution, although the QA Manual is easily and widely available. The University is tracking national developments on teaching quality information, and is planning to fulfil these requirements. The *FHEQ* and subject benchmark statements are used to inform the design of programmes, although their impact on programme specifications is not always explicit.

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

60 Since the 1997 continuation audit the University has engaged in 10 Agency subject reviews. In most of these the University has achieved a grade close to the maximum. The University had aligned its internal processes so as to prepare for subject review, and had subsequently reviewed its systems following the inception of the institutional audit process.

61 The nature of the portfolio offered by the University is such that many programmes are subject to accreditation by PSBs. The SED notes that 'professional accreditation bodies play a key role in verification of standards' in these programmes. The University states that its 'review process has taken the requirements of the professional bodies into account in an attempt to streamline the accountability requirements on departments'. The University's system for dealing with PSB accreditation is set out in the QA Manual. The procedures provide for DSR to take place a year prior to a PSB review in preparation for it where this is appropriate. From the documents seen by the audit team and the information provided in meetings, it appeared that arrangements were rather more fluid in practice, with departments requesting changes to internal review timing from QAC to accommodate PSB review, and QAC permitting a report prepared for PSB to be treated as a DSR. Although such arrangements would help to control the workload created by reviews, it appeared to the team that PSB submissions might not encourage sufficiently the critical analysis and reflection expected of a DSR. The University later informed the team that the report was the first example of a report prepared for a PSB being used for a DSR.

62 Accreditation submissions are approved by the University's Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) before submission. Accreditation reports are submitted with reports from the head of department to the QAC for consideration, and reported to LTC. The audit team was informed that departments considered it essential to respond to the requirements of professional bodies and give priority to their required changes or additional resources, and that this was recognised by the University. In practice, accreditation reports have generally been positive. Where necessary, the University has been able to provide a timely response to requirements, and the team saw illustrations of such responses. The overall conclusion drawn by the team was that professional body accreditation was a very important part of the quality assurance system at the University, and that this was fully recognised by the

University in the way it prepared for, and responded to, this aspect of external review.

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

63 Students are represented at university, faculty, departmental, and programme level. At university level, student views are represented by the sabbatical officers of the Students' Union. Through these representatives, students are represented on key committees such as the Senate, QAC, LTC and the Graduate Studies Committee. At faculty level, students are represented on the faculty boards of studies. At departmental level, students are involved in both the DSR and departmental review processes. Student representatives are elected by students on each programme to represent their views on the departmental SSLCs.

64 The SWS considered that postgraduate representation is sufficient, and is taken seriously by the University. The submission explained, nevertheless, that communication between postgraduate course representatives and the Postgraduate Association, which is part of the Students' Union, is not formally structured. As a result, postgraduate representatives expressed the view that they lacked sufficient insight to be effective representatives. The audit team's meeting with research students endorsed the view of the SWS that there was room for improvement in the effectiveness of postgraduate student representation.

65 The DATs carried out during the audit confirmed the role of student representatives in DSRs. The SWS considered that DSRs varied quite widely in terms of the number of students involved and how well the students were prepared by the department to participate effectively. The submission also identified a number of matters regarding the operation of SSLCs, which suggested that the University's guidelines on the operation of SSLCs in the QA Manual were implemented inconsistently. Nevertheless, students who met the audit team during the DATs were broadly satisfied with the operation of their SSLCs. An internal audit of the establishment and operation of three SSLCs took place in 2002-03, and the team was provided with the report of one of these internal audits. Recommendations were made in the report for improving the operation of the SSLCs that were audited, but nothing in the report supported the suggestion made in the SWS that the guidelines were operated inconsistently.

66 Since October 2002, a new system has been in place, aimed at increasing the Students' Union involvement in SSLC meetings based at partner colleges. The University's view was that this had proved a very effective method of liaising with students studying at partner colleges, and representatives of partner colleges who met the audit team during the audit visit confirmed that attendance at SSLCs of the link tutor and a representative from the Students' Union had enhanced the effectiveness of the SSLCs.

67 The summary results of the 2002-03 student satisfaction survey (see below, paragraph 68) indicated that students expressed dissatisfaction with the ability of student representatives to influence the decision-making process within the University. None of the students who met the audit team expressed this view. However, since the survey indicated that this was considered an area of importance, the University will no doubt wish to reflect on how best to respond.

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

68 The University's procedures, practices and guidelines on student feedback, as set out in the QA Manual, require that arrangements are in place for the collection of student opinion on both units and programmes of study. Arrangements for obtaining feedback at programme level are discretionary, but evaluation by questionnaire is a widespread method of obtaining feedback at unit level. A University-wide student satisfaction survey was issued for the first time in April 2003. At the time of the audit visit there had been little opportunity for the University to consider the survey, the summary results of which were produced while the audit was taking place.

69 The SED stated that 'formal student feedback is considered by the SSLCs', and students who met the audit team during the DATs gave examples of action taken on student feedback. At unit level, the sample questionnaires seen by the team indicated that, while different departments use different questionnaires, there are strong similarities between some versions, particularly those within the same faculty. At programme level, there is greater variance in the methods of gaining student feedback. According to the SED, discussions were ongoing with respect to producing a set of core questions for use by departments in unit and programme questionnaires, and it was confirmed during the audit that discussions had taken place but that no decisions had yet been reached. Given the variability

in programme feedback and response rate, the team would encourage the University to give further thought as to how it might improve feedback at programme level.

70 The audit team was provided with a copy of the summary results of the 2002-03 student satisfaction survey, and was informed of the process in place for responding to the survey. Departments had received preliminary results at the start of the academic session 2003-04. The team learnt that a formal report on the outcomes of the survey would be made available after the LTC meeting of December 2003, and departments would be required to respond to LTC before the end of the academic session 2003-04.

71 The Alumni Relations Office has undertaken surveys of alumni, although the SED acknowledged that these tended to be 'relatively general rather than programme specific', and explained that some academic departments had started to produce their own surveys for graduates. A number of the support services collect feedback from users or hold focus groups, although the University acknowledged that the gathering of feedback was not undertaken systematically by all services. The University explained that the matter of collection of feedback from students was raised in the 2001-02 review of Student Support Services. One of the terms of reference of the recently established Student Experience and Strategy Committee was the annual evaluation and enhancement of the University's support service provision.

72 The SED stated that employer feedback is gathered from a range of sources, and noted that the student-placement network has resulted in there being strong links with some companies. Employers are asked to comment in student placement reports on the student's achievements and the preparedness for the placement. Employers sit on advisory boards in a number of departments, in the Faculty of Engineering and Design and in the School of Management, and are lay members on the University's Council. However, the audit team did not gain an impression of any systematic collection or use at a university level of feedback from employers, and would encourage the University to consider how it might gain greater structured input to the management of quality and standards from the good links that it has with employers.

### **Progression and completion statistics**

73 The University notes in a report on admission statistics that 'for the first time we have produced a table summarising the number and proportion of

offers we make compared with applicants, and the response of applicants to our offers'. The Recruitment and Admissions Office provides information on undergraduate applications and admissions, broken down by home and overseas students, and compared with the previous year. The conversion rates 'are included for the interest of the Deans' Group', and are used for making comparison with other similar institutions. The University uses data on undergraduate offers made to inform the planning process for the forthcoming academic year, and has started to review its data on entry qualifications during the year following entry.

74 Annual programme monitoring reports contain admission, progression and award data, but only for the year in question. This approach does not allow any trend analysis to be undertaken as part of the annual monitoring process, although data over the previous five years is considered as part of a DSR. First destination data is provided separately by the Careers Office, and is distributed to departments in the February following graduation, but it is not used as part of annual monitoring.

75 In the past, the data for annual monitoring has been provided by the individual departments because academic departments have not had access to the student records system. The methods by which the data have been gathered and presented in reports differ from one department to another, which does not foster meaningful comparison between departments. The SED explained that this situation was changing as a new students record system - SAMIS, becomes implemented. The University's first priority for SAMIS has focused on admission and registration. The University recognises that there is a lack of centrally-held data on student assessment, and the SAMIS project team has been working on this as the next phase of implementation.

76 The SED stated that the University considered its performance on progression and retention rates 'to be well within sector norms', and explained that its guidelines on retention, in the QA Manual, set a threshold of 10 per cent attrition for all undergraduate programmes. Despite this figure being used across the University, the audit team found that comparison tended to be made with the same subject at similar higher education (HE) institutions, rather than with other departments at the University itself. The external examiner from Edexcel has confirmed that the figure for University HNDs is in line with sector norms. Postgraduate retention rates are reported to the Graduate Studies Committee. The SED expressed the University's intention that, as the SAMIS system developed,

'information on postgraduate programmes as well as progression statistics will become available from a central source under agreed common principles'.

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

### **Appointment**

77 The SED explained that the University's approach to appointing teaching staff was to 'attract well-qualified applicants and to appoint on the basis of merit'. The appointment procedure is governed by the requirements of a code of practice on staff selection and recruitment, which, among other matters, contains information on equal opportunities and the aims and conduct of the interview. The SED stated that 'recruitment of well-qualified staff is regarded as one of the strengths of the University's quality strategy'. Training is available for staff involved in recruitment, and is a requirement for members of those panels who do not include representatives from the Human Resources Department.

78 For professorial appointments, a search committee comprising senior academics, one of whom must be from another faculty, decides the job description and the recruitment and selection procedure. For other posts the dean of faculty and head of department make these arrangements, and the interview is chaired by a member of staff from outside the department concerned. All academic appointments are reported to the Senate and Council.

79 The SED described the recruitment procedures as 'robust'. As part of the selection process candidates are required to present a 'lecturette' to assess competence in teaching. The audit team met a group of staff appointed within the last four years, who confirmed the professional manner in which they had been recruited, and adherence to the University's code of practice. The professional credibility of staff delivering programmes in partner colleges is assessed via the Office of Associated Colleges by scrutiny of curricula vitae. Representatives of the University's partner colleges who met the audit team confirmed that the Office of Associated Colleges provides induction for college staff teaching on the University's programmes.

80 The induction of new academic staff into the University involves the issuing of an induction pack and the attendance at a one-day event 'Introduction to the University of Bath'. New members of teaching staff at lecturer grade normally serve a probationary period of three years, during which they receive reduced teaching loads to facilitate the development of their research interests. Their progress is

monitored at university level by the Academic Staff Committee. As a condition of probation, lecturers must successfully complete the Initial Teaching Development Programme for new teaching staff, either by the taught route or prior experiential learning route, although exemptions are granted for those who can demonstrate equivalence in professional development from another institution. The programme is accredited by the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. Members of teaching staff who were engaging in this programme or who had completed it confirmed to the audit team that it prepared them well for their teaching duties, and the team took note of their reflective attitude towards learning in HE. However, the report of the Staff Development Unit for 2001-02 noted that 'there continues to be resistance from some participants', and the team would encourage the University to consider how it might achieve more enthusiasm among staff to participate in the programme.

81 Heads of department assign a senior colleague to act as a mentor to their new members of teaching staff. The role of mentors is set out in the QA Manual, although 'patterns and guidelines for meetings and other contact during the mentorship are agreed between the two parties'. Recently appointed staff who met the audit team confirmed that the nature of the mentoring differed in individual circumstances, but reported that they were pleased with their experiences of the mentoring system.

#### **Appraisal**

82 The annual appraisal scheme for all staff (excepting manual staff) was revised in 1999. It is organised by the Staff Development Unit. The aims of the scheme, which are clearly documented, are to review the past year, identifying successes and problems, and to plan for the future taking into consideration the objectives of the department, the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the appraisee, and his or her career aspirations. The scheme involves the completion of a structured account of past and planned activities by appraisees, on a form tailored for academic staff, academic-related staff, research or support staff, and an interview with their line manager to identify development needs. Academic staff, at various meetings with the audit team, confirmed that the scheme operated as stated by the University. The team supported the view that the scheme has the potential, expressed in the notes on the appraisal process, to give 'a clearer definition of the expectations of the department and the University for each individual member of academic

staff'. Appraisal forms are forwarded to the Human Resources Department, but the Staff Development annual report for 2001-02 expressed concern about the low proportion of forms it receives, especially in respect of research staff (see also below, paragraph 86). The Human Resources Department is currently reviewing the forms in an attempt to increase overall completion rates, targets for which have been set in its action plan at 50 per cent for the 2002-03 session and 70 per cent for 2003-04. The team formed the view that the University would continue to find it difficult to take effective action to improve appraisal completion rates until it has a reliable schedule for appraisal activity at institutional level. The team considered that the introduction of more active monitoring that appraisal has actually taken place would enable the University's aspirations for its appraisal scheme to be better met.

#### **Reward**

83 The University awards three annual prizes related to teaching: one for 'excellence' as voted for by students and staff, one for innovation in learning and teaching, and one for dedication to the academic and personal lives of students combined with accomplishment in research. Following the recommendations of the 1997 continuation audit, the University has widened its promotion criteria to include quality in facilitating learning for progression from lecturer to senior lecturer, although promotion to professor does not take account of quality of activity in teaching and learning.

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

##### **Approach**

84 The University, in its Staff Development Policy, regards 'continuing development and training...as essential' to achieve its mission. The SED emphasised that 'a development framework designed to ensure that staff knowledge and expertise is kept up to date as well as providing opportunities for personal and professional self-development'. Such opportunities are provided through the Staff Development Unit which offers a range of development programmes in relation to learning and teaching. Continuing professional development for support staff is also available through the Staff Development Unit, and may be identified as part of the appraisal process. The SED stated that staff teaching on the University's programmes at partner colleges were 'entitled to attend any of the general staff development sessions provided by the University', although college staff who met the audit team explained that it was not always possible to access these sessions for practical reasons.

85 During 2001-02 the Staff Development Unit ran 250 events to over 2,560 attendees, a significant increase on the previous year. The University aims to increase attendance at staff development sessions by 10 per cent annually, partly through working more closely with academic departments such that a development session specific to each department will be held 'at least every three years'. Information technology (IT) training is also available through Computer Services. The SED stated that 'the responsibility for the personal and professional development of all staff is one of faculties and departments', and the University explained that responsibility for strategy formulation is with the Staff Development Unit. In its meetings, the audit team heard that departmental staff regarded the control of the strategy for staff development to lie with the Human Resources Department. The team therefore found a variety of views of the ownership of staff development processes, and would encourage the University to reflect upon this and act to gain appropriate involvement of departments in the personal and professional development of their staff.

86 The University's strategic priorities for staff development appeared to the audit team to emerge from various sources: the University's aims and objectives, the deliberations of QAC and departmental learning and teaching strategies. Although a function of the appraisal system is to identify development needs, the appraisal process appeared to have little impact on the priorities of the staff development programme. In respect of the development of staff moving into leadership roles, the team noted the workshop for directors of studies. Given the complexity of this role, the University might wish to consider the merit of making participation in this useful workshop a condition of taking up a post of director of studies.

#### **Teaching Development Fund**

87 The University has established a Teaching Development Fund to 'promote accessibility and innovative approaches to learning and teaching'. Six awards were made in 2003, a criterion for award being the enhancement of teaching quality, including more effective or efficient teaching practice. Recipients of the Teaching Development Fund and winners of the Innovation Prize are invited to present their projects to the wider University community at an annual Innovation in Learning and Teaching event to which staff in partner colleges are invited. The SED explained that this event aimed to 'increase the awareness of different practice in Departments'. The audit team recognised the good intent behind this event, but questioned its effectiveness as a means of

dissemination of good practice since the majority of attendees at this half-day event are themselves involved in the presentations.

#### **Graduate teaching assistants**

88 Postgraduate research students engaged in teaching activities can access the 'Associate Teachers programme' run by the Staff Development Unit. The audit team considered this programme to be well structured and comprehensive in its treatment of the skills postgraduates were likely to require in teaching. In its QA Manual, the University requires that 'postgraduate research students will be given adequate training and skills assessment in support of their teaching'. However, not all of the research students who met the team were aware of the mandatory nature of the training, or had received an offer of feedback on their performance. The University will want to ensure that it meets the good practice set out in the QA Manual, and that all postgraduate students engaged in teaching receive training and feedback. Postgraduate research students also have access to a programme run by the Staff Development Unit for training students in the processes involved in independent research. This is complemented in the Faculty of Engineering and Design by an additional compulsory programme for first-year research students in research methods and practice. In the academic year 2002-03 about one-third of the full-time research students had participated in programmes run by the Staff Development Unit.

#### **Peer observation**

89 The QA Manual sets out a comprehensive set of procedures for the peer-review of teaching. The SED highlights the peer review process as a means for dissemination of good practice in teaching. The implementation and management of the scheme is the responsibility of individual departments, and observation of each member of staff should take place as a minimum every two years. Although academic staff who discussed these matters with the audit team confirmed that these procedures were adhered to, the University in its SED 'recognised that the process of peer observation has not been uniformly undertaken' across the University. The team saw reports on peer observation from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, and found these to be rather descriptive documents, lacking in reflection and with limited value in dissemination of good practice. However, as part of the University's learning and teaching strategy, all faculty teaching and quality committees will, in future, receive reports on the outcomes of peer observation from their respective departments,

thus improving the potential of the scheme for enhancement of quality in teaching and learning.

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

90 The QA Manual includes a code of practice for distance-learning provision which is based on the *Guidelines on the quality assurance of distance learning*, published by the Agency. The University's code makes clear that all programmes are subject to the principles laid down in the QA Manual, and subject to the University's quality assurance systems. Until recently, the majority of such programmes were managed and administered by the former Centre for Distance Learning, but all programmes are now the responsibility of the appropriate academic department, and the Centre, now titled the Centre for Lifelong Learning, only retains responsibility for editing, publishing and dispatching materials. The University did not reflect on the impact of these changes in its SED, but noted that it 'has recognised the need for a distance-learning policy'. While such programmes are subject to the University's normal quality assurance procedures, arrangements for students' feedback are varied to fit with the mode of delivery. The audit team saw examples of annual monitoring reports for distance-learning programmes, with details of the student feedback arrangements used.

91 The University's LTC is responsible for monitoring the development of flexible learning and the dissemination of good practice. The SED explained that the University's Centre for the Development of New Technologies in Learning was 'proactive in working with academic departments to implement flexible-learning methodologies in particular'. The University's preferred internet-based system is available to support distance-learning programmes and the delivery of teaching materials to students overseas.

92 The University's learning and teaching strategy includes the development and introduction of flexible learning methods for students taking undergraduate degrees, and the audit team was informed that such methods were helping to address limitations on time and on space. The SED explained that the e-learning portfolio currently offered 276 courses (unit or programme or part thereof) across the University. For example, students on the MChem programme take a module by distance learning during their placement year so that the curriculum can be covered, and the number of lectures for pharmacology students has been halved through a shift to internet-based learning. Changes to the mode of delivery of units,

including changes in the overall contact time, are categorised as 'minor changes' within the University's quality assurance procedures, but should be approved by faculty boards of studies and monitored through annual reports 'to ensure that the focus of the programme has not altered overall'. Where additional major resources are required, the change is considered to be a major one and must be approved by the Senate in the year prior to its introduction. It was not clear to the team that this process paid sufficient attention to the impact on student experience of significant changes to mode of delivery and learning. During the DATs, some students commented that they appreciated the support of internet-based teaching materials where no small-group teaching was provided, but other students said that they felt isolated without group work.

93 Overall, the audit team formed the view that the University had an effective system for assuring the quality of flexible and e-learning provision. However, where the programme was primarily delivered on campus, the team remained unconvinced that the systems for dealing with changes to units or programmes, and annual monitoring, allowed sufficient consideration of the impact on students of the introduction of a substantial proportion of self-directed learning. The University is encouraged to consider how it might emphasise students' learning experience in its proposed distance-learning policy, and ensure that annual monitoring takes careful account of the impact on students' experience of the introduction of greater use of self-directed learning.

### **Learning support resources**

94 The LLC, situated on the main Claverton campus, is open 24-hours a day, seven days a week throughout the academic year, and for extended hours during the summer vacation. The SED stated that 46 per cent of the LLC budget is spent on books, periodicals and information sources, the seventh highest proportion nationally of all 171 university libraries. The SWS commented that the availability of library resources is a recurring issue, but although some students who met the audit team suggested that the University should reconsider its short loan/long loan policy, most were broadly satisfied with the provision of books and periodicals. Feedback on library provision is gathered through departmental library representatives, SSLCs and an annual survey undertaken by LLC. The SWS confirmed that the LLC was proactive in seeking student feedback and receptive to student input. The SWS noted that student representatives on the Library Liaison Committee reported that the Committee was very

welcoming and inclusive. Students registered for University programmes at partner colleges are normally invited to the Claverton campus for induction. Students on franchise programmes at partner colleges have full privileges at the Claverton library, although representatives from partner colleges indicated that networked electronic information was often more convenient for such students.

95 The SWS referred to concerns that have been expressed by students at the use of the library as a teaching space. The University acknowledged that space on the Claverton campus was severely constrained, and pressure on space has been exacerbated by the need to vacate a building due to asbestos problems. Departments have been asked to review their space requirements and, where possible, to make more use of departmental teaching space. Improvements have been made, but the University acknowledged that the situation will need to be carefully monitored over the next few years until student numbers balance out.

96 Computers housed in the LLC are generally available for student use 24-hours a day, seven days a week, and some departments have additional specialist IT resources. The SWS indicated that this resource is much appreciated. The summary results of the 2002-03 student satisfaction survey indicated some dissatisfaction with the availability of computers, endorsing a concern expressed in the written submission about a shortage of available computers at peak times. Students acknowledged that the introduction of laptop docking-points had been very effective in improving networked access, and those who met the audit team during the DATs expressed broad satisfaction with IT facilities available to them.

97 The SWS raised concerns about photocopying/printing costs, and students who met the audit team raised this issue and expressed concerns also at the queuing times for printers, particularly in relation to the impact of assessment bunching on the availability of these facilities. The summary results of the 2002-03 student satisfaction survey indicated dissatisfaction with the cost of printing. In light of the University's intention to increase the use of flexible-learning methods which can result in students having to print more materials, the team would encourage the University to review the availability and cost to students of generating hard copy to support e-modes of learning. The University will wish to reflect upon the impact of a shift towards autonomous learning on the resources for learning, and on the costs borne by students.

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

98 The SED stated that the University aimed to provide an integrated and supportive learning environment and appropriate guidance and support in academic and personal matters. The strategy for the provision of student support and guidance is 'based around a cooperative framework of academic and pastoral support based on a system of personal tutors backed up by the director of studies, other staff in academic departments, and by the central support services'. Departments are the first point of contact for students requiring academic and pastoral support, and staff are able to recommend students to the appropriate part of the University's central support network when necessary. Students are made aware of the central support network through induction, departmental handbooks and other centrally produced guides.

99 All undergraduate students have a personal tutor, whose main function is to provide advice on option unit choices, discuss academic problems the student might encounter, and review the student's academic performance. The SWS indicated that the personal tutoring system did not always meet the University's guidelines on personal tutoring, as set out in the document QA33 in the QA Manual. While acknowledging that some of the problems may be due to unwillingness on the part of the students, the submission expressed the view that the majority of undergraduate students did not feel that the personal tutor system had any benefit or influence on their time at University. Students who met the audit team during the DATs reported variations in practice. For example, some students indicated that initially it was not made clear whether the personal tutoring system extended beyond academic support; that not all students saw their tutor three times in each semester of the first year as is required by QA33; that not all students met regularly with their tutor after the first year as is required by QA33; and that a written record of meetings as required by QA33 was not always kept. Students who met the team expressed the view that some of this inconsistency could be due to the increasing commitments of some tutors. In spite of the fact that the personal tutoring system did not always operate as set out in QA33, students who met the team during the DATs expressed broad satisfaction with the personal tutoring system, as did the summary results of the 2002-03 student satisfaction survey. In following up the reasons for procedural divergence from QA33, the University will no doubt wish not only to consider how best to reduce significant variation in practice for personal tutor

support for its 'home' students but also for those studying in partner institutions.

100 Personal tutoring systems have been implemented for a number of full-time postgraduate taught programmes, and the SED commented that the University would like to see this process established across the full range of taught postgraduate programmes. Document QA33 was revised at the start of academic session 2003-04, and the draft revised procedures extend personal tutoring to cover all taught postgraduate students and students studying at partner institutions. Taught postgraduate students who met the audit team expressed broad satisfaction with the tutoring system used by the host department. Research students who met with the team indicated that they felt well supported, mainly through the 'open-door' policy of supervisors.

101 The University has a long history of providing opportunities for students to undertake placements as part of their programmes. The majority of placements are undertaken within the UK, but an increasing number of overseas placements are now available. All departments have a named placement tutor/officer, each of whom is a member of the Placement Tutors' Forum which reports directly to the QAC. The summary results of the 2002-03 student satisfaction survey indicated high levels of satisfaction with placements.

102 A Working Group Report on Key and Enterprise Skills in the Curriculum envisaged that personal tutors would play a key role in the development of PDP for students. Concerns were raised about the workload implications for personal tutors, and as a result, PDP is being piloted in each faculty. A PDP officer is based in the Students' Union. The Personal Development Planning Steering Group will report to the Senate by the end of the academic session 2003-04, and PDP will operate across the University from the start of academic session 2004-05. As the University continues to review how best to implement PDP, it will wish to reflect on how the current variability of practice of the personal tutoring system might impact on the successful operation of PDP in practice.

### **Personal support and guidance**

103 The University has an International Office whose remit is to recruit and support international students. This includes welcoming, induction, welfare and social support through the international student adviser, as well as services specific to international students such as visa renewals.

The SED also noted that academic departments provide much of the support for international students in their day-to-day delivery of programmes. The SWS indicated that students reported very positive experiences of the International Office. It also indicated that a recent survey of international students showed a broad level of satisfaction with the support they receive from the University, and international students who met the audit team during the DATs expressed their appreciation of the support provided for them.

104 Following a reorganisation in January 2003, three of the main student support services: the Learning Support Service; the Student Money Service; and the Counselling Service, are coordinated by the Head of the Department of Student Services. Students are made aware of these student services pre-application through information in the prospectus, on the web site and during open days, and information on the work of student services is an integral part of the academic departmental induction for new students. The 2002-03 annual report of the Department of Student Services acknowledged that closer collaboration with academic departments should be encouraged in order to support the student experience more effectively. It appeared to the audit team that liaison with academic departments is on an *ad hoc* basis with respect to individual students, although the team heard that liaison is becoming more systematised through the work of the Student Support Forum. The summary results of the 2002-03 student satisfaction survey indicated that students expressed high levels of satisfaction with the Learning Support Service and the Student Money Service, and broad satisfaction with the Counselling Service. In a survey of students on the specific area of learning support, students indicated general satisfaction with the quality of support provided by the Learning Support Service. Students, including dyslexic students, were positive about a number of tutorials provided by the Learning Support Service and rated a number of the tutorials 'exceptionally favourably'. The 2002-03 annual report of the Department of Student Services was considered by the team to be evaluative and reflective. The team formed the view that the organisation and operation of services for students undertaken by the Department of Student Services was a feature of good practice.

105 Other student support facilities provided include the Careers Advisory Service, the Westwood Nursery, the Medical and Dental Centres and the Chaplaincy. The summary results of the 2002-03 student satisfaction survey indicated that students expressed

broad levels of satisfaction (or better) for these student support services.

### Collaborative provision

106 The University has a small number of collaborative programmes and, according to the SED, aims to 'increase collaboration with local and regional HE and FE providers in future years'. All collaborative arrangements are covered by an institutional agreement, and are recorded in a register held by the Quality Support Office. The register lists the name of the partner institution, the home department or faculty, the nature of the programme, the date of the initial agreement, the duration of the agreement and any additional comments. An Associated Colleges Handbook guides partner colleges on the University's quality assurance requirements, and a link tutor system supports the academic aspects of the provision. Link tutors meet from time to time in the Link Tutors' Forum, and link tutors' reports and annual monitoring reports are submitted to the Board of Studies for Lifelong Learning and the relevant faculty board of studies. The quality assurance of degree-level (undergraduate and postgraduate) collaborative provision is the responsibility of the departments. All such provision is subject to the University's system of annual and periodic review. HNC/D provision, engaging about 400 FTEs in all, is managed by the Office of Associated Colleges, working within the framework of the QA Manual and in collaboration with relevant departments.

107 The University has developed a protocol for the development of Foundation degrees which, according to the SED, are likely to take over from current HNC/D provision by 2005. The protocol identifies the significance of *The Foundation degree: qualification benchmark (final draft)*. Criteria are established to help develop and locate Foundation degrees within the University's developing curriculum, to define the nature of progression possibilities, and to identify the choice between full and part-time provision and the choice between franchise and validation. The University sees the development of Foundation degrees as a key element of its proposed development of a Swindon campus.

108 The report of the 1997 continuation audit recommended that the University should 'consider the advisability of ensuring that all collaborative arrangements are adequately secured by signed memoranda of cooperation'. The University has responded by ensuring that signed memoranda secure all collaborative arrangements. The University has withdrawn, since the last institutional audit,

from one overseas collaboration as a result of unresolved concerns over standards and quality in the collaborating institution, and has clarified the communication process with respect to the University of Hong Kong and developed local case studies in response to feedback from the Agency's survey of distance-learning provision in Hong Kong. The SED demonstrated that the University has brought the quality assurance of its collaborative provision into line with expectations and precepts relating to such provision and that action has been taken on issues raised by the report of the 1997 continuation audit.

109 The audit team reviewed relevant documentation, including the validation report on Swindon College and sections on the SWS relating to students on collaborative programmes. The development of new collaborative provision and the review of existing provision are conducted on the same basis as annual monitoring and DSRs as specified in the QA Manual for both domestic and international provision. College representatives who met the team spoke in wholly positive terms about the quality review engagements between the programmes in the colleges and the Office of Associated Colleges. It was clear to the team that such engagements resulted in a positive impact not only upon the programmes themselves but also on the internal reflections and discussions that had taken place as a result on wider matters of quality assurance in the collaborating institutions. The link tutor system was rated as effective, developmental and supportive. College representatives expressed the view that at each stage in the process, from initial engagement to programme development and implementation, requirements were clear and action from the University was supportive. The team concluded that the Office of Associated Colleges had established good practice with respect to programme development and enhancement in collaborating colleges.

110 The audit team noted one significant problem in the progression from collaborative programmes to the University's degree programmes. This was brought to the team's attention by the SWS. Although a recently developed Foundation degree allows a direct progression into education, students successfully completing HND programmes have not usually been admitted to progression routes within the University, although in such cases the University has enabled routes elsewhere for these students. The University explained that the original agreements made with the colleges in 1998-99 made it clear that there were no appropriate progression routes

from the HNDs although alternative progression routes would be sought. Nevertheless, the lack of direct progression is of concern to the students on the programmes and their colleges. In view of its ambitions to develop provision at the Swindon campus, the development of Foundation degrees and its policy towards widening participation, the University may wish to reflect on the current situation in respect of progression to the University's degree programmes from its collaborative provision. The University should ensure that the location of award-bearing programmes is carefully specified in all relevant publicity to avoid the potential for misleading applicants.

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

#### **Undergraduate programmes in chemistry**

111 An audit trail was conducted for the programmes leading to the degrees of BSc (Hons) and MChem in Chemistry, BSc Chemistry with industrial training and BSc Chemistry with a study year abroad. The discipline trail also encompassed the BSc (Hons) degrees in Chemistry with Management, Chemistry with Management with industrial training, and Chemistry with Management with a study year abroad. All programmes are accredited by the Royal Society of Chemistry. The DSED supplied by the University consisted of the report of a 2001 DSR for the above programmes, with appended programme specifications, a six-month progress report submitted to the Faculty Board of Studies on the outcomes of the DSR, and a Progress Update - Summer 2003 document. This combination of documents allowed the audit team to form a clear picture of the quality framework and practice in the Department of Chemistry prior to the audit visit, and generally gave the impression of a responsive Department. The DSR report was usefully frank and appropriately reflective in its evaluation of the programmes. The progress report described the Department's responses to the recommendations from the DSR. These responses were considered by the team to be appropriate.

112 Programme specifications are available for prospective students on the University's web site and for current students on the Department's web site. Programme specifications adequately described the programmes in terms of what was delivered to the students. Academic staff described the programme specifications as written for a student audience, but considered the programme handbooks to be more useful to students in delivering course information.

Programme specifications refer to relevant subject benchmark statements and the *FHEQ*, but do not make clear links to them; the DSED stated that the subject benchmark statement had been 'informally considered'. In the view of the audit team, the programme specifications take appropriate account of the academic infrastructure.

113 The Department produced its own progression and first destination statistics which, according to the DSED, it considered to be more reliable than those produced by the University prior to the introduction of SAMIS. The statistics are considered at the Courses Committee and as part of the annual monitoring report and DSR. While degree classifications are split by degree, the other data are amalgamated, thus reducing the likelihood that a progression issue particular to one degree can be identified. The amalgamated data show good rates of progression through the degree programmes.

114 Teaching matters are considered at the departmental Courses Committee, which meets monthly during semesters and has 'primary responsibility for course design and administration'. A Teaching Forum, whose constitution includes all members of teaching staff, is convened on an *ad hoc* basis to deal with specific teaching issues. This twin approach is often driven by the expressions of students via the SSLCs, and appeared to the audit team to work well. The BSc (Hons) Chemistry with Management programmes are overseen by a committee that meets at least twice each year, comprising representatives from both the Department of Chemistry and the School of Management. A single annual monitoring report covers all the degrees encompassed by this DAT. While information is readily available about the quality of the combined suite of programmes, information concerning individual programmes is not. The team considered that, where programmes are so distinct as to present their own quality issues, such as the cross-departmental BSc (Hons) Chemistry with Management, the Department might consider the merit of annually monitoring the programme on its own.

115 In common with most of the University, single units in chemistry attract a six-point credit rating. However, those of the School of Management attract five points, but for students of BSc (Hons) Chemistry with Management these units attract six points in order to fit with the tariff of the chemistry units. Thus students on different programmes study the same material but are awarded a different number of points. The University has identified this anomaly, and is addressing it. Students who met the audit

team were aware of a policy concerning the late submission of assessed work, but indicated that the system can vary with respect to different members of academic staff. Students confirmed that most written work is judged reliably against assessment criteria issued by staff. Academic staff confirmed that these criteria were usually issued orally but described the system as 'informal'. The Department might wish to adopt a more formal system for the issuing of assessment criteria to ensure that students receive that information reliably.

116 External examiners are appointed in each of the branches of organic, inorganic and physical chemistry. The reports of the external examiners seen by the audit team were comprehensive and complimentary. Where issues have been raised by external examiners they have been dealt with appropriately by the programmes' annual monitoring report, the Courses Committee and the Teaching Forum. A recent example concerned an external examiner's suggestion that a marking scheme became more explicit to indicate the responsibilities of each marker. The team noted that one external examiner had appeared confused about the Department's assessment practices, suggesting to the team that a more focused briefing for external examiners might be required.

117 Examples of student work were made available to the audit team as a sample from the later stages of the programmes. Project work made good use of primary literature and was appropriately double-marked using an appropriate scheme, with evidence of discussion between the markers before agreement on a mark was reached. The team agreed with the reports of the external examiners that the standard of work was appropriate to the learning objectives and aligned with the qualification level as described in the *FHEQ*.

118 The audit team saw a small sample of students' coursework. Feedback on this work comprised a list of appropriate answers issued electronically or posted on the intranet together with an invitation to seek personal feedback if necessary. Academic staff confirmed that the system was informal and the team noted from SSLC minutes that feedback is sometimes available only to those students who request it. Students who met the team confirmed this, and expressed satisfaction with the arrangement. They commented that assessed work was returned promptly.

119 Students who met the audit team described the programme handbooks as useful documents which provided a basis for an understanding of their

responsibilities and their learning and assessment expectations. The description of most chemistry units in the programme handbooks included relevant learning objectives, although in some cases the team considered that learning objectives could have better emphasised conceptual understanding as indicated in the *FHEQ*. The team noted that some project-based units differed in credit rating but not in learning objectives, and that marking criteria showed some misalignment with the learning objectives. For several units, the team found that their descriptors, particularly with respect to learning objectives, were inconsistent between those issued to students in programme handbooks and those available from the University's Unit Catalogue on the internet. The University will want to ensure that its descriptors of programmes and the expectation of students are accurately represented both in the information issued to students and in that which is publicly available.

120 The arrangements for industrial placements are extensive and robust, complying with the *Code of practice*. Students who met the audit team reported that they were content with these arrangements and the information supplied before, during and on completion of the placements. The students particularly valued the opportunity, in the first two years of the programmes, to meet weekly in small groups with one of three academic tutors, noting that, while these sessions have an academic focus, there is the opportunity for pastoral support. One-to-one discussion takes place in the first year of study and at the request of students in later years of study. Students who met the team were complimentary about these arrangements, citing the approachability of staff as contributing to the effectiveness of pastoral support. The students were satisfied with internal communication arrangements. The learning resources offered to the students were generally comprehensive and valued by the students.

121 Students confirmed the importance of the SSLCs and cited the approachability of staff as helpful in supporting the students' ability to give feedback on their programmes. The SSLC provides an effective forum for discussing and dealing with issues of concern to students so that students are engaged in quality management at departmental level. At least one student member of the Chemistry SSLC also serves on the Management SSLC to represent the interests of students studying programmes in Chemistry with Management. The DSED stated that the 'SSLC meets twice per semester' but minutes provided to the audit team indicated that it had met less often in 2002 and

2003. The team was interested to note that the departmental web site provides email links for students to contact their representatives and the time of the next SSLC meeting. The students the team met were all members of the SSLCs and some had been trained for their role as SSLC members. They expressed the view that students' concerns could be dealt with effectively through the SSLC, and cited examples of assessment 'bunching' and the demand for the introduction of a new unit as issues successfully dealt with through this route. A summary of unit feedback questionnaires is discussed by the SSLC.

122 Overall, the audit found that the quality of learning opportunities is suitable for the taught programmes of study in the Department of Chemistry.

#### **Undergraduate programmes in electronic and electrical engineering**

123 The scope of the audit trail in electronic and electrical engineering was the undergraduate awards offered by the Department:

BEng (Hons) and MEng (Hons) in Electronic and Communication Engineering;

BEng (Hons) and MEng (Hons) in Computers, Electronics and Communications;

BEng (Hons) and MEng (Hons) in Electrical Engineering and Applied Electronics;

BEng (Hons) and MEng (Hons) in Electrical and Electronic Engineering;

BEng (Ordinary) in Electrical and Electronic Engineering;

BEng (Hons) and MEng (Hons) in Electronics with Space Science and Technology;

BEng (Hons) and MEng (Hons) in Communications Engineering with Psychology.

All awards have the option of a placement year.

124 In March 2003, the Institution of Electrical Engineers (IEE) conducted an accreditation of all these awards. All issues from the previous accreditation had been addressed. The existing degrees (the first five in the above list) were re-accredited for a full five-year term, while the new degrees (the last two in the list) were awarded interim accreditation for two years, these terms being the maximum possible for re-accreditation and accreditation respectively.

125 The University's DSR in August 2003 made use of the documentation produced for the IEE accreditation but included responses to the accreditation report. The DSR document was

submitted as the DSED. The format of the submission required for the accreditation did not facilitate a self-evaluative approach that would have been helpful for both the DSR and the DAT. This lack of self-evaluation had been recognised by another department in the Faculty which, learning from the experience, intends to submit a separate document for its own DSR.

126 Programme specifications are available for all the above awards, and are maintained on the University's web site. The audit team noted that they had been produced with reference to the *FHEQ* and the appropriate subject benchmark statements, although there were no explicit links to these documents. The team heard that programme specifications had been written with the student audience in mind but, in practice, students find their programme handbooks, which contain some of the information from the appropriate programme specifications plus additional material, more accessible. There was good evidence that the handbooks are well-used by students and considered to be useful. The information in them is supplemented by oral information given in lectures, particularly at the start of a unit. The team considered that the aims and learning outcomes for the BEng and MEng awards were distinct and appropriate, although there were necessarily strong similarities between the aims and learning outcomes for the different named awards at the same level.

127 There are a number of different weighting schemes in place for the way in which the different stages of the awards contribute to the final award classifications. Students who met the audit team were clear about what counted, and to what extent, for their own award. Students are given clear written criteria for assessment of the various projects that they undertake. Otherwise, it is usual for information on criteria to be given in the teaching sessions. Students commented that feedback on their marked work, and the time taken to return it, is variable. The Department might wish to consider how it could achieve greater consistency in these matters.

128 External examiners are used appropriately, and verify that standards are comparable with awards made at similar institutions in the UK. Issues raised by them received a timely and formal written response from the Department. The DSED noted that group projects had been improved recently, to meet IEE recommendations. The IEE assessors had noted that, while the marks awarded to projects were appropriate, no rationale was given for the marks awarded, and the marking scheme was not transparent to external parties. The audit team saw samples of students' assessed work, and confirmed

that the standard and content of student achievement is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the *FHEQ*.

129 All lecturers produce a unit report for their particular units, and these are used to produce the annual monitoring report. This includes a summary of admission, progression and award data for the year in question, although no comparison with other years is made as part of the process. Although standards of the awards made in one year are assessed by comparison with the previous years' results, no longer-term trend analysis appears to be undertaken systematically.

130 A resource-based, self-paced, approach to teaching and learning for first-year students is now in its third year of operation. The scheme was developed with some funding from the University's Teaching Development Fund, a HEFCE award to refurbish and re-equip existing laboratories, and some support from an industrial partner. It was introduced to address the diverse backgrounds of students on entry. The approach has been disseminated through the University's annual Innovation in Learning and Teaching event and at a national conference.

131 Students provide feedback on their learning experience during tutorials, which are offered in groups of up to four students during the first two years, and also by evaluation questionnaires at the end of each unit. Although matters raised through feedback are explored at SSLC meetings, there does not appear to be any systematic way of gathering feedback on students' experience of the year overall. The Department extends membership of its Courses Committee to student representatives from its SSLC. This is not a University requirement, but the audit team considered it to be good practice. The SSLC discusses the results of the unit evaluation questionnaires, and has been instrumental in bringing about changes.

132 Overall, the audit found the quality of learning opportunities is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

#### **MSc in Management**

133 This DAT covered the MSc in Management programme hosted by the School of Management. It is a one-year, full-time masters programme. It is not for graduates in business or management but rather a generalist programme, designed for graduates in any discipline other than business or management. The number of students has risen fourfold since the programme's inception in 1996 to a current intake of 150 students.

134 The DSED was based upon an internal review of 2002. The document tended to be more descriptive than evaluative. It included the programme specification, which made a clear link to the *Subject benchmark statement* for masters awards in business and management. The programme learning outcomes indicated that, in drafting the programme specification, cognisance had been taken of the *FHEQ*. The audit team was provided with examples of unit descriptors, not all of which were written in terms of intended learning outcomes, but the team was informed by staff that all unit descriptors would refer to learning outcomes by the end of academic session 2003-04.

135 Examples of completed unit monitoring reports for 2002-03 were made available to the audit team. Despite there being a template for such reports, these were of variable quality. None had been signed, as required, by the Director of Studies; not all of them provided an analysis of results; not all of them provided an analysis of student feedback; and in one case, comments from the member of staff were perfunctory. The team would encourage the University to reflect on how best to improve what is an important part of its internal review processes. The team was also provided with a copy of the preliminary programme monitoring report for 2002-03. This was a more reflective document, which contained not only analysis but also actions to be taken in response to issues raised.

136 A new programme structure was introduced in 2000-01. Students subsequently commented on the absence of any feedback on their performance prior to examinations at the end of the first semester. As a result, changes were introduced in order that a range of assessment methods was used in both semesters. Students who met the audit team indicated that a further development had been an increased use in session 2003-04 of group-based formative assessments. Staff who met the team acknowledged that, because of high student numbers, it was not always possible to meet the University policy of providing feedback to students within three weeks of assessments being submitted. The team would encourage staff to continue to develop an assessment policy which ensures that students are provided with timely feedback on their performance.

137 The audit team studied examples of external examiners' reports. It noted that these had been carefully considered, with action being taken on the examiner's comments and a response sent to the examiner by the Director of Studies. The team saw evidence of how external examiners' comments and advice had been used to enhance the quality of provision. The team reviewed a range of students'

assessed work. It was satisfied that the nature of the assessment and standard of student achievement in the programme met the expectations of the programme specification, and was appropriate to the award of MSc in Management and its location within the *FHEQ*.

138 Students who met the audit team were appreciative of most aspects of the provision. Recruitment information provided to potential students was considered accurate and reliable. Staff provided students with all necessary information, including staff expectations with respect to assessments. Library and IT resources, including the use being made of the University's preferred internet-based system, were considered highly satisfactory. Students were particularly appreciative of the dedicated computing laboratory in the School of Management.

139 Most teaching for the nine core units on the programme is delivered in two-hour lectures to two groups of 75 students. Students who met the audit team indicated that, while some lectures had an interactive element, additional smaller classes in both semesters would be considered beneficial. The preliminary annual monitoring report for 2002-03 also referred to this matter. In response, it is intended to pilot a mix of larger lecture groups with seminar groups of 15 to 20 students. The preliminary annual monitoring report for 2002-03 recorded that this approach to teaching will be monitored.

140 The School of Management has a SSLC for postgraduate students, chaired by the Director of Studies. Students who met the audit team reported that their induction pack fully explained the role of the SSLCs and of student representatives, and that they were satisfied with the manner in which the SSLC operated. They explained that they were consulted on the agenda for meetings and that they felt free to submit items to the agenda. Students complete unit appraisal questionnaires, the results of which contribute to unit monitoring reports. Students were appreciative of the fact that the use in session 2003-04 of formative assessments in five of the six core modules in Semester A had been the result of discussions at focus groups formed as part of the DSR for the MSc in Management programme.

141 The audit team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the award of MSc in Management.

#### **Undergraduate programmes in social and policy sciences**

142 The DAT in social and policy sciences covered the programmes of the Department leading to first degree awards. The DSED took the form of the report

of a DSR together with follow-up and monitoring information. The DSR had been conducted within the framework established by the QA Manual, and documents consulted in the review included the previous degree scheme review, the subject review reports published by the Agency, relevant to the subjects within the Department, *Subject benchmark statements* for social policy and administration and social work, and for sociology, and the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work revalidation of May 2000. The external members of the DSR panel included employers and placement providers and current external examiners. The DSR covered 11 degree programmes together with the Department's responsibility for the two-year Diploma in Social Work at Wiltshire College. Programme specifications for the degree programmes were included in the DSR and in the DSED.

143 Programme specifications have been completed according to the requirements of the University. The specification for each degree programme points to the relevant subject benchmark statement and to the *FHEQ*, and that for the social work and applied social studies programme refers to the GSCC and the fact that the degree carries with it professional status. Students are informed of the programme specifications in the Student Handbook. It was clear that the relevant subject benchmark statements had been used in drawing up the programme specifications, although the audit team considered that it would not be immediately clear to students how the elements of the programmes had been mapped against the benchmark statements.

144 Degree schemes within the Department share common expectations for knowledge and skills, but the precise role of programme specifications, learning outcomes and the link with assessment can become confused by this approach. The Department identifies generic skills required by all its graduates, and these skills apply across programmes of study, although the criteria against which the stated skills are to be assessed are not made clear. The Department commits itself in the review to 'include this when we consider assessment issues further'. The DSR noted that a few employers had commented on problems with report-writing skills, and the Department informed the audit team that, since the DSR, it had introduced a greater emphasis on report writing, a skill now assessed in one of its units. Each programme is accompanied by a flow chart illustrating progression routes and, where appropriate, progression routes to other degree programmes if a student should fail the compulsory professional studies element.

145 The mandatory Core Skills unit was discussed in the audit team's meeting with students, and was commended by them. Unit learning outcomes are clearly stated, but they are not always contextualised by level, leading to outcomes that could be fulfilled at any stage of the programme, and making it difficult to see what the precise link would be between the learning outcome and assessment. While staff who met the team were clear that skills developed in this unit were applied in other units, it was not clear to the team how the sequencing of skills development and their application within the programme was dealt with. The team formed the view that the links between level and learning outcomes, assessment and unit contents could be more precisely drawn, especially with respect to the development of skills.

146 Although the DSR report is entitled 'Undergraduate Degree Programmes: Review', it is not constructed as a review of each of the programmes of study but rather as a generic approach to learning and teaching issues within the Department, together with some investigation of particular schemes. From its discussions with staff, it was clear to the audit team that the staff group is self-critical and reflective. Eighteen recommendations were generated for the Department's own action by the review, set within a defined timeframe. At the time of the audit visit, most of these actions had either been implemented or were in the process of being implemented, and the University has cited the Department for good practice in the measures that it has taken to enhance the quality of the student experience. While the generic approach to the DSR has many useful aspects, the team remained unclear about the University's expectations for the combination of annual monitoring at programme level and the more generic periodic DSR at departmental level. The University may wish to reflect on the process, content and requirements of a DSR of the style employed for the review of the Department of Social and Policy Sciences.

147 Assessment strategies are discussed in the report of the DSR. Assessment serves to classify degrees and provides 'a formative function of monitoring student progress'. Students are normally assessed through a mixture of coursework assessment and examination. Feedback is provided on examinations through the personal tutor, and the DSR report noted that 'transcripts are given to students by their personal tutors who are then in a position to discuss the results'.

148 The Department stated that 'the personal tutor is central to the Department's support and guidance system for students'. From its discussions with students, the audit team formed the view that the effectiveness of the personal tutor system relied, to some extent, on student-initiated action and students' understanding of the academic, pastoral and welfare aspects of the tutor's role. The Department informed the team that 'staff see their personal tutees on a regular basis', and that if staff had not seen their tutees they would 'chase' them by email or remind them through classes. While recognising that tutees as well as tutors determine how well a personal tutor system fulfils its function, the team would encourage the Department to monitor the effectiveness of the operation of the system in view of its centrality to students' support and guidance.

149 Assignments and examination questions are subject to monitoring by the Board of Examiners and by external examiners. Recent reports of external examiners drew the Department's attention to the benefits that come from using the full-marking range. This is a matter that the University drew attention to as a generic issue in its overview of external examiner's reports for 2001-02. The Department has responded by the introduction of a banded system of marking to overcome the bunching of marks. The audit team found that external examiners' reports are critically evaluated, action taken and responses made at programme and departmental level. The team saw examples of students' assessed work and the relevant reports of external examiners. The team was able to confirm that the standard and content of student achievement is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the *FHEQ*.

150 Student handbooks exist for the programmes overall, for placements and for the dissertation. In general, the audit team considered the documents to be clear and systematic in their approach, and the booklet on dissertations to be particularly helpful. Students who met the team saw the main handbook and the placement handbook as useful. Students made it clear to the team that if there were an issue that they needed to explore in the Department, such as an appeal or complaint, they would find it easy to locate the information on how to proceed. Some students reported that it was difficult at first to understand placement issues since these were 'a step into the unknown'. It was, however, agreed that students were taken through the documentation as part of the briefing process prior to their placement. Student feedback is

collected on placement issues and analysed. The placement experience is clearly a positive one and reflects, at departmental level, the University's view expressed in the SED, of the distinctiveness of the University's approach to professional development.

151 The main mechanism through which students participate in quality management is the Departmental SSLC, to which students are invited to submit agenda items one week prior to a meeting. It is normal for the SSLC to be informed of the outcomes of action taken on matters raised. At the audit team's meeting with students, second and third-year students reported on areas of provision where the SSLC had achieved changes.

152 Students who met the audit team expressed concern about their potential 'anonymity' within the Department, given the comparative lack of small-group teaching in the first year. Those students in the group who did not readily self-identify with the image of a proactive learner reported that they had felt disadvantaged in accessing the support available to them on an informal basis. The Department explained to the team that the problems across the University in terms of time and space had made it difficult to provide all large first-year units with separate seminar time, but where it had not been possible to provide small-group teaching, mid-semester assessments had been conducted. Students reported that feedback on assignments was normally within the three-week target set, but where this did not happen an explanation for the lateness of turnaround was usually provided.

153 The Department has taken steps to use the University's quality framework to enhance its understanding of quality assurance, in line with the University's expectations as set out in QA Manual. The developing approach within the Department to enhancement within the new framework is positive, reflective and responsive.

154 The audit found that the quality of learning opportunities is 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**

155 The accuracy and utility of published and issued information was discussed in the audit team's meetings with sabbatical officers of the Students'

Union and with students in each of the DATs. The officers of the Students' Union confirmed that the information presented in the SED was realistic. Students were asked about published information, both hard copy and on the intranet, information provided as part of their courses and before they joined the University, and information available to them during and before engaging in a placement. They confirmed the accuracy of the prospectuses, and the on-line versions. The latter contain links to programme specifications for most undergraduate programmes and some postgraduate programmes although, in general, students showed little awareness of programme specifications.

156 Students reported that the information provided to them was generally accurate, reliable and informative, but noted that some programme handbooks might require updating. The University publishes minimum institutional requirements for the content of a programme handbook, stating that departmental directors of studies should notify students 'in writing, of any substantial changes to the content of the handbook during the course of an academic session'. Nevertheless, students were generally satisfied with the completeness of programme handbooks. Students expressed to the audit team some concerns about a lack of information in respect of the feedback they should expect to receive on their academic performance, echoing the information gathered in the 2002-03 student satisfaction survey. The SWS noted that international students who responded to the survey rated the promotional material they had received prior to entry as 'good'. The SWS noted, however, that some students at associated colleges reported some confusion over information on opportunities to continue their studies to degree level at the University. The University will, no doubt, wish to act to remove the potential for confusion over progression opportunities open to students on its collaborative programmes.

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

157 The extensive range of published information seen by the audit team in the course of the audit included prospectuses and web sites providing programme and University information, catalogues of programmes and units and student handbooks.

158 At the time of the audit visit the University was monitoring national developments as HEFCE's document, *Information on quality and standards in higher education* (HEFCE's document 02/15), moved toward the definition of a final specification of

published teaching quality information. The University is preparing to implement the recommendations in HEFCE's document 02/15, and QAC has formed a Working Group to address their implementation. At the time of the audit visit, the Working Group had yet to meet. Much of the material recommended in HEFCE's document 02/15 for internal availability is already accessible, and the statistical data should be better available when the new management information system, SAMIS, is fully rolled out. Before proceeding further, the University was, at the time of the audit visit, awaiting further guidance from HEFCE on the exact form of the information required. It was confirmed through the DATs that, at the time of the audit visit, the University's departments had not yet been asked to make an input to the requirements of HEFCE's document 02/15.

159 A sampling by the audit team of quantitative data available internally showed no instances of unreliability or inaccuracy. On the basis of meetings with staff and students, and documentation made available to it, the audit team found the University's current published information to be broadly accurate and reliable. However, the University will wish to address the occasional cases where there are inconsistencies in the information describing units between that in programme handbooks and on the intranet, and that available from the University's Unit Catalogue on the internet.

# Findings

## Findings

160 An institutional audit of the University was undertaken during the period 20 to 24 October 2003. 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 an awarding body. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, four DATs were conducted. 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 processes for assuring the quality of programmes

161 The University's quality assurance system is supported by a substantial QA Manual, revised to incorporate the *Code of practice*, setting out detailed procedures for all its quality assurance systems including procedures for programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review. The QA Manual does not itself have the status of a code of practice but attempts to clarify what is required and what is good practice.

162 The University has a thorough process for programme approval which requires the consideration of the academic rationale, market and resources and external academic review. Programmes are approved at faculty level and reported to the Senate. Collaborative programmes also require approval by the QAC. The University regards programme approval as a 'process rather than an event' and this reflects the practice of developing proposals as they pass through the committee system, rather than finalising them before submission.

163 The University's system for the quality assurance of its programmes is centred on its faculties operating through their teaching and quality committees. Central overview of the system is provided by the QAC which reports to the Senate. The system places considerable responsibility on directors of studies within the departments who, among other quality-related tasks, prepare annual monitoring reports on programmes, and serve on their faculty's committee which consider these reports. Programmes are subject to three distinct periodic review processes: DSR, departmental review and internal academic audit. In addition, many departments operate programmes which are subject to regular PSB accreditation.

164 Feedback from students is obtained through departmental feedback questionnaires at unit level. Feedback at the level of the programme as a whole is not routinely obtained. Departments are required to have SSLCs. The views of employers are obtained for DSR, and there is student representation on DSR panels. In 2002-03, the University worked with the Students' Union to conduct a University-wide survey of student satisfaction.

165 The University applies the same quality assurance procedures to its distance learning and collaborative provision. The Office of Associated Colleges maintains links with collaborative partners to ensure monitoring of programmes, and review reports are considered by QAC. The University has recently obtained a licence from Edexcel so that it now has responsibility for all aspects of the HND programmes that it operates with partner colleges.

166 The University states that its quality assurance framework is underpinned by principles that quality assurance should be directed towards developmental outcomes and enhancement; be pervasive and inclusive; foster critical self-evaluation and recognise different levels of responsibility and accountability. It notes that its QA Manual has introduced more consistency and regards it as one of its strengths. It is aware of perceptions within academic departments that there are too many procedures that are bureaucratic rather than adding value, and has reviewed its procedures to avoid duplication. It relies on its committees to ensure that its processes are operating effectively, and for the dissemination of good practice, and recognises that a widening of internal and external representation could increase the effectiveness of the role of committees in the assurance and enhancement of quality.

167 Overall, the audit team shared the University's views about its QA Manual and the need to widen consideration of quality assurance matters, but also agreed with staff that the current procedures sometimes tended to be bureaucratic and somewhat burdensome. The examples of unit reports and annual programme reports seen by the team, and some of the DSR reports, were not very reflective, and discussions with staff, particularly in relation to the changes occasioned by space restrictions, indicated that adequate attention was not always paid to the impact of management decisions on the student experience.

168 In the audit team's view, the demands on directors of studies, the limited feedback at programme level, the quality of annual reports and their scrutiny by committees of directors of studies

reduced the capacity of annual reporting to foster critical awareness or to share good practice across departments. Similarly, the composition of DSR panels without membership from other faculties or departments and their reliance to some extent on external examiners for external academic input and on annual reports as source documents, produced some reviews which could be inward-looking and uncritical rather than reflective and enhancing. The recent decisions by QAC to remit reports that demonstrated little analysis suggested that there was recognition of this problem by QAC, but not necessarily that departments understood the purpose of DSR to provide an opportunity to reflect on and develop their programmes.

169 The University has programme specifications for all of its programmes, but acknowledges that it had not yet embedded the use of learning outcomes to describe the academic character of individual units. The audit team noted that the classification of changes to units or programmes needed to be amended so as to ensure that programme specifications remained in line with changes to delivery or assessment modes at unit level, but placed heavy demands on faculty executive assistants to be alert to this. Nevertheless, the team was satisfied that, through its processes for approving programmes and changes to them, the University was currently maintaining a satisfactory oversight of the quality of its provision.

170 The internal academic audit process had been operating for less than a year at the time of the audit visit, so the audit team was not able to form a view as to its long term effectiveness or its capacity to improve the operation of quality assurance systems. The team noted that this system had been added to a review process that some staff already regarded as burdensome and that, at least within academic departments, it covered matters which could be explored in either DSR or departmental review. The team was not convinced that the process of academic audit would add much value to the existing academic annual monitoring and periodic review processes if those processes were operated fully, as designed, to encourage reflection and the dissemination of good practice.

171 The audit team considered that processes for assuring the quality of programmes were generally operating effectively, but noted instances where annual monitoring and periodic review had not met the level of analysis and reflection expected by the University in its procedures as described in the QA Manual. Overall, however, the findings of the audit confirm that broad confidence can be placed in the

soundness of the University's current and future management of the quality of its programmes.

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

172 The University considers its external examining process to be a key strength in assuring the academic standards of its awards. The QA Manual sets out comprehensive and detailed procedures for the external examining of taught provision, and the examination of research degrees excluding higher doctorates. The procedures include procedures for nomination of examiners, approval by the appropriate faculty board, induction and reporting. The precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*, are observed.

173 A large number of the programmes delivered at the University are accredited by PSBs, and such accreditations help to secure the appropriateness and standards of the University's awards. Although the University expects accreditation to be supported by the process of scheduling a DSR a year ahead of the PSB review, documentation prepared for an accreditation review was also being used as the basis for a DSR. It was subsequently recognised, in this instance, that the preparation of documentation for accreditation does not necessarily promote the level of self-reflection required for a DSR.

174 A new student record system, SAMIS, was in the process of being implemented fully at the time of the audit visit. The initial priority area for the system is admission and registration. The University recognises that there is a lack of centrally-held data on student assessment, and the SAMIS project team has been working on this as the next phase of implementation. The annual programme monitoring reports contain admission, progression and award data, but only for the year in question, an approach which does not allow trend analysis to be undertaken as part of the process. First destination data is provided separately by the Careers Office, but is not used as part of annual monitoring. Admission data is reviewed annually by the Senate, for planning purposes and for comparisons with comparable institutions.

175 External examiners are asked to comment on appropriate issues, and to submit their reports annually to the Vice-Chancellor. All reports are reviewed by the Vice-Chancellor and are circulated to the appropriate dean, head of department and the Deputy Chair of QAC. The use of external examiners at the subject level is effective, and external examiners make a positive contribution

to the standards of awards. The majority of the issues raised in their reports concerned matters of academic detail of the programmes for which they were responsible. The audit team noted, however, that external examiners have for some time been questioning the linkage of assessment to programme learning outcomes, and considered that this was an area that the University needs to continue to develop.

176 External examiners have commended many good practices, and confirm that standards are comparable with, or exceed, those at institutions with which they are familiar. The audit team noted prompt written responses by the relevant departments to matters raised by external examiners. The audit found that broad confidence can be placed in the University's present and future capacity to manage effectively the academic standard of its awards.

### **The use made by the institution of the academic infrastructure**

177 The Quality Support Office has coordinated analyses of the sections of the *Code of practice* as they have been published by the Agency, and improvements have been made to University procedures as a result. The University's consideration of all sections of the *Code of practice* was addressed in the SED. The audit team formed the view that the University had given appropriate consideration to the *Code of practice*, and had aligned its own QA Manual with the good practice outlined in the *Code of practice*.

178 Programme specifications are produced for all programmes to a University-wide template, and made available to students. Programme specifications have been written with the student audience in mind, but much of the information within them is recast into programme handbooks, which are then used by students as the primary source of information about their programmes of study. The audit team explored programme specifications during the DATs. It formed the view that the University could usefully encourage departments, as they continue to develop their programme specifications, to optimise links between intended learning outcomes, students' skills and competences and the learning and assessment methods that support them.

179 Subject benchmarks statements and the *FHEQ* are used as reference points in the formation of programme specifications. Although explicit reference is not made to them in programme specifications as a matter of course, there is evidence

that these aspects of the academic infrastructure have informed the design of programmes. Overall, the audit found that the University is making effective use of the academic infrastructure.

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

180 The LLC, situated on the main Claverton campus, is open 24-hours a day, seven days a week throughout the academic year and for extended hours during the summer vacation. Students reported that they were broadly satisfied with the provision of books and periodicals. The SWS raised concerns about photocopying and printing costs, and students who met the audit team also expressed concerns at the queuing times for printers. The summary results of the 2002-03 student satisfaction survey endorsed these concerns. In view of the fact that increasing use is being made of flexible-learning methodologies which can result in students having to print more materials, the University is encouraged to reflect on how changes in its approach to teaching and learning might impact more widely on the students' experience.

181 The University aims to provide an integrated and supportive learning environment and appropriate guidance and support in academic and personal matters. All undergraduate students have a personal tutor whose function is to provide advice on academic matters and review the student's academic performance. The audit team found variability in practice in the personal tutoring system. In seeking to implement its proposals for PDP for students, the University is encouraged to reflect on the acceptable variability of practice of the personal tutoring system.

182 The SWS indicated that a recent survey of international students showed their broad satisfaction with the support they receive from the University. It also indicated that students reported very positive experiences of the International Office, and international students who met the audit team were very appreciative of the support provided.

183 Three of the main student support services: the Learning Support Service; the Student Money Service; and the Counselling Service are coordinated by the Head of the Department of Student Services. On the basis of the evidence presented to it, the audit team concluded that the organisation and operation of services for students undertaken by the Department of Student Services was an example of good practice.

184 The capacity of staff to support students' learning is facilitated through a range of staff development opportunities, although ownership of responsibility for meeting the development needs of staff was unclear. Impetus for the development of new courses was provided in a number of ways, but there does not appear to be a systematic mechanism overseeing this. The appraisal process contributes little to identifying staff development needs, and the University might wish to consider how a more reliable system of monitoring the appraisal process would better enable its aspirations for appraisal to be met.

185 New staff are mentored through their probationary period, and are required to complete the University's Initial Teaching Development Programme, unless they can demonstrate equivalent experience. The audit team took note of the reflective attitude towards the support of learning shown by the recently appointed academic staff whom it met.

186 A scheme is in place for the peer review of teaching, but its implementation across the University is variable, making this opportunity for learning and dissemination unreliable. Excellence in teaching is developed and rewarded by mechanisms including prizes, awards from the Teaching Development Fund and the annual Innovation in Learning and Teaching event. Attendance at the event is modest however, and the University might wish to consider a more structured and effective approach for the dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching.

## Outcomes of the discipline audit trails

### Undergraduate programmes in chemistry

187 The programme specifications for the programmes that were the subject of this DAT set out appropriate educational aims and learning outcomes. These are in turn linked to the delivery of the programmes and the support and assessment that students might expect to experience. In general, the programme specifications match the expectations of the academic infrastructure. From its study of students' work, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the programmes is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the *FHEQ*.

188 Although some systems concerning the support of student learning within the Department of Chemistry are not formalised, the students who met the audit team commented in broadly positive terms

about their experiences of the courses as a whole. The Department is responsive to the concerns of students and its external examiners. Feedback to students on progress, and evaluation of the courses by students, are conducted at unit rather than at programme level. The team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

### Undergraduate programmes in electronic and electrical engineering

189 The scope of the DAT in electronic and electrical engineering was the undergraduate awards offered by the Department, all of which have the option of a placement year. In March 2003, the IEE conducted a successful re-accreditation of the existing awards and accreditation of the new awards. All issues from the previous accreditation had been addressed, including improvements to group projects. The undergraduate laboratories have been refurbished since the last accreditation visit, and the accreditation panel was impressed by the new facilities.

190 Information to students is provided in handbooks which were well used by them. Handbooks are supplemented by information given in lectures on the details of a unit and its assessment. Programme specifications were produced with reference to the *FHEQ* and the appropriate subject benchmarks, although they do not show explicit links to these reference points.

191 In order to address the diverse backgrounds of students on entry, a resource-based, self-paced approach to first-year teaching and learning has been developed, and is now in its third year of operation. This approach is being disseminated within the University and nationally, and its effectiveness is being monitored within the Department.

192 The audit team concluded that the standard and content of the assessed work that it saw was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the *FHEQ*. This is confirmed by the IEE accreditation and the external examiners. The team also concluded that the quality of learning opportunities is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

### MSc in Management

193 The audit team was satisfied that the nature of the assessment and standard of student achievement in the programme met the expectations of the programme specification. The programme specification itself had addressed the *Subject benchmark statement* for masters awards

in business and management, and the descriptors of academic level of a masters award in the *FHEQ*. The audit found that the standard and content of students' work was appropriate to the award of MSc in Management.

194 Documentation reviewed by the audit team indicated that students on the MSc in Management programme were broadly satisfied with the programme. Students who met the team confirmed that they were very appreciative of most aspects of the provision. The team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for a programme of study leading to the award of MSc in Management.

#### **Undergraduate programmes in social and policy sciences**

195 The DAT in social and policy sciences covered the programmes within the department leading to first degree awards, and the documentation for the DAT was based on the report of the most recent DSR. The audit team was satisfied that the University's internal procedures had been used effectively to guide the development of the DSR, that there was proper external representation in the review process and that reflection leading to enhancement had taken place.

196 Programme specifications for the undergraduate degrees were completed according to University requirements and in line with external expectations of such documentation. The Department may, nevertheless, wish to reflect further on the way in which skills elements are assessed within the framework of the Department's developing assessment strategy and on the contextualisation of learning outcomes by academic level. Documentation available to students was considered by the audit team to be clear, and the support given before, during and after placement was considered to be helpful to the enhancement of student learning.

197 The audit team concluded that the academic standard and content of students' assessed work was appropriate to the titles of the awards. The team also concluded that the quality of learning opportunities, including the support for placements, was suitable for the programmes of study leading to those awards.

#### **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**

198 The SED provided a clear description of the key elements and the details of its strategy for managing quality and standards based on the QA Manual and the quality framework. Throughout, the SED reported on the strengths of the developing system and reflected frankly on issues either still requiring attention or on perceptions and problems relating to implementation. It was less clear about its proposed timeframe for future action. The SED illustrated an active process of development, implementation and review, based upon faculties and departments, in a management context in which the relationships within faculties and between faculties and the central University are still evolving. The termination of a collaborative partnership as a result of unresolved quality concerns, and the incorporation of lessons learned from this partnership into programmes elsewhere, shows the benefits that come from a clear process of articulating standards and quality. The correspondence between the University's declared strengths and limitations and the findings of the audit supports confidence in the University's capacity for effective institutional-level reflection, evaluation and appropriate action.

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

199 The SED indicated aspects of the University's system for the management of quality and standards where work is still in progress or where action still has to be taken. The development of programme specifications and the associated elements is relatively recent, and the University is aware of the need to ensure that the understanding of the formal requirements of the quality system is spread widely through all levels of staff and within departments. The SED provided ample evidence of action being taken or about to be taken, and highlighted in particular the new internal audit based on assessing the implementation of identified themes across the University. The University anticipates that internal academic audit will supplement existing mechanisms for ensuring the monitoring, identification and spread of good practice.

200 The SED showed that the University understands the need for establishing a quality management system which is capable of using the quality assurance framework to secure enhancement of the quality of the student experience, through

the spread of good practice not only within faculties but also across faculties. It also demonstrated the University's awareness of the importance of ensuring that its systems actually secure the potential enhancements. The SED made it clear that the University sees quality management and enhancement as a continuous and reflective process, a journey rather than a final destination. The SED, however, did not convey a sense of priority and a timeframe for enhancement activity. Instead, it gave an impression of much action at a variety of levels and in a variety of forums rather than coordinated action within a clearly articulated enhancement strategy. A clearer sense of priorities and proposed timeframes may help the University better to specify and secure the key enhancements in quality of provision and the student experience that it is seeking to obtain.

### The reliability of information

201 The audit process included a check on the progress made by the University towards production of the information set in the format recommended in HEFCE's document 02/15, and the reliability of those elements currently published by the University. The University reported that it had formed a Working Group to address the implications of HEFCE's document 02/15, but that it was waiting for further guidance from HEFCE before proceeding. Much of the material recommended for internal publication is already accessible, and the new SAMIS system should make the information more complete and more accessible.

202 A sampling of quantitative data available internally, and of quantitative and qualitative information available externally showed no evidence of unreliability or inaccuracy. A small number of unit descriptors were found to be inconsistent between versions issued to students and those publicly available. Students reported that the information issued to them as part of their programmes of study and prior to their entering the University was generally accurate and reliable.

### Features of good practice

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

- i the quality of the University's engagement with its associated colleges (paragraphs 79, 109);
- ii the organisation and operation of central services for students undertaken by the Department of Student Services (paragraph 104).

### Recommendations for action

204 The University is advised to:

- i reflect upon the impact of the University's quality assurance systems on the students' experience, and the effectiveness of those systems for maintaining and enhancing the quality of that experience (paragraphs 25, 41, 42, 48, 52, 92, 99, 136, 146);
- ii reflect upon how changes in the structure and organisation of teaching, learning and assessment, and changes in student support mechanisms, might impact on the quality of the students' experience (paragraphs 30, 56, 93, 97, 102, 110);
- iii continue to develop programme specifications as a means for clarifying and optimising constructive links between learning outcomes and students' skills and competences and the learning and assessment methods that support them (paragraphs 32, 119, 145, 148);
- iv consider introducing wider cross-faculty representation on DSRs and on faculty teaching and quality committees (paragraphs 36, 37);
- v consider how to undertake the systematic collection of information at programme level to support the ability of the University to have a good overview of students' experience (paragraphs 69, 72).

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

The University welcomes the report's findings of '**broad confidence**' in the management of **quality and standards**, both now and into the future, and is delighted that the strong commitment to ensuring a high quality learning experience for our students is recognised. We are also pleased that a number of areas of existing good practice have been identified including 'the quality of the University's engagement with its associated colleges' and 'the organisation and operation of central services for students undertaken by Student Services'. We acknowledge the need to establish a 'clearer sense of priorities and proposed timeframes for completion' for the significant amount of developmental work being undertaken.

In response to the recommendations outlined in the report, the University has already taken steps to begin to address these opportunities for improvement.

- Although review of our procedures and practices is a continuous process, a comprehensive review of the University's quality assurance systems, as articulated in the QA Manual, began in 2002. This review will continue over the next few months and will endeavour to reflect upon the impact on the student experience as well as increasing the opportunities for enhancing the quality of that experience.
- We believe that the University's Learning and Teaching Committee and Student Experience and Strategy Committee have already made significant progress in ensuring that structural and organisational changes to learning, teaching, assessment and student support mechanisms, especially with regard to the increase in more flexible learning methods, are considered routinely. However, we recognise that there is further work that could be done in this area and will seek to strengthen this involvement as we develop further initiatives.
- Work is almost complete on mapping student skills and unit learning outcomes throughout all programmes of study. Programme specifications will continue to be developed in light of this recommendation and further training on linking learning outcomes and assessment will be provided.
- As a result of the Audit Report the University will look to re-evaluate its procedures for all areas of internal review. This will include considering the membership of degree scheme review panels. Discussions on cross-faculty representation on Faculty Teaching and Quality Committees will need to wait until the work of the Future Shape of the University Working Group is complete.
- As advised in the Self-Evaluation Document (para 9.9) discussions are already ongoing with respect to the systematic collection of information at programme level to supplement the information already collected at unit level.

The Quality Assurance Committee will monitor progress on these initiatives.

