

**Kingston University**

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MARCH 2005

Institutional audit

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## Preface

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

### The purpose of institutional audit

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

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

### Judgements

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

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

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

### Nationally agreed standards

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

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

### The audit process

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

The main elements of institutional audit are:

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

### The evidence for the audit

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

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

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

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

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## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Kingston University (the University) from 28 February to 4 March 2005 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

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

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

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

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

### Outcome of the audit

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

- broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's current management of the quality of its programmes.
- the findings of the audit suggest that there can be broad confidence in the University's institutional-level capacity to manage effectively the security of its awards.

### Features of good practice

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

- the effectiveness of the way in which the University uses self-reflection to inform its development
- the accessibility of academic staff and the supportive way in which they interact with students
- the academic and pastoral support available to students at both faculty and University level

- the support available across the University to promote learning and teaching initiatives
- the enhancement of the student experience by extensive external input into programmes across the University
- the preparation and pre-placement support of students for the placement/sandwich year
- the responsiveness of the University, at all levels, to student views.

### 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:

- take steps to assure itself how staff appraisal, which it sees as a key mechanism for identifying staff development needs, is being consistently and fully deployed
- continue to monitor and develop its learning resources, particularly the availability and use of appropriate space, to match the growth in student numbers.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- consider how the development of assessment criteria which reflect more explicitly the level of the modules, their learning outcomes and their modes of assessment would benefit both students and internal and external assessors.

### Outcomes of discipline audit trails: Art and Design, Business and Management, Chemistry and Computing

The standard of student achievement in the programmes audited is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the awards.

### National reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings the audit team also investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the audit suggest that the University has

responded appropriately to the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements, programme specifications and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, while noting that the University may wish to consider further parts of the section of the *Code* on assessment of students.

In due course, the institutional audit process will include a check on the reliability of the information set published by institutions in the format recommended in documents HEFCE 02/15 and 03/51. At the time of the audit, the University was alert to the requirements set out in document HEFCE 02/15 and to the implications of document HEFCE 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, and was moving in an appropriate manner to fulfil its responsibilities in this respect.

# **Main report**



## Main report

1 An institutional audit of Kingston University (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 28 February 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility for its awards.

2 The audit was carried out using a process developed by QAA in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and Universities UK (UUK), and has been endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills. For institutions in England, it replaces the previous processes of continuation audit, undertaken by QAA at the request of UUK and SCOP, and universal subject review, undertaken by QAA on behalf of HEFCE, as part of the latter's statutory responsibility for assessing the quality of education that it funds.

3 The audit checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of its academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study leading to those awards and for publishing reliable information. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, the audit included consideration of an example of institutional processes at work at the level of the programme, through discipline audit trails (DATs), together with examples of those processes operating at the level of the institution as a whole. The scope of the audit encompassed all of the University's provision apart from its collaborative arrangements which will form the basis of a separate audit.

## Section 1: Introduction: Kingston University

### The institution and its mission

4 Kingston upon Thames has been a location for vocational and higher education (HE) for over a century. In 1970 Kingston Polytechnic was formed through the merger of colleges and it was incorporated under the terms of the Education Reform Act (1988). Following the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), the Polytechnic became Kingston University and was then able to exercise its own full degree-awarding powers. The University delivers its courses over four sites, two of which are close to the town centre, with the other two being about three to five miles away: Penrhyn Road, Knights Park, Kingston Hill and Roehampton Vale.

5 At the time of the audit, there were more than 17,700 students registered on courses leading to the University's awards, 80 per cent of whom were studying full-time and the remainder part-time. The majority of students were taking first degrees; there were approximately 230 research students and just under 2,500 students on taught postgraduate courses. There has been significant growth at all levels in student numbers over recent years (20 per cent over the last five years), and this has included the successful development of Foundation Degrees (FDs) and increases in overseas students.

6 Having achieved the targets required from the previous three-year allocation of HEFCE Additional Student Numbers (ASNs), 2003-04 was the first of three years of ASN growth. An increase in student numbers continues to be an essential element of the University's plans in respect of widening access and participation, providing opportunities to develop the portfolio, deepening and extending the links with further education (FE) partners, and of attracting significantly greater numbers of international students. Specific targets will be reviewed as part of the preparation of a new Strategic Plan.

7 The University is organised into six Faculties: Art, Design and Music; Arts and Social Sciences; Business; Health and Social Care Sciences; Science; and Technology. Each Faculty is subdivided into schools. One school, Education, stands outside of the faculty structure although it will join the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in 2005. The Faculties are reasonably balanced in terms of size, with student numbers ranging from 1,800 in Health and Social Care Sciences to over 3,800 in Business.

8 The University claims to be at the forefront of FD development, particularly regarding joint ventures with employers such as KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, the Army, and the Royal Navy. A range of FDs has also been developed with partner colleges. Part of the Health and Social Care Sciences provision is delivered at St George's Hospital Medical School, which results in students being registered for awards of Kingston University or of London University, depending on the particular course they are taking.

9 The Strategic Plan 2002-03 to 2005-06 presents the Mission Statement and character of the University as follows:

'The mission of Kingston University is to promote participation in Higher Education, which it regards as a democratic entitlement; to strive for excellence in learning, teaching and research; to realise the creative potential and fire the imagination of all its members; and to equip its students to make effective contributions to society and the economy'.

10 The Strategic Plan identifies eight Institutional Goals:

- to provide all students able to benefit from higher education, regardless of their social, ethnic and religious background, age or experience, with opportunities to realise their life-long learning ambitions
- to provide a comprehensive range of high quality courses that encourage critical learning and also develop personal, social and employability skills
- to engage in research, scholarship and consultancy that adds to the stock of knowledge and contributes to the development of understanding for the benefit of individuals, society and the economy
- to build an inclusive and caring University community based on mutual respect and openness of which all students and staff, regardless of their status, are equal members and in which all have access to high quality services
- to contribute to the comprehensive provision of post-18 education in the region (primarily South West London and Surrey), in partnership with other higher education institutions and further education colleges
- to develop the University's links with the rest of Europe and the wider world in order to enrich learning, enhance research and contribute to the regional, national and global economy
- to ensure that the University's organisation, structure and systems are appropriate to its Mission and Goals, and to manage and develop its human, physical and financial resources to achieve the best possible academic value and value-for-money
- to strengthen the University's 'civic' and, in particular, cultural contribution to the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the region.

11 The University has extensive collaborative provision with partners in the UK and overseas. This provision will be the subject of a separate QAA audit.

### Background information

12 The published information available for this audit included:

- the report of QAA's continuation audit of the University published in 2002, 10 QAA subject review reports, three QAA developmental engagement reports, and 15 Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) reports

- information made available through the Higher Education and Research Opportunities in the UK (HERO) portal, the website of the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the University's own website.

The University provided QAA with:

- a self-evaluation document (SED)
- discipline self-evaluation documents (DSEDs) for each of the four disciplines selected for DATS
- a student written submission (SWS) produced by Kingston University Students' Union (SU)
- the University's Strategic Plan 2002-03 to 2005-06, its Corporate Planning Statement 2004 and other corporate information.

13 The University provided the audit team with substantial written information which was well organised and catalogued, and also additional documentation on request. Further, auditors were able to access Kingston's Live Interactive Campus (KLIC), including both staff and student pages.

14 The audit team is grateful to the University for ensuring that the information required for the audit was readily made available, and to the SU for providing their SWS.

### The audit process

15 Subsequent to a preliminary meeting at the University in July 2004, QAA confirmed that four DATS would be conducted during the audit visit. The audit team's final selection of DATS was: Art and Design, Business and Management Studies, Chemistry and Computing. QAA received the University's SED in October 2004 and the DSEDs in January 2005. The SED and the DSEDs for Chemistry and Computing were written specifically for the audit, whereas the DSEDs for Business and Management and Art and Design reproduced documentation arising from recent Internal Subject Reviews.

16 The audit team visited the University from 25 to 27 January 2005 and met with the Vice Chancellor, senior members of staff, and student representatives including officers of the SU. These briefing meetings enabled the auditors to better understand the character of the University and the management of quality and standards, and to discuss with students matters raised in the SWS. No areas were selected for thematic enquiry. Based on documentation received prior to the visit and on the briefing visit, the audit team identified a programme of meetings which would allow it to pursue various lines of enquiry.

17 The SWS was compiled by the University SU on behalf of the student body using information gathered by survey, focus groups and face-to-face interviews at all four of the University sites. The SWS was not confidential. The audit team met with student representatives during the briefing visit, and with a larger representative selection of all students during the audit visit.

18 The audit visit took place from 28 February to 4 March 2005 and included further meetings with staff and students of the University, both at central level and in relation to the DATS. The audit team comprised Dr J Grattan, Professor J Latham, Dr R M Latto, Professor D Meehan, and Professor P Sullivan, auditors, and Mrs H Douglas, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Ms F Crozier, Assistant Director, Development and Enhancement Group.

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

19 The 2002 report commended the University for many good practices, including the flexibility within institutional frameworks to provide for local and subject specific needs; the clarity of the framework put in place to assure quality of provision and academic standards in the joint (with St George's Hospital Medical School) Faculty of Health and Social Care Sciences; the establishment of the roles of faculty learning and teaching co-ordinators and educational technology leaders to support the implementation of its learning and teaching strategy; its induction and staff development processes for new staff, and the initiatives taken to involve a wide range of staff in development activities; the thoroughness of its processes of programme validation and review; the support in place to ensure the quality of the student learning opportunities in collaborating institutions; and the way in which consultation and communication are being used to support its approach to quality management.

20 The audit report invited the University to consider the advisability of ensuring that, where institutional frameworks allow variation in interpretation and implementation, the boundaries of admissible variation are appropriately defined and adhered to; reviewing the regulations concerning the organisation of boards of examiners to ensure that these regulations support appropriate practice; expediting the review of its appeals and complaints procedures to improve clarity and equity of treatment; and extending the mechanisms to monitor and evaluate as a whole the various strands of staff development offered across the University.

It also pointed to the desirability of continuing to review at institutional level the terms of reference and membership of faculty boards; and continuing to encourage faculties to appoint student representatives in a timely manner and to make them aware of the support and training offered for students taking up these positions.

21 A detailed one-year follow-up to the audit which provided responses to the above points was submitted to QAA in March 2003. The SED updated these responses and the present audit considered the actions taken by the University and their effectiveness, and these will be covered in this report.

22 Discounting QAA reviews of collaborative provision, which is to be the subject of a separate audit, engagements with QAA since the previous academic audit have been as follows:

- Subject Review, Hospitality, Leisure, Recreation, Sport and Tourism (Sports Science), report October 2001
- Major Review of Healthcare programmes (pilot review), Kingston University / St George's Hospital Medical School / South West London Workforce Development Confederation Radiography and Physiotherapy, report December 2003 (visit 2002)
- FD, Aircraft Engineering, spring 2003
- Developmental Engagement, Social Work, visit spring 2003
- Developmental Engagement, History, visit spring 2004
- Developmental Engagement, Law, visit spring 2004.

23 In addition, the School of Education has been visited twice since the 2001 audit as part of the 2002 to 2008 Ofsted cycle of inspection of initial teacher training. There have also been follow-up reviews and a paper-based review of those HNDs that have been revalidated as FDs.

24 Reports of the scrutiny described above confirm from an external and independent viewpoint a confidence in quality and standards at the University, with instances of good practice and only limited areas for improvement noted. There is clear evidence that the University reacts in a responsive, reflective and balanced way to external reviews.

## Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

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

25 The SED identified the two primary purposes of its Quality Strategy as the 'maintenance of the standards of the academic awards of the University at a similar (or higher) level than those of similar awards in other HE institutions' and 'ensuring the highest quality of student experience (in its broadest sense) within the resources available to the University'. The SED explained that 'the University adheres to the principle that quality and standards are located at the interface between all staff and students'. To achieve this it has established a framework to guide, support and monitor staff in the execution of their responsibilities at all levels.

26 The SED recognised that this framework approach can create tensions, particularly between the range of variation that is desirable to meet discipline needs and the requirement to limit this to achieve comparability across disciplines and faculties. The last QAA Quality Audit Report, in 2002, advised the University to review the boundaries of admissible variation, identifying particularly annual monitoring, marking strategies, assessment feedback, academic and pastoral student support, and student handbooks. Since that audit, the University has developed its quality framework further to increase the commonality in many areas. The SED concluded that overall 'the balance is right with systems in place to detect excessive variation and review procedures' while maintaining a degree of local autonomy appropriate for different disciplines.

27 During the briefing and audit visits the audit team had the opportunity to explore this framework and the variation around it at all levels, and to assess how it operated in practice to assure the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

### The institution's framework for managing quality and standards

28 Overall responsibility for all academic affairs, including quality and standards, lies with the Academic Board. This is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and has a maximum membership of 40, including representatives of academic staff, faculty academic managers, and students. Since 2001, operational matters have been delegated downwards to three subcommittees. The Academic Standards and Quality Group (ASQG) is responsible for monitoring quality and standards, considering alignment of new qualifications with *The framework*

*for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*, reviewing outcomes of procedures, and ensuring engagement with the Academic Infrastructure. The Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) is responsible for developing and maintaining policies and strategies on assessment, learning, and teaching. Both ASQG and LTC are chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and have some common membership to provide integration between their processes. They also include members from all faculties, providing a route for information to flow both horizontally between faculties and vertically between the centre and faculties. A third sub-committee, the Research Committee, is responsible for the research strategy. It has a sub-committee, the Research Degrees Committee, which is responsible for the quality and standards of research degrees. All assessment boards are also formally sub-committees of the Academic Board.

29 ASQG has three sub-committees with responsibility for quality and standards in distinct areas: The Graduate Development and Approvals Board (GDAB), the Undergraduate Modular Scheme Development and Approvals Board (UMSDAB) and the External Examiners Approvals Board. The Annual Monitoring Working Group, and the Validation and Review Working Group were also established to advise ASQG on specific matters in these areas. GDAB and UMSDAB are responsible for developing and managing the modular schemes in their areas and for approving variations from these in the University's courses. In addition, all validation and review panels report to ASQG.

30 The Academic Directorate, a group of senior academic and administrative staff chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, has a high-level strategic function in course planning and academic strategy. There is an overlap of membership of Academic Directorate and the Executive and this forms an important link between these committees and the executive arm. The Academic Development Department (containing the Academic Development centre), is a central academic department which works closely with the Academic Registry, has a specific role in developing and evaluating the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures and in ensuring that the University adheres to the Academic Infrastructure. There are also a number of less formal groups, sometimes created to address particular issues. The well-established Academic Affairs Management Group, like the Academic Directorate chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and consisting mainly of senior administrative staff, has an important role in the development of strategic discussion papers.

31 The SED described a 'hierarchy of responsibility' for maintaining quality and standards. Much of the responsibility for maintaining quality and standards is therefore delegated from Academic Board and its sub-committees down to faculties. Deans of faculties are required to have appropriate management structures and processes in place to maintain standards and quality. This committee structure may vary between faculties according to the needs of their disciplines, but it must articulate with the University's procedures. Within faculties, heads of school are responsible for 'the curriculum, standards and quality of the modules in the subject(s) within their schools', and module leaders are responsible for the 'standards and quality of the delivery of their modules'.

32 The University's processes for assuring quality and standards are laid out in a number of detailed documents available to staff on the web through KLIC. An overall summary is available in the document Approval, Validation and Review of Taught Programmes with details of procedures laid out in full in the Quality Assurance Procedures Handbook. A new edition of this was brought out for the 2004-05 academic year to incorporate a number of recent significant changes. The audit team noted that at the time of its visit the section on guidelines for producing student handbooks was missing from this new edition but understood that a replacement was under preparation. There are also separate documents on The Undergraduate Modular Scheme (UMS) and The Postgraduate Credit Framework (PCF), with detailed accompanying guidance notes. All these documents are available for students to access through KLIC.

33 The University has established frameworks for assessment at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. These are delineated in a number of documents on KLIC. The Assessment Handbook defines responsibilities of staff at all levels and the general procedures to be followed by Module Assessment Boards (MABS) and Programme Assessment Boards (PABs). The Academic Regulations pages on the web include more detailed procedures for marking and classifying students in the UMS and PCF. All this information is available on both the student and the staff sections of the web. There is some variation in the way these procedures are deployed at faculty and school level but the audit team was able to confirm through the DATs that there was overall adherence to the framework.

34 The Academic Regulations web pages on KLIC contain level descriptors for programmes, assessment criteria and an example of standard grade criteria, which has been adopted widely across the University.

This is necessarily very general. The SED states that 'staff use criteria designed appropriately for particular types of assessment'. However, the audit team saw a number of examples in the DATs where further development was necessary. Although students always seemed content that they knew what the assessment criteria for specific pieces of work were, it would be desirable for the University to explore ways of ensuring that published criteria at the module and programme level are always appropriate to the level and type of work being assessed. (See paragraphs 119, 132 and 152).

35 Following the University's recent review of the first-year experience, there has been a move to increase the amount of formative assessment in the first year, partly to help the transition to higher education of students from a non-standard educational background. Through the DATs it was possible to confirm that this was taking place and was much appreciated by students.

36 The Quality Assurance Procedures Handbook web pages on KLIC contain detailed and effective procedures for appointing and using external examiners to maintain and enhance quality and standards. The audit team saw good evidence in the DATs that these procedures were working and that, in the few instances where there had been problems, there were robust monitoring procedures for ensuring that the problem was rectified.

37 The SED describes the University's substantial collaborative provision as subject in principle to the same arrangements for management of quality and standards as its in-house provision. This will be considered in a future audit by QAA.

38 The SED states that the University's procedures have been subject to a systematic review to ensure adherence to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA. Although the audit team found a lack of clarity at the level of criteria for some assessments, it can confirm adherence to the precepts of the *Code* at both DAT and central levels. Similarly, there was a high level of responsiveness to other parts of the Academic Infrastructure relevant to quality assurance procedures. Overall, the team found good evidence that the University's policy of establishing a central framework around which faculties and schools would build their procedures for maintaining the quality of its provision and the standards of its awards was working well. The policy is dependent on a robust and integrated system for monitoring and controlling the amount of variation. With very

few exceptions, the team found that the system the University had put in place to achieve this was effective.

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

39 The SED recognises the importance of proactive strategies in addition to effective monitoring and review processes and the sharing of good practice that these generate. It indicates that future enhancement is being planned against a background of expansion, widening participation and pressure on space. It is the University's intention to continue investing in and developing a number of recent initiatives designed to enhance learning and teaching in this context. There will be a further deployment within Faculties of Learning and Teaching Coordinators and Educational Technology Leaders and a continuing emphasis on the development of the amount and sophistication of the use of the University's virtual learning environment (VLE). Another important mechanism for enhancement is the encouragement and funding of faculties to develop initiatives, initially serving their own disciplines, which may in due course be rolled out across the University. Mathsaid, now a University-wide remedial maths programme on the VLE, is an example of this process. Other areas currently being developed with faculty involvement are the enhancement of the first-year experience in the context of increased widening participation and the enhancement of the limited space for teaching and, in learning resources, to better fit the learning and teaching needs. A Deputy Director of Academic Development has recently been appointed to encourage and integrate these initiatives.

40 The audit team saw many examples, both in the documentation and in meetings with staff, of initiatives being encouraged and adopted, and noted the enthusiasm with which enhancement issues were being addressed throughout the University, but particularly at school and faculty level. It also saw instances, for example in the introduction and operation of the new Internal Subject Review (ISR), where self-reflection by the University had resulted in substantial improvement of both institution-wide and local processes. However, there were some enhancement mechanisms, for example staff appraisal and the peer observation of teaching, which the team found to be used rather variably (see paragraph 122), perhaps because they were initiated and monitored at faculty level and different faculties valued them differently. The team also found in the DATS that the University's new student record and information

system (SITS: Vision), which the SED identified as an important potential enhancement mechanism, was still not generally viewed as a useful source of information at School level. Overall, though, the audit team came to the view that the University was successful in creating a system and a culture that was generating a continuing and effective enhancement of quality and standards.

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

#### **Course and Field Approval and Validation**

41 The University uses the term 'field' to describe a validated group of modules that can contribute to an award title. Fields may be minor, half, major or full. The term 'course' describes the award for which the student is registered. It can consist of a full field or a combination of major, half or minor fields.

42 New fields and courses are subject to a two-stage approval process. An initial proposal is submitted through the relevant faculty to the Academic Directorate on a pro forma which addresses in some detail general issues relating to University and faculty priorities, recruitment, requirement for new modules, resourcing, and the need for external accreditation. This is reviewed by an Advisory Sub-Group of the Academic Directorate who identify issues for consideration by the Academic Directorate which, in turn, makes recommendations for approval to proceed to validation, or otherwise, to the Academic Board. This triggers the formal validation process.

43 In 2003-04 the University moved from the full, University-level validation of all new fields and courses to a more selective, risk based approach. Procedures for this, including the criteria for allocation to different validation procedures, are laid out in full in the Quality Assurance Procedures Handbook. If a new field is to be made up of more than 50 per cent new modules, then it is subject, as before, to a full University-level validation event by a panel with external membership. The process is monitored and administered throughout by the Academic Standards and Awards Section which is responsible for circulating the panel's report, together with any conditions and recommendations, both centrally and to the faculty and for ensuring that any conditions are fulfilled before the course commences. The 2002 QAA Quality Audit Report commended the University for the thoroughness of this process and the audit team can confirm from the examples it saw that this remains the case.

44 A few other high risk developments, such as new fields or courses proposed by overseas collaborative partners or by new United Kingdom public/private sector collaborative partners, still require this full validation procedure even if they are made up of only 50 per cent new modules or less. However, for all other new fields or courses with 50 per cent new modules or less, validation is delegated to faculty boards. Faculties manage this process through their normal committee structures, with the faculty sub-committee responsible for quality reviewing the proposal and making a recommendation to their faculty board. A degree of externality, in accordance with the *Code of practice*, is normally achieved through membership of this sub-committee from schools other than the one submitting the proposal. Documentation for faculty-level validation is normally limited to a field specification and module specifications for all the new modules. In principle, this relatively light touch for validation of new fields largely based on existing activity should be both effective and efficient, although the audit team felt it was too new to be certain that it is operating fully as intended. The process is being reviewed by the Validation and Review Working Group of ASQG who have identified some variation in practice between faculties which is being addressed in order to achieve greater commonality. The team saw this as evidence that here, as elsewhere, the University's ability to monitor and, if necessary, adjust its processes was robust.

#### **Annual monitoring**

45 The SED indicates that the University 'considers ongoing annual monitoring, evaluation and development to be a cornerstone of quality assurance'. This is based around a well-established hierarchy of module, subject and course logs, each completed according to a standard template. These templates are very full and well-defined. The Module Log, completed annually by the module leader, requires consideration of information from student feedback, external examiners and detailed progression data together with a discussion of the use of the VLE, innovations, and future change. It culminates in an action plan which is signed off by the subject leader or Head of School. The Subject Log has a briefer template, requiring the identification of any generic issues, examples of good practice and necessary actions arising from the modules within a subject. It is the responsibility of the Head of School and is approved by the Dean or a designated nominee. The Course Log, which may be combined with the Subject Log where subjects and courses are coterminous, is the responsibility of the Board of Study or the Course Director and is again approved at

faculty level. The template for this is very full, covering strategic planning issues, as well as detailed analysis of progression statistics, curriculum, learning and teaching strategies, external input, student feedback, and resourcing needs. It culminates with a report on the previous year's action plan and proposals for future action. At the top of this hierarchy of logs is a Faculty Annual Monitoring Report normally prepared by the chair of the faculty quality committee and submitted to ASQG. This is based on another very full template which mirrors closely the Course Log. These reports are reviewed and summarised for ASQG by a working group, the Annual Monitoring Review Group.

46 The audit team found this process to be very well designed and thorough with effective mechanisms for identification of both weaknesses and innovation and for tracking these through to ASQG. However, when looking at the way it functioned at the level of DATS, it was clear that there were some areas where its operation in practice could be improved. The use of centrally generated progression statistics was very patchy and schools and faculties were still often generating their own. Although at their best logs were full and evaluative, the team saw several examples which had not been fully completed. The SED indicates that the University is aware of these weaknesses in what is otherwise a comprehensive system and is addressing them.

#### **Periodic review**

47 The University's principal mechanism for the periodic review of its academic provision is the Internal ISR. This is a new procedure, replacing the previous course based process in 2003-04. All courses and fields within a subject area, defined by the JACS code designations, are reviewed together using a system based on the developmental engagement model devised by QAA. The process is highly structured with very full details laid out in the Quality Assurance Procedures Handbook. It is initiated by the Academic Standards and Awards Section (ASAS) of the Academic Registry which has established a six-year cycle for reviewing all areas of the University and monitors the process of individual reviews. The subject area being reviewed prepares a Critical Self Evaluation (CSE) document following a pre-defined structure and makes available a wide range of other documentation, including relevant minutes, handbooks, accreditation reports, external examiners' reports, module, field and subject logs, student evaluations, and student work. The review panel is chaired by an experienced reviewer and contains at least two subject specialists external to the University. The formal review event lasts for between one and a half and two days and

includes meetings with staff and students. The panel then produces a report, following a set structure, and makes a set of judgements on the provision and recommendations for future action. Following receipt of the report an action plan is prepared for approval by the faculty quality committee. The report and the action plan are forwarded to ASAS for checking and submitting to ASQG for approval. Follow-up reports on the action plan are subsequently included in the annual monitoring process and a brief report on the implementation of action plans is submitted to ASQG after one year. Franchised collaborative courses in the UK are included in the standard ISR process. Validated collaborative courses in the UK and all overseas collaborative arrangements are subject to a separate review which feeds into the subsequent ISR.

48 This is a relatively new process, which is still subject to review and development. As part of the DATs, the audit team was able to see it in operation in two subject areas. In both cases the reviews were detailed, evaluative and robust. There was good evidence that their outcomes were accepted as valuable by staff in the subject areas concerned and had led to significant changes. The University's Validation and Review Working Group did an initial and very thorough evaluation of the first three ISRs in the autumn of 2004, and concluded that they were working well and needed only minor changes, mainly to the documentation of the process, which have now been instituted. From the evidence it saw, the team can confirm that the new ISR process is thorough and effective.

49 In addition to ISR, the University has three other processes for reviewing its provision. Internal Quality Audit (IQA) is a new process intended to provide a rapid, normally internal, review of a specific quality related area. It is instigated by the ASQG normally in response to a problem identified in routine monitoring or review processes and is organised by ASAS and the Director of Academic Development. The audit team saw the documentation associated with one of the two IQAs completed to date, on external examining, and can confirm that it was an effective process.

50 Portfolio Reviews are a process initiated by the Academic Directorate to consider, with the help of external advisers where appropriate, such things as management structures and teaching and research opportunities within a subject group, particularly when these cross faculty boundaries. They are not concerned directly with quality but lead to recommendations about, for example, faculty structure. Business Process Review (BPR) was introduced in 2002-03 with a BPR manager and a

BPR Project Board as a mechanism for reviewing and developing systems, such as admissions, that cross structural boundaries. The audit team saw and heard evidence to confirm the University's view that these three review processes complement the more formal and cyclical ISR system and provide valuable mechanisms for developing and enhancing the University's provision.

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

51 The new validation and review processes described above have changed the way the University seeks and uses external input to its review processes. University level validation procedures include two external members nominated by the faculty and approved by ASAS. One of these should have academic expertise and the other professional or industrial experience in the relevant area. There are strict guidelines for their selection, excluding for example, current or recent external examiners. ISR panels also have at least two members external to the University. The Quality Assurance Handbook states that these 'must be subject specialists and have experience of audit and review methodologies and be familiar with the Academic Infrastructure'. New fields and courses which are validated by their faculty, because they contain 50 per cent new modules or less, have externality limited to members of the University from outside the School delivering the new provision. The audit team felt this was acceptable, providing the criterion for imposing a full University-level validation procedure is carefully enforced. The template-based annual monitoring system requires module, field and course leaders to demonstrate that they have analysed and acted upon the external examiners' reports for their area. Panels for ISR, the University's new periodic review process, must contain at least two members external to the University with the appropriate subject specialism. The ISR reports read by the team demonstrated that the external panel members made a full and significant contribution. During the DATs, the team also saw a number of examples of more informal external input from industry and practitioners feeding in to the development of its provision. Overall, the team came to the conclusion that the University's use of external input into its validation and review processes was effective.

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

52 The external examiner system is claimed in the SED to be the cornerstone of the University's approach to maintenance and enhancement of



standards. When External examiners' reports are received they are read by staff in the Academic Registry and points for action are highlighted. These are sent to the Vice Chancellor (VC). Reports are circulated to deans, chairs of MABs/PABs and directors of modular schemes. Chairs of assessment boards ensure that boards of study discuss issues raised either at the board or in the reports. Feedback to external examiners on the actions taken to address their concerns is required. Where issues are raised which relate to University Regulations, policies and procedures, the Director of Academic Development is consulted and responds directly to the External examiner if necessary.

53 The University has implemented an External Examiners Working Party, which reports directly to ASQG and reviews the University's procedures against the *Code of practice*. Its clearly iterated principles and guidelines for external examiners are mapped to the *Code* and appeared to the audit team to be followed and applied across the University.

54 External examiners' comments are required to be incorporated in module logs, course logs and subject logs along with a summary of the response. Issues are therefore flagged and addressed at the appropriate level at each stage of the consideration of the reports. ISR events in 2003-04 revealed some confusion among academic staff over the process for responding to external examiners and, as a result, this was clarified that it is the responsibility of Heads of School who may delegate to field leaders.

55 The template for external examiners' reports encourages comment on a variety of matters including quality and standards, and the effectiveness of academic regulations and the conduct of the assessment boards. However, in a limited number of cases, internal quality assurance procedures in respect of external examining have identified the need to improve the level of comment offered by external examiners. It is the responsibility of the Field Leaders to respond directly to the external examiners and discuss the resolution of any issues raised. In the examples seen by the audit team, this system appears to work effectively.

56 The External Examiners' Approval Board, a sub-committee of ASQG, acts to ensure that appropriate appointments are made to the role across the University. The minutes of the Board reveal this to be a robust and thoughtful committee. The Board also works to ensure that new external examiners are paired with more experienced partners.

57 External examiners' reports seen by the audit team confirm robust marking, comparable standards and in some cases 'best practice'. Where concerns are raised by the external examiners responsible for each pathway these were clearly identified and responses clearly iterated.

58 On the evidence seen by the audit team the external examiners system works effectively. Emerging themes and issues are compiled and robustly reviewed at school and faculty level. A final overarching consideration of matters raised in the reports is made in an annual assessment report which is considered by ASQG. This system is thorough and ensures that concerns which are raised are dealt with at the appropriate level.

### External reference points

59 The extensive range of activities undertaken by the University requires the mapping to a wide range of external reference points, including the Academic Infrastructure and PSRB accreditation expectations. The University has also considered the implications of the Bologna Agreement. The Academic Development Centre (ADC) liaises with the Academic Registry to monitor external quality assurance developments and ensure adherence with the relevant external reference points. The ASQG considers accreditation or reaccreditation reports and monitors any actions which are subsequently required.

60 The University has reviewed its alignment with the *Code of practice* to ensure that its procedures meet the precepts of the *Code*. Thus, 'Procedures that meet the precepts of the *Code* are built into the university's policies and procedures and overt reference to the *Code* is not deemed necessary in every subsidiary document'. However to assure itself that this is the case ISRs do check that the fields under investigation are properly benchmarked to external reference points. The University's standard agenda for quality assurance matters, which is an annex to the preface of the Quality Assurance Handbook, makes explicit the need for all new validations to be mapped to external reference points. The ASQG maintains clear oversight of this mapping process and the relevant committee minutes contain reference to such activities.

61 The University states that explicit reference to the FHEQ may not be found at local/course level as adherence is built in to course design and other procedures with compliance sitting at University level. The SED claimed that the University's awards have been reviewed against the FHEQ by the Academic Board and modifications made as

necessary. It also claimed that its level descriptors are consistent with the FHEQ. The audit team can confirm that this was the case.

62 The SED claimed that a systematic review of each section of the *Code of practice* has been undertaken as it is published and that, 'overall the University is confident that it has adhered to the Code'. These actions are summarised in the 'Summary document illustrating compliance with the QAA code of Practice', which was prepared in January 2005. The audit team was satisfied that the University has effectively mapped its activities to the *Code*.

63 The SED also stated that, 'unlike parts of the Academic Infrastructure, compliance with benchmark statements is a matter for subject experts.' Subject areas have been required to review courses to ensure consistency with subject benchmarks and this is an issue that is addressed through periodic review or ISR. The audit team found explicit references to subject benchmark statements in the field specifications reviewed on KLIC and in the DATS.

64 From the evidence seen by the audit team, it is clear that the University takes care to ensure alignment with and appropriate use of external reference points. The team considered that sufficient procedures were in place to ensure that this will continue to be the case in the future.

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

65 The University has participated in one QAA subject review and three developmental engagements since the last institutional QAA Quality Audit Report. It also took part in a QAA pilot Major Health Review and an FD review. In each case the outcomes were generally very positive and with few general weaknesses identified that needed addressing at institutional level. ASQG reviews each report along with the action plan that the relevant subject area is required to produce. Follow-up at discipline level is through the normal annual monitoring process. The SED and other documentation available to the audit team described the effective action that had been taken to address specific points in the review reports.

66 Many areas of the University's provision have been the subject of reviews by other bodies for approval and accreditation. The School of Education has twice been visited by Ofsted since the last QAA Quality Audit Report, and has not received less than a 'good' rating on any aspect of its primary and secondary initial teacher training. Accreditation by

professional and statutory regulatory bodies (PSRBs) has also been uniformly successful, with no accreditations being withdrawn. ASQG receives all PSRB accreditation reports along with the discipline areas' consequent action plans, with the latter being followed up through the normal annual monitoring process. From the documents it saw, the audit team came to the view that the University's procedures for considering and responding to reports from external agencies are sound.

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

67 The University commented in its SED that it values the contribution of students to its senior committees. At institutional level representatives of the SU are members of key committees, including Board of Governors, Academic Board, ASQG and the LTC, and are invited to participate in working parties and consultative groups such as those groups set up to review plagiarism and student consultation processes. The University noted that it could do more to complement the National Union of Students' generic training for sabbatical officers by, for example, providing them with briefings prior to joining committees.

68 At local (school/faculty) level the primary representation and consultation vehicle in the University has been the course committee or the staff-student consultative committee, which consists of student representatives and key staff members, with minutes of these committees being reported to boards of study. In general, except in the Faculty of Art, Design and Music, Boards of Study currently do not have direct student representation. The pilot in this faculty is now under consideration for extension to other faculties. Varying numbers of student representatives are also members of Faculty Boards. The SU provides training for course representatives.

69 The University evaluated student representation as generally effective, citing, in the SED, evidence from internal and external reviews that the course committee system works well, that the student voice is heard and feedback to students on the issues they have raised generally occurs. However the University also noted that there is room for improvement including the need to undertake a 'systematic review of the effectiveness of all forms of student consultation and build in good practice', including the need to systemise the relationship between the University and the SU with respect to finding/electing student representatives and to review, with students, the most effective course committee structures. In order to progress this aim a

Student Consultation Working Party, previously the Student Feedback Working Party, was re-established in October 2004 and is currently considering these issues. The Academic Development Centre produced a draft guide to University Requirements and Good Practice in Seeking Student Opinion in September 2003 that is helping to inform the deliberations of the working party. At the time of the audit the working party had met twice.

70 In their written submission student representatives acknowledged that there are plenty of opportunities for students to raise issues within the University, either directly, or through the SU. The students expressed concern regarding the variation in practice across the Faculties for electing course representatives and lack of standardisation concerning which committees students at local levels are entitled to sit on. They also expressed concern that the names of the course representatives were not systematically identified and communicated to them by the Faculties, constraining the numbers of representatives whom could be offered training. The audit team noted that this issue had been picked up as part of the Student Consultation Working Party and was being addressed (see paragraph 72). The team also noted the University's view that, in previous attempts to remedy this situation, it had experienced some difficulty with lack of continuity and priority within the SU.

71 Meetings with students confirmed that in general both undergraduate and taught postgraduate students are aware of the mechanisms for representation at the local level and they cited the staff-student consultative committee as an effective means of ensuring that the student voice is heard. Students also confirmed the view expressed in the SWS that student representatives may volunteer, be nominated or elected. Students were able to cite a number of examples where issues raised at staff-student consultative committees had been resolved although they felt that the length of time taken to resolve issues varied.

72 The audit team found that, in line with the University's view, mechanisms for student representation are generally effective. Ensuring the more systematic confirmation of course/field representatives to the SU would be helpful in addressing the concerns raised in the SWS regarding training. The University's idea of supplementing training for SU sabbatical officers before they take up roles on University Committees might assist in cementing the relationship between the University and its sabbatical officers. The team would also

encourage the University in its intention to extend the pilot in the Faculty of Art, Design and Music to enable student representation on Boards of Study, allowing students to feed into the wider debates around curriculum content and academic issues. It was recognised by the team that these issues might well form part of the agenda of the Student Consultation Working Party as it progresses its deliberations.

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

73 The University indicated in its SED that the primary mechanism for collecting feedback from students is through the staff-student consultative committee (see Section above) but that in some subject areas additional information is gained by the use of questionnaires, particularly where these may complement, rather than duplicate feedback gained through the committees.

74 A 'standard' module feedback questionnaire is in use for undergraduate courses, although it allows some flexibility as appropriate to different subjects. Questionnaires may be analysed centrally, using the Optical Mark Reader (OMR) service provided through ICT Services. The University confirmed that module questionnaires are primarily for use by module teams and that while outcomes from questionnaires are used to inform the next operation of a module through the module logs, and allow cross module comparisons to be made, feedback to students is more problematic as they may have moved on to subsequent modules or graduated. A suggestion made through the Developmental Engagement in Law that feedback is given to the next group of students to take a module is to be picked up by the Student Consultation Working party.

75 Although the audit team heard from some postgraduate students that questionnaires were being used to gain feedback (See paragraph 79), there is currently no University requirement for using standard questionnaires for postgraduate courses; a decision taken by the University because of the small numbers of students on some of these courses. Through GDAB, the University is reviewing its method of consultation with postgraduate students and it has been agreed that two standard feedback questionnaires should be devised for postgraduate students to facilitate consideration of issues at field/subject level and module level. The Director of Graduate Studies is also a member of the Student Consultation Working Party, ensuring that the interests of postgraduate students are represented within the deliberations of that group.

76 At institutional level the University has conducted University wide student satisfaction surveys, the last one being in 2001-02. The University confirmed that it has not undertaken a more recent survey, and has waited for the standard national survey to be finalised, thus avoiding potential duplication. Surveys of student opinion regarding academic support services including Library and ICT provision are undertaken more regularly, and the audit team saw evidence through the DATs and in meetings with staff and students of action having been taken as a result of this feedback.

77 The University has not adopted a standard model for gaining course level feedback from employers or graduates, with feedback being sought in a variety of formal and informal ways such as through employer advisory committees, graduate subject associations, employer involvement in foundation degrees, student placement providers, professional societies and PSRBs. First destination returns are published annually. An alumni system, which the University sees as having potential to be a valuable tool for gaining feedback from graduates, is at an early stage of development.

78 The University confirmed that it believes that the collection of student feedback within current frameworks is effective at local level, citing internal and external review outcomes and comments, but is undertaking a systematic review of all forms of student feedback through the Student Consultation Working Party (as described in paragraph 69 above).

79 The undergraduate students who met with the audit team confirmed that they are familiar with the undergraduate module questionnaire, which is issued for all modules. They also confirmed the University's view that it was not always clear what the formal feedback mechanisms were following completion of the questionnaires although some students felt that anecdotally they could point to changes that had been made to modules through talking to students on lower levels of their fields. Postgraduate students cited a variety of methods being used to gain feedback including, for example, the use of questionnaires and discussion sessions at the end of modules.

80 The audit team found that in general the mechanisms used for gaining feedback from undergraduates and postgraduates are effective, but would encourage the University in their deliberations concerning standard feedback mechanisms for postgraduate students and the ways in which more formal feedback may be given to students following the evaluation of module questionnaires. While the University has not

established a standard method for gaining course level feedback from employers there was evidence that the University has good links with its employers, placement providers, professional bodies and others and had in place an effective range of mechanisms to ensure that consultation takes place, with the student experience at the University clearly being enhanced though the extensive use of visiting lecturers, work-based learning opportunities, projects linked to real-world problems and scenarios and through sandwich placement opportunities.

### **Progression and completion statistics**

81 A key objective of the University's L&T strategy is to improve student progression. Progression and completion data are used at module and course level to monitor quality and standards, and in addition they are also used at school, faculty and University level. The University has used this information to attempt to improve its retention above national benchmarks. It produces a detailed census of the student body. In addition to the numbers on courses it informs itself of the gender, sex, race and degree of disability of its intake. These data have been used thoughtfully in the 'University Retention Project'. It is clear that the Academic Directorate maintain close scrutiny of these data and that the Governors are kept fully informed and that reflection on this issue takes place at the highest level of the University.

82 The University meets its national benchmark for retention and progression and reports a slight increase in progression from year one to year two in the 2003-04 academic session. The only exception is for full-time undergraduate mature students for whom the University's retention and progression figures are marginally below benchmark.

83 In 2001 the schools identified a decline in progression and the University acted quickly to address the problem, investing £50K in research projects that focused on student retention. This research resulted in the 'First Year Experience', a complete redesign of the first year, including longer induction, revised assessment, and improved pastoral and academic support. It is clear that these initiatives have been embedded in the faculties and departments. Faculty and School Board minutes frequently discuss the First Year Experience and monitor locally developed initiatives which are designed to meet this institutional goal. LTC oversees this process.

84 From the evidence seen by the audit team, the University monitors and uses progression and completion data satisfactorily, is aware of any

problems at school and faculty level and is addressing them (See paragraph 46).

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

85 The University has an established policy and practice for the appointment and probation of teaching staff, which the audit team considered to be broadly consistent throughout the University and was accurately described in the SED and supporting policy documentation. The appointment process is presented in clear chart and step form in the HR department's user guide, within the University's recruitment and selection policy. Evidence of positive approaches to and outcomes of the appointment policy was noted by the team through discussion in the DATs, HR documentation, the staff survey analysis, the SWS, and student feedback results, as well as the University's self-awareness of points for improvement. As noted in the SED and supporting documents, staff new to teaching in HE are required to undertake a SEDA/ILT accredited PgCert in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education as an element of the University's approach to the assurance of the quality of teaching staff. The SED speaks positively of the appointment process and cites staff survey results, external verification of the University's equal opportunities achievements, and process review and redesign in support. The team found the appointment process to be sound and concurred with the University's view.

86 The purpose, philosophy and practical points of the appraisal process, and aspects of appraiser training, are made clear in the University's appraisal scheme. It was noted in the staff handbook that the scheme is intended to apply to all staff and may draw evidence from student feedback and peer observation where appropriate. The SED asserted that the appraisal scheme works well. However, in discussions as part of the DATs, and through committee minutes and meetings with senior staff, it was apparent to the audit team that this intention at the time of the audit had not been achieved in full. The audit team found examples of emerging good practice through 360-degree appraisal, effective practice in an academic department where a systematic approach to appraisal was fully deployed, partial deployment of the appraisal scheme, and areas where no appraisals had taken place in the last 12 months. While the University is aware of the varying deployment of its scheme and remedial action is planned, the University is encouraged to review the use and effectiveness of appraisal, ensure the linkages with staff development, and establish a

forum and action plan where the good practice in appraisal can be shared with areas where the process is less well developed.

87 Teaching quality is formally recognised and rewarded through its inclusion as a criterion in the promotion process, an internal teaching fellowship scheme that offers successful applicants £5k over two years as honoraria and project costs, and a range of local and informal recognition approaches.

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

88 Through the SED, DATs, HR policy documents and institutional, faculty and school committee minutes, evidence of considerable staff development activity was presented. This is in part funded by the HR department and supported by training from a number of support departments aimed to familiarise staff with new developments in, for example, software that could influence teaching and learning, health and safety in the workplace, widening participation, and legislation that may impact upon the student experience. To complement this activity, staff development opportunities are provided within faculties and by the LTC workshops and annual away days. The audit team formed a view of clear support for the development of staff to improve teaching quality. However, given the University's plans for growth and commitment to continuous improvement, the audit team would encourage a review of the balance between the bottom-up and top-down approaches referred to in the SED, and to adopt a more systematic approach, where appropriate, to assure itself that teaching quality and capacity ambitions and targets can be met. For example, it is unclear how the university's target for the active use of the VLE will be met while its associated staff development, take up, and post-staff development support appears to be optional.

89 Written and anecdotal evidence was available to illustrate satisfaction with staff development; the appraisal scheme includes an evaluation of individual development, and staff perception measures were included in the 2002 staff survey report. With the exception of the latter, which is clear and concise, performance data that demonstrated the effectiveness of staff development was limited. In view of the importance of such development in the delivery of the New University Project, the University could consider the enhancement of how it assures itself that staff development achieves its intended outcomes.

90 While peer observation of teaching is not a requirement of the University, except within the

PgCertHE, the SED stated that it is widely regarded as good practice. Discussion in the DATs reinforced this view. The approaches discussed ranged from the use of a well thought through standard pro forma to help give structured feedback, to the interaction that often occurs as a consequence of team teaching. The limited selection of staff development committee and other committee meeting minutes read by the audit team made no reference to peer observation, or how good practice was shared, and improvements made as a consequence. In view of the strongly collaborative culture of the University and its willingness to reflect upon and improve practice, the audit team recommends that the University could consider a review of the varying approaches to peer observation and that good practice is systematically spread for improvement purposes. In particular, the University is encouraged to consider whether the informal approaches enabled by team teaching are, on their own, sufficient to meet individual and institutional needs.

91 The participation of postgraduate students in teaching is limited; nevertheless a well-structured training programme for such teaching is established. The audit team considered that this arrangement worked well, though it recommends that the training is reviewed for further investment should postgraduate student teacher numbers rise in line with the growth in student numbers.

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

92 There is no distributed and distance learning delivered by the University outwith a collaborative partnership. Those courses that it does have will therefore be considered in a separate Collaborative Provision Audit.

### **Learning support resources**

93 The SED described the learning support resources provided at local level and those provided by two major central services, Library Services and ICT Services. Special mention was made of the VLE as a major element of the University's learning support strategy. To these resources should be added the management and provision of the space where formal teaching and learning often takes place.

94 Overall, Library Services receive strong satisfaction ratings by students. During DATs students spoke highly of the responsiveness of library staff to their learning needs and of students' understanding of the service's constant challenges in managing the competing needs for quiet study

space, space to lay out reference material, for book and information display and storage, and for access to computers. Discussions with staff illustrated that solutions to these competing needs are seldom straightforward. The audit team concluded that a key facilitator of the service's responsiveness is its annual review that gathers, analyses, and disseminates student satisfaction feedback, and enables the use of such data to inform decisions.

95 During DATs and in the SWS students had some criticisms concerning computer access, the range of up-to-date books, opening hours to accommodate full and part-time students, the effect of increased student numbers, study space, and the availability of multiple copies of main texts. Most of these points were mirrored in the SED and featured in library committee meeting minutes, illustrating a self-aware and fact based approach in the service's support for student learning. The audit team was satisfied that most, and possibly all, of the points raised by students were being addressed, with a main concern of opening hours well in hand, though the impression was gained that the effective use of space and the rising number of students was a continuing challenge. Given the opportunities that could be presented by the further reconfiguration of the available space, the University is encouraged to continue to review the distribution of library space in order to maintain its effective service to an increasing student population.

96 The 2004 Library Services student survey analysis showed that 83 per cent of respondents had their own computer and that 79 per cent used their own PC or laptop to access the Learning Resource Centre services on the Internet. This is indicative of the mounting scale of use and reliance on ICT support for learning. The SWS and students who met the audit team were critical of the service, in particular concerning navigation, the search facility and the location and availability of needed information. Discussions with staff and points noted in the ICT Strategy Group meeting minutes assured the team that the University is sensitive to the student concerns and is actively engaged in meeting the area's responsibilities for student learning support. Staff anticipated that the planned new portal would relieve many of the present problems.

97 VLE is regarded by the University '...as a major element of the university's learning resource strategy...'. This is given weight by the strategic plan key target to 'ensure that by 2005/6 at least three-quarters of modules make active use of the VLE to enrich traditional forms of delivery'. Examples of good practice of the University's application of the

VLE were viewed by the audit team. These examples combined video, static images, diagrammatic and written course material, linkages to relevant websites, and a dialogue facility for staff and students. Further usage in the interest of staff efficiency and effectiveness and improved student learning was being explored. In the subject areas where VLE was well established, students were uniformly enthusiastic about its use as an enrichment of traditional teaching and learning. Some disciplines were less well advanced and some made no use of VLE as a useful support for learning. While the effective practice observed aligned with University policy, the team developed the view through discussion with staff and students that achievements resulted from the enthusiasm of individual staff, rather than a coordinated and consistent approach sponsored by the University. Under these circumstances the audit team felt that it was unclear how the 2005/6 target of '...active use.... to enrich traditional forms of delivery' will be achieved and would encourage the university to consider how it could reduce the gap between target and actual results.

98 The University has established the New University Project (NUP) for completion in January 2009 to manage, in particular, questions of space inherent in its planned growth. Its increasing preparedness for growth is indicated in recent appointments in the Estates Department, in external project management and architectural design, and the production of a development framework and an interim management plan. While the amount of space available may see a small increase the space plan relies on a more efficient use of space to accommodate an increasingly large student body by 2005-06. This space efficiency relies on the timelines of the NUP being broadly met, recruitment in the planned subject areas and not elsewhere, changes in the methods of teaching and learning in growth areas, a take up of the VLE in areas where at present there is none and improvements in others, efficient on-line access of university information by students, and a doubling of halls of residence capacity. While these inter-reliant targets and learning resource requirements are being addressed by the university, the audit team considered that there was a risk attendant in these factors not being met and, consequently, their impact on others. The team therefore recommends that the University further consider the levels of risk in all factors of growth and to continue to monitor and develop its learning resources, particularly the availability of space to match the growth in numbers.

## Academic guidance, support and supervision

99 The University confirmed in its SED that it does not adopt a single mechanism for academic support and guidance, but expects that each student will have access to academic advice appropriate to the nature of the course, level of the course and size of the course. In some subject areas formal arrangements exist whereby year tutors and Field or Course Directors take responsibility for academic support, backed up by day-to-day access to academic staff and Modular Offices.

100 A major University-wide initiative to review the first year experience has led to various Faculty initiatives to improve students' initial experience of the University, to make better use of the available time and provide better feedback on progress to students. The audit team heard that as part of this initiative there was a move to more clearly separate academic guidance from pastoral support, allowing academic staff more time to concentrate on giving academic advice, backed up with dedicated pastoral roles. Students who met with the audit team particularly praised the fact that academic staff are supportive and accessible, also noted through external subject reviews, the SWS and the 2001-02 student satisfaction survey.

101 The University noted that, 'all courses include induction programmes for students new to the University.' Induction has central and local components and includes introduction to the SU and its activities, with the SU using experienced students as 'Induction Angels' thereby helping to support new students at an early stage of their experience within the University. A major review of induction, funded through the Widening Participation (WP) strategy, has recently been carried out. All students who met with the audit team generally confirmed that they had received appropriate and useful induction programmes, including for international students induction activity that included helpful orientation components.

102 School/subject or field specific student handbooks are made available to students. Those handbooks seen by the audit team contained comprehensive information including field and subject specific information, as well as University-wide information such as assessment and other regulations. While there is no requirement for a standard handbook to be produced, the previous version of the University Quality Assurance Procedures Handbook provided guidance on what information teams might include in student handbooks. Although the team noted that similar guidance was not included in the current version,

it understood that a replacement section was under preparation. Students confirmed that these handbooks were a repository of useful information, which supported and assisted their learning experience. A wide variety of material, including academic regulations, is also made available to students electronically through VLE and KLIC.

103 Module guides provide module specific information, including information on learning outcomes and assessment. The SWS commented that most module guides are comprehensive although samples of module guides seen by the audit team demonstrated that they vary considerably in terms of content and utility, ranging from a comprehensive description of the module, teaching and assessment schedules and further reading, to not much more than a one page list of the topics covered weekly. Module guides are generally available electronically through the VLE.

104 The University publishes a minimum key skills specification for all undergraduate degrees within which faculty approaches are framed. Approaches which are fit for purpose are encouraged at course level, and development projects have been funded to support new initiatives that can be disseminated to other areas. The audit team heard examples of how these had been developed and good practice disseminated. University wide support is provided through some generic initiatives such as Mathsaid and English Language Support for international students. In some subject areas additional support is provided through the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) scheme, where more senior students undergo training to provide limited academic support to first year students. Other local initiatives, including the Academic Skills Centre in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, are also in place.

105 Undergraduate students who had undergone placement activity in their fields of study were particularly complimentary about the support they had received through academic placement coordinators and the placement administrators located in their various faculties, which ranged from assistance in CV writing and job application, through to support during the interview process and placement itself and reinforced the excellent relations which the University has with the placement providers.

106 The University confirmed that research students are supported through a Director of Studies and at least one other supervisor. Each faculty has a senior member of staff who takes oversight of research student affairs. Common facilities are provided on each site for research students through Graduate

Centres, who also provide research supervisor training. The SED noted that the University's Code of Practice for supervisors and students is consistent with the extant *Code of practice* published by QAA, with RDC reviewing procedures and practices in the light of the new draft code. The Research Degree Committees (RDC) deals with all aspects of regulations and procedures relating to research students, students and supervisor training and retains oversight of Faculty Research Degrees Committee (FRDC), the latter having delegated authority for approval of programmes, supervisory and examination arrangements (except for non-standard entry and students outside UK) and monitoring of progress.

107 Research students who met the audit team confirmed that they receive useful handbooks and undergo compulsory training, normally in their first year, linked to their studies. This training is agreed by their Director of Studies and is monitored through the annual monitoring process. Additional training is provided for research students who support the teaching and learning process. Those research students who met with the team felt that the support they received, at both local and University levels, was appropriate and effective.

108 Despite the University's stated variability of approach to providing academic guidance and support it was evident that a comprehensive range of support mechanisms are in place both locally and University-wide and that students felt well supported. Moreover, the University has clearly linked the provision of both academic and pastoral support to its strategic aims, for example using its widening participation strategy and funding to support faculties to develop a wide range of initiatives most appropriate to their own circumstances and students and ensuring that specific issues such as retention and the overall first year student experience are addressed. The audit team formed the view that the wide range of support mechanisms and initiatives at the University made available to ensure that students are well supported was good practice. The team found academic guidance and support and supervision at the University to be broadly aligned to the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*. Also of particular note was the consistent praise given by students to the academic staff for their approachability and accessibility. Students who met the team felt that this support had made a significant, positive contribution to their overall learning experience.



## Personal support and guidance

109 The University stated that, 'in general personal support and guidance maps onto academic support and guidance at course level, students seeking advice from designated tutors, depending on the precise local arrangements and procedures.' Several elements are noted including a sign-posting system to refer students to more specialist (central) services, attendance monitoring and course offices. The University also described the use of Widening Participation money to employ full-time student support staff, which it claims is proving very successful.

110 A range of central student support services are offered by the University, including Health and Counselling Services, Disability Support, Accommodation Services, Financial Advisory and Careers Services. The Student Life office deals with matters such as student complaints and disciplinary matters and works closely with the SU. The audit team also heard about the dyslexia support services offered through the Academic Development Centre and the Adaptive Technology Resource Centres located within the LRCs on two of the University sites, set aside for the sole use of students with disabilities, including those with dyslexia.

111 The University confirmed its approach to the provision of student services was one of offering professional services through, wherever possible a 'one-stop shop'. The SED confirms that the provision has taken full account of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*.

112 The SWS raised issues concerning the variability in quality of administrative support experienced by students across the University and this was echoed to some extent by some of the postgraduate students who met with the audit team. Students were generally aware, and supportive of, the wider central services provided but many had no direct experience of them and felt unable to comment from a personal point of view on what was available.

113 During meetings with staff, the audit team heard how the review of the first year experience had led to a variety of support mechanisms being put into place at local school and faculty level, including in some Faculties dedicated pastoral support staff and attendance monitoring systems. Other local support mechanisms such as the Technology Academic Advisory Service (TAAS), in the Faculty of Technology have been in place for some time. The University has also recently undertaken a BPR the main objective of which was to, 'define what should constitute student support services, establishing requirements and suitability of this service and to

develop an integrated approach to delivering these services', the final report making 26 recommendations towards meeting that objective. The timing of the BPR means that it was not possible for the team to comment on its impact, although the report itself supports the team's view concerning the self-reflective nature of the University.

114 The audit team heard that the University's description of personal support was accurate in that there was no one model in operation, and as with academic support and guidance, personal support and guidance was offered to students in a number of ways, although there seemed to be a growing distinction, particularly for undergraduates, between academic and personal support. In contrast, field and course leaders provide both pastoral and academic support to taught postgraduate students. Few of the students who met with the audit team cited personal tutors as the main mechanism for accessing personal support and guidance despite the comments in the SWS that personal tutoring is very successful, and in some subject areas such as Computing where the School noted that the personal tutoring system had been re-introduced for the 2004-05 academic year. However as with academic support, the audit team found that a wide range of appropriate and effective support services are available to students and students felt well supported.

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

### Discipline audit trails

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

#### Art and Design

116 The scope of the DAT was the BA (Hons) courses in Graphic Design and in Illustration and Animation, plus the MA in Production Design for Film and Television. The DSED gave insights into the recent history, future developments, breadth, aims, educational methods, resources, programme specifications and approaches to the enhancement of quality. These were supported by an ISR report, the School's action plan and the ISR committee's response. These documents and discussions provided clear evidence of a collaborative culture of self-reflection, as

well as objective exchanges in support of the enhancement of quality management.

117 The DSED, comprehensive and indexed information, student work, and meetings with staff and students supported the DAT. The audit team observed the courses to be well organised with staff committed to continuously improving the student experience. Key strengths identified by the team were high levels of externality, a strong educational bond between staff and students, and robust engagement with the ISR. Key areas of concern identified by the team included the capacity to accommodate growth in student numbers, aspects of assessment and the linkage between staff development and appraisal. While the frankness of the ISR was appreciated by the team and its findings accepted as factual in the team's view, the School should consider lengthening its engagement with the ISR process to achieve an improved balance of conclusions of strengths and areas of concern.

118 Documents covering approaches to quality and standards were reviewed. These demonstrated detailed consideration of external examiner comments and follow-up action, action in response to student and other stakeholder feedback, and an emerging use of statistical information to monitor achievement and inform decision-making. References to action involving alignment with the *Code of practice* and subject benchmark statements were noted. Student representation in committees was clear, complemented by regular informal interaction between staff and students. The audit team formed the view that the contribution of the Director of Undergraduate Studies had made itself felt in terms of improved organisation, course alignment with university protocols, and quality management. It was noted that the ISR panel required further improvements in the scope of some committees and their reporting lines with Directors of Studies. These documents and processes indicated reflective and mutually supportive approaches to improvement activity.

119 The assessment process is described in the BA student handbook and referred to in less detail in the MA handbook. Further information is available on the student and staff intranet pages; assessment also features in project briefs. Students stated their firm understanding of what was expected of them, and placed particular value on project briefings and regular dialogue with staff. While student satisfaction was noted, the audit team found that all project briefs viewed used four standard criteria, despite a wide variety of learning outcomes. The School should consider the soundness of this

approach and is encouraged to ensure a more accurate alignment between learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The School may also wish to reflect on the practice of using identical percentage weightings for virtually all criteria and consider whether this is an accurate guide for students in the deployment of their time. The wording of the School's grading scheme varies from the University's; for example, descriptor terms such as authoritative creativity and visual awareness have been added. While the variations have the positive intention of making grade descriptors more relevant to art and design students, staff and examiners, the School could consider a review of the completeness of their understanding of the variation. For example, the School may wish to assure itself that students are clear concerning how creativity and visual awareness are taught, learnt and assessed.

120 In common with comments made in the SWS, students praised library provision and the responsiveness of library staff in meeting their needs. Some students believe that the library is too small, though they appreciated the difficulties in keeping a balance between book space, ICT provision and space to work. ICT provision strives to meet need and in many cases this is achieved, though some queuing and omissions occur. The University has an estates plan to reconfigure accommodation across the institution, and while course staff and students offered the view that studio space and other resource issues were generally in hand, external examiners' reports, course logs and committee minutes present a picture of courses at full stretch, with some concern for the faculty's 'strategic imperative' of 'Expansion of home and overseas numbers on existing and new courses within the existing space envelope'. Given the tension between the need to retain the fundamental benefits of studio based learning and expansion within the existing space, the University is encouraged to consider what supportive additions in the modes of teaching and learning could be made and included in its space plans, in order to maintain the present high level of student attainment.

121 For example, the University's strategic plan to 2006 includes the key teaching and learning target to 'Ensure that by 2005/06 at least three-quarters of modules make active use of 'VLE' to enrich traditional forms of delivery'. Staff and students met by the audit team expressed apprehension concerning the value of the VLE; though the school may wish to consider reviewing its position, given the recent advances in the technology, and the examples of good practice available in the University.

122 The School has a clear staff development policy aligned with that of the faculty. Documentation concerning staff development indicated a wide range of personal and professional development. As the resources to help develop staff to cope with the expansion of student numbers are finite, the School could consider expanding its policy to include priorities, take-up targets, and measures that demonstrate the effectiveness of the development undertaken. In conjunction with this the School is encouraged to ensure that staff who missed annual appraisal are appraised as soon as practicable. The audit team understood that a reconfiguration of the School placed too high a burden on the Head of School for appraisal, and that this will be relieved with imminent appraisal training for other senior staff. Peer observation occurred informally through team teaching. While staff benefit from informal feedback, the School is encouraged to consider the benefits of formal peer observation; examples of good practice in this are available within the University.

123 Formal systems for pastoral and academic counselling are provided, used, and rated highly by students; though students reported that a key strength of their experience was the regular informal counselling with course staff that generally led to timely, personal solutions.

124 The audit team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for programmes of study leading to the awards of the three courses and that the standard of achievement in these is appropriate to the title of the awards and to their location within the FHEQ.

#### **Business and Management**

125 The scope of the DAT was the MBA, BA (Hons) Business Studies and BA (Hons) Business Management.

126 The Faculty comprises six schools, each of which is a 'subject area': Accounting and Finance, Business Information Management, Business Strategy and Operations, Human Resource Management, Marketing and Law. The delivery of the subject matter is organised on a matrix basis, with the various schools providing modules for the courses. For the general business and management courses, the provision is drawn from a number of the schools.

127 The primary DSED for this DAT was the CSE prepared for the University ISR for the JACS codes N100/N200. The DSED also contained: a helpful introduction which provided a context for the document; the ISR report; an action plan that described the Faculty's response to recommendations contained in the report together with an update of progress made; supplementary

information; and field specifications. The review team had been skilfully selected to include members external to the Faculty and to the University, and a number with expertise in the subject area with experience of QAA subject review and audit and professional body accreditation. The ISR report has been carefully considered by the Faculty, with appropriate and specific actions put in place and deadlines stated. The Faculty has in place a system for monitoring progress. Faculty staff spoke positively about the new review process and were able to cite a number of ways in which it was an improvement on the previous approach. A member of staff on the ISR panel, who was external to the Faculty, commented on the way in which good practice was shared through the process, and said that the presence of external subject specialists had been particularly valuable. The audit team considered that the ISR process has been successfully introduced into the Faculty of Business.

128 Programme specifications (also called field specifications) included in the DSED were well constructed and full. It was evident that in writing them subject teams had given thought to articulation with level descriptors used across the University which are themselves aligned with the FHEQ. This articulation was further evidenced by consideration of module specifications, demonstrating to the team how subject content and related skills were identified in a progressive manner in alignment with the level descriptors in the FHEQ. The programmes of study covered by the DAT were, as a result, thought by the audit team to be well articulated and coherent. The audit team considered that the postgraduate curriculum provided complete coverage of the areas and skills identified in the subject benchmark statement Masters' Awards in Business and Management. The team noted that an outcome of the ISR was that subject teams should undertake a detailed exercise of mapping provision to subject benchmarks. This had been completed for Masters' courses but was not due to be completed against the benchmark statement for general Business and Management for undergraduate courses until July 2005.

129 The audit team noted the useful way in which programme specifications made explicit any approved variants from either the University Modular Scheme or Postgraduate Credit Framework.

130 The ISR report had commented that there was a lack of any holistic student data or detailed analysis of statistics for recruitment, attrition and completion across the Faculty in the ISR SED, and the audit team considered that the same could be said for the

DAT. Although progression and completion data were provided only in limited form in the DAT, there was evidence available from other sources to show that such data are used routinely in annual logs as part of annual monitoring. Staff in the Faculty commented that data produced centrally from the Student Record System had not been available in time for annual monitoring 2003-04, but that this had not presented a problem as the Faculty had used its own data.

131 The Faculty is the primary point of contact for external examiners. The audit team found substantial evidence to demonstrate that it manages communication with external examiners extremely well and responds to their reports in a considered way. Reports are made to Faculty and University Committees confirming the University processes described in the SED.

132 A particular initiative of the Faculty has been the production of an Assessment and Feedback manual, which is comprehensive in coverage and made available to all staff. It contains an assessment strategy, describes assessment methods, states regulations and covers a wide range of practical matters associated with assessment and feedback. It encourages good practice to be shared, at present within the Faculty. The audit team met with students who, on the whole, were satisfied with the different aspects of assessment, and praised the Faculty in terms of the different styles used and the speedy response to concerns raised. Students said that there was some variability between modules in the quantity and quality of feedback received, a point raised by the ISR team and confirmed by the teams' scrutiny of marked assessments. Students also made clear their dislike of group work, which they felt was used excessively. The section of the *Code of practice* on Assessment of Students is taken seriously and observed within the business discipline. The Faculty may nevertheless wish to consider ways in which assessment criteria might be developed which reflect more explicitly the level of modules, their learning outcomes and their modes of assessment.

133 Examples of assessed work amply demonstrated achievement of the outcomes stated in the field specifications. Standards on courses were endorsed by external examiners with many mentions of excellence, and marking was considered to be fair. The audit team considered that the standard of student achievement is appropriate to the titles of awards made and their location in the FHEQ.

134 Course handbooks are issued at the beginning of a course, with updates provided annually

thereafter. Students regarded the information provided in these as comprehensive and an important source for their use. They are designed to assist students in many ways, especially at the beginning of their course, and include material to aid understanding of learning and assessment expectations: they also make clear to students what their responsibilities are. The audit team noted the students' response to the handbooks they receive.

135 Module guides are normally given out to students in the first module lecture. Students considered them to be generally good, with some of poor quality, a point confirmed by the audit team in its reading of module guides. The specific criticism expressed by students related to the paucity of information to help option choice, though the Faculty is taking steps to address this.

136 The business and management provision is based at the Kingston Hill site. Students were critical of the space and facilities there, believing them to be at capacity and over-used. They understood that the NUP would address the problem in future. Recent initiatives have included changes in their configuration of space and longer Library opening hours. Apart from space restrictions, they felt that the Library and its staff provided a good service. Students were appreciative of the efforts made by academic staff in using the VLE in a variety of ways; it was regarded as an excellent communications tool, and was used by students alongside other traditional means of gaining information. Support for learning was regarded as excellent, particularly because academic staff are accessible and always helpful.

137 There are a number of mechanisms through which students are able to provide feedback to the Faculty and staff, including staff/student consultative committees, questionnaires, representatives on committees and through normal contact with academic and administrative staff. Students considered that their concerns were acted upon and that responses by the Faculty were both appropriate and timely. Recent examples of student feedback and Faculty response are: a module rethought and redesigned following student feedback; continuing pressure from students for all module handbooks to be available on the VLE leading to efforts by the Faculty which at the time of the audit were almost complete; and quality problems experienced with some open learning materials were addressed.

138 Staff/student consultative committees meet twice a year for the undergraduate courses looked at by the audit team, and attendance by student representatives is good. Notes of the meetings are

detailed, and include descriptions of follow-up actions and outcomes. Students were content that arrangements were such that their concerns could be dealt with on an ongoing basis between meetings. Because of the smaller numbers involved, postgraduate students linked closely and well with their Course Director to ensure regular discussions on issues without recourse to formal mechanisms. The audit team viewed a wide range of evidence and confirmed that students are actively and co-operatively involved in quality management.

139 The Faculty of Business has taken a number of initiatives forward to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, including appointments to new supporting posts and arranging focused events for its staff. Appraisal is well organised and feeds into the identification of development needs, and its occurrence is monitored in such a way to provide assurance to the Dean.

140 The audit team considered that the quality of learning opportunities was suitable for the programmes of study leading to the awards covered, and that these programmes were appropriately located within the FHEQ.

#### **Chemistry**

141 The scope of the DAT was as follows:

- BSc (Hons) in Chemistry
- BSc (Hons) in Applied Chemistry
- MChem in Chemistry
- MChem in Chemistry with Industrial Experience
- BSc (Hons) in Medicinal Chemistry
- BSc (Hons) In Joint Chemistry (and Major/minor Chemistry)
- MSc in Analytical Chemistry
- MSc in Pharmaceutical Analysis.

142 The DSED was prepared for the audit visit and field specifications were provided for all the fields involved in the DAT. The field specifications are developed by the School using the University's own descriptors, which are designed to be comparable with the FHEQ. The audit team can confirm that this is the case. The field specifications seen by the team were extremely useful documents which make clear links to the FHEQ and relevant subject benchmark statements.

143 Reviews and validations of new courses are normally accompanied by a questionnaire which is sent to industrial concerns to ascertain their views. Staff and students were clear that good links with

industry were established and that industrial input had resulted in changes to the curriculum. Staff in the School have extensive links with the Royal Society of Chemistry and Higher Education Academy and are clearly influential in the pedagogic development of the discipline at a national level.

144 Progression and completion data were appended to the DSED. Although the numbers involved in any individual programme are too small to be statistically meaningful Chemistry is fully engaged in the University's project to improve year 1 retention and the first year experience.

145 The School is well informed of the achievements of its students. A Student Support Officer (SSO) was appointed in 2002-03 as part of a student retention project. Amongst the duties of this post is to conduct diagnostic tests in induction week and arrange extra learning support if necessary. The SSO also contacts those students with a poor attendance record. From evidence seen by the audit team in the DAT, the University is actively seeking to tackle any problems surrounding retention and progression.

146 The SSO's role is mainly pastoral, but is clearly informed by good quality data on student retention and progression and continues to work to gather information which may explain students' failure to progress. Chemistry continues to evaluate and reflect upon the effectiveness of this post.

147 The University believes that it is at the 'interface of staff and students that standards and quality are delivered'. Within Chemistry and Pharmaceutical Science, module leaders are seen as the initiators of quality assurance. The School believes it has successfully developed a range of courses which are attractive to students and has promoted participation in HE from students from non-traditional social and ethnic backgrounds.

148 Module Logs, subject logs and course logs are used to inform the School and generate action plans which are intended to enhance standards and quality. These logs are valuable documents. Staff are forthright about pass and failure rates in each module and reflect upon the potential causes for these. Where relevant, External examiner comments are also included. They also discuss the student feedback on the module, and describe action to be taken in response, this clearly addressing students' concerns. The action plans which conclude each Module log are appropriate and achievable.

149 The salient points from the module logs are compiled and discussed in the Subject Log Report which considers generic analysis and also deals with

assessment, external examiners' reports and the progress of L&T strategies.

150 The Course Log Reports are the final link in the QA chain in the School; again they are realistic, reflective and evaluative and draw upon generic issues raised in external examiners' reports.

151 The process is clearly rigorous, reflective and evaluative. Issues which arise are dealt with at the appropriate level. Overall the process as it operated within this School confirms the University's belief that the interface between staff and students is where quality is delivered. External examiners' comments within this DAT were handled openly and effectively. Their reports are acknowledged directly by Subject Leaders and dialogue on any issues of concern are opened in this way. In all the examples seen by the audit team, follow up has been timely and effective.

152 The School has been at the forefront of introducing Multiple Choice questions into the assessment regime in an effective and thoughtful manner. A publication resulting from their experience and good practice was then disseminated throughout the rest of the University. The section of the *Code of practice* on Assessment of Students is observed, and appropriate feedback is given to students within a reasonable time, usually three weeks. In line with the University's 'First Year Experience' project the range and nature of assessment in year 1 has been redesigned to emphasise the formative rather than the summative. Learning outcomes are clearly articulated, but what is less clear are the assessment criteria mapped to these. The assessment criteria seen in the student handbooks, for both subjects and modules, is that which is posted on KLIC, and is of a general nature. The audit team would encourage the School to consider mapping assessment criteria to the learning outcomes of the module in order that they are appropriate to the assessment set.

153 Examples of assessed work seen by the audit team were all appropriate to the location of the awards on the FHEQ, with an interesting range of work being set. External examiners were complimentary about this range of tasks. Clear feedback was provided to the students.

154 With the exception of the point made above in paragraph 152 about assessment criteria, student handbooks are very comprehensive. They clearly articulate the students' responsibilities and also detail the extensive network of support available within Chemistry and Pharmaceutical Sciences courses.

155 With regard to learning resources, some rooming provision was reported by students as sub-standard and as restricting attempts to introduce other assessment methods as an alternative to formal examination. The DSED also acknowledged problems in obtaining rooms for modules with large numbers of registered students. However, new laboratories were occupied in 2002 and the students met by the audit team were satisfied with this accommodation. The School benefited from a Science Research Investment Fund (SRIF) investment of £180K in 2002 and considerable investment has been ongoing since then, the DSED stated that, 'this has enabled purchase of equipment which has particularly benefited student project work'.

156 The School has adopted VLE, in conjunction with the Faculty of Science 'e-Teaching' initiative. Students were very complimentary of the way it was used and of the flexibility which it offered. The School has been awarded a Teaching Fellowship and has piloted a 'Blended Learning' project, mounting very sophisticated material on the VLE. In the view of the audit team the initiatives piloted in this School represent good practice within the University.

157 Students were complimentary of improvements in the organisation of the library and the recent extension of subscriptions to Electronic Journals.

158 Students are provided with an extensive support network which addresses both the pastoral and academic needs of the student. Personal tutors, student support officers and specific assistance in maths and chemistry, combine to create an environment where the student is encouraged to face their difficulties, seek help and succeed.

159 Student feedback is considered by several means. Each module log makes explicit reference to the student feedback obtained. Issues raised covered matters such as the perceived difficulty of the material covered, the need for more rapid feedback on assessed work, quality of teaching accommodation and the bunching of assignment deadlines. The audit team was able to track the discussion of these issues in the School LTC.

160 The audit team read minutes of the Staff/Student liaison committee. The School took comments raised here seriously and worked actively to a rapid resolution. Students felt that the staff were very concerned to respond positively to any concerns they may have and felt the SSCC was a valuable forum. Salient issues from the SSCC were debated in the Chemical and Pharmaceutical Sciences Board of Study. Despite some problems with accommodation the School is working actively

to deliver an excellent learning environment. Students met by the team were united in their praise of the quality of their learning opportunities.

161 The audit team considered that the quality of learning opportunities was suitable for the programmes of study leading to the awards covered, and that these programmes were appropriately located within the FHEQ.

### **Computing**

162 Computing is taught across three Faculties with the majority of the provision being in the School of Computing and Information Systems (CIS), in the Faculty of Technology, with the 2004-05 census data showing 1206 undergraduates and 93 postgraduates on Computing programmes within the Faculty. The School offers three undergraduate programmes and variants in Computer Science, Information Systems and Software Engineering and eight postgraduate programmes. The School, in collaboration with FE partners, also offers two HNDs and a number of FDs, outside of the scope of this audit. The undergraduate honours provision within the School was redesigned and revalidated in 2000-01, with the revalidated suite being offered from 2001-02. The postgraduate portfolio was reviewed in 2000 and 2001. In 2003-04 the University undertook a review of the whole Computing portfolio, one outcome of which was a decision to merge the Schools of Computing and Information Systems and the School of Mathematics to create a new Faculty of Computing, Information Systems and Mathematics from August 2005.

163 The DAT focussed on BSc Computer Science, BSc Computer Science (Network Communications) and MSc Information Technology within CIS. The two honours degrees are offered in full time and sandwich modes, while the MSc can be studied either on a full or part-time basis. The DSED was written specifically for the audit and included field specifications for those fields being looked at through the DAT. Field specifications for all undergraduate and postgraduate provision within the School were made available during the audit.

164 The provision has been developed within the framework of the University's goals. The detailed aims of the fields are described in the field specifications, which comply with University requirements and provide full information on the main features of the fields. Development of the provision was influenced by the FHEQ, undergraduate and draft postgraduate Computing benchmark statements, relevant sections of the *Code of practice*, the University key skills framework and

the British Computer Societies' guidelines on Course Exemption and Accreditation. Additional input is gained from industrial contacts and employers through a variety of mechanisms including, for example, the School's placement providers. A number of these reference points are referred to explicitly in the field specifications and are also reflected in the educational aims and learning outcomes of the fields. The provision is accredited by the British Computer Society (BCS). The Institute of Analysts and Programmers also recognises the School as an Educational Provider of courses in Computer Science, Information Systems and Software Engineering.

165 Admission, progression and completion data is incorporated into course and module logs. Meetings with staff confirmed that this was the first year the University had provided the data centrally and they are just beginning to use it formally to monitor quality and standards. For example, the data had shown the School that students undertaking a sandwich degree were more likely to achieve a higher classification than those taking a full time award.

166 These courses are subject to the standard University monitoring and review mechanisms. Course logs are completed by Field Leaders and are considered, along with external examiner reports, at undergraduate and postgraduate Field Boards, which in turn report to the Faculty Board through the Faculty Quality Assurance Committee and Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee. Summary reports are signed off at Faculty level and passed through to ASQC, with feedback coming back into the Faculty from ASQC.

167 Module logs are completed by module leaders and signed off by the Head or Deputy Head of School. A subset of the Field Boards hold planning meetings to consider the delivery of modules prior to the start of each semester. While the School provided examples of some excellent module logs there were a small number of module logs that had been sparsely completed and, because of the paucity of information provided, these appeared to form a less sound basis for enhancement than those logs which had been completed more fully.

168 Staff confirmed that change and development within the subject is facilitated by the newly delegated quality assurance procedures, with changes to curricula now being evolutionary rather than based on step functions, with new modules and fields being introduced by Field Boards and approved at Faculty level.

169 The School conforms to the University's Principles and Practices of external examining, with external examiners able to comment on examinations and other assessment if they wish to do so. External examiners' reports are considered as part of the annual monitoring process. Examples of formal written responses to external examiners, showing how their comments were actioned, were made available during the audit. At postgraduate level the response was sent by the manager of the postgraduate office. At undergraduate level a comprehensive response was sent by an undergraduate field leader although responses dated June 2004 and February 2005 referred to external examiners reports for 2002-03 which might suggest that the process of timely, formal written response to the external examiners has yet to be well embedded within the School.

170 The Faculty of Technology's Learning and Teaching Strategy maps on to and is reviewed against the Strategic goals of the University's learning and teaching strategy. Within the School the assessment strategy has been designed to help students understand what is expected of them in meeting the learning outcomes, by providing assessments that match the capability of the students and encourages staff to be innovative in their assessment regime. Students confirmed that they experienced a variety of assessment methods, with group work in particular being utilised quite extensively. Students also felt that they understood what was expected of them, that the loading of assessment was appropriate and while there was no standard hand-back period in operation in the School feedback on assessment was generally timely and adequate.

171 Comments made by external examiners generally confirm that assessments are set at an appropriate level and that student achievement is appropriate to the titles of the awards and location within the FHEQ and this was also confirmed through the sample of work made available to the audit team.

172 Comprehensive handbooks are provided for students; for undergraduates by level across the School's group of undergraduate fields and for taught postgraduates by field or by group of fields. A handbook is also made available to postgraduate research students. In all cases these provide students with a variety of local and University-wide information. Students confirmed that handbooks were a repository of useful information.

173 Additionally module guides give details regarding the delivery and assessment of taught modules, but it was clear from the samples seen and on the VLE that

the content and utility of module guides varies from module to module (see paragraph 103).

174 The School's resources document provided an excellent description of the resources available to the School's staff and students. There was clear evidence both from students and from minutes of staff-student consultative committees that issues raised by students regarding resources were actioned. Students confirmed that they were content with the resources provided including IT facilities and library resources. They particularly commended the availability and use of the VLE.

175 The Faculty of Technology operates the TAAS, for undergraduate students, supplementing the support offered by field leaders. The DSED noted that the focus of the centre has changed over time with its primary focus now being on acute needs such as offering advice on mitigating circumstances. To supplement the pastoral support available to students the School re-introduced personal tutoring in 2004-05. Support is also offered through the Modular Office. Field leaders provide academic and pastoral support for taught postgraduate students and postgraduate research students have a Director of Studies and at least one other supervisor. Although not all students were familiar with the new personal tutoring system the excellent support provided by academic staff was particularly highlighted by all students.

176 For those students undertaking placements, support is offered through the placement staff located in the Modular Office, the available support being commended by students who had undertaken sandwich courses.

177 While examples of recent staff development activity were helpful in illustrating that the School is committed to developing its staff, the School noted that staff appraisal had fallen into disuse within the School, something they were currently addressing by ensuring that appraisers were being trained. Given the University's stated importance of appraisal in the staff development process the School is encouraged to ensure that regular appraisal is made available to all staff.

178 The DSED confirmed that student feedback mechanisms described in the SED are used within this provision, and in particular the staff student consultative committee which are set up to precede field boards so that student feedback may be fed into the process. Minutes of field boards confirm that student issues are fed into field boards and actions taken. Field leaders within the School also hold additional meetings with student



representatives to supplement the two formal meetings per year and discussion forums have been set up on the VLE for year groups.

179 The minutes of staff-student consultative committees showed that a wide variety of issues are raised and action taken, including for example postgraduate students asking for greater and more consistent use of the VLE, which in turn lead to the introduction of guidelines for such usage.

180 In general the audit team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities was suitable for the programmes of study considered.

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

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

181 The audit team consulted a large number of information sources available to students including the University and Faculty undergraduate prospectuses, the Postgraduate Directory, a range of subject-based course and module handbooks, the University's website and the student pages on KLIC. Many of the University's publications were available on-line. The quality and accuracy of publications was discussed with representatives of the SU at the Briefing Visit, and with students at the general student meetings and with those in subject areas where DATS were undertaken. The audit team also took account of the evaluation of information for students contained in the SED.

182 The External Affairs Department produces many of the publications and also carefully monitors supplementary material that comes from the faculties. The University considers feedback from students in reviews to confirm that information provided is accurate and realistic and does not lead to false expectations.

183 The University, through the Registrar, issues guidance on the information that students should receive, thus providing a framework which is intended to ensure that all students either receive or know where to find all information they would normally need. The University was looking to develop an information strategy and regarded this as a future challenge. A key approach at the time of the audit was to encourage staff to make greater use of the VLE to provide information to students in addition to using it for the purposes of teaching and learning. Much effort had gone into enhancing the

University's website which was being reviewed at the time; and improving signposting on the site was one of the priorities.

184 The SWS stated that the document was compiled by SU, on behalf of the student body using information compiled by surveys, focus groups and face-to-face interviews with students at all four sites. It claimed that 'the University prospectus does not reflect the reality of studying at any of the four sites'. This view was reinforced by an Executive Officer of the SU during the Briefing Visit. However, during the audit visit, a wide range of students praised the University for the information they received. Following application and prior to enrolment, students had been sent a prospectus, student pack, information on visiting days and had made use of the University website; they found the information to be full, useful and accurate. Those students who had raised queries had received a speedy response. Induction weeks were held in high regard and were much appreciated, acting to provide an effective base for studies as well as providing a considerable amount of useful information. Course handbooks were regarded as comprehensive, containing everything a student would need; module guides though were thought to be variable in quality. Information given in advance for option choice was considered to be variable and the audit team noted the University's intentions to address this through the VLE. Information and support available in advance of the placement year was praised highly. Students were aware that information on assessment requirements, and complaints and appeals procedures are contained in student handbooks as well as on KLIC.

185 In recent years, the University has taken many proactive steps to ensure accuracy of information. Based on the evidence gathered from documentation, meetings and the University's website, the audit team judged that the students' experience of published and other information available to them was, on the whole, a positive one: information is available through different sources which are readily accessible, is consistent across areas of the University and is supported by staff who are acknowledged to be approachable and helpful.

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

186 The HEFCE requires all HE institutions to publish information on the quality and standards of their teaching. This information is available to the public through the HERO TQI website, which went live in August 2004, that is six months prior to the audit visit. At the time of the visit, the site was showing as

being 'under development' with the full launch of the site due to take place during the summer of 2005. In due course, the institutional audit process will include a check on the reliability of the information set published by institutions in the format recommended in documents HEFCE 02/15 and 03/51.

187 At the time of the audit visit, the following reports could be viewed on the University's pages of the HERO website ([www.tqi.ac.uk](http://www.tqi.ac.uk)):

- detailed reports and statistics for each subject area
- the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy
- details of the structure of External examiners
- summary of how the University identifies employer needs and trends
- a commentary on the University's HESA data.

188 The University is alert to the requirements of document HEFCE 03/51, the final guidance on *Information on quality and standards in higher education*, and the audit team considered that it was moving in an appropriate manner to fulfil its responsibilities in this respect.



# Findings

## Findings

189 An institutional audit of Kingston University (the University) was undertaken during the week 28 February to 4 March 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility as a UK degree-awarding body. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals and Universities UK, four discipline audit trails (DATs) were selected for scrutiny. This section of the report of the audit summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and recommendations to the University for enhancing current practice.

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

190 The University has made substantial changes to its processes for assuring the quality of its programmes since the last QAA Quality Audit Report in 2002. Full details of all these processes are available to staff on the Quality Assurance Procedures Handbook web pages on Kingston's Live Interactive Campus (KLIC). This is regularly updated and, together with other web-based documentation, provides staff with clear and well-formulated guidance. The general principle adopted by the university is to provide a centrally determined framework within which some variation is permitted where it can be justified by a particular discipline's needs.

191 Proposals for new courses or fields are considered in outline by the Academic Board to ensure that they are compatible with the University's policies. Approval leads to one of two forms of validation. Courses or fields with more than 50 per cent new modules are subject to a full University level validation with at least two external panel members. This is a robust and carefully monitored and reported system which ensures, among other things that new courses are consistent with the Academic Infrastructure. Courses or fields with 50 per cent new modules or less are validated by the faculty concerned through their normal committee structure. Externality here is limited to the membership on committees of staff from outside the School making the new proposal. This new faculty-level validation is open to variability in process and in the criteria for approval and the University is keeping it under review through the Validation and Review Working Group of ASQG.

192 The University's procedures for the annual evaluation of its courses are based on a hierarchy of template-based reports known as 'Logs'. Each faculty produces a Faculty Annual Monitoring Report based on input from Subject Logs and Course Logs which in turn incorporate information from Module Logs. The templates for these logs require detailed consideration of external examiners' reports, student feedback and progression statistics. The Faculty reports are considered by the Annual Monitoring Review Group, a sub-committee of ASQG. This is a well-designed and thorough system which ensures that the responsibility for ensuring quality begins at the level of the individual module. However, the audit team did find that there were a few examples where logs had been approved although they had been filled in only very sketchily. The SED indicated that the University is addressing this problem.

193 In 2003-04, the University introduced a new system of periodic review which follows a six-year cycle of Internal Subject Review (ISR). This is a centrally managed process in which all courses and fields within a subject area are reviewed by a panel containing at least two external members. The procedure is well defined and thorough with a reporting route up to ASQG and effective follow-up procedures. The audit team saw good evidence that it was working well and was producing valuable enhancements.

194 Internal Quality Audit (IQA) is a second new procedure for producing a rapid, normally internal review of a specific area identified centrally from the routine monitoring and review processes. In addition to ISR and IQA, the university has two other review processes. Portfolio Reviews are concerned more with the structures for most effectively delivering teaching and research. Business Process Reviews are being used for enhancing systems that cross structural boundaries.

195 Feedback from students on the quality of the University's courses is primarily through course committees and student evaluation questionnaires for individual modules. Exact procedures vary across schools and faculties and the University is currently considering ways of making them more uniformly effective. However, the audit team found both in documentation from committees and annual monitoring and in talking to students that the University was in general making good use of student feedback on the quality of its courses. Similarly, although there was no consistent procedure for collecting and using feedback from employers or graduates, the team saw good evidence that this was being sought where appropriate.

196 The information in documents and meetings that the University provided in the course of the audit demonstrated that these monitoring and review processes were generally being thoroughly and effectively undertaken. In particular, it was clear that the University at all levels has a culture of constructive self-evaluation. Overall, 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 provision.

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

197 The central mechanism for securing standards at the University is the external examiner system. The University's policy is to use external examiners as auditors of standards and processes rather than as examiners of individual students. This policy and the procedures to be followed with respect to external examiners are described in detail on the Quality Assurance Procedures Handbook web pages on KLIC. There are now formal processes in place to insure that appropriate external examiners are appointed to all modules and are inducted into the University's procedures. They are required to produce a report on a well-designed template which is widely circulated and responded to in detail in the annual monitoring system. The audit team did see a few examples where there had not been full compliance with procedures, but these had all been identified by the University's review or monitoring systems and had been rapidly corrected. The team can confirm that the external examiner system is working effectively.

198 Marking and classification procedures are also specified centrally to ensure a reasonable degree of standardisation across the University and the audit team found that these were generally being complied with. The one exception was a failure sometimes to match assessment criteria to the particular type of assessment being used. The audit team recommends that the University works to design assessment criteria that are mode-specific and mapped to the learning outcomes of each module. Given the diversity of the University's provision, the variety of assessments set and the diversity of its student intake, the team believes that the design and implementation of clearer assessment criteria will be beneficial to the University, its students and its external examiners.

199 Progression and completion statistics were universally used to scrutinise the provision and their analysis is part of the annual monitoring process. At the time of the audit, these were largely generated locally, but the audit team saw evidence that the

newly installed central database was now capable of providing uniform statistical reports for this process.

200 The evidence available to the audit team in the form of student work, external examiners' reports, assessment board minutes, and annual monitoring reports enables it to confirm that, overall, there can be broad confidence in the University's present and future capacity to manage effectively the academic standards of its awards.

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

201 A combination of the self-evaluation document (SED), the students' written submission (SWS), meetings with staff and students, and access to a comprehensive range of documents gave the audit team a clear picture of learning support provision.

202 The effectiveness of the Library Services and the responsiveness of library staff to student learning needs were rated highly by students and staff. The growth in student numbers and changes in patterns of learning nevertheless placed a constant challenge on managing the competing needs for study space, book shelving and storage, and computer space. The audit team formed the view that a key facilitator of the service's responsiveness was its review process that produced quantitative and qualitative information to inform decision-making. This illustrated a self-aware and fact based approach to the service's support for student learning. Matters of space to accommodate the growth in student numbers were discussed with the audit team; given the developmental stage of the New University Project, no firm conclusions concerning space configuration were made. Nevertheless the university may wish to consider whether the present distribution of library space is appropriately configured for future needs.

203 As an illustration of the scale of ICT requirement for learning support, the SED noted that 83 per cent of surveyed students owned computers and that most used these to access the Learning Resource Centre services on the Internet. The SWS, and students who met the audit team sought improvements in the service. This aim was mirrored by centre staff. Discussions with staff and points made in the ICT Strategy Group meeting minutes assured the team that the university is actively engaged in improvements in support of student learning. It was anticipated that the planned new portal would relieve many of the problems noted.

204 The SED, strategic plans of the University and faculties, meetings with staff, and presentations to

the audit team gave emphasis to the place of 'VLE' as a major element of the university's learning resource strategy. Presentations of good practice underlined the qualities of the medium as a support for learning and soundness of the university's strategy. The team noted that where the medium was well established students found that it enriched traditional teaching and learning, though a number of subject areas were less well developed and some disciplines had made limited progress. In discussion with staff and students the team developed the view that many achievements resulted from the enthusiasm of individual staff, rather than a systematic approach across the University. The team therefore considered it unclear how the University's target for the deployment of the medium as a support of learning would be achieved, in particular in some subjects where significant increases in student numbers are planned.

205 Intranet access to comprehensive documentation and discussions with staff provided insights into the New University Project (NUP), and in particular to the University's approach to space management in anticipation of an increasingly large student body. The audit team noted the interdependence of the NUP timelines being met, recruitment in the subject areas planned, changes in the methods of teaching and learning in growth areas, and a doubling of halls of residence capacity, and attendant risk in these factors not being met. In view of these points the university may wish to further consider the levels of risk in all factors of growth and to continue to monitor and develop its learning resources, particularly the availability of space, to match the growth in numbers.

206 Evidence of considerable staff development activity at many levels in support of learning was noted through the SED, DATs, policy documents and committee minutes. The SED described the university's approach as bottom-up and top-down, which the audit team found to be the case. However, when considering the University's plans for growth, the team formed the view that a more systematic approach, where appropriate, could help assure the University that its teaching quality and capacity targets will be met. Documents presented and discussions with staff illustrated satisfaction with staff development; though with the exception of the 2002 staff survey report, performance data that demonstrated the effectiveness of staff development was limited. As part of the systematic approach mentioned above, the University should consider how it may better assure itself that its clear commitment to staff development achieves the intended outcomes.

207 The audit team viewed a number of approaches to peer observation, from the use of well-structured and documented observation to informal interaction between team members. While a strong culture of collaboration was evident, the team considered that the informal approaches during team teaching could be, on their own, insufficient to meet individual and institutional learning support needs.

208 A relatively small amount of teaching is carried out by postgraduate students; nevertheless a well-structured training programme for such support is established. The audit team considered that this worked well, and anticipated that training would develop further should postgraduate student teacher numbers rise.

209 The University has an established policy for the appointment of teaching staff, which the team considered to be broadly consistent throughout the institution. Evidence of its positive outcomes was noted in the DATs, HR documentation, the staff survey analysis, the SWS, and student feedback results. Staff new to teaching in HE are required to undertake a SEDA/ILT accredited PgCertHE as an element of the institution's approach to the assurance of the quality of teaching staff.

210 A clear and well-structured appraisal scheme applicable to all staff was noted by the audit team. Its benefits and linkages with staff development and peer observation were discussed in DATs and staff meetings. Where appraisal was not implemented in full this was declared in the main with an openness that reinforced the audit team's view of the self evaluative nature of the University. The team was satisfied that the University was responding to this varying deployment and that remedial action was planned.

211 The audit team found that teaching quality is formally recognised and rewarded through its inclusion as a criterion in the promotion process, by an internally funded teaching fellowship scheme, and a range of local and informal recognition approaches.

## Outcomes of discipline audit trails

### Art and Design

212 From its study of students' assessed work, and from discussion with students and staff, the audit team found that the standard of student achievement in the BA (Hons) Graphic Design, BA (Hons) Illustration and Animation and MA Production Design for Film and Television is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location in the FHEQ. The DSED presented the breadth, aims, educational methods, resources, programme specifications and approaches to the

enhancement of quality. These were supported by an ISR report and the School's action plan, which combined to provide clear evidence of the courses' approach to the enhancement of quality management. The provision meets the expectations of the subject benchmark and the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

213 Students stated their firm understanding of what was expected of them. They placed particular value in regular dialogue with staff, the opportunities to work with professionals external to the university, and library provision in support of their learning. Students, staff and external examiners had apprehensions concerning the balance between the planned increases in student numbers, the key need to retain the fundamental benefits of studio based learning and the maintenance of the high level of student attainment. Formal systems for pastoral and academic counselling were rated highly by students; though students reported that a key strength of their experience was the regular informal counselling with course staff that generally led to timely, personal solutions.

214 The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities provided for students is suitable for the courses they saw.

#### **Business and management**

215 The scope of the DAT was the MBA, BA (Hons) Business Studies and BA (Hons) Business Management.

216 From its study of students' assessed work, discussions with staff and students and a consideration of external examiners' reports, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement on general business and management courses was appropriate to the titles of awards made and their location within the FHEQ. The programme specifications set out appropriate educational aims and learning outcomes and were designed to meet QAA benchmarks and relevant accreditation criteria. Students are positive about the teaching and support afforded to them by the Faculty of Business and the University centre. Student evaluation of their programmes is favourable, with the academic support provided by staff in the Faculty receiving particular praise.

217 The audit team found the quality of learning opportunities to be suitable for the programmes of study leading to the awards made.

218 The Faculty of Business has produced comprehensive documentation to explain to staff the policies and procedures in place. The audit team found that practices in the Faculty are generally

consistent with the University frameworks and that, where exceptions exist, these are documented and have gained appropriate approval. Business and management courses were one of the first areas to be subject to the University's new ISR methodology. Staff believed that the process was less onerous than the previous one and yet provided greater benefits. The team considered that ISR had been successfully implemented into the Faculty. The Faculty has in place systems to ensure that reviews, reports and other forms of feedback are considered, leading to actions and monitoring.

219 Students were critical of the space and facilities at the Kingston Hill site. They understood that little more could be achieved within the current space available and that the University was embarking on its New University Project. A good quality of provision has been mentioned, but the Faculty and University are advised to continue to monitor and develop their learning resources to match any growth in student numbers.

#### **Chemistry**

220 The scope of the DAT was as follows:

- BSc (Hons) in Chemistry
- BSc (Hons) in Applied Chemistry
- MChem in Chemistry
- MChem in Chemistry with Industrial Experience
- BSc (Hons) in Medicinal Chemistry
- BSc (Hons) In Joint Chemistry (and Major/Minor Chemistry)
- MSc in Analytical Chemistry
- MSc in Pharmaceutical Analysis.

221 From its study of the students' assessed work and from its discussions with staff and students, the audit team found that the standard of student achievement in the undergraduate and taught postgraduate degrees was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. Programme specifications set out appropriate aims and learning outcomes and are aligned with the national Academic Infrastructure, appropriate subject benchmarks and PSRB requirements. External examiners comments were generally supportive of the provision.

222 The assessment criteria seen in the student handbooks, for both subjects and modules, is that which is posted on KLIC, and is of a general nature. The audit team would encourage the School to consider mapping assessment criteria to the learning outcomes of the module in order that they are appropriate to the assessment set.



223 Student evaluation of the provision was positive and students were highly supportive of both the extent and the nature of support they received from staff, and were very satisfied with the learning resources placed at their disposal. The audit team concluded that the quality of the learning opportunities available to students is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

#### **Computing**

224 The scope of the DAT comprised the following awards: BSc Computer Science, BSc Computer Science (Network Communications) and MSc Information Technology. From its study of the students' assessed work and from its discussions with staff and students, the audit team found that the standard of student achievement in the undergraduate and taught postgraduate degrees was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. Programme specifications set out appropriate aims and learning outcomes and are aligned with the national Academic Infrastructure, appropriate subject benchmarks and PSRB requirements. The School's industrial and employer contacts provide further mechanisms for external input to the content of courses. External examiners comments were generally supportive of the provision.

225 Student evaluation of the provision was positive and students were highly supportive of both the extent and the nature of support they received from staff, and were satisfied with the learning resources placed at their disposal. The audit team heard from students that there were appropriate mechanisms in place for feeding back on their experiences. Good use was made of the VLE to communicate information to students and to support their learning. For those students undertaking placements, the available support was commended by students who had undertaken sandwich courses. The audit team concluded that the quality of the learning opportunities available to students is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

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

226 To provide further evidence to support its findings the audit team also investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The SED documents the University's confidence that it has acted actively to place its own structures in alignment with the framework and cites its

anticipation of various aspects of the *Code of practice* as evidence of its proactive engagement with this area. The objectives of the University's 2001 Quality Strategy embed engagement with the Academic Infrastructure within its activities, and indeed a seventh objective was added to the strategy, which states that one of the University's Quality Strategy objectives is to ensure 'that the university takes full account of QAA's Academic Infrastructure in the maintenance of quality and standards and is compliant where necessary'.

227 The SED stated that the University found the Academic Infrastructure useful and had engaged in a review of each section of the *Code of practice* as it was published. Among the documents viewed by the audit team was a table which mapped the University's clear description of the manner in which the it had sought to address each of its key elements: the FHEQ; subject benchmark statements; programme specifications and the *Code*. This document allowed the team to assure itself that the University had acted to map its activities against the COP. Where necessary, the University has convened Working Parties to consider regulations and procedures in relation to the *Code* as they are published and revised and propose changes where necessary. The team located and considered several of these documents and found them to be reflective and evaluative.

228 The SED stated that the Academic Board had acted to ensure that the University's awards were consistent with the FHEQ, and revised regulations were approved by the Academic Board in November 2002. The SED stated that standard regulations for taught programmes were now in place across the University and the audit team was able to assure itself through its scrutiny of relevant documentation and through its meetings with staff that this was the case.

229 In its SED the University stated that all subject fields were reviewed for consistency with subject benchmark statements. A standard template is used and the audit team was able to satisfy itself that field specifications referred appropriately to subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ.

230 In general the audit team found the Quality Assurance Procedures Handbook (2004/05) to be thorough and comprehensive and firmly embedded within the Academic Infrastructure. It found that KLIC established a clear framework and guide which encouraged engagement with the Academic Infrastructure across the University.

231 Having reviewed the information provided by the University in the SED and its annexes, material provided in the base room and the DSEDs and

accompanying field specifications and the papers of the schools and faculties audit team came to the view that the University's approach to matching its own arrangements to the advice offered by the Academic Infrastructure had been critical, evaluative, timely and effective, and that the account offered in the SED was accurate and reliable.

### **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**

232 The SED provided a useful and full description of the University's arrangements for assuring the quality of its programmes and securing the standards of its awards. In general the SED reflected on all relevant aspects of the University's provision and drew attention, where appropriate, both to areas of good practice as well as to areas where issues had been or were being identified, often outlining action that was being or might be taken to ensure the enhancement of quality and standards. The SED fully supported the audit team's confidence in the University's capacity for reflection and self-evaluation.

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

233 Changes introduced since the last QAA Quality Audit in 2002 indicate clearly that the University has effective procedures for enhancement. These are based on a mixture of encouraging and rewarding local initiatives, careful monitoring and self-reflection to identify areas of good practice and weakness, and proactive, centrally activated developments to respond to external changes, to spread good practice and to eliminate weaknesses. Current areas of enhancement which the University intends to continue with are its VLE, its student database (SITS), support mechanisms at faculty level for both staff teaching and student learning, the first year student experience, and space usage. All these are being thoughtfully planned and monitored. The audit team also saw evidence that careful consideration is being given to the context, both external and internal, in which future developments will be occurring. The team found two areas, staff appraisal and, to a lesser extent, the peer observation of teaching, which were used rather variably, overall though it was able to conclude that the University has very effective systems in place to develop and enhance its provision.

### **Reliability of information**

234 The External Affairs Department produces many of the University's publications and also carefully monitors supplementary material that comes from the Faculties. The University considers feedback from students in reviews to confirm that information provided is accurate and realistic and does not lead to false expectations.

235 The University, through the Registrar, issues guidance on the information that students should receive, thus providing a framework which is intended to ensure that all students either receive or know where to find all information they would normally need. The University is looking to develop an information strategy and regards this as a future challenge. A key approach at the time of the audit was to encourage staff to make greater use of the VLE to provide information to students in addition to using it for the purposes of teaching and learning. Much effort had gone into enhancing the University's website which was being reviewed at the time; and improving signposting on the site was one of the priorities. Based on the evidence gathered from documentation, meetings and the University's website, the audit team judged that the students' experience of published and other information available to them was, on the whole, a positive one: information is available through different sources which are readily accessible, is consistent across areas of the University and is supported by staff who are acknowledged to be approachable and helpful. However, the University should take note of the view expressed by students in the SWS that its prospectuses do not reflect the reality of studying at any of the four sites, and may wish to address this in future publications.

236 At the time of the audit visit, the TQI website was shown as being 'under development' with the full launch of the site due to take place in summer 2005. The audit team was satisfied that the University is taking a sound approach to the production of the recommended information set. The University was alert to the implications of the document HEFCE 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, and the team considered that it was moving in an appropriate manner to fulfil its responsibilities in this respect.

## Features of good practice

237 The following features of good practice were noted:

- i the effectiveness of the way in which the University uses self-reflection to inform its development (paragraphs 40, 113 and 116)
- ii the enhancement of the student experience by extensive external input into programmes across the University; (paragraphs 51, 80, 127 and 164)
- iii the responsiveness of the University, at all levels, to student views (paragraphs 79, 137, 138 and 179).
- iv the accessibility of academic staff and the supportive way in which they interact with students (paragraphs 100, 108, 114, 123 and 136)
- v the academic and pastoral support available to students at both faculty and University level (paragraphs 107 and 113)
- vi the support available across the University to promote learning and teaching initiatives (paragraphs 139 and 156)
- vii the preparation and pre-placement support of students for the placement/sandwich year (paragraph 176)

## Recommendations for action

238 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- i that the University takes steps to assure itself how staff appraisal, which it sees as a key mechanism for identifying staff development needs, is being consistently and fully deployed (paragraphs 40, 88, 90 and 177)
- ii that the University continues to monitor and develop its learning resources, particularly the availability and use of appropriate space, to match the growth in student numbers (paragraphs 95, 98, 120 and 136).

239 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- i that the University considers how the development of assessment criteria which reflect more explicitly the level of the modules, their learning outcomes and their modes of assessment would benefit both students and internal and external assessors (paragraphs 34, 119, 132 and 152).

## Appendix

### Kingston University's response to the audit report

The University welcomes the conclusions of the QAA Institutional Audit Report, most notably that broad confidence can be placed in our ability to maintain standards and the quality of the student experience. The identification of a significant number of quite wide-ranging features of good practice is very pleasing and the University will continue to build upon these strengths. To a great extent they reflect our own evaluation as presented to the Agency in advance of the Institutional Audit.

The recommendations for action are also helpful and the University is pleased to note that they are limited in number, with two that are advisable and one that is desirable. To a significant extent these are matters that were already being considered by the University at the time of the Institutional Audit. Pilots of new approaches to staff appraisals were trialled during 2004/2005 and a major review is taking place in 2005/2006. The University is growing and has been amongst the most successful in being awarded additional student numbers, in part a recognition of our success in introducing Foundation Degrees that meet the needs of employers. Although some of this growth is with our partner colleges, the University is actually aware of the need to plan resources, including space, to support growth. We are engaged in a major initiative, the "New University Project" which includes acquisition of major new buildings and refurbishment of the existing estate. Included in the project are new approaches to teaching and learning and student support. The University is fully aware of the challenges facing it and is confident that it can manage them. The final recommendation that it would be desirable to look at some refinement of assessment criteria is useful. We note that the body of the report indicates that our students indicate that they know what is expected of them when they undertake assessments and we will continue to ensure that we build upon this. We are acutely aware of the need to balance the level of detail about assessment criteria and advice to students on how to tackle assessments with the need to ensure that higher education remains a challenging, but fair, experience.

In most respects the report is a reflection of the University's own self-evaluation. However, we are very strongly of the view that the parts of the report that consider the University's approach to e-learning and the relatively recent introduction of a University-wide Virtual Learning Environment to support and enhance learning (not necessarily replace face-to-face teaching) are not a true reflection of the excellent work being done (paragraphs 88 and 97 in particular). Some 1,800 of 2000 undergraduate course modules actively use the VLE and there are approximately 150,000 hits per day on the VLE servers on an average working day and targets for VLE use are being carefully monitored and largely met. Students are enthusiastic and feedback from them is excellent. The VLE is for communication of information and only, where it is appropriate to do so, for learning, teaching and assessment. To describe use of a VLE as patchy implies criticism when the reality is that the strategy is pedagogically sound. The report indicates that voluntary staff-development might not have been appropriate which ignores the fact that we had significant pre-existing expertise with a wide range of e-learning, and that compulsion is not necessary in a well planned strategy.

Developments in the short period between the Audit visit and publication of the report have inevitably been limited. Two, however, are worthy of note. Firstly, from 2005/2006 the University has re-organised from six faculties to seven. The Faculty of Technology has divided into a Faculty of Engineering and a Faculty of Computing, Information Systems and Mathematics. This reflects growth in engineering, differences between the subjects and physical location. Secondly, during 2004/2005 a new Strategic Plan for the next five years has been developed. Whilst the core mission of the University remains unchanged, new objectives and targets have been set for the future. The new Strategic Plan updates the information presented in the body of the Audit Report (e.g. paragraph 10) and will be available on the University's web site following final approval in the summer of 2005.

