

# **University of Lincoln**

---

MAY 2003

Institutional audit

*Published by*  
Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education  
Southgate House  
Southgate Street  
Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000  
Fax 01452 557070  
Email [comms@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:comms@qaa.ac.uk)  
Web [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

© Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2003

ISBN 1 85824 977 5

All the Agency's publications are available on our web site [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

*Printed copies are available from:*  
Linney Direct  
Adamsway  
Mansfield  
Nottinghamshire NG18 4FN

Tel 01623 450788  
Fax 01623 450629  
Email [qaa@linneydirect.com](mailto:qaa@linneydirect.com)

## Preface

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

## The purpose of institutional audit

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

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

## Judgements

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

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

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

## Nationally agreed standards

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

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

## The audit process

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

The main elements of institutional audit are:

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

## The evidence for the audit

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

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

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

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

## Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>1</b>		
Introduction	1	Academic guidance, support and supervision	24
Outcome of the audit	1	Personal support and guidance	24
Features of good practice	1	Collaborative provision	25
Recommendations for action	1		
BA (Hons) Business Studies; BA (Hons) English; BA (Hons) Fine Art; LLB (Hons); BA (Hons) Social Policy	1	<b>Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline trails</b>	<b>26</b>
National reference points	2		
<b>Main report</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Section 4: The audit investigations: published information</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Section 1: Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>	The students' experience of published information and other information available to them	35
The University of Lincoln	4	Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information	36
Collaborative provision	5		
Background information	5	<b>Findings</b>	<b>40</b>
The audit process	5	The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes	40
Developments since the previous academic quality audit	6	The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards	42
<b>Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes</b>	<b>7</b>	The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning	43
The institution's view as expressed in the SED	7	Outcomes of discipline audit trails	43
The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision	8	The use made by the institution of the academic infrastructure	45
The University's intentions for the enhancement of standards and quality	9	The utility of the SED as an illustration of the institution's capacity to reflect upon its own strengths and weaknesses	45
Internal approval, monitoring and review processes	10	Commentary on the institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards	46
External participation in internal review processes	13	The reliability of information	46
External examiners and their reports	14	Features of good practice	46
External reference points	15	Recommendations for action	47
Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies	17		
Student representation at operational and institutional level	18	<b>Appendix</b>	<b>48</b>
Feedback from students, graduates and employers	18	The University's response to the audit report	48
Progression and completion statistics	19		
Assurance of the quality of teaching staff, appointment, appraisal and reward	20		
Assurance of the quality of teaching staff through support and development	21		
Assurance of the quality of teaching delivered through distributed and distance-learning methods	23		
Learning support resources	23		

## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) visited the University of Lincoln (the University) from 12 to 16 May 2003 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

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

The words 'academic standards' are used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an 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 academic programmes. The findings also confirm that there can be broad confidence in the soundness of the University's future management of the quality of its academic programmes, provided that it completes the plans that are in progress for reviewing the effectiveness of its quality assurance procedures, and continues to develop and enhance these procedures; and
- broad confidence can be placed in the University's present and future capacity to manage the academic standards of its awards effectively, provided that it continues to refine the reliability of its processes for making use at institutional level of the information that is available about academic standards at programme level.

### Features of good practice

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

- the use being made of programme specifications to specify learning outcomes and criteria of assessment;
- the University's constructive relationship with its local partner colleges; and
- the academic and personal support available to students.

### Recommendations for action

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

- clarify roles and responsibilities in the academic approval of new and amended programmes;
- give priority to the development of its management information system so that it has the ability to be an effective tool for the evaluation of student progression and achievement at both institutional and programme levels; and
- consider whether it is making full use of staff development and appraisal to support its institutional priorities.

The audit team also found a number of matters where the University might benefit from further action. These matters are:

- making sure that actions that have been identified to strengthen the management of academic quality and standards are completed within a specified time;
- defining the acceptable level of variation in the content and analysis contained in reports that contribute to annual monitoring;
- using the information available from internal and external review more systematically at institutional level to support quality enhancement; and
- building on the good practice that exists in some programmes for timely feedback to students on academic performance so that this becomes the expectation for all programmes.

### **BA (Hons) Business Studies; BA (Hons) English; BA (Hons) Fine Art; LLB (Hons); BA (Hons) Social Policy**

To arrive at these conclusions, the audit team spoke to staff and students and was given information about the University as a whole. The team also

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

### **National reference points**

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team also investigated the use made by the University of the academic infrastructure which the Agency has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The academic infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The audit found that the University was making effective use of the academic infrastructure to inform its framework for the management of quality and academic standards.

From 2004, the Agency's audit teams will comment on the reliability of the information about academic quality and standards that institutions will be required to publish, and which is listed in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document, *Information on quality and standards in higher education* (HEFCE's document 02/15). The audit found that the University was making good progress toward meeting, by that date, the requirements set out in HEFCE's document 02/15.

# **Main report**

## Main report

1 An institutional audit of the University of Lincoln (the University) was undertaken during the period 12 to 16 May 2003. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility as an awarding body.

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

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

## Section 1: Introduction

### The University of Lincoln

4 The history of the University can be traced back to 1861 with the foundation of the Hull School of Art, becoming Humberside Polytechnic, which received university status in 1992, and adopted the title of the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside in 1996.

5 In October 2001, following a fundamental review of its strategic direction (see below, paragraph 28), the University formally changed its name to the University of Lincoln. The Lincoln School of Art and Design and the Lincolnshire School of Agriculture

were transferred from De Montfort University (DMU) to the University of Lincoln, which now has four Campuses: three in Lincoln - the Lincolnshire School of Agriculture at Riseholme Campus, the Lincoln School of Art and Design in the centre of Lincoln, and the main Brayford Campus. A fourth campus in Hull houses the Schools of Health and Social Care, Management, Applied Computing, and Art and Design. The administrative base of the University is located at the Brayford Campus.

6 The University has degree awarding powers for taught and research degrees. At undergraduate level, the University awards Foundation degrees (FDs), Certificate and Diploma in Higher Education, BA (Hons), BSc (Hons), BEng (Hons), BBA (Hons) and LLB. It also delivers HNC and HND awards under licence from BTEC. Postgraduate provision includes Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas, MA, MSc, MBA, LLM and NBA. The University offers two postgraduate research degree awards - MPhil and PhD - and a range of designated doctoral awards, including an EdD and a DBA.

7 In 2002-03, the University had some 6,100 students based on the three campuses in Lincoln, some 4,100 in the two campuses in Hull, and some 300 students off campus. Academic staff levels show an increase from 472 in 1995-96 to 550 in 2000-01.

8 A new faculty structure was introduced in February 2002. The new structure is intended to focus academic management on academic departments of cognate disciplines. The faculties are:

- Applied Computing Sciences;
- Art, Architecture and Design;
- Business and Management;
- Health and Life Sciences;
- Media and Communications; and
- Social Sciences and Law.

9 Four school and centre identities have been retained at the Hull campus. These are:

- Hull School of Health and Social Care;
- Hull School of Art and Design;
- Hull Centre for Management Development; and
- Hull Centre for Applied Computing.

10 The mission of the University is 'to be recognised as a university of quality and distinction'. The University's self-evaluation document (SED) explained that '*quality* means a commitment to quality enhancement and continuous improvement' while '*distinction* reflects the unique circumstances and potential of the University which serves a wide



geographical area, to a large extent previously not served by a local university'.

11 To support its vision, the University states that it will promote the following values:

- become student-centred in all activities;
- encourage innovation;
- develop confidence;
- develop transparency and high standards of integrity;
- ensure equality of opportunity;
- help all staff to be engaged and committed;
- ensure talent, success and quality are rewarded;
- create a partnership ethos.

### Collaborative provision

12 In 2001, the University served notice to terminate its remaining overseas collaborative partnerships. All of the University's UK collaborative provision is now concentrated into bilateral arrangements with colleges in the region through two consortia (see below, paragraph 132).

### Background information

13 The published information available for this audit included:

- the information on the University's web site;
- the University undergraduate prospectus 2003 and 2004;
- the University postgraduate prospectus 2002-03;
- one Agency quality assessment report and four subject review reports for the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside, and the Agency subject review report for DMU in Art and Design;
- the report of the Agency's overseas partnership audit for the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside and Colegio Universitario Melchor de Jovellanos (October 2000);
- the report of the Higher Education Quality Council's (HEQC) overseas partnership audit of the link between the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside and the University of National and World Economics, Sofia (May 1998);
- the report of the Agency's audit of the collaborative partnership between the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside and Skyline Institute, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (September 1998);

- the report of HEQC's quality audit of the University of Humberside (January 1996);
- the report of HEQC's collaborative provision audit of the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside (January 1997).

14 The University provided the Agency with:

- an institutional SED;
- five discipline SEDs (DSEDs) for the programmes selected for DATs;
- the University's Strategic Plan 2002 to 2007;
- the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002 to 2005;
- the University Regulations 2002-03;
- Quality Assurance Document 4: Periodic Subject Review;
- list of awards currently offered by the University, including definitions of each of the tariff awards;
- the University's External Examiner's Handbook 2002-03;
- undergraduate modular scheme award structures;
- the Annual Review 2001-02;
- Financial Statements 2001-02.

15 During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was given access to the University's internal documents and to its intranet. The team appreciated the unrestricted access it was given to these sources of information.

### The audit process

16 Following receipt of the University's SED, and a preliminary meeting at the University in September 2002 between an Agency officer and representatives of the University and students, the Agency confirmed that five DATs would be conducted during the audit visit.

17 On the basis of the SED and other published information, the audit team confirmed that the DATs would focus on programmes leading to the awards of:

- BA (Hons) Business Studies;
- BA (Hons) English;
- BA (Hons) Fine Art;
- LLB (Hons); and
- BA (Hons) Social Policy.

The University provided the Agency with DSEDs and supporting documentation for these DATs in March 2003.

18 At the preliminary meeting for the audit, the students of the University were invited, through their Students' Union Cooperative, to submit a separate document expressing views on the student

experience at the University, and identifying any matters of concern or commendation with respect to the quality of programmes and the academic standards of awards. They were also invited to give their views on the level of representation afforded to them, and on the extent to which their views were noted and acted upon. In generating their written submission, the Students' Union Cooperative formed six focus groups under the leadership of a sabbatical officer working with the help of a member of the University staff for each group. The key issues chosen by the sabbatical team were as follows:

- marketing and course information/literature: student perspectives;
- University systems - effectiveness and reliability;
- the student's experience as a learner;
- University facilities;
- the transition from DMU to the University; and
- Hull transition.

19 The Students' Union Cooperative submitted this document to the Agency in January 2003. The document concluded with a summary, listing the strengths and limitations as seen by the student body. The audit team is grateful to the students of the University for preparing this helpful document.

20 The audit team visited the University on 2, 3 and 4 April 2003 for the purpose of exploring with the Vice-Chancellor, senior members of staff of the University and student representatives, matters of institutional-level management of quality and standards, raised by the University's SED, the students' written submission (SWS) and published documentation. At the close of the briefing visit, a programme of meetings for the audit visit was agreed with the University.

21 The audit visit took place from 12 to 16 May 2003. Nine meetings were held during the visit with groups of staff and students from the University and its partner colleges. Meetings were also held with staff and with students in the five subjects selected for the DATs. The audit team comprised Dr S Billingham, Professor D Buss, Dr P Cardew, Dr E P Maher, Professor R Pearce, Professor S Price, auditors, and Ms H Placito, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for the Agency by Dr D J Buckingham, Assistant Director.

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

22 The University of Humberside received a quality audit by HEQC, the report of which was published in January 1996, and a subsequent audit of the

collaborative provision of the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside, the report of which was published in January 1997. Since then, the University has undergone significant changes in respect of physical location and configuration, its size, the balance of its portfolio of programmes, and the scale and nature of its collaborative provision.

23 Following the HEQC audits, high priority was given to establishing an effective and consistent institution-wide system for personal tutoring and academic guidance for standards. This resulted in the Academic Advice and Guidance Network document, which was established for on-campus undergraduate students in September 1996.

24 Concerns raised in the 1996 HEQC report about tiered boards of examiners were addressed in the development of undergraduate assessment regulations and further refinement of the Guidance on External Examining - now entitled The External Examiners' Handbook, all of which are updated and reissued annually.

25 In August 2002, HEFCE published its *Evaluation of Internal Control Arrangements* for the University, which states in its overall conclusion: 'the University is operating within a particularly complex set of circumstances. It is undergoing a major restructuring in collaboration with the HEFCE...the small core executive...is tackling the problems transparently, energetically, analytically and with a sense of purpose...there is no sense that problems are considered insurmountable'.

26 The 1996 HEQC report identified a number of areas where validation, monitoring and review processes could be improved. The University subsequently addressed these by updating the process for approving minor modifications to validated programmes, the monitoring of programmes by course committees, the related annual reporting process, and student feedback. FDs have been introduced into the undergraduate modular scheme (UMS). The UMS itself is described in the Undergraduate Prospectus as giving students 'a wide range of subjects and combinations'. A subject is defined as 'an area of study', made up of units, defined as 'blocks of study that cover particular topics within that subject'. A programme of study, leading to an award, may be made from a single subject or from two subject majors, each of which has a specified combination of units. A programme that is outside the UMS, such as one leading to a taught postgraduate award is also referred to as a 'course'.

27 Since February 1995, 12 subjects have undergone Agency subject review. In all cases, the provision was approved and, in the case of the review of Education, the University was awarded the maximum grading.

28 Throughout 2000-01, the University conducted a fundamental review of its strategic direction. This highlighted the critical importance of focusing on full-time undergraduate recruitment as the University's core business, and the need to review the academic portfolio to address the decline in full-time undergraduate recruitment since 1996. In January 2001, the Board of Governors adopted a 'Recovery Plan'. The option that was adopted, following consultation with staff and students, included the following proposals:

- the administrative base of the University to be established at the Brayford Campus, Lincoln by September 2002;
- transfer of the Cottingham Road Campus to the University of Hull by January 2002, then leased back until July 2003;
- refurbish Queen's Garden and George Street buildings in Hull by July 2003 to establish a new city centre campus for approximately 1,500 full-time undergraduate students by 2005, in partnership with Hull College;
- the transfer of approximately 2,000 full-time undergraduate full-time equivalents (FTEs) to the Brayford Campus by 2005, increasing its students' population to 5,500 full-time undergraduates.

29 In August 2001, the Board of Governors approved the transfer of DMU's Lincoln-based School of Art and Design and the Lincolnshire School of Agriculture to the University. This strategy was included in the Recovery Plan and in a restructuring and collaboration bid to HEFCE, and in September 2001 the University received formal confirmation from the Council of an additional total £5 million grant in respect of these two submissions.

30 As a result of the review of its academic portfolio, the University made substantial reductions in the range of courses it offered, offset by enhanced recruitment targets in those subjects/programmes with the potential to grow. Subjects and programmes with little prospect of achieving economic viability, namely undergraduate programmes in Applied Social Sciences, Business in Hull, Engineering and Languages, were reduced or terminated. Of the joint honours programmes, only those that can demonstrate a clear academic resonance between the two subjects, and which

have a proven or potential market demand, continue to be offered. In 2001-02, the University achieved its recruitment target with a 28 per cent increase in full-time undergraduate enrolments - the fourth highest increase in the sector for that year.

31 The University also conducted a fundamental review of its senior management and service structure. New departments were established in July 2002 with all new service directors appointed by January 2003. This exercise resulted in the appointment of a number of key posts, and the establishment of a Teaching and Learning Best Practice Office, together with a generic local management office for the Hull campus. At the time of the audit visit, many of these new structures were still at a very early stage of implementation, and were still being embedded into the University's activities, as will be noted later in this report.

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

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

32 In reviewing its process for standards and quality, the University's SED lists a number of what it sees as overall strengths. These include the Academic Board and its sub-structure, and the University's range of strategies, policies and guidance documents. A list of 26 'particular strengths' includes the planning approval process for new subjects and programmes, and what is described as a 'mature and effective validation process'. The SED also acknowledges among 14 current limitations of its process 'the as yet incomplete implementation of the planning cycle to ensure timely submission and consideration of new subject and course proposals' and 'weaknesses in data reporting in support of academic monitoring and review'.

33 The University believes it has maintained a clear sense of quality and standards throughout the management of the recent transitions in its structures and that it now has more sophisticated processes than those present in the period 1995 to 1997 when the University was previously audited. In developing those processes, the SED claims both internal and external influences. The external influences include the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, subject benchmark statements, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*, guidelines on programme specifications, and

reports from Agency subject reviews and professional bodies. The SED made several references to the University's recognition of these external sources, and gave examples of its adherence, or intention to adhere, to the Agency's academic infrastructure. The audit team was told that the University's decision to terminate all overseas partnerships and place a moratorium on all new overseas ventures was heavily influenced by its reflection on the external reviews of its collaborative provision. The team was interested to assess the extent to which other external reviews and accreditations had influenced the University's processes.

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

34 The University made clear in its SED that 'the ultimate academic authority on quality and standards is the Academic Board'. The Board has established a subcommittee, the Academic Standards Committee (ASC), to advise it on policies related to the maintenance and enhancement of academic standards and quality. Among the responsibilities delegated to ASC are the maintenance of an effective system of quality assurance and the validation of academic programmes.

35 Authority to validate programmes is further delegated to validation panels, which are established under the authority of the ASC. Their actions are subject to scrutiny by the Validations and Authorisations Committee (VAC), a subcommittee of ASC. From February 2001, validation panels have had delegated powers to validate proposals, with the VAC having authority to refer decisions to ASC which 'in turn has the power to suspend or overrule the decision wholly or in part'. Prior to validation, all proposals for new programmes of study leading to awards of the University emanating from faculties or partnership consortia must first achieve planning approval. Responsibility for this has been delegated to another subcommittee of Academic Board, the Academic Development Committee (ADC). In 2001, the University instituted new academic planning procedures. A working group of ADC was created specifically to scrutinise faculty proposals for new programmes.

36 The SED explained that, 'day-to-day monitoring of the quality and standards of the University's programmes is and always has been a local responsibility'. In this context, 'local' is taken to include 'the relevant faculty board and its committees, boards of examiners and the student body'. Monitoring culminates in an annual reporting

process upward from unit level through subject and course committees to faculty boards, and from faculties to ASC. The audit team was told that this system maintains an appropriate balance between central oversight and local ownership of the assurance of quality and standards. ASC maintains an overview of the ways in which faculties and partner colleges discharge the responsibilities that are delegated to them through a process of audit operated by its executive arm, the Quality Unit.

37 The University has a two-tier system of examination boards at undergraduate level. Subject boards of examiners in academic departments have the responsibility for monitoring overall quality of a subject and the standards of student performance. The UMS Board of Examiners is responsible for applying regulations relating to adverse circumstances and use of dishonest means, and for determining award and degree classification.

38 The various procedures for approval, monitoring and review of programmes are laid down in two manuals: the Programme Development Manual and the Quality Assurance Manual. The Programme Development Manual is the single source document for those designing new programmes. It contains a summary of the key stages in the validation process and the structural requirements for programmes, and is updated and re-issued periodically. The Quality Assurance Manual consists of a growing set of numbered 'quality assurance documents', which are developed at the behest of ASC by the Quality Unit, and are implemented following formal approval by ASC. It requires that subjects and programmes proposed for revalidation must conform to 'any benchmarks in force at the time'. In addition, it requires validation and review panels to 'calibrate proposals for new programmes and subjects, as well as subjects under review, against the *FHEQ*'. Programme specifications 'provide the basic factual data for all subjects and programmes, for quality assurance processes'.

39 The audit team noted some duplication and overlap between the Programme Development Manual and the Quality Assurance Manual, and between some of the 14 individual documents that constituted the latter at the time of the audit visit. This reflected the process of accretion of a succession of new documents. Notwithstanding this evolutionary process, and the relatively recent inclusion of some of the documents, the team took the view that the two manuals represented a comprehensive guide to the University's procedures, a conclusion that echoed comments made in Agency subject review reports.

40 The audit team was interested to consider further the balance in the University's processes between central control and local ownership, and the extent to which the detailed procedures documented in the Quality Assurance Manual were converted into practice within the faculties. According to the SED, the University's review of its academic portfolio had resulted in 'a focus on embedding effective quality assurance processes'. The SED went on to state that 'the University has in place a comprehensive and proven set of strategies, procedures and policies for the assurance and enhancement of the academic quality and standards of its programmes and awards'. Given the relatively recent introduction of aspects of the University's quality assurance infrastructure, the team considered that it was probably too soon to refer to the set as 'proven', and wished to investigate how embedded the centrally defined processes were at programme level. The team also wished to explore how the recent structural changes influenced the University's ability to maintain an effective oversight of the quality and standards of the programmes leading to all of its awards. These areas of investigation provided one aspect of the team's agenda in its subsequent meetings with staff and students at discipline and institutional levels.

41 The audit team noted that certain programmes offered at different sites and with different curricula led to the same award and award title, without any differentiation in nomenclature to reflect the differences between the programmes. This situation arose from the amalgamation of the DMU School of Art in Lincoln into the University, and related only to the three awards - Fine Art, Graphic Design and Illustration - where the University had existing awards of the same name, offered in Hull through the long-established Hull School of Art and Design. The team expressed some concern about the legitimacy of the University maintaining, on the Lincoln and Hull campuses, discrete programmes leading to the same named award of the University, and about the means employed to ensure alignment of standards between the programmes. The University subsequently explained that, following the amalgamation, it had worked to manage and revise the converging awards so as to honour its commitments both to former DMU students in Lincoln and continuing Lincoln students in Hull, while maintaining an appropriate level of comparability of standards and curriculum. It went on to state that students, whether at Hull or at Lincoln, are examined by the same award examination boards, and will be under the same external examiner in future. The team was reassured by the University's statement that it had no intention of continuing to

offer different awards under the same title at its different campuses once the former DMU students have completed their degrees, although it also noted that the University was still recruiting for September 2003 entry to the existing Graphic Design and Illustration programmes at both Hull and Lincoln campuses. The University will, no doubt, wish to make sure that the actions that it has identified for removing anomalies resulting from the amalgamation are completed within its planned timescale.

42 The University's arrangements for assuring the quality and standards of collaborative provision delivered through its partners have been profoundly influenced by a radical change in its strategy. Partly influenced by concerns about 'its capacity to ensure quality and standards at remote sites in the longer term', the University served notice of termination of many of its partnerships. Those affected included all overseas collaborative partnerships and all UK franchise and/or validation arrangements other than those with further education (FE) colleges in the Humber or prospective Lincolnshire Consortia. In the latter continuing and developing partnership arrangements, the University makes a distinction between its responsibility for the standards of awards made in its name and its partners' responsibility for the quality of students' learning opportunities.

43 The University, therefore, has had to maintain effective oversight of the standards of academic programmes in the terminating partnerships and the quality of learning opportunities for their diminishing numbers of students. At the same time, it was installing and managing new arrangements with the consortia, which were intended to manage all the University's higher education (HE) provision in FE institutions in future. The audit team was interested to see how the University was establishing the boundaries of its responsibilities and discharging those responsibilities against a background of reorganisation, staff changes, and changed relationships with partner institutions.

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

44 The University sees the assurance of quality and standards as central to the realisation of its educational goals. It notes 'the current debate over whether quality processes should be concerned with *assurance* or with *enhancement*'. In the absence of definitive guidance, the University, in its Quality Assurance Manual, 'views quality assurance as an active rather than a static process'.

45 The University stated in its SED that it has 'developed and implemented (or is implementing) a range of strategies, policies and guidance documents, relevant to the assurance and enhancement of quality and standards', which have taken into account a range of internal and external factors including the Agency's academic infrastructure. The UMS is seen as the basis for developing 'coherent and robust discipline-based subjects', with the consequent need to focus the processes for assuring and enhancing standards and quality around these subjects.

46 The University acknowledges that most items in its agenda for future enhancement are 'already in train', but 'need to be seen through to completion'. The SED concluded with the statement that further enhancements of process will build on the work 'to absorb the remainder of the *external* quality and standards framework, while further embedding the *internal* quality and standards framework within the University'.

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

47 The University's processes for approving, monitoring and reviewing its subjects and programmes consist of an initial process of planning approval; the validation (and revalidation) of programmes and their authorisation to approved centres; ongoing monitoring of subjects (undergraduate level) and courses (postgraduate level) culminating in annual reports; and periodic, internal subject review. Programmes that are offered collaboratively off-campus are subject to the same approval, monitoring and review procedures but with the University's partners also being subject to quality visits and periodic review of centres.

#### **Programme approval and validation**

48 The University has separated the procedures for giving planning approval for new programmes from those for giving academic approval. Proposals for new programmes that have already obtained approval from faculty boards of studies are assessed on behalf of ADC by a working group against criteria that include market position, fit with existing plans, employment or further study prospects of students, and overall cost. The University stated in its SED that faculties have faced difficulties in meeting the deadlines for planning approval, thereby placing greater pressure on the time available for subsequent academic approval. To ameliorate this problem, and to ensure the timely submission of new subject and course proposals, the University has adopted a two-year

rolling planning cycle, but acknowledges that implementation is as yet incomplete. The audit team noted that the University's academic approval processes allow the deadline for validation events to be breached in exceptional circumstances, and was assured that in such cases all the normal validation controls were adopted, and that only the timescale was foreshortened. The University will no doubt wish to complete the implementation of its planning processes in order to allow the maximum possible period for its academic approval processes to take place.

49 The validation of all new subjects and programmes, the authorisation of franchises and the approval of new partnerships ('centre approval') are managed by the Quality Unit under the authority of the ASC. Once ADC approval to proceed has been given, a member of the Quality Unit is assigned to arrange the validation event. Before that can take place the faculty responsible for the proposal has to confirm that the documentation meets certain basic standards. The Quality Assurance Manual sets out validation, revalidation and franchise authorisation procedures. The objectives of validation, according to the Manual, include ensuring that proposed programmes meet the University's requirements for the relevant award and the academic standards appropriate to that award, and conform to the *FHEQ* and align with relevant subject benchmark statements published by the Agency. Programme proposals have to include programme specifications which incorporate, where appropriate, a benchmarking analysis.

50 ASC retains its delegated responsibility for overseeing validation arrangements. However, the SED explained that increasingly heavy agendas and the difficulties of giving appropriate attention to validation reports had led to the establishment of the VAC in March 2000. VAC was given the remit to receive validation and authorisation reports, and to report on these to ASC as its parent body. Following what the SED described as 'potential confusion over the responsibilities of validation panels and the various committees', the Academic Board in February 2001 granted panels the authority to validate programmes and authorise centres directly. The point of validation was to be the finalisation of the report by the panel chair. As a safeguard, VAC is still expected to receive reports on all validation, franchise authorisation and centre approval events, and to act as the guardian of academic standards by commenting on inadequacies of reports. It can also refer such matters to ASC, which can decide to suspend or overrule a validation decision, wholly or

in part, if it has cause for concern. The Academic Board stipulated that reports have to be finalised and accepted by VAC before enrolment of students.

51 VAC therefore has an important role in maintaining on behalf of ASC a central view of academic approval processes and acting as the guardian of standards; it is expected to provide the 'rigorous monitoring' that the University sees as a strength. The audit team noted there was a gap of nearly 11 months between the last two meetings of VAC for which confirmed minutes had been provided. Members of VAC who met the team explained that this gap had resulted from the restructuring of the Committee, and that in the interim period the work of the Quality Unit and provisional Chair's action had ensured that the business of the Committee had continued to be conducted. The team heard that the Committee had already embarked on a cycle of more frequent meetings. The team noted a degree of ambiguity in the terms of reference for VAC. The Committee is charged with recommending where it feels necessary the suspension or overruling of a validation/authorisation/centre approval, and also with recommending the 'acceptance or otherwise' of reports to ASC, an apparently unnecessary addition if authority is normally delegated to panels. Given the past confusion referred to in the SED, and the comparatively short time available in some cases for scrutiny of panel reports before student enrolment, the University may consider it advisable to further ensure that the respective roles and responsibilities of its committees and panels in relation to the academic approval of programmes are clearly delineated, and that the VAC has a meeting schedule that allows it to fulfil its monitoring function with the degree of rigour that the University wishes to see.

52 From the information provided to it about a number of programmes, and from meetings with staff, the audit team was satisfied that the University has adopted a thorough approach to the process of academic approval with an appropriate degree of externality (see below, paragraph 63). Particular care has been taken to revalidate programmes that had been transferred from DMU, or have undergone substantial change during the University's transition. In the former case, staff who had transferred reported to the team that they had found the University very supportive and thorough in helping them to prepare for revalidation of their portfolio of programmes, and that the Programme Development Manual had been a particularly helpful resource. The team, however, also noted that some

of the conditions and recommendations set by panels did not appear to be time-limited. The VAC had noted in November 2001 concern at the number of validations recorded where the conditions could be considered to be well-overdue, and had more recently suggested that where conditions were imposed by panels, deadlines for meeting them should be set. The team would wish to encourage this development as part of a wider move to the more timely closing of loops, and of the University assuring itself that actions that have been identified in respect of the management of quality and academic standards are completed within a specified timescale.

#### **Minor changes to programmes**

53 The audit team discussed with undergraduate and postgraduate students instances of their experience of changes to their programmes. The team subsequently attempted to discover the extent to which programmes could be changed within the University's procedures without recourse to revalidation. It was told that, while elective elements could and did change, the core elements of a programme could only be altered through the standard procedures specified in the Quality Assurance Manual. The University's procedures for minor modification allow changes of up to one-fifth of the total credit points in a unit in a given year, but larger changes require revalidation. The team was reassured to learn that any changes in a programme structure that had not been approved by one of the specified routes would be brought to the University's attention through the Student Management System (SMS) (see below, paragraph 92). The team was also told that the University would normally try as far as possible to protect students' chosen programmes, and was given an example of a postgraduate programme in which that had been achieved. While accepting the assurance it was given about student choice and programme modification, the team noted that an annual limit of one-fifth change could allow a significant cumulative change over a longer period.

#### **Annual monitoring**

54 The procedures for routine programme monitoring are set out in the Quality Assurance Manual in Document 11, which was approved by ASC in March 2003. This document states that these procedures bring together 'existing practice and approved processes for the ongoing monitoring of units, subjects and courses, including the operation of subject/course committees and responsibilities for the annual subject/course reporting exercise'. Faculties are required to establish a committee for each subject

(undergraduate) and course (postgraduate) which is expected to maintain a continuing critical appraisal of the subject/course. The Quality Assurance Manual makes it clear that responsibility for quality at the unit level normally rests with unit coordinators. They are expected to report annually to their subject/course committee on key unit statistics, actions taken or planned in response to external examiner/professional body comments and student feedback and actions taken in response to that feedback. Each subject or course committee is in turn expected to complete a standard annual monitoring report to its parent faculty's board of studies. These reports and the views of external examiners then form the basis of a faculty report, which is expected to be available for consideration by ASC in the December of the following academic year. Students are involved in the monitoring process through membership of committees at subject/course, faculty and institutional levels, and through their responses to questionnaires.

55 Faculty boards are also responsible for the ongoing monitoring of off-campus programme provision. Most approved centres are subject to an 'annual quality visit' which is expected 'to review the performance of both partners' and 'to provide an opportunity for any centre-wide issues to be discussed with staff and students of the centre and reported to the University'. According to the Quality Assurance Manual, faculty boards should 'liaise with the link persons, consider the centre's annual reports, annual quality visit reports (where they apply) and periodic review reports, and send academic staff representatives to visit the centre as appropriate'. Some local partner colleges have their own boards of studies, which are expected to monitor their programmes and to report annually through the appropriate University faculty boards.

56 All the above procedures that operate through boards of studies, both in faculties and partner colleges, are subject to audit by the Quality Unit. An audit of annual review reports took place in the academic year 2001-02, and involved three faculties and a local partner college. The purpose of the audit was to test for compliance with a model process, and to identify good practice that might be transferable. The audit found broad compliance but variation in practice, with some examples of missing reports. It was concluded that there was a need for greater consistency of procedures and for increased formal documentation. More recently, the ASC noted that by the time it had received some reports up to 18 months could have elapsed since some of the reported events had occurred. It therefore resolved that reports for the current academic year

should be received in time for the December meeting of ASC.

57 The audit team was provided with a range of annual reports at subject and faculty level. It noted the comprehensive procedures laid down in the Quality Assurance Manual, and the efforts made to gather and distil information at all levels. It was clear to the team that, even during a period of unprecedented change for the University, the newly formed faculties were taking their responsibilities for annual monitoring very seriously. Minutes of meetings of ASC showed that several annual reports had been referred back to faculties for amendment, thus confirming the view expressed to the team that ASC did not simply 'rubber-stamp' reports. The team found itself in broad agreement with the University's own audit in terms of the variability between reports at the programme level, particularly in the extent of analysis of the various sources of available data. Given the view expressed in the SED that student retention is a 'key issue' a greater depth of analysis of student progression might have been expected. The faculty and partner college reports that the team saw were also variable in content and analysis. In some cases the bulk of the report consisted of a substantial appendix of external examiners' comments and the action proposed on them. Given the continuing variability in the content and analysis of the components of the annual monitoring process the University may consider it desirable to define the acceptable level of such variability.

58 Notwithstanding the variability in annual reports, the audit team took the view that the University was able to demonstrate an extensive and well-documented process for annual monitoring. Effective interactions between centre and faculty levels are facilitated by the relationship between members of the Quality Unit and the faculty registrars and key senior academics responsible for quality within their faculties. It was clear to the team that staff it met during the DATs had gained value from the reflective monitoring process, and from the opportunities to disseminate good practice. On the other hand, the team noted some uncertainty among staff at the discipline level about the process that takes place above faculty level, and their expectation of little or any feedback from it. The view was expressed to the team that problems are often solved in a timescale much shorter than that of the monitoring process.

59 The audit team formed the view that the process reflected a desire, understandable for a University in transition, to demonstrate compliance with both internal and external expectations of



quality assurance. The team was told that the complexity of procedures, the inevitable filtering of issues in the upward reporting process and the balance between quality assurance and quality enhancement were matters of continuing discussion, and that the University has decided to have its processes audited by external colleagues. In this respect the team was encouraged to note that the Students' Union Cooperative representative on ASC would be reviewing all the 2001-02 monitoring reports in order to identify any student issues for the Committee's attention. As it continues to embed its procedures, many of which are still relatively new, the University may be able to find ways of simplifying some aspects of these procedures while extracting greater benefits at institutional level by identifying and disseminating examples of good practice. The team would wish to encourage the University in its intention to investigate the fitness for purpose of its procedures and in further development and refinement of its quality assurance procedures in order to gain maximum benefit in terms of identifying and sharing good practice.

#### **Periodic review**

60 The University's procedures for internal periodic review of subjects are set out in its Quality Assurance Manual as Document 4, which the SED explained was heavily influenced by the Agency-led debate on subject review methodologies and related matters. The document states that 'the overall purposes of the process are to assure the University that appropriate standards are being set and achieved within the subject, and to form judgements on the quality of learning opportunities being provided to those studying the subject'. All local collaborative provision and all related programmes outside the UMS are expected to be included in the review. Thus taught postgraduate courses are considered alongside relevant undergraduate subject areas. Reviews are expected to include comparison of subjects with relevant subject benchmark statements and the *FHEQ*. There are also related but separate procedures for the periodic review of approved off-campus centres that offer the University's programmes.

61 Document 4 of the Quality Assurance Manual provides a template for the faculty submission of a SED, the constitutional activities of the panel conducting the review, the template for the review report and the actions expected after receipt of the report. Faculties can make substantial revisions to subject(s) and/or course(s) through revalidation, concurrent with a periodic subject review, in which case a single panel is expected to discharge both sets of procedures and to produce separate review and revalidation reports, although these may have

significant elements of commonality. The revalidation report follows the same route through VAC as described above for validation, while the review report goes directly to ASC.

62 According to the SED 'the review reports and the minutes of the ASC demonstrate that this process makes robust contributions to the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities'. The audit team had access to four review reports, each from a subject within a DAT, and concluded that the process was both comprehensive and rigorous, and that the panels had an appropriate level of external membership. From the minutes of the ASC, the team noted that both the review reports and eventual faculty responses to them - expected 12 months later - were agenda items, and in some cases resulted in referral back for amendment. It was less clear how the fulfilment of review recommendations was ensured. The team was therefore reassured to be told of the University's recognition that it had adopted a somewhat passive approach to earlier subject review reports, and that there was a need for more effective loop-closing in its internal review processes. The proposed remedial action is to extend into general practice a pilot, regarded as successful, in which the original review panel was reconvened after one year to comment on progress. The team would encourage the University's intention to strengthen its internal review processes while recognising the costs involved in the means that it intends to adopt. The team asked about the future plans for internal periodic review, given changes in external requirements, and was reassured to hear that the University views periodic review as a helpful developmental process that will continue. Subjects will be reviewed on a six-year cycle with dates for review of new programmes recorded in validation documents.

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

63 According to the University's Quality Assurance Manual, validation panels should comprise at least two members external to the University in a panel of at least five members. The two external members, who are nominated by the programme's development team, are both expected to be qualified in the main subject(s) of the proposal, and between them to provide current or recent academic and practitioner or industrialist expertise. The Manual also specifies that periodic subject review panels should comprise at least four members, of whom one should be external to the University and experienced in the subject under

review. The final size and composition of the panel is determined by the Chair of ASC in consultation with the Head of Quality.

64 Although the SED referred to the part that external influences play at the programme design stage in ensuring the currency of curricula, and made frequent references to the importance of external examiners, it was almost silent on external input to the validation and review processes. The audit team therefore wished to investigate whether external influences on approval and review are sufficiently strong and rigorous to ensure that those processes make a full contribution to maintaining standards and quality. In the examples of validation and review reports that were provided to the team, the external membership of panels was in line with that specified in the Quality Assurance Manual. External panel members cannot be current or previous external examiners and must not have had any previous formal relationship with the University. The team noted with interest that in some recent validations the panel members were chosen for their particular expertise in the development of subject benchmark statements. The team formed the view that the University was making effective use of external representation in its internal review processes.

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

65 The SED explained that the role of external examiners is central to the University's quality assurance arrangements. The role of external examiners is set out in the University's Assessment Handbook and in the External Examiners' Handbook. All programmes leading to an award of the University have at least one external examiner, but the way in which external examiners are used differs between different kinds of programme. In the case of postgraduate programmes, each programme has a single board of examiners with one or more external examiners. Similar arrangements apply for programmes operated through overseas partnerships. Different arrangements apply to UK-based undergraduate provision, where the University operates tiered boards of examiners. While the role of the external examiner is the most significant part in the University's approach to maintaining the standards of its awards, it became clear to the audit team, from discussions with staff, that there was good general awareness of the wide range of factors underpinning the University's assurance of standards, including reference to the academic framework, annual monitoring, and accreditation by professional and statutory bodies.

66 Appointments of external examiners are made by the External Examiners Committee which reports to ASC. The role of external examiners depends upon the nature of their appointment. Those with subject responsibilities are expected to approve programme specifications, approve assessment tasks, review samples of student work, and attend boards of examiners. They are also consulted on minor changes to programmes and units. Scheme examiners are principally concerned with oversight of the process to ensure that decisions on award recommendations 'have been reached by means according with the University's requirements and with normal practice in HE'.

67 External examiners' reports are made on a pro forma that combines a checklist of points covered by the examiner with spaces for comment. The reports are read by the Principal Quality Officer (PQO) who will require further information to be provided by the external examiner if the report as received is not suitable 'as an instrument for provision of information to the University on the health of the subject or programme concerned'. In 2000-01, seven reports were remitted to external examiners for a fuller report because not all the specific questions asked were clearly answered, or because additional comments did not sufficiently explain the respect in which an aspect was unsatisfactory. In the most recent academic year for which reports have been received, no reports were returned for further information. If the report is considered to be sufficiently full, it is circulated to the Vice-Chancellor's office and to the faculty and department concerned. The PQO with other members of the Quality Unit prepares an annual overview report for the ASC. This overview report does not take account of any responses to issues raised by external examiners, nor is it intended to trigger action on individual recommendations, since those matters are dealt with by means of the circulation of the full reports. The report is able to trigger action on any general issues which become apparent only through a consideration of the full range of external examiners' reports, and it provides information to ASC on the extent to which external examiners have commented on the comparability with subject benchmark statements.

68 The circulation of external examiners' reports triggers two processes, one of which is bottom-up, the other top-down. The top-down process is initiated centrally. The PQO notes for the attention of the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) any issues that may require urgent investigation. The PVC may take these issues up directly with relevant deans or

heads of department or service. Replies may be requested directly to the PVC, or a report may be requested for ASC. In 2000-01, 18 memoranda asking for a response to an issue raised by an external examiner were sent, but only three replies had been received in time for the ASC's meeting of December 2001. In 2002, the overview report stated that 'copies of seven memoranda requesting a response to issues raised by external examiners sent by the PVC have been received by the Quality Unit but only one reply has been received to date'. By the time of the audit visit, some six months later, the position had improved, but some replies had still not been received by the Quality Unit, despite details of the relevant memoranda having been sent to faculty registrars. It was indicated to the audit team that it was possible that in some cases a response might have been sent directly to the PVC but not copied to the Quality Unit. As the overview report indicates, 'a non-response does not necessarily mean that action has not been taken [but] it does make it difficult to easily provide evidence of loop closing for the issues highlighted'. Since it is most likely that the PVC will request a response by means of a memorandum where the issue is one of importance, the failure of the University process to close the reporting loop on external examiners' reports creates a risk that significant matters might remain unresolved for some considerable time after being raised by an external examiner's report. The University is aware of this problem, and the team was informed that steps have been taken to ensure that it does not recur in the future. The University will no doubt wish to monitor the effectiveness of the additional measures that it has put in place for ensuring that procedures for responding to external examiners' reports are followed in a timely manner.

69 The second, bottom-up process that is triggered by the circulation of external examiners' reports is that they are considered at the subject level. The University's Assessment Handbook states that the faculty board has responsibility for acting on, and responding to, issues raised in external examiners' reports, and that as a matter of course the faculty board should respond in writing to all external examiners to indicate what action is being taken on their reports. In practice, this last responsibility is discharged by the relevant head of department. In one of the DATs the audit team observed that a head of department had produced a synopsis of main points made by all of the external examiners within the discipline, and had copied this, with a note of proposed action, to all of the external examiners. This had been identified as good practice

by the faculty, and was to be implemented in future as faculty policy for all its departments. External examiners' reports are appended to the annual subject report, which is expected also to indicate the action which is being taken upon any recommendations. The report is considered by the relevant subject committee before being transmitted to the faculty learning and teaching quality committee, which considers the reports on behalf of the faculty board. The faculty board reports to ASC by means of a summary of its external examiners' reports which tabulates the points raised by external examiners within the faculty, and who is to take action on them. It seemed to the team that the nature of these summary reports meant that they conveyed little information of value. The points raised by external examiners were described in such a cursory fashion that they would make little sense to anyone who had not read the full report. There was no description of the action which it was proposed should be taken, nor was there any indication of the timescale within which action was expected to be completed. The University might like to reflect upon the value of these reports in practice.

70 The ASC is the point at which the bottom-up and the top-down processes intersect, since the ASC receives the overview report, reports of any action taken in response to memoranda raised by the PVC where this has requested a report to the committee, and the faculty reports. The summary reports provided to ASC as part of the faculty reports do not, in the view of the audit team, contain clear explanations of the actions taken in relation to external examiners' reports, and the overview report is intended principally to identify overarching issues, so does not in itself systematically report on the completion of actions which are expected to have been dealt with at subject or faculty level. The team formed the view that the failure of the two processes more clearly each to support the other creates a small risk that matters of concern in external examiners' reports might be overlooked at the institutional level, a risk which is minimised by the thoroughness of the process at the subject and faculty level. The University might wish to give further consideration to the relationship of these two processes in the interest of achieving best value from their interaction.

### External reference points

71 The University informed the audit team that the Agency's publications on the academic infrastructure had appeared at an opportune time, since it had been possible for the University to use the academic

infrastructure as a significant point of reference in supporting the journey of transformation that it had undertaken.

72 There was a good awareness of the Agency's *Code of practice* among staff who met the audit team. The University's approach to some sections of the *Code of practice* has been to use gap analysis to identify specific matters that it needs to consider, and the SED provided examples of sections of the *Code of practice* that had been approached in this way. It was also clear from the SED that the *Code of practice* had influenced the development of the University's own documentation, in particular the series of quality assurance documents which form the Quality Assurance Manual. The University has not identified any significant instances in which it considers that the guidance provided by the precepts in the *Code of practice* is inappropriate for its particular circumstances. The team, and the SED, noted that, although the University was committed to addressing all of the sections of the *Code of practice* in full, there were a number of instances in which the University had not completed all the actions that it had identified as necessary within a year of the publication of the relevant section. Although it was not always possible to be certain from the minutes of ASC that all actions identified as necessary had been completed, the team was assured that reports indicating closure of all outstanding actions were expected in the near future. For example, in relation to the section of the *Code of practice* relating to students with disabilities, there had been considerable delay in completion of its review, in part because of subsequent legislation imposing other obligations, but the University's action plan had been reviewed shortly before the audit visit thus enabling the University to deal with outstanding issues under the direction of a recently constituted Disability Working Group. The team considered that the University's approach to the *Code of practice* has been appropriate, but the University will wish to ensure that outstanding actions are completed within an agreed timescale and that these actions are fully 'signed off'.

73 The SED stated that the *FHEQ* 'is a significant recent influence on programme design and the University's validation and subject review processes'. Validation and revalidation panels are required to calibrate new and reviewed programmes against the *FHEQ*. The audit team saw evidence through the DATs that this had happened. In the case of subjects and programmes validated before the publication of the *FHEQ*, and which have not yet been subject to periodic review, the University's stated approach is

to ask faculty boards to satisfy themselves that such subjects and programmes are properly calibrated against the *FHEQ*.

74 The SED stated that 'the University has in place a complete set of programme specifications, written to an institution-wide template'. The audit team was informed that the programme specifications already appear on the University's Virtual Campus, and are planned to appear on its web site in autumn 2003. It also stated that 'in June 2001, ASC agreed that programme specifications will provide the basic factual data for all subjects and programmes, for quality assurance purposes, and for the contents of student handbooks and promotional materials'. The SED commented on the 'tensions in satisfying the Dearing Report's intent of documents that inform both (prospective) students and employers, and that provide text that describe academic requirements'. The team learnt that the University had met this difficulty by 'layering' the programme specifications so that some parts of the specification could be extracted to be used in the prospectus. At its meetings with students, the team heard that the programme specifications, and in particular the learning outcomes, and the associated unit learning outcomes, were considered by the students to be very helpful in focusing their studies.

75 The programme specifications seen by the audit team contained express reference to the relevant subject benchmark statement, and indicated their relationship to this. The methods used to verify alignment with subject benchmark statements include the use of internal periodic review, validation and revalidation events, and certification by faculty boards as part of the annual monitoring process. In addition, the overwhelming majority of external examiners commented that 'standards were comparable to national benchmarking' statements, and none commented unfavourably upon such comparisons. The team was satisfied that the University is taking full and appropriate account of subject benchmark statements.

76 The SED and DSEDs provided some illustrations of links between the University and the professions or other external bodies. For example, when the Law Department relocated to Lincoln, it set up the Lincolnshire Law Practitioners' Support Group to provide links with local legal practitioners, and a Hull Advisory Board provides advice on the move of the University's operations in Hull to the city centre. Students who met the audit team were complimentary about the university's links with practitioners at subject level. The team, however, did not gain the view of an embedded university-wide

culture for developing links with practitioners or employers in order to provide a systematic source of advice on programme development and operation.

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

77 Ten HEFCE and Agency subject reviews have been conducted at the University since the HEQC audit report of the, then, University of Humberside in 1996. All these reviews considered the provision to be 'approved'. The reports of several recent reviews made positive comments about the University's procedures for validation, monitoring and review of its programmes, with particular reference to the comprehensiveness of quality systems and the high standard of the underpinning documentation. Subject review reports have given consistently high grades for student support and guidance, and the more recent reviews have graded student progression and achievement and learning resources highly. However, there have also been some criticisms of quality management and enhancement in recent reviews. One report commented on the less effective closing of quality loops at partner colleges when compared to on-campus provision, and another noted the variability of subject reports and the failure to follow the University's procedures for amending an existing course.

78 The audit team recognised that the many recent changes in the University, including developments in quality systems and the closure of some programmes, made it unreasonable to place too much reliance on the conclusions of earlier subject review reports. However, the team was confident that it should be guided by subject reviewers' very positive comments about the University's arrangements for student support and guidance, and by the recognition in recent reports of the establishment of a well-documented, comprehensive system for quality assurance. In directing its further investigations, the team was also influenced by those instances in subject reviews where the effectiveness of quality systems at the programme and partner levels was questioned, and by comments about the design of assessment and feedback to students. In relation to the reports of reviews of two subjects which had subsequently been transferred from DMU to the University, the team took the view that at the time of the subject review, the management of quality and standards was the responsibility of DMU, and that the reports' conclusions were therefore not relevant to an audit of the University. However, given that Fine Art was one of the DATs, those aspects of the report on Art

and Design at DMU that might relate to the current delivery of the subject were treated as appropriate information sources.

79 The SED made many references to the positive outcomes of subject reviews. However, it did not make clear how the University ensured that the outcomes of review fed into its quality assurance and enhancement processes. The audit team asked staff whom it met how the University had used the outcomes of subject review, and heard that there was a formal requirement for departments to respond to subject review reports to ASC, through the faculty, 12 months after the event, following the same timescale and process that applies to internal review. Overall, the team formed the view that the University had made use of the outcomes of external subject reviews with good effect as a basis for providing independent evaluation of its academic provision.

80 The audit team also had access to three reports of audits undertaken by HEQC and the Agency of overseas partnerships involving the University. All three reports predated the University's decision to terminate its overseas partnerships, and their conclusions were, therefore, of limited value to the present audit. However, the team did note with interest several findings of the most recent report, which was on the University's partnership with Universitario Melchor de Jovellanos in Spain. The report drew attention to some concerns about assessment and student feedback, and made observations about the balance of responsibilities between centre and faculty. It concluded, nonetheless, that 'if the partnership was representative of the University's approach to overseas collaborations, the findings of the audit would support some confidence in the University's developing arrangements for the stewardship of quality'.

81 The SED cited nine examples of the University's programmes being recognised or accredited by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies, but did not go on to explain how the University incorporated the findings of any accreditation and recognition reports into its quality assurance procedures. The audit team was told that, following an external engagement of this kind, the department involved was expected to produce a response which was dealt with using a process similar to that for internal annual monitoring. Because of concern that action had not always been completed as intended, and drawing upon its experience for internal periodic reviews, the University has recently decided that a panel should be convened one year following the original event. The team considered that the University is acting properly in seeking a means of ensuring that

identified local actions are completed within agreed timescales, but formed the view of lack of impact of those external influences at institutional level, or of an institutional overview. The team would invite the University to consider whether its mechanisms for dealing with events involving external agencies or bodies are as effective as they might be in identifying issues that provide a source of opportunity for enhancement across the University as a whole.

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

82 Students are represented at unit, subject and faculty level and within the University's committee structure. The President of the Students' Union Cooperative is a member of the Board of Governors, and sits on the Academic Board with two fellow sabbatical officers. There are two student representatives on ASC and one on ADC. The SED explained that the Student Affairs Committee, which reports to the Academic Board, has four student and two Students' Union representatives who represent the views of the Student Consultation Forum, a group recently formed by the Students' Union to facilitate 'the involvement of student representatives at this more central level'. It was clear to the audit team that students are represented at all levels in the University's committee structure.

83 The SWS commented favourably upon the opportunities open to students to engage in the maintenance of quality and standards at the University noting, particularly, the effectiveness of this process at university and faculty level, through ASC and faculty boards. Students illustrated for the audit team their general satisfaction with the process by referring to a number of instances where student opinion has caused the University to reflect and reconsider. Students' Union officers reported to the team that they felt their opinions to be valued by the University, and that they felt they played a full part in those committees upon which they served.

84 Students are involved in all aspects of the annual monitoring process, from unit level reporting up to the deans' reports to ASC. The audit team met students during the course of the DATs, and found a variety of students' views on the effectiveness of representation at subject/programme level, and a perception that it was difficult to address more generic, university-wide, issues through committees at this level. Students also commented upon the difficulty of attracting students onto committees, and reported that the nomination of students for election as representatives on committees at faculty

level and below sometimes took place in an *ad hoc* fashion. Nevertheless, the team formed a clear view from students whom it met that students were generally satisfied with the opportunities afforded them to contribute to the management of the quality of provision in the University.

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

85 Evaluation by questionnaire is a widespread method of obtaining feedback at unit level, informing an annual report from each unit to its subject board. In addition, evaluation by questionnaire at the end of year (or end of course) operates in some cases, although this practice is not universal within the University. The SED pointed to initiatives in place which are 'designed to provide an enhanced climate for local employment possibilities for university graduates and to provide feedback into the on-campus student experience with local case-study projects'.

86 The SED explained that individual departments, such as Learning Resources and Student Services, operate a system of annual student evaluation through questionnaires circulated to users towards the end of the academic year. The audit team learnt that the University intends to move these departmental-level surveys of user satisfaction onto the Virtual Campus in the future, following the piloting of an annual Student Satisfaction Survey through the Virtual Campus.

87 The University stated in its SED that it had been encouraged by the recommendations of HEFCE's document, *Information on quality and standards in higher education* (HEFCE's document 02/15) to review its approach to canvassing student opinion, with a view to instigating an institution-wide student survey on the academic experience. A Student Satisfaction Survey was piloted in 2002-03, and its draft report of March 2003 to ASC was available to the audit team at the audit visit. The pilot student survey involved the use of student focus groups to define the questions to be posed in the survey, followed by an on-line opportunity for students to complete the questionnaire through the Virtual Campus. The actions to be taken as a result of the survey, according to the SED, should be delivered within a timeframe designed to provide feedback to the students on results and follow-up actions before the end of the academic year. Results and follow-up actions will be placed in the public domain.

88 The draft report of the survey noted that in order to 'close the loop', the University needs to have in place systems for identifying and delegating responsibility for action, for defining accountability for action taken or not taken, for giving feedback to students, and for committing appropriate resources.

89 Overall, the outcomes of the survey are positive. Students rated as 'satisfactory' accurate and accessible course information, knowing what they can expect from their course and tutor, and knowing what is expected of them as a student. Students were, however, less satisfied with promptness of feedback on assignments and examination performance. Overall, the survey shows that students feel that they are learning what they hoped to learn, thus showing a close match between student expectation and what the course actually delivers. Students also rate the Virtual Campus highly, for usefulness and ease of use and for value of information retrieved.

90 The survey does show, however, a lower level of satisfaction with availability of information about Student Services. This correlates with the points made in the SWS about confusion of information during the period of transition, and also with comments made to the audit team by Students' Union officers in relation to whether students at Hull and at other campuses had access to the same level of services as students at the Brayford Campus. The University will no doubt take note of the survey's indication that there may still be issues in relation to clarity of information about student support at campuses other than Lincoln.

91 The survey had been publicised at all the University's sites, and the level of response was monitored on a daily basis. The report notes that student authentication through the Virtual Campus worked well, and prevented access to non-students, as well as preventing students from submitting the questionnaire more than once. The report notes that the use of the Virtual Campus as the medium for accessing the survey meant that lower response rates might be expected in areas where routine use of the Virtual Campus was less well-established, particularly campuses which had been recently integrated from DMU. The report goes on to surmise that an unexpected benefit, therefore, may be that the survey has raised awareness of the Virtual Campus. An area of concern is the very low number of responses from part-time students, and the report notes that greater efforts will need to be taken in future years to identify and target cohorts of part-time students. That aside, the audit team learnt with interest that at least one faculty had already begun reflection on the outcomes of the

survey and initiated discussion with students, with further discussion and action planning scheduled to take place at the faculty board.

### **Progression and completion statistics**

92 The SED recognised that 'many subject and faculty-generated documents...have referred to problems in generating quality data from the SMS in support of the monitoring and review processes'. The University acknowledges that Agency subject review reports before 2000-01 had alerted it to the need to remedy weaknesses in data management to support quality assurance. It cites two major reasons for this. The minor reason relates to programming errors, which the University claims now have been identified, isolated, and eliminated. The second, more serious, reason relates to the initial system design and development work, which focused on subjects and levels rather than units and cohorts, and therefore did not 'lend itself to the easy generation of statistical reports in support of monitoring and review processes, or to their interpretation'. The University explained that a new system to replace SMS will be introduced for admissions into 2003 and enrolment in 2004, and this major project is offered as a solution to problems in its management information systems.

93 The SED referred to 'substantial evidence to demonstrate consistently positive achievements in the progression and achievement of students', for which it cited good completion rates in Education and Psychology, and high progression and retention rates in History. Reference is made to student retention as a matter of strategic importance for the University, and the SED included an appendix of data on student progression and achievement for each faculty. The use of statistical data to quantify progression and achievement is therefore of importance in the University's management and evaluation of quality and standards at the subject level. Nevertheless, the DSEDs submitted for the DATs lacked analysis of statistical information for trends in students' progression, completion and achievement.

94 The report of the most recent periodic review of Business and Management found that the statistical evidence in the SED was incomplete and inconsistently presented, and that there was disquiet within the faculty over the validity and reliability of statistical data available from the SMS, although the review panel acknowledged that, by the end of the review process, fuller and more robust sets of data and related analysis had been developed. The panel was, however, assured by faculty members that students' progress was tracked both individually and

globally. The report explains that it was very difficult to draw firm conclusions on the extent to which student progression and achievement attested to the quality of the students' opportunities.

A recommendation of the panel was that 'reasons for student completion rates, where they cause concern, are examined as part of their regular review of academic provision in order to ascertain the principal causes'. This is consistent with the University's view as represented in the SED.

95 The follow-up to that periodic review was examined by a meeting of the ASC in June 2002, and the minutes of this meeting indicate that ASC was satisfied that appropriate progress had been made in this aspect of the use of SMS in the period following the review report. The audit team was told that the SMS had valuable features in supporting examination board processes within the UMS and in annual monitoring, but ongoing deficiencies were acknowledged in relation to its support of non-UMS awards, and its ability to produce refined or easily comprehensible data. The team saw evidence that statistical data produced by the SMS was used to inform the process of annual monitoring, forming one or more appendices to annual reports, the template for which required comment on enrolment, progression and achievement. The University's concern to improve its ability to enable student achievement, as evidenced by retention rates, is consonant with its policy on widening participation, but the identified deficiencies in the SMS continue to inhibit its capacity to monitor progress in this area. The team would endorse the University's intention to upgrade the SMS to address the system's current deficiencies.

96 The University's view of the effectiveness of its arrangements for the use of statistical information for evaluating quality and standards is that the quality of the data themselves is not of an appropriate standard. The SED made reference to the fact that the University is keen to improve its performance in terms of retention of students. Nonetheless, the data indicate, and the University recognises, that it is performing around or better than its benchmark in the national statistical indicators for progression, achievement and retention. The audit team took this as an indication of the University's wish to go beyond merely satisfying the expectations embodied in the national benchmarks.

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

97 The University stated in its SED that it has 'a robust policy for the appointment of quality staff at all levels'. An appointment policy, and its

accompanying procedures on staff recruitment and selection, has been in place since 1998. This was revised early in 2003 to meet new obligations under employment law, and a Managers Guide to the new policy and procedures was introduced. At the time of the audit visit both the policy and the Guide appeared to be in draft form. They stressed the significance of equality of opportunity principles underpinning recruitment and selection processes, including the requirement for clear linkage between the forms of assessing candidates used during the selection process and the published person specification or role profile and job description. The policy states that staff who serve on selection panels are 'normally expected' to have attended in-house or other equivalent recruitment and selection training. The audit team was informed that over 160 staff had attended the training since June 2000. Academic staff recently appointed to the University who met the team commented very favourably on their experience of the recruitment and selection process, highlighting especially its professionalism.

98 On the basis of the evidence available to it, the audit team formed the view that the appointment policy was appropriate in terms of assuring the quality of teaching staff through recruitment and selection. The robustness of the new policy was difficult to assess, given that it had been amended so very recently, and did not appear to have been finally approved at the time of the audit visit. However, given that the new version did not vary greatly from the previous one, there was no reason to suppose that it would create any significant instability in processes and procedures. The University may wish to consider, as it rolls out the new policy, that its robustness might be strengthened further by ensuring that all staff who serve on recruitment panels are properly trained for the role.

99 All academic staff are required to participate in the University's appraisal scheme. The scheme does not require staff to be appraised by their immediate manager, and does not include issues relating to conduct, capability, probation or promotion which are covered under other procedures. The scheme is based on self-appraisal, facilitated by an appraisal interview, the outcome of the process being completion of an agreed personal action plan. These plans are used to compile departmental appraisal reports, which in turn form the basis for faculty reports which, according to the SED, are used by the University's Human Resources (HR) Department to identify staff training and development activities. This procedure is facilitated through the work of the University's Appraisal



Review Team, which considers the faculty reports each year to identify ways in which the appraisal scheme itself might be enhanced and to summarise staff development needs.

100 The University acknowledged that although the appraisal scheme was intended to operate on an annual cycle, this had not happened consistently across all faculties in 2001-02. Academic restructuring and relocation of staff from Hull to Lincoln were given as the main reasons for this. It was explained to the audit team that all staff would complete at least one appraisal interview in the two-year period 2001 to 2003 before the scheme returns to its intended annual cycle.

101 Academic staff who met the audit team reported positively on their experience of appraisal, which they saw as developmental and supportive. The team also heard that the individual staff development needs identified through the appraisal process are linked to the University's strategic aims both at faculty level, where priorities for development are established, and through the HR Department, which provides development activities across the University. On the basis of the evidence it saw and heard, the team formed the view that, where it was happening, the appraisal scheme was working well to identify individual and some collective staff development needs. This appeared to be very largely a 'bottom-up' approach, in which the role of institutional strategic priorities was not always explicit. The team would encourage the University to pursue its proposed review of staff development strategy, and its declared intention to restructure the coordination of academic staff development so that the overall outcomes of the academic staff appraisal process might be linked more clearly to institutional strategic priorities for development and quality enhancement.

102 The audit team noted some possible ambiguity about the role of training for appraisers. The staff development policy document stated that 'undertaking the relevant training is a prerequisite for staff wanting to serve as appraisers...', but academic appraisal documents seen by the team stated that training was not compulsory. The University might wish to consider clarifying the status of appraiser training within its wider strategy for staff development and quality enhancement.

103 All senior academic and service managers have, since 2001, agreed annual performance objectives and key performance indicators aligned to faculty and corporate plans. The first senior staff appraisals started in autumn 2002. This formal performance

review scheme for senior managers and the core executive is linked to pay. The academic appraisal and peer observation of teaching schemes for other staff are not linked to pay, nor to other forms of reward or recognition. The University does not intend to link academic or researcher performance to pay at this time, but, according to its document Strategy for Rewarding and Developing Staff in Higher Education 2002 to 2004, it intends to move to non-financial reward and recognition for good academic performance.

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

104 The University has a scheme of allocating colleagues as 'workplace inductors' to support new appointees during their first few weeks at work. New staff receive an Induction Pack which includes a statement that the University 'endeavours to treat part-time/temporary staff in the same way as full-time/permanent'. According to that pack, the induction process may not apply fully to 'visiting speakers', but staff on greater than a 0.5 FTE contract 'will require a full induction programme'.

105 Data on the operation of the induction programme from September 2002 to February 2003 suggested to the audit team that less than a quarter of new academic staff had received the formal University induction process. Recently appointed academic staff who met the team commented favourably on their induction, including that provided centrally by the University. The greater strength of the induction process appeared to the team to be in the way it operated at the local level, with the support provided by the 'workplace inductors', line managers, and other colleagues in the department. The team concluded that any potential weakness in the assurance of quality of new teaching staff associated with the relatively low proportion of newly appointed staff who have attended the University induction is off-set by the more informal but effective processes operating at departmental and faculty level.

106 The SED explained that staff training and development was related closely to faculty and service department strategies and plans. It concluded that the University had confidence in the progression of its HR strategy for ensuring that staff were being supported in delivering effective learning, teaching and assessment. Specific aims and objectives for staff development are incorporated in the University's Corporate Plan and Annual Operating Statement. For 2002-03 the stated

'strategic themes' for staff development are:

- teaching and learning;
- widening participation;
- scholarship and research;
- working with business and communities.

107 The University's staff development policy document states that it is the responsibility of those managing staff to ensure that staff development needs are identified, and met. The policy identifies a range of ways in which such needs may be met, including on-the-job-training, staff meetings to share good practice, attendance at external courses/events, consultancy, in-house programmes, and staff enrolling on programmes leading to accredited awards, internally or externally. Financial and other support for staff development activities relate to the categorisation of the proposed activity as 'essential', 'encouraged' or 'personal preference'. The HR Department is required to monitor and report annually on the operation of the staff development policy.

108 The University has established a subcommittee of the Core Executive, with a remit to concern itself with strategies, policies, plans and issues relating to all staff development associated with the academic process. The subcommittee had considered bids for staff development funding support from academic and service departments and faculties during 2002, and identified, in October 2002, that more detailed criteria for evaluating bids needed to be created and disseminated. The criteria for evaluating bids appeared to the audit team not to have been fully agreed or resolved by March 2003, and documents reporting the outcome of bidding do not make clear how the decisions made related to the University's stated strategic priorities for staff development.

109 The audit team saw and heard evidence of formal and informal staff development activity, locally or centrally organised and funded, and considered that this was clearly meeting individual, and to some degree departmental and faculty, needs. It was credible that this activity was ensuring that staff delivered effective learning, teaching and assessment, as claimed in the SED. On the basis of the evidence presented, the team was less clear about how local and institutional processes for deciding which individual staff development activities to support and prioritise were informed by the University's strategic priorities, aims and objectives as claimed in the SED and the staff development policy document. For example, one department staff development strategy for 2002-03 identified curriculum development, research, and

learning and teaching as its staff development priority areas, whereas the institutional priorities did not include curriculum development but did prioritise widening participation and working with business and communities. The University has recognised this potential problem by establishing the subcommittee of the Core Executive with a remit that emphasises its strategic function. The team would encourage the University to continue to strive to clarify and strengthen in practice the relationship between its overall strategic objectives and its approach to identifying and supporting staff development activities.

110 The audit team heard of several examples where the University had involved staff in partner colleges in staff development activities, both in relation to institutional policies - for example, with regard to programme specifications - and to local subject/course issues. It was clear to the team that the University takes a constructive approach to partnership working in the area of staff development.

111 In June 2001, ASC approved a scheme for the peer observation of teaching. The SED acknowledged that implementation of the scheme had been neither smooth nor universal owing to the wide structural changes taking place at the time. The scheme emphasises the developmental role which peer observation of teaching can play in changing and enhancing teaching practices, and is explicitly not linked with the academic appraisal and promotion process. The scheme is based on at least one teaching session being observed each year for every University teacher. It requires departments to produce a report on its outcomes, and annual subject reports should include reference to this report.

112 Academic staff who met the audit team reported that the scheme was operating, and generally confirmed that it was helpful to their personal and professional development in respect of learning and teaching. Some departments had operated peer observation of teaching for some years before the introduction of the current university-wide scheme. The team had confidence that the scheme was contributing already to the enhancement of teaching quality and the student experience, and would do so even more effectively once it was fully embedded across the University. The University may wish to consider whether perceptions of the role of peer observation of teaching in enhancing the quality of learning and teaching might be strengthened by incorporating it explicitly in its published learning and teaching strategy.

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

113 The University's approach to quality assurance of distance-learning methods is set out in the Quality Assurance Manual. The Manual states that quality assurance processes for these programmes are the same as for all others 'but with variations and augmentations to cater for the different nature of academic delivery'. This was reinforced by cross-reference to other documents within the Manual which apply equally to this type of provision as to more traditional methods of delivery.

114 The University's SED made only one reference to distance-learning, and this was in the context of the role that the Virtual Campus would play in supporting students and staff on overseas programmes which were being managed to final closure. The Virtual Campus is described to students as 'an interactive web based learning environment, providing facilities and resources to support every aspect of your student life'. The Virtual Campus was particularly praised by students as a useful learning tool, despite the occasional technical problem. The SWS gives the impression that the Virtual Campus is used largely as a resource where students can access course information, lecture notes, notice-boards, and discussion groups and general news affecting them. The audit team formed the view that the Virtual Campus is a useful tool for dissemination and updating of programme-related materials.

115 The University has some distance-learning elements integrated into existing programmes, and these can involve the use of hard copy and/or electronic means of supported learning. The audit team was informed that materials currently on the Virtual Campus are not covered by the section in the Quality Assurance Manual on the quality assurance of distance-learning, and that the University is in a transitional phase in the development of strategies for distance-learning provision in the future. The team heard that the University was reviewing the role of the Virtual Campus for the future delivery of its stated objectives in the learning and teaching strategy.

### **Learning support resources**

116 The SED explained that responsibility for the provision of learning resources is situated within 'the Learning and Teaching Directorate that reports to the PVC (Academic)', thus indicating a commitment to its integration within the academic provision of the University as a whole. Central resources on the

Brayford Campus are situated within the learning resources centre (LRC), with corresponding provision at the Hull campus. Some specialist areas of operation have separately identified information technology (IT) areas, but otherwise central IT resources are made available through a booking system.

117 The SWS, and students who met the audit team, reported that the staff of the LRCs were 'very helpful', although students also pointed to there being a pressure on resources at key points in the year. In meetings with students during the DATs, a view was expressed to the team by some students that the provision of resources tended towards the reactive rather than the strategic - books were ordered after a need became apparent rather than in prospect of that need. Staff who met the team supported this view, to some extent, by suggesting that the ordering of extra copies of texts was triggered by borrowing rates.

118 The effective use of resources for learning is supported by Information and Learning Advisers (ILAs). These are described in the SED as working 'closely with academic departments to identify and meet their resources requirements', and, in collaboration with the Best Practice Office, also working 'closely with academic colleagues to promote effective use of the ICT network...and support good practice in learning and teaching'. ILAs work across both the library-based resources and those situated within the Virtual Campus.

119 The University places a strong emphasis upon the Virtual Campus as 'an important support for the learning and teaching methodologies within faculties'. The SED stated that 'the Virtual Campus is playing an increasing role in the support of student learning, particularly as the growing demand for flexible access to learning resources is met'. It was evident to the audit team through the DATs and through meetings with staff across the University and from local partner colleges that the Virtual Campus is used in different ways, and with varying effect, across the University's provision as a learning resource.

120 LRC staff support use of the Virtual Campus in a number of ways, including the resolution of technical difficulties, running workshops on the use of on-line resources and providing individual advice. The audit team formed the view that one of the chief assets of the LRCs is their staff - both those employed within learning resource support and the ILAs - who are highly valued by staff and students alike.

121 It appeared to the audit team that the provision of resources for learning is managed by the University in an efficient, if sometimes reactive, way to the benefit of both staff and students. The University's intention to manage 'resource allocation for LRCs to support the University's learning and teaching aims', using external reference points, such as the Standing Conference of National University Libraries to 'enable effective planning and targeting of investment in library and information resources', will help to enhance provision in the future. The University recognises that there are many opportunities available for developing the wider and more effective use of the Virtual Campus, particularly through the increased awareness of staff in its capabilities for enhancing learning and learner support.

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

122 The SED stated that the University has established a network of support mechanisms for students 'at unit and subject levels, by unit teams coordinated by unit coordinators, and academic advocates, respectively'. The audit team's meetings with students and staff during DATs confirmed that student support within individual units is taken very seriously. This is reflected within the unit reports presented to subject boards, where student feedback on the unit is considered. This support extends across all areas of the University's provision, including its partnerships with institutions delivering programmes leading to the University's awards. Students who met the team in the course of the DATs expressed their appreciation of the level of support given by individual staff members, and pointed to the approachability and availability of staff, including those serving on part-time contracts.

123 The University places emphasis upon its 'academic advocate' system which exists in many areas as a year-tutor system, with academic advocates giving advice to students on academic progress and performance. There was some evidence from the DATs that the academic advocate system operated in slightly different ways in different subject areas, and the audit team noted that some subjects were reviewing its operation.

124 The establishment of the Graduate School has helped to provide similar levels of support to postgraduate students. Students on taught postgraduate courses look to their course leader as the main focus of support and guidance, but are also assigned a dissertation supervisor. Research students look to their supervisor as the central focus of their support mechanisms. There is some evidence that support mechanisms at postgraduate level are slightly more *ad hoc* in their delivery, and depend

largely upon the style of the teaching team or supervisor. Further development of the Graduate School may well help to enhance support for postgraduate students, and its consistency, and the audit team would encourage the University to foster this enhancement and greater consistency of support as the Graduate School continues to develop.

125 Academic support for students represents one of the University's key strengths. This strength was emphasised to the audit team by the consistently positive attitude towards the University's support services demonstrated by the students whom it met. While there is some evidence that operation of the academic advocate system can vary from one area to another, such variation is not necessarily a weakness as long as the local style of operation is understood by students and staff, and is appropriate for its purpose. As the University continues to review the effectiveness of its mechanisms for academic guidance, support and supervision it will no doubt reflect upon the advantages and disadvantages of defining more closely the boundaries of permitted local variations.

### **Personal support and guidance**

126 Personal support and guidance is provided to undergraduate students principally through the academic advocate system. In addition to its academic perspective, the system provides, according to the University's document Parents' Guide, 'advice [to students] on circumstances affecting performance', and represents students at examination boards 'where decisions are made surrounding mitigating circumstances'. Taught postgraduate students receive corresponding help from their course leader, and research students from their supervisor, although in both cases the further development of the Graduate School may enhance the operation at this level.

127 At university level, student support is focused within the Student Services Department. The SED explained that 'in Lincoln, services are based on the Brayford Campus, with access to key staff also being available at both Riseholme and Cathedral Campuses for those students unable to travel to Brayford. In Hull, services are integrated within the Hull Campus Office, with appointments being available locally for students to meet with specialist staff'. Integrated student services offer a wide range of personal support mechanisms to students, dealing with personal problems, complaints, careers guidance, recruitment, admission and induction. It is also the locus for the Disability Access, Resources and Technology (DART) service, and for the University's Chaplaincy Centre.

128 Students who met the audit team during the DATs, and the SWS, consistently praised the work of Student Services, which is described as 'an excellent network of support for students'. The SWS pointed to a weakness in the system that 'some students are unaware of the level of support that is available to them'. This weakness was not widely reported during the DATs, where all students who met the team expressed awareness of the opportunities available to them, and their gratitude for the level of support provided.

129 The SED noted that 'the management of student complaints transferred to Student Services from July 2002 with the intention of providing a more accessible service, closer integration with the Students' Union and greater support to students making a complaint'. ASC monitors student complaints procedures through periodic reports, and considers that the process is operating well with 'the number of formal complaints being very low and the majority of these being resolved at the earlier stages'. The SED explained that a theme emerging from these reports was 'an increase in the number of complaints being rejected as being academic appeals' (see also below, paragraph 210). The audit team formed the view that the transfer to Student Services of the management of complaints, and the recent establishment of the Student Affairs Committee to allow more frequent monitoring of student complaints by student representatives, will help to give students better guidance on the complaints and appeals procedures that are available to them.

130 The SED described the University's DART service as having 'for many years successfully supported students with a variety of disabilities into, and throughout their academic programmes'. The service extends to the University's partner colleges, and provides a support network for a wide variety of students within the region. Students who met the audit team during the DATs were widely appreciative of the support given through the DART service. The team considered the DART service to be providing particularly effective support in the way that it integrates identification of the needs of individual students with the delivery of support mechanisms to meet those needs and with staff development to ensure that those support mechanisms work.

131 As with the provision of academic support and guidance, it was clear to the audit team that the University is fully engaged with its duties and responsibilities for the personal support and guidance of students, and is working consistently to maintain this at a high standard.

## Collaborative provision

132 The University's strategic review of its collaborative activities in the period since the 1997 report of the HEQC collaborative provision audit has made significant changes to both the nature of its collaborative activity and the volume of students involved. At the time of the audit visit, all overseas collaborative partnerships had been served notice of termination, and the existing student cohorts were being managed through to graduation. Recruitment to these collaborative programmes has ceased, and there is a moratorium on any new overseas franchise arrangements for at least three years from November 2002.

133 The University has in place a number of mechanisms to manage the remaining overseas collaborative cohorts to graduation. These include the work of the International Office, the availability of the Virtual Campus to students and staff overseas, and the continuation of the subject/faculty links with individual providers. The University stated that it was satisfied that a continuation of current arrangements for boards of examiners and external examiners will provide a full contribution to the continued maintenance of academic standards, as the provision is phased out. In its SED, the University identified as a strength its moderation process 'for maintaining academic standards in overseas collaborative provision'.

134 All indirectly funded franchise provision is being, or has been, discontinued to be replaced by directly or consortium-funded programmes through a combination of overall consortia agreements and bilateral agreements with individual partner colleges. The University, the University of Hull and a number of FE colleges have established the Humber Consortium, and the University is now involved in the development of a similar HE consortium for Lincolnshire, which it will lead. Effective links with FE partners are seen by the University as important in implementing its intentions for widening participation in the region, particularly, but not solely, through the development of FDs.

135 The University identifies as a particular strength 'the implementation of signed agreements with UK collaborative partners, which demarcate the respective responsibilities of the University and its partners'. Representatives from partner colleges who met the audit team praised the University for the level of support and guidance it gives to these centres, including access to staff development events and opportunities to sit on University validations. Adherence to the precepts of the *Code*

of practice is confirmed at the point of validation, where programmes must be shown to align with the University's structures and regulations.

136 The University has concentrated on partner colleges' existing and well-developed processes augmented, in the case of larger institutions, by a board of studies and coupled with annual reporting procedures and close links between staff and subject/course committees. The University has generally taken the view that the practices, traditions and cultures relating to the learning and teaching process at partner institutions should be respected, and that FE colleges are well-practised in providing appropriate and effective learning environments for their students. There is cross-moderation of courses and, for franchised programmes, the same external examiner(s) assess(es) all programmes leading to the award. The SED sets out the University's belief that it can demonstrate that 'a clear sense of quality and standards has been maintained throughout the management of the transitions'.

137 The audit team found evidence of good practice in several aspects of the collaborative arrangements within the UK. Representatives from the partner institutions sit on faculty committees, validation panels and review panels and, similarly, University staff sit on the colleges' committees. Staff development events have been organised by the University to engage partner colleges' staff in academic development; sometimes these are attended by both University and partner college staff jointly.

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

#### **BA (Hons) Business Studies**

138 The programme leading to the award of BA (Hons) Business Studies is offered on the University's Hull and Lincoln campuses, and with collaborative partners at North Lindsey College and Grimsby College, in full and part-time mode. Recruitment to level 1 of the programme in Hull ceased in 2002. A redesigned Business Studies programme was revalidated in 2002, and began in Lincoln in September 2002. The old scheme is running out through levels 2 and 3 in both Hull and Lincoln. Part-time recruitment also ceased in Hull, and has not yet occurred in Lincoln.

139 The DSED was written for the audit rather than being derived from an internal review report. It was clearly written, but was more descriptive than

evaluative. The introduction to the programme specification states that the programme is described using the protocols required by the UK National Qualifications Framework (now the *FHEQ*). It contains a detailed appendix - benchmarking analysis - which specifies clearly the relationship between the curriculum and the relevant subject benchmark statement.

140 Progression and completion data, broken down by full or part-time status, from 1999-2000 to date, were available to the audit team. There was evidence that these data were used in the monitoring of quality and standards, through the annual subject/course report. Staff reported to the team that they were happy that the student information system (SMS) now provided them with valid and reliable data, and that they expected the system to continue to improve, although they acknowledged that there had been problems in the past.

141 Staff were satisfied that internal monitoring and review, through the annual subject report, was an effective procedure, with the additional Dean's report of matters arising from external examiners' reports supporting this and complementing the Quality Unit's annual summary report. The annual report process included explicit action planning. Evidence of follow-up to external examiners' reports was in the form of reports, letters to external examiners from the Head of Department, the annual subject report and the Dean's report. From its discussions with staff, however, it was unclear to the audit team whether the Head of Department would respond to external examiners routinely or only where particular issues were raised, and the team heard that this response might be provided by the subject leader where this was more appropriate. Tracking whether an issue raised by an external examiner had been followed up appeared to be complicated by the various feedback routes, but the action planning now incorporated in the annual subject report and the Dean's report might be expected to make tracking simpler in future.

142 Students expressed full confidence that requirements embodied in assessments match their expectations, based on published learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The programme specification expectations correlated well with the types of assessment exemplified. A range of assessed work, by level and unit, was seen by the audit team. The standard of student achievement, on this evidence, is appropriate to the title of the award and its location within the *FHEQ*.

143 Students who met the audit team reported that they found programme and unit handbooks invaluable sources of information, and praised these as essential guides to expectations of assessment. They were clear about the intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria, on the basis of handbooks, explanations at induction, and supplementary materials provided by staff as appropriate. The fact that material was available in hard copy and on the Virtual Campus was seen as a particular strength.

144 Staff advised the audit team that, in relation to the closure of recruitment at Hull, much effort had been put into communicating the issues to Hull students through meetings and individual plans agreed for all students to ensure they could complete their programme without disadvantage. The students who met the team endorsed this, and expressed the view that Hull students had not been disadvantaged by the programme closure, were clear about the options open to them, well-supported by tutors, and continued to have access to adequate resources. The team concluded that the University and Faculty had managed this closure with due attention to the needs of the students and in a supportive manner.

145 Learning resources were described to the audit team by staff as more than adequate, with particular praise for the role of the ILA in alerting staff to the materials available. Students endorsed the view that learning resources were satisfactory. While acknowledging some pressure points in computer terminal availability, they saw the ability to pre-book a computer as useful in ensuring access, and expressed the view that the University was well-furnished with IT facilities. Students confirmed that their views on adequacy of resources are solicited through unit questionnaires and the recent Student Satisfaction Survey, as well as through in-library surveys.

146 Students praised the availability and helpfulness of all staff associated with the programme. Staff reported to the audit team that peer observation of teaching and staff appraisal were both being implemented successfully across the faculty this year, despite recent loss of staff and associated difficulties. The Faculty is reviewing its system of student support, and the DSED acknowledged 'tension' between the roles of academic advocates, course leaders and personal tutors. Staff expressed confidence that support for students was coherent, and students endorsed this view, stating that they were clear where to turn for specific types of help.

147 The audit team saw examples of unit feedback forms. Feedback to students on actions taken was, formally, to course representatives at subject committees, as well as informally, through tutors. Students considered that they generally needed to raise few issues formally since staff were approachable and immediately responsive as issues were raised, so that students would normally raise any matters directly with staff, rather than through formal procedures.

148 Student representatives are members of the subject committee for the programme. Representatives who met the audit team explained that there was some lack of clarity as to whether all students were aware of the identity of their representatives at level 1. All representatives, however, agreed that their seminar colleagues were aware of their role, but that few issues were ever remitted to them to take to the subject committee due to the tendency of students to take matters up with staff directly. Overall, the student representative system appeared to be functioning adequately, but appeared to be largely regarded as 'unnecessary'.

149 The audit team noted that different formats were currently in use for such things as coursework coversheets and end-of-unit questionnaires. Staff expressed the view that the differences were not great, but that a Faculty aim was to move towards consistent formats. Students saw no difficulty in using or receiving different formats. In relation to tutors' written feedback, the view was expressed by students that this was somewhat patchy, with some very good feedback and some that was less complete, and occasionally difficult to read. This was borne out by the examples of feedback seen by the team. Overall, however, feedback was considered to be supportive and constructive, with useful tips to enable students to improve. The team found the quality of learning opportunities to be suitable for the programme of study leading to the named award.

#### **BA (Hons) English**

150 A DAT was conducted for the programme leading to the award of BA (Hons) English. This single honours programme began operation in 1999, graduating its first cohort of students in 2001-02. The programme was reviewed internally as a part of the periodic subject review of English which took place between May and July 2001. The DSED that was presented to the audit team was, however, specially written for the audit. A programme specification, endorsed by the ASC in March 2002, was appended to the report.

151 The programme specification makes clear links to the *Subject benchmark statement* for English, with a mapping of learning outcomes against the *Subject benchmark statement*, and against assessment within the programme. Reference is made to a potential future need to consider the relevance of the *Subject benchmark statement* for linguistics to some units of the programme. While there is no direct reference made to the *FHEQ*, the programme is affirmed as operating within the University's UMS.

152 Progression data are included within the annual reports for English, although the report for 2001-02 concludes that such data 'are not easy to interpret and may not be entirely reliable'. Staff who met the audit team confirmed that data collection and analysis had improved since the introduction of an admissions system located within the Faculty, that data was now entirely reliable and, now the programme was moving towards graduating its second cohort of students, comparative analysis of graduation data would form a part of quality monitoring. The team saw evidence of the consideration of data within unit reports, but noted that this is focused within the academic year.

153 Annual reports for English have been produced for each year of the programme's operation, and the scope of the reports includes those students taking English in combination with a range of other subjects within the University and those operating at partner colleges. Reports demonstrate reflection upon the operation of the programme, as well as indicating any minor modifications to the programme, and responses to external examiners' reports. The Peer Observation of Teaching Scheme has been instituted within the Department, and staff who met the audit team reflected favourably upon its operation in respect of the programme, as well as on the operation of staff appraisal within the Department. Staff expressed their appreciation of the good level of mutual support within the Department and, of the support provided at institutional level in terms of staff development opportunities, and a growing level of support for research within the University culture.

154 External examiners' reports are responded to directly by the Head of Department, and dialogue may also take place between individual unit coordinators and an external examiner. External examiners' reports are considered at the Subject Committee, which includes student representation. A summary of responses to external examiners' reports forms part of the annual report for the subject, and indicates what action has been taken. A further summary of external examiners' comments is collated at faculty level, for report to ASC.

155 The audit team studied examples of students' assessed work. These examples illustrated the use of second-marking within the programme, and moderation by the external examiner. The annual report for 2001-02 indicated within its action plan that the distribution and return of students' work was 'an issue' within the Department, and students who met the team commented that there was no centralised process for the return of work. However, they also indicated that advice on returned assessed work was helpful and clear, and that opportunities existed for them to follow up individual points with members of staff. The team considered that the assessed work that it saw demonstrated a level of achievement appropriate to the honours award of BA as identified by the *FHEQ*.

156 Handbooks are provided for each level of the degree programme, and each unit provides an accompanying handbook as a part of its learning materials. The 'level' handbooks include a range of central information as well as programme information, including unit descriptors for each unit within the level. Unit handbooks share a common core of information - for example, regarding plagiarism - specify the learning outcomes for the unit, and include an overview of the operation of the unit. Handbooks are available through the Virtual Campus and in hard copy to the students.

157 The DSED stated that 'validation and periodic subject review reports indicate that library, ICT and specialist facilities are adequate. However, students and staff have commented on a number of deficiencies which the Faculty is seeking to correct'. Students who met the audit team expressed the view that resources were adequate, but were often stretched to the limit within units with high student numbers. They commented very favourably upon the work of the ILA within the subject, and reported that where a particular deficiency was identified there were effective mechanisms for addressing it.

158 There have been some significant problems with timetabling over the past year, and the annual report for 2001-02 commented that 'student support was disrupted again by poor management of staff accommodation'. The Department acknowledged, in its DSED, that space allocation, particularly of performance space, has been a concern, although these difficulties are being addressed through new building. Students reported that there was much pressure upon IT resources, and the audit team noted that 'availability of computers' and 'adequacy of printers' received low ratings in the Student Satisfaction Survey. Staff and students who discussed these matters with the team



were appreciative of the Virtual Campus as a means of providing and accessing resources, and as a medium for communication.

159 Subject Committee minutes illustrate active student involvement in the operation of the programme, and this was confirmed to the audit team by the student representatives. Students were aware of the system of course representation, and knew who their representatives were. They explained that matters could be raised for Subject Committee either by contact with representatives or through individual members of staff. However, there was no formal means for the Department to report back on resolution of issues, with minutes of the meetings being forwarded to representatives on the Committee but not being made available more widely. Students commented favourably upon the resolution of issues that were directly within the Department's sphere of influence, but were less satisfied with the progression of issues at institutional level, such as timetabling.

160 Students who met the audit team were happy with the scope and operation of their programme, and with the level of support provided by staff. Tutors were considered to be open and approachable, and there were many instances of good practice within the anecdotal information given to the team by the students. Overall, the team found the quality of learning opportunities to be suitable for the programme of study leading to the named award.

#### **BA (Hons) Fine Art**

161 Following the transfer of the Lincoln School of Art and Design from DMU to the new Faculty of Art, Architecture and Design at the University in September 2001, the former DMU undergraduate course in Fine Art was revalidated in 2002 to ensure compliance with the University's structural requirements and academic regulations. The first enrolment to the new course commenced at the start of the 2002-03 academic year. The University's BA (Hons) Fine Art course based at Hull enrolled its final cohort of students in September 2001, and students already enrolled on this course will be managed through to graduation by the Department of Art at Lincoln. The University's SED explained that students who transferred from DMU 'are completing their degree in a form unchanged from that for which they enrolled with DMU'. Similarly, Hull students will continue to follow their validated programme until all have progressed through to graduation in 2004.

162 The DAT focused on the revalidated BA (Hons) Fine Art course. Members of the audit team also met staff, as well as students from levels 2 and 3, who had transferred from DMU, and saw examples of work produced by the latter. The SED provided for this DAT stated that the revalidated course 'drew on good practice from both Hull and Lincoln awards, including that identified during the Agency subject reviews of those provisions'.

163 The DSED provided to the audit team was written for the audit, and the programme specification compiled for the revalidation was included as part of the document. The programme outcomes set out in the programme specification closely mirror the *Subject benchmark statement* for art and design, with some minor modifications and appropriate shifts of emphasis to make them more specific to Fine Art. The minutes of the revalidation event were also made available to the team. The conclusions of the validation panel included satisfaction that 'the programmes had maintained their academic integrity through the changes' and that 'the programmes did appropriately reflect the appropriate national benchmarks'.

164 Progression and completion data, provided by the University's SMS, were appended to the Fine Art annual subject report of November 2002, but as these relate to the former DMU course, their relevance to the University's current provision is limited. The report makes no specific reference to the data, but the Head of Department indicated to the audit team that the recruitment strategy for Fine Art had been rethought to reflect the increasing proportion of applications from local feeder institutions.

165 The course team had failed to meet the University's timetable for internal monitoring and review during the current year because of the adjustment to the University's schedule from the much later DMU schedule. The course team expressed the view that they had gained much from the University's procedures, which they felt were particularly rigorous and stimulated reflection.

166 External examiners are yet to be involved with the assessment of work for the new BA (Hons) Fine Art course. Only one external examiner was involved with the final assessments for the DMU Fine Art course in 2001-02. The external examiner reported that 'the module aims and outcomes...are appropriate for this academic level and are in accordance with the national benchmarks'. The examiner's two main concerns - about the lack of technical and teaching support for sculpture, and the contextualisation of practice - had been

addressed and progress reported in the annual subject review. The audit team considered this response to be appropriate. A second external examiner is to be appointed for the programme in Fine Art at the University.

167 A carousel of slides of examples of work produced by Fine Art students was available to the audit team. These covered work in a range of two and three-dimensional media, and a variety of approaches to Fine Art. Within the limitations imposed by this type of presentation, the team considered that the standard of students' assessed work was appropriate for an honours award. No written work relating to this programme was seen by the team. Students who met the team felt that feedback on their assessed work could be slow and unsystematic, but this was balanced by the degree of feedback given verbally.

168 A new student handbook was produced for the first cohort of the revalidated course. It is written and presented in a clear, user-friendly form, and provides useful information about the course aims, structure and assessment, and it highlights the student's responsibilities. The programme outcomes from the programme specification are included in the handbook. There are brief descriptions of all the modules available to Fine Art students, and explanations of which modules are core and which options are available at each level. The concluding section covers the staff team, student support services, and other useful contacts. Students reported that they found the handbook useful reading.

169 Students were complimentary about the levels of learning resources and support. Most of their needs are catered for by the resources at Chad Varah House to the extent that they rarely find it necessary to access the resources on the main Brayford Campus. While advice provided by the Fine Art staff to students about life-after-university was considered relevant and useful, the contribution of the University's central Careers Service was the subject of some criticism by the students.

170 Neither the staff nor the students are yet making significant use of the Virtual Campus. The audit team heard that the number of computers that can be used to access this resource is about to be increased, and a new technical adviser appointment will provide training for staff. Staff development in the subject currently prioritises research and scholarly activity.

171 Students who met the audit team expressed satisfaction with the levels of representation offered them at subject, faculty and university levels,

although the process of selection of representatives seemed unclear to them, and it appeared that most representatives had not been formally elected. The process of student unit evaluations was regarded by staff who met the audit team as 'the most informative formal mechanism at programme level', providing more immediate feedback on students' perceptions of their learning experience.

172 The audit team was informed that minutes of the staff-student liaison committee meetings are circulated to all students. Students who transferred from DMU indicated that they were satisfied that the University had handled their transfer in a sympathetic and supportive manner. The team heard that 12 students who had been offered a place on the BA (Hons) Fine Art course at Hull for 2002-03 entry were not informed of the closure of the course until two weeks before enrolment, but they were all offered alternative places at Lincoln, and one of this group who met the team spoke positively about the University's supportive handling of this situation.

173 For the revalidated course, only the first semester of level 1 had been in operation at the time of the audit visit. On the basis of this limited evidence base, but also taking into account the good standing, as judged by Agency subject review reports, of the out-going Fine Art courses at Hull and DMU, the audit team had no concerns about the quality of the learning opportunities available to students currently at level 1 of the programme of study leading to the named award.

#### **LLB (Hons)**

174 The DAT related to the LLB (Hons) award in the single subject of law. The programme is available to both full and part-time students, with separate provision being made for each, with 84 full-time and five part-time students being admitted in the most recent cohorts. The Department of Law also offers a joint-honours programme which currently leads to the award of a BA (Hons) degree. Recruitment to a programme leading to that award has now ceased and, after the existing cohorts have graduated, entrants to the joint-honours degree programme will be awarded the degree of LLB. There are no longer any law students following a single honours law programme in Hull. The degree is a qualifying law degree recognised by the relevant legal professional bodies.

175 The Department was subject to an internal periodic review in 2001-02, but the DSED provided to the audit team was specially written for the audit. It included the programme specification,

which states that it operates within the parameters of the UK National Qualifications Framework (now the *FHEQ*) and that 'it responds to the United Kingdom QAA benchmark statements for the subject of law'. That statement was supported by the findings at the internal periodic review, and by the team's scrutiny of the documentation provided to it. Students who met the team indicated that they found the learning outcomes particularly helpful as a guide to their studies, and that they made frequent reference to them.

176 Progression and completion data are available in the annual subject reports, which contain some analysis of the data. The DSED indicated that 'it is of concern to the teaching team that, while student losses due to withdrawal have fallen markedly since the programme's inception, losses due to failure at levels 1 and 2 have correspondingly risen'. The DSED suggested that the failure rate may reflect the access policy under which students are recruited from diverse educational backgrounds and achievements, and it indicated that measures had been put in hand to enhance retention. The audit team was informed that these actions focused upon improving admissions and the selection of students, including action to ensure that students were aware of the commitment involved in joining the programme. The Department had not carried out an analysis of student failure and withdrawal based on student type, and the available statistical information would not support an analysis of this kind.

177 Unit coordinators are expected to produce an annual unit report which contains a breakdown of student classifications by unit, together with a statement of any changes made to the unit in the course of the year, and an analysis of student feedback. The nature of this analysis varies considerably from one unit to another. The DSED indicated that a minority of reports did not contain the expected depth of analysis, for instance of student feedback, and the audit team confirmed the view of the Department that there is scope for improvement in this respect. Annual unit reports are considered by the Subject Board, which includes the external examiner but not student representatives. The reports of this Board indicate that the information provided to it is given careful consideration. The data in unit reports is not, however, provided in a form that facilitates comparisons of student performance between modules.

178 Unit reports are also used in the preparation of the annual subject report that is considered at the Subject Committee, which includes student representatives, before being submitted to the

Faculty's teaching and learning quality committee (TLQC). The annual subject report feeds into the development of the Dean's report which is considered at faculty level before submission to the University's ASC. Although Departmental staff who met the audit team were able to indicate that there was often feedback from the TLQC to the Department, they were less aware of feedback from committees more distant from the Department in the University's committee structure.

179 The audit team was able to follow the way in which external examiners' reports are considered and followed up at the discipline level. The Head of Department produces an analysis of the main points made by each external examiner with responses and intended action points. This analysis is then provided to all of the examiners, although this was not a University requirement. The team was interested to hear from staff that this practice had already been identified as good practice by the Faculty, and was in future to be extended to its other departments. A summary of issues raised by external examiners is also included in the annual Dean's report to the Faculty Board, but this summary identifies issues only by 'headline' descriptions. Major issues raised by external examiners are also addressed in the narrative part of the Dean's report. The team was satisfied that the follow-up at discipline level on external examiners' reports was appropriate and timely although it was less convinced that every step in the current reporting process added value.

180 The University has recently introduced a uniform policy for second-marking or moderation. In the sample of assessed work seen by the audit team, which related to work produced prior to the adoption of the University policy, there was evidence of second-marking or moderation in some cases. The Department is aware of the desirability of providing clearer evidence in future of second-marking or moderation in order to demonstrate adherence to University policy.

181 Students reported to the audit team that feedback on assessed work was both timely and sufficiently detailed to be helpful. They had, in the past, had concerns about self-assessment, which had contributed 20 per cent of the total mark in three units but had not, until recently, been subject to moderation. In response to the concerns of students, the Department had introduced processes for the moderation of self-assessment grades, and in the current year the contribution of self-assessed work in two of the three units concerned had been reduced to 10 per cent of the total module grade.

Since the assessed work emphasised study skills rather than subject-specific skills, the team considered that this level of emphasis given to self-assessment was appropriate. From its study of examples of students' assessed work the team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the programme is appropriate to the title of the award and its location within the *FHEQ*.

182 The DSED stated that the Department of Law 'is confident that the Law Collection supplies all but the most specialist research needs of students'. The undergraduate students who met the audit team indicated that the library did meet the needs of their programme, and that they had access to electronically available materials which supplemented the library collection, and was particularly useful for access to law reports and periodicals. Students who had served on the Law Subject Committee expressed the view that they were not, however, convinced that the formula used by the University for library funding adequately reflected the importance of the library as the lawyer's laboratory.

183 The DSED also stated that 'the effectiveness of the Law Collection in supporting student learning is measured by library surveys and student feedback questionnaires'. The audit team sought to ascertain what evidence supported this statement. It observed that the sufficiency of library resources was not addressed in the unit-level questionnaires, and staff who met the team confirmed that no other questionnaires were used in the Department. It was suggested that user surveys had been conducted within the library, but none of the students who met the team had a clear recollection of such surveys. The team did not, therefore, consider that the statement made by the Law Department in its SED was justified by the evidence provided. The Department will, no doubt, wish to consider whether the methods it uses to verify the views of the student body on library provision are adequate. The team was also interested to note that the Law Department had made no reference in its SED to the 'Statement of Standards for Law Libraries' published by the Society of Legal Scholars, which gives guidance on the provision which should be made in law libraries to support degree level studies in law. The team was told that the Department intended in the near future to consider the guidance given in this publication.

184 Staff reported to the audit team that the University's expectations in relation to both appraisal and peer observation of teaching were being met, and that, indeed, the Law Department had

introduced peer observation of teaching a year prior to this being made a University requirement. The recent internal review had, however, indicated that the link between peer review and the development of staff and the curriculum was not clearly evidenced, and this issue remained unresolved at the time of the visit. Because of the pressures of moving programmes and staff from Hull to Lincoln, many staff had only limited engagement with research, but activities in the future were likely to include a greater emphasis on research to reflect the mission of the University.

185 The audit team heard from students that the student handbook, available through the Virtual Campus and in hard copy, and with a supplement for part-time students, provided useful guidance on study at the University, and that the contents had been explained in a helpful induction offered by the Department. The team noted with interest the way that the Department explained assessment criteria by means of a practical exercise in which students were asked to compare pieces of work illustrating the difference between Second class and First class work. The students also spoke highly of the information provided to them by means of the unit handbooks. Although there was some variation between these, it seemed not to have presented difficulties for the students. Through the induction process and the handbooks, the students were familiar with learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and they found the information provided through the statement of learning outcomes to be valuable in preparing for their assessments. Students were satisfied that the assessments mapped properly against the learning outcomes for the units, and this was confirmed in the sample of assessed work seen by the team.

186 The Department has recently enhanced the attention it gives to part-time students through the production of the part-time students' handbook, the appointment of an academic advocate with special responsibility for part-time students, and through meetings between this advocate and student representatives. Very few of the full-time students seen by the audit team had experience of using the academic advocate. They expressed the view that, if necessary, they would have been able to identify their academic advocate, but, in practice, the accessibility of all staff meant that there were few occasions upon which it would be necessary to seek the advice of the academic advocate. The students were content with the careers support which they were receiving.

187 Student feedback is obtained for each student at the unit level through a standard feedback questionnaire. Students who met the audit team were satisfied that this covered the major issues upon which they would wish to make their views known, and there were sufficient open questions to allow for feedback on matters that were not covered by specific questions. The team noted that in some instances the response rate was very poor. The students were aware, through their own observations, of instances where action had been taken in response to student feedback, but there did not appear to be any routine mechanism by which the students were informed of the findings of student evaluations of modules or of action proposed in consequence. Unit leaders are expected to prepare a synopsis of issues arising from unit evaluations, and of the actions proposed, but this synopsis is considered at the Subject Board, where students are not represented. The Department might wish to consider how it might establish a more reliable mechanism for reporting to students on actions arising from unit evaluations.

188 The Department does not have any mechanism for obtaining feedback from students on their experience of the programme as a whole, except through student representation on the Subject Committee. The minutes of this Committee indicated that it discussed a wide range of curricular matters as well as learning resource issues. The Department may wish to consider whether the instruments and mechanisms which it uses for obtaining student feedback to support programme monitoring at programme level provide it with all relevant information.

189 The DSED indicated that when the Law Department relocated to Lincoln, formal contacts were developed with local legal practitioners. These links had continued, and students who met the audit team said that they found these links, which included participation in advocacy master classes and moots, as well as talks on careers in law, made a positive contribution to their experience. Overall, the team considered that the quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for a programme of study leading to the award of LLB (Hons) in the single subject of law.

#### **BA (Hons) Social Policy**

190 A DAT was conducted for the programme leading to the award of BA (Hons) Social Policy. The University offers Social Policy as a single honours degree and major subject within the UMS. The Department of Policy Studies is also responsible for the MA in Social Policy. The discipline area has

experienced considerable recent change, including significant curriculum renewal in 1999-2000, followed in 2002 by revalidation to consolidate changes made in the interim and to anticipate known voluntary redundancies in the staff team. There have been necessary changes to the unit portfolio, and consequential revalidation in 2001. The University has a clear process for approving minor modifications to units and programmes. It is important that students are informed of impending changes to their programme of study in a timely and structured way, and evidence from students who met the audit team suggests strongly that guidelines on this may need to be incorporated into the regulations and procedures for minor modifications to units and/or programmes.

191 The DSED, and the DAT investigations, focused exclusively on the single honours degree. The DSED had been written specifically for the audit, although it referred frequently to the findings and recommendations of the periodic review of Social Policy and Criminology which took place between March and June 2001. The programme specification for the programme leading to the award of BA (Hons) Social Policy was appended to the DSED. The programme specification provides a clear outline of programme aims and learning outcomes, teaching and learning approaches, programme unit structure and the regulatory framework. Programme outcomes are mapped across the unit portfolio, including reference to the units of study in which these outcomes are assessed. The DSED also included mapping of subject benchmark statements cross-referenced to the teaching and learning approach, mode of assessment, and programme level learning outcomes delivered by different units of study.

192 The DSED stated compliance with the *FHEQ*. The report of the periodic review made reference to the *FHEQ* only in relation to the postgraduate provision in Social Policy, although the institutional SED claimed that panels reviewing subjects were required to calibrate programmes against the *FHEQ*. That having been said, the audit team noted that successive reports of external examiners confirmed the appropriateness of standards in relation to similar programmes at other universities. There was robust evidence of active engagement with relevant subject benchmark statements.

193 The DSED did not include student progression and completion data, but this was included in the annual subject reports. These reports did include data on entry qualifications, the gender of applicants and enrolled students, and the distribution of degree

classifications, but none of these data appeared to have been used explicitly to inform forward planning. The data included in recent reports did not appear to be used for any rigorous programme-level analysis of trends in retention and progression. There was some cross-reference in annual subject reports to these data, but not in ways which might have helped the better understanding of issues highlighted by the periodic review.

194 The discipline area has had some difficulties with recruitment and retention. It was not evident from the annual subject review reports, or from the audit team's meetings with staff, that the available data had been used in addressing these concerns. Nevertheless, the team heard that the discipline was engaged in a range of activities, both on its own and as part of faculty and university-wide initiatives, to address issues of recruitment and retention.

195 According to the DSED, the Subject Committee is 'an effective forum for debate and the identification of concerns by student representatives and academic advocates'. Students' attendance at classes is monitored, and a scheme of progress panels was introduced in 2000-01 in an attempt to address student retention problems. The process now includes a review of attendance in November followed by reviews after assessment at the end of semester one and again at the end of semester two. The audit team formed the view that the discipline area was actively engaged with issues relating to student recruitment, retention and progression, prompted particularly by the conclusions of the periodic review in 2001. The team was less convinced that full use was being made of the information available to inform future planning and curriculum development.

196 The DSED referred extensively to both critical and supportive comments made in external examiners' reports in recent years. The discipline area clearly has a productive relationship with its external examiners, and is actively engaged in constructive dialogue about both matters of concern and possible future curriculum and/or learning and teaching developments. A concrete example of this was the way in which the discipline area had responded to external examiners' concerns about the preparation of students for level 3 dissertations through the teaching of research methods at levels 1 and 2. The consequent curriculum changes had been made too recently for the audit team to be certain that they would have the desired effect, but it was clear to the team that staff were actively engaged in attempting to resolve these problems.

197 Key points arising from external examiners' reports are summarised in annual subject reports, and these are reflected in an action plan which forms part of each report. Summaries of these key points are also discussed by the Subject Committee, and formal letters of response to the external examiner's report are sent promptly following receipt of the report.

198 The audit team was able to see a sample of assessed student work from units across all levels of study from the programme leading to the award of BA (Hons) Social Policy, including coursework assessments and formal examinations. The standard of work seen was appropriate to honours degree level in the *FHEQ*, and reflected the expectations of the programme specification and the views of external examiners as expressed in their reports.

199 The audit team saw a sample of student handbooks. These included handbooks for each level of study and some unit handbooks. Handbooks for each level of study followed a common template, and unit handbooks were often very similar in structure and content. Generally, both types of handbook were written in easily accessible language. The 'level' handbooks contain useful information about learning outcomes, assessment and re-assessment, progression regulations, different teaching and learning approaches, and the role of the academic advocate. Unit handbooks contain more specific information including syllabus content, weekly teaching schedule and reading lists. Handbooks had been generally commended in the reports of external examiners. Students who met the team expressed the view that the unit handbook was the most important document, and was considered overall to be very good. The Virtual Campus is used for additional student access to handbooks as well as other programme and unit administrative materials, and some learning materials.

200 The DSED claimed that the learning resources available for the BA (Hons) Social Policy were 'of a good standard' including 'a wide range of good quality rooms for teaching and learning' and 'access to the University's computer and ITC resources'. The Department has an ILA who works closely with academic colleagues in the discipline. Learning resource issues had been signalled in external examiners' reports, some student feedback on some units, and in annual subject reports. Students who met the audit team reported problems with access to computers, both in terms of pressure on the availability of centrally bookable PCs at certain times in the academic calendar, and also in accessing the University network externally. Students also reported

problems with the appropriateness, especially in size and disabled access, of some teaching accommodation. The discipline had been working to overcome particular learning resource issues which relate, in the main, to specific units of study rather than to the discipline overall. The team heard from students that the role of the ILA was significant and much appreciated in this effort. It would encourage the continuation of this work with the University to ensure that there is parity in the quality of student learning resources across the units that form the programme leading to this award.

201 The DSED did not comment upon mechanisms for receiving student feedback. Evidence seen by the audit team confirmed that there was systematic student evaluation of units using a common questionnaire. These individual unit evaluations appeared to feed only indirectly into the annual subject report. In addition to individual student evaluations of units, issues regarding the student experience overall can be raised by student representatives at the Subject Committee. Issues concerning learning resources for specific units feature regularly, and the Subject Committee has addressed these directly. In contrast, issues around the late cancellation of teaching sessions raised in Subject Committee in 2000 are raised again in 2003, suggesting to the team that this matter has not been resolved satisfactorily.

202 The student cohort on the BA (Hons) Social Policy programme is relatively small, and this fosters a considerable degree of informality in student feedback to tutors and, subsequently, back to the relevant student body. This is understandable, and it seemed to the audit team that informal communication between students and staff was working well in the interests of the majority of students and the ongoing enhancement of the provision. The team would encourage watchfulness to ensure that informal processes do not overtake formal ones, and that there is parity of student feedback processes across the programme.

203 The DSED did not comment on staff-student liaison. There is no separate staff-student liaison committee for Social Policy, but these students are represented on the Subject Committee. The Committee's agenda included a standing item on feedback from student representatives, and the minutes show that this is a significant element of the Committee's business, with detail of discussions recorded and actions identified. Overall, the audit team can confirm that the quality of learning opportunities is appropriate for the programme of study leading to the award of BA (Hons) Social Policy.

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

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

204 In their SWS to the audit, students referred to the prospectuses and other guides and programme specifications. Students have been involved in the development of many of the University's publications, including guides for mature students, new applicants and parents, in addition to the prospectuses. The audit team saw examples of these guides, and considered them to cover a range of useful information in an accessible and informative way. The team found these guides to be helpful additions to the range of information produced by the University. The students' view is that the Undergraduate Prospectus is an informative publication covering everything that could be expected, and with valuable additional information. Students who met the team expressed the view that there had been no cases of incomplete or inaccurate information in relation to courses, or any mismatch of expectations of what a course would provide.

205 The SWS refers to the Postgraduate Prospectus in less glowing terms, and refers to some uncertainty over the implementation of some courses. It goes on to state that students consider that the Postgraduate Prospectus requires clearer explanation of the variety of postgraduate qualifications, although Students' Union Cooperative representatives who met the audit team considered that these problems had been eliminated in the new Prospectus. Unlike the Undergraduate Prospectus, course descriptions in the Postgraduate Prospectus are not presented in a consistent format.

206 The Postgraduate Prospectus includes a statement that 'the University...reserves the right to make variations to the content or methods of delivery of programmes, to discontinue programmes and to merge or combine programmes, if such action is considered to be necessary. If the University discontinues any programme it will use its reasonable endeavours to provide a suitable alternative'. The Undergraduate Prospectus contains similar paragraphs in respect of programmes which may not run as described or indeed may not run, and readers are referred to the web site for current information. The audit team heard that updating of programmes was undertaken daily for the electronic record. Prospectuses, therefore, are not

automatically sent out with a current erratum slip, unless an enquiry focuses on a specific course. In relation to this practice, the team noted that the degree programme in Fine Art, recently withdrawn in Hull, remained within the 2004 Undergraduate Prospectus. The team formed the view that, notwithstanding the frequent updating of the web site, accuracy of information would be better assured for all enquiries if a printed erratum sheet were included with the Prospectus.

207 Programme specifications are the basis for factual data for all programmes, and for the contents of student handbooks and other promotional materials. They are therefore key documents in respect of the validity and accuracy of published information. In June 2001, ASC agreed that, for marketing purposes, programme specifications should form the basis of prospectus entries, as well as constituting the core documents from which a student handbook should derive its programme information. The audit team saw evidence of this in student handbooks. In relation to programme specifications the SWS noted that these are less well-publicised, and were still under construction at the time of writing the submission, although students were aware that programme specifications are scheduled to be completed during 2003. Students described the existing programme specifications as detailed and structured, and noted their importance to students.

208 The second topic addressed by the students in relation to published information was the accessibility and quality of information available to them in respect of programme outcomes and expectations. Students reported to the audit team that course and unit handbooks are useful and easy to understand, and this view is supported by the report of the recent Student Satisfaction Survey. In relation to handbooks, the SWS stated that 'in the main, information is accurate and correct and any changes required, post production, are clearly pointed out by teaching staff'. The University publishes minimum requirements and recommended formats for student handbooks in the Programme Development Manual. The team saw a range of handbooks, and found them appropriately informative although not consistent in style. Students expressed the view that the information available to them, in handbooks and on the Virtual Campus, described assessment requirements clearly. The team heard from staff that a great deal of reflection and testing on students was involved in the production of handbooks, and formed the view that this student-entitlement model for generating information was operating effectively.

209 The SWS raised the matter of some lack of information for new students over the summer months, including students switching from DMU to the University. In discussion with students, the audit team noted some instances where students on the Hull Campus felt they lacked sufficient information about change although, overall, they felt that the University had tried hard to make the process efficient and inclusive. Students were generous in their praise of the accessibility of University senior managers to the Students' Union, and their willingness to communicate readily on all matters.

210 The SED noted that there had been an increase in the number of complaints within the University being rejected as being academic appeals, although in both its regulations and procedures the University distinguishes carefully between these two dimensions. This caused the audit team to question whether students had sufficient information to understand the appeals and complaints procedures. The Students' Union officers who met the team were clear that, while not all students were aware of the procedures until they needed them, when they did need them they had easy access to the information, either through the web site or by asking a Students' Union officer, or a member of Student Services. The team saw the information on appeals and complaint procedures on the web site and leaflets produced by Student Services, and it was satisfied that students have access to clear information should they wish to appeal or complain.

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

211 The SED gave an account of the University's methods for assuring the accuracy of information in its prospectuses and promotional materials. Programmes for inclusion in prospectuses are determined and approved through ADC within the two-year planning cycle. Prospectus entries for individual programmes are signed off by the relevant heads of department, who are charged with ensuring the accuracy of the text.

212 For on-campus programmes, other promotional material is approved through the faculties. Promotional material used by partner institutions must be signed off by the responsible academic faculty and by the Marketing and Recruitment Service (MARS). The audit team was informed by senior staff that the strategy for assuring the quality of published information was characterised by 'rigorous gatekeeping'. For example, information for publicity purposes is produced at faculty level, is signed off at that level and involves liaison between



the faculty marketing officer and a member of MARS. The content of the Virtual Campus is checked by ILAs, and information on quality matters placed on the Virtual Campus is checked by a designated member of the Quality Unit. The team saw the draft document on procedures for the quality of publicity that had been recently considered at a meeting of ASC. On the basis of this evidence, the team was confident that the University was putting in place sound measures and controls to assure the quality of information published both on paper and electronically in relation to programmes and University procedures.

213 The SED stated that use of promotional material by overseas partners is checked during quality visits, annually for UK partners, and for all partners during periodic centre reviews. The audit team saw documentary evidence that this was the case for overseas partnerships, and heard from representatives of partner colleges that they liaise closely on the production of materials with the relevant faculty.

214 The University stated in its SED that it is working towards compliance with the recommendations of HEFCE's document 02/15, and expects to achieve full compliance by spring 2004. The SED went on to state that electronic versions of programme specifications written to central electronic templates will be available by the end of 2003 on the University web site. It was confirmed to the audit team by senior staff that the University is on track to meet that target.

215 External examiners' report forms have been redesigned for the session 2002-03 in the light of recommendations of HEFCE's document 02/15, and now will require an individual summary outlining key programme characteristics, distinctive elements, notable strengths and comment on areas that might be strengthened. The audit team's view was that the new form would provide information in line with HEFCE's document 02/15 expectations. The report form does, however, require comment on programmes, although the external examiner may be appointed to a subject within the UMS and not programme, so the current wording may need some amendment to avoid the possibility of confusion. An annual overview report of external examiners' key comments is already presented by the Quality Unit to ASC, and is published on the academic registry web site. The SED went on to say that this summary report will be published alongside programme specifications by the end of 2003.

216 The SED stated that a summary of the review, action points and resolution of issues arising from

periodic subject review and centre reviews will be published on the Quality Office's web pages, while annual subject and programme reports will be published on faculty web pages, the latter reports containing the recommended statistical indicators of student admission, progression and completion. No timescale was given for these, other than the overall expectation that the University will have met the requirements of HEFCE's document 02/15 by spring 2004.

217 In conclusion, the University expressed the view in its SED that it already publishes some of the information stipulated in HEFCE's document 02/15, and that arrangements are 'well in hand for placing the remainder into the public domain in the near future'. The audit team formed the view that the University has processes in progress to ensure that it meets the recommendations of HEFCE's document 02/15 during 2004. It did, however, appear to the team that the information currently, and planned to be, published was located in different parts of the University's web site and in different formats, which might make it difficult for both the University and external stakeholders to gain a coherent overall picture of quality and standards within the University. In the interim, before HEFCE's document 02/15 information is published on a single web site, the University might consider the merit of locating its various information sources on one area of its web site to make them easier to find by those who might wish to access them.

# Findings

## Findings

218 An institutional audit of the University was undertaken during the period 12 to 16 May 2003. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility as a degree awarding body. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, five DATs were conducted. This section of the report of the audit summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged during the audit, and making recommendations to the University for action to enhance current practice.

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

219 Since the previous quality audits of the University and its collaborative provision in the period 1995 to 1997, the University has undergone profound changes in its strategic direction, location, curriculum, partnership arrangements, the number and structure of its faculties and its student services. In its SED, the University stated its belief that throughout the management of the recent transitions it has maintained a clear sense of quality and standards in its structures, and that it now has more sophisticated quality management processes than before.

220 While the University's Academic Board has ultimate responsibility for quality and standards, the pivotal structure in developing those processes and maintaining an effective quality assurance system is a subcommittee of the Board, the ASC. Its executive arm, the Quality Unit, has been active in developing, updating and implementing a range of procedures for the academic approval, routine monitoring and periodic review of programmes and partnerships. This work has often been stimulated by the development led by the Agency of the external agenda and framework for quality and standards.

221 The University's process for monitoring the quality of its programmes places most of the day-to-day responsibility for the academic health of its provision at the level of the smallest coherent academic entity, which is usually the unit. An annual reporting process upward from units through subject (undergraduate) and course (postgraduate) committees to boards of studies culminates in reports from each faculty and partner college to the ASC. Cognate subjects and courses whether offered on or off-campus are periodically reviewed on a six-year cycle, as are partner centres. The University sees this

system as an appropriate balance between faculty autonomy and central control. In order to measure the state of that relationship, the Quality Unit is charged with periodically auditing the performance of faculties and partner colleges in relation to those procedures and responsibilities that have been delegated to them. Effective interactions between centre and faculty levels are facilitated by the relationship between members of the Quality Unit and the faculty registrars and key senior academics responsible for quality within their faculties. The audit team took the view that the process of internal audit of faculty procedures was a useful means of gathering evidence for institutional-level management of quality, and for sharing good practice.

222 An internal audit of the 2001-02 annual monitoring process found broad compliance but variation in practice. The audit team reached a similar conclusion about considerable variability in relation to the content and level of analysis in reports, but recognised that the specified procedure was being applied, and had the capability to ensure that any major concerns were brought to the University's attention. However, the team noted that the time it took to gather in all elements of the required information, the number of reporting stages and the filtering effect at each stage might limit the value of the process. The team found that the University was not yet making significant use of the cumulative outcomes of faculty and centre reports for institutional learning and feedback. Therefore, the team was encouraged to learn that the University has plans to use external experts to help it to review its monitoring process, and welcomed the University's recognition that reports to ASC should be produced to the specified deadlines, and that a report-tracking system has been introduced to support this.

223 The University's procedures for academic approval and periodic review have an appropriate level of external involvement, and appeared to the audit team to be rigorous and thorough. The team saw evidence of effective scrutiny of review and validation reports at the institutional level, but was less convinced that there was always timely follow through on specified conditions or required actions. The team considered that the remit and functioning of the recently reconstituted VAC, which has a vital role as ASC's 'watchdog' on the academic approval process, could still be sources of potential confusion if they are not clarified.

224 The University lays great weight on the views of external examiners and on complying with the components of the Agency's academic

infrastructure. The influence of other external inputs, such as accreditation by professional and statutory bodies, was less obvious to the audit team. Reports of such events are considered at institutional level and formal faculty responses are required, but the team took the view that more could be done to ensure that follow-up actions are completed within a specified timescale, and that the University is able to draw any cross-institutional conclusions from its range of external sources.

225 Students are represented at all levels of the committee structure from subject and course up to and including Academic Board. The audit team heard that many of the representatives were 'approached' rather than elected by their peers. This may simply reflect a dearth of willing candidates or the prevalence of more informal but very effective communication between staff and students. The team noted that ASC expects students' views on the quality of provision to be represented in the annual reports from faculties, and was interested to learn that ASC had asked one of its student members to review all such reports to draw out any student-related matters requiring attention. Student views are also sought by questionnaire at subject/course level. The University has recently instituted a generic satisfaction survey in which focus groups are used to identify areas of concern to students for inclusion in the survey. While the response rate was not very high, it was sufficiently representative to enable the University to draw useful conclusions on areas requiring action. The University will no doubt also wish to reflect on the means of encouraging greater student participation in future surveys.

226 The University has only a small number of courses that have a significant distance-learning component. Approval for such courses follows the normal validation route with the addition of an external panel member with appropriate expertise. The University's Virtual Campus is currently primarily used as an electronic platform for learning resources rather than a delivery mechanism for distance-learning. The Virtual Campus was widely appreciated by students who met the audit team.

227 Since 1997, the University has terminated all of its overseas partnership arrangements and all UK franchise and validation arrangements other than those with colleges of FE in two local consortia. In respect of the assurance of the quality of learning for the diminishing number of students progressing through terminating programmes, the audit team was reassured to learn that the partners would continue to be subject to the full range of the University's quality assurance procedures, including

annual quality visits. In the continuing collaborative arrangements with local consortia, the University intends to distinguish what it sees as its responsibility for the standards of awards made in its name from its partners' responsibility for the quality of students' learning opportunities. The implications of this dichotomy were still being worked through. The team concluded that the University had developed constructive and supportive arrangements with its partner colleges, and that these were underpinned by well-documented procedures that closely followed those applying to on-campus provision. In the team's view, the University's decision to limit its partnerships to colleges within the local consortia should provide it with much greater confidence in the standards and quality of its collaborative provision.

228 The University's view, expressed in its SED, is that it 'has in place a comprehensive and proven set of strategies, procedures and policies for the assurance and enhancement of the academic quality and standards of its programmes and awards'. Many of the University's procedures, following the reorganisation, are of recent origin, as are the faculties that are responsible for operating many of them, so the audit team was aware that it was too soon for it to be in a position to endorse the word 'proven'. Nevertheless, from the evidence available to it at both subject and institutional levels, the team was able to confirm that the University's framework had incorporated much of the external quality and standards framework, and was well-underway to being embedded within the University and its partners.

229 Overall, the audit team concluded that the systems in place for assuring the quality of programmes were operating effectively, both for the University's own programmes and for those delivered through collaborative arrangements. The continuing development and refinement of its procedures for approval, monitoring and review of programmes should provide a robust framework for quality assurance. However, the team had two provisos. Firstly, the current variation in the content and analysis of annual reports might be limiting their value, and the University would be advised to set limits of variability. Secondly, the University would be advised to set deadlines for actions to be taken or conditions fulfilled in order to ensure timely closure of quality loops.

230 Despite the pressures which the recent period of considerable change has put upon senior managers, and indeed on all staff, there has been no failure on the part of the University to give proper attention to quality assurance. In some respects the

University may have been a little more reactive than it would have been in 'steady state', and some problems could possibly have been anticipated before they arose, although once identified, appropriate action was taken. The University may feel that it is approaching the time when it can consider how to make greater use of all the sources of information and evaluation available to it in moving from a primarily compliance mode of quality assurance towards a greater emphasis on quality enhancement in support of its strategic aims. The University has demonstrated its capacity to manage change effectively, and has the capacity further to improve its ability to identify and manage the consequences of change, in areas such as the development of a pervasive research culture, one of the key elements of its strategic plan.

231 In the light of the audit team's evaluation, the findings of the audit confirm that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's current and future management of the quality of its programmes, on the basis of the University bringing to completion the plans in progress for reviewing the effectiveness of its quality assurance procedures, and continuing to develop and enhance these procedures.

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

232 In the period since the previous HEQC quality audit, the University has introduced an undergraduate modular scheme with, as described in the SED, 'a tiered approach to undergraduate boards of examiners and the roles of their external members'. Each subject board has one or more subject external examiners, while the UMS Board has one external member for each faculty and two others 'selected for their experience of modular schemes'. Programme specifications set out how learning outcomes are related to assessment, and these are available to students through handbooks and on the Virtual Campus. The audit team had no concerns about the control of academic standards at the level of the subject and programme.

233 The reports of external examiners are considered by means of both 'top down' and 'bottom up' processes, but the relationship between these two processes was not always clear to the audit team, and the reporting loop failed to demonstrate reliable closure. A summary of external examiners' reports is provided to ASC. The team noted from this that there had been delays in responses on action taken in response to specific recommendations made by external examiners. The team was told, in some cases, the recommendations

may have been dealt with by the bottom-up process and the response not copied to the Quality Unit, and was informed that this problem was being addressed through an amendment to the process of sending and returning memoranda. The University will no doubt wish to monitor the effectiveness of these additional measures for ensuring that procedures for responding to external examiners' reports are followed in a timely manner.

234 The University had recently revised its policies on external examining and assessment, including provision for second-marking or moderation of samples of assessed work, a matter on which there had previously been considerable variation. The new policies had been too recently introduced for their operation to be tested by the audit team.

235 The SWS indicated some variability in the timescale in which assessed work is returned to students, with some cases where work was not returned until the semester following submission. There are differences of practice between faculties and, in some instances, between departments within a faculty, in the means used to provide feedback to students on their academic performance, although there was no evidence that this impacted prejudicially upon the students' experience. The audit team also saw examples of good practice which merited dissemination, and was informed that the Best Practice Office was taking action to support the dissemination of identified good practice on feedback on assessment.

236 The University's annual monitoring system appeared to be effective in drawing together, at departmental level, consideration of matters relating to student performance, including progression issues, the reports of external examiners, and student feedback, although the University has noted instances where the system could be improved. It acknowledged that its SMS had limitations which meant that it did not meet all of its needs in regard to supporting analyses of student progression and completion. The audit team concurred with this view, and would encourage the University in its intention to develop its management information system to enable it to be an effective tool for the evaluation of student progression and achievement at both institutional and programme levels.

237 Departments are required to produce action plans to deal with significant issues which arose from internal review, but the audit team was not always able to track these action plans to verify that actions had been completed. The team observed that, while action may have been taken at the

departmental level to deal with matters affecting the standards of University awards, closure on this action is not always visible at all relevant levels within the University's deliberative and quality assurance committee structure, and the Academic Board may not therefore be in a position always to be assured that the standards of University awards are being safeguarded. The team was informed that a recent modification to the periodic subject review process required the review team to reconvene a year after the delivery of its report to check upon progress in implementing its recommendations. This had been tested as a pilot and was now to be extended as general practice.

238 The University stated in its SED that it is 'confident that its procedures...when applied effectively...play a full role in maintaining and monitoring the standards of its awards and the quality of its students' learning opportunities. Issues relating to quantitative data in support of process are being addressed'. On the basis of the evidence that it saw, the audit team was satisfied that broad confidence can be placed in the University's present and future capacity to manage effectively the academic standard of its awards, on the basis of the University continuing to refine the reliability of its processes for harnessing at institutional level the information available at programme level about academic standards.

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

239 The University provides support for learners through the provision of resources, through academic guidance, support and supervision and through the provision of mechanisms for personal support and guidance. The audit team found that in all these aspects of its operation the University was acting to ensure that its mechanisms operated efficiently. In some areas of its operation the University has examples of good practice which represent key strengths in its relationship with its students.

240 The provision of learning resources across a multi-campus site presents the University with challenges in ensuring that there is parity of the learning experience for all its students. However, the University is taking due notice of external reference points which will provide it with sector-based benchmarks through which to assess its own provision. The University seeks the opinions of the users of its learning resources in a systematic way, and has demonstrated that it is responsive to their suggestions.

241 The next stages of development of the Virtual Campus, with the proposed Intranet Portal taking on the role of an information point allowing the Virtual Campus to develop as a learning and teaching tool, will be an important step. The role of the Virtual Campus as a tool to be used from all sites, from collaborative partner colleges and from home will help to ensure the equality of learning experience which the University seeks to achieve.

242 Students who met the audit team were enthusiastic about the commitment of their tutors and advisers, and there was a good sense of team commitment between academic and support staff. Although there is some inconsistency in the operation of the University's academic advocate system, with different practice emerging across individual departments, both the ILA system and the DART service were highly praised by the students who used them. Overall, the findings of the audit suggest that the University is fully engaged with its duties and responsibilities toward its students, and is working to maintain a quality of academic guidance and personal support that is a key strength of its provision.

### **Outcomes of discipline audit trials**

#### **BA (Hons) Business Studies**

243 The programme specification for the programme leading to the award of BA (Hons) Business Studies sets out appropriate educational aims and learning outcomes. It links these to the teaching and learning employed by the programme, and to the support and assessment that a student undertaking the programme is expected to experience. The mapping of programme outcomes against the *Subject benchmark statement* is clear and detailed; the programme design has been broadly informed by the expectations embodied in the benchmark statement. From its study of students' assessed work, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the programme was appropriate to the title of the award and its location within the *FHEQ*.

244 Student evaluation of the programme was positive. The availability and helpfulness of staff and the clarity of assessment criteria and expectations of achievement, located in student and unit handbooks, both in hard copy and on the Virtual Campus, being identified for particular positive comment. The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for a programme of study leading to the award of BA (Hons) Business Studies.

### **BA (Hons) English**

245 The programme specification for the programme leading to the award of BA (Hons) English sets out appropriate educational aims and learning outcomes, and links these clearly to the teaching and learning styles, support and assessment that a student undertaking the programme would be expected to experience. The programme design provides appropriate progression through the degree and a wide range of assessment instruments is used. From its study of students' assessed work, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the programme was appropriate to the title of the award and its location within the *FHEQ*.

246 Student evaluation is conducted at unit rather than at programme level. Students who met the audit team commented in very positive terms about their experience of the programme as a whole. They were particularly complimentary about the supportiveness of staff, and of the role of the ILA. The team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for a programme of study leading to the award of BA (Hons) in the single subject of English.

### **BA (Hons) Fine Art**

247 The new Fine Art undergraduate course was in its first year of operation at the time of the visit, and will progressively replace the corresponding courses previously delivered at the Lincoln campus of DMU and at the Hull campus of the University. While the audit team was able to consider evidence of the quality and standards of the out-going courses, and of the effectiveness of their transfer to the University campus, the evidence base for the new Lincoln-based degree programme was inevitably limited at this stage.

248 Because the programme leading to the award of BA (Hons) Fine Art had been recently validated, it provided a good illustration of the University's new procedures for the approval of courses. The programme specification complies with the University's requirements for validation, and provides a clear and succinct document for stakeholders. The national *Subject benchmark statement* for art and design has been interpreted to make it more appropriate and specific to the discipline of Fine Art, and programme-level learning outcomes are clearly described in accessible language. An 'assessment map' indicates in which units these outcomes are assessed.

249 The course is located in the Greenstone Building, a short distance from the main Lincoln

campus, but student representatives assured the audit team that the facilities and support services here met most of their needs, and that they could access others as and when needed at the main campus. The only serious criticism expressed by students of support services related to the University's careers service.

250 On the basis of the evidence available to evaluate the new course, the audit team concluded that the University is providing a learning experience that is of a quality suitable for the award of BA (Hons) Fine Art. The record of the former DMU and Hull-based Fine Art courses suggest that the new course will prove to be of high quality, but the team recommend that the course is monitored closely as it comes fully on-stream to ensure that these expectations are fulfilled.

### **LLB (Hons)**

251 The programme specification for the programme leading to the award of LLB (Hons) sets out appropriate educational aims and learning outcomes, and links these clearly to the teaching and learning styles, support and assessment that a student undertaking the programme would be expected to experience. The programme design provides appropriate progression through the degree and a wide range of assessment instruments is used. From its study of students' assessed work, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the programme was appropriate to the title of the award and its location within the Agency's *FHEQ*.

252 Student evaluation is conducted at unit rather than at programme level. Students who met the audit team commented in broadly positive terms about their experience of the course as a whole. They were particularly complimentary about the supportiveness of staff, and of the Department's links with local legal practitioners. The team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for a programme of study leading to the award of LLB (Hons) in the single subject of law.

### **BA (Hons) Social Policy**

253 The programme specification for the programme leading to the award of BA (Hons) Social Policy provides a clear outline of programme aims and learning outcomes, teaching and learning approaches, programme unit structure and the regulatory framework. Programme outcomes are mapped across the unit portfolio, including reference to the units of study in which these

outcomes are assessed. Students' assessed work seen by the audit team reflected the expectations of the programme specification. The DSED referred extensively to both critical and supportive comments made in external examiners' reports in recent years. Reports of external examiners confirmed the appropriateness of academic standards. The team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the programme was appropriate to the title of the award and its location within the Agency's *FHEQ*.

254 The discipline area has had some difficulties with recruitment and retention but is now actively engaged with these issues. It has also been working to overcome learning resource issues which relate, in the main, to specific units of study rather than to the discipline overall. The audit team would encourage the continuation of this work to ensure parity in the quality of student learning resources across the units which comprise the programme.

255 Students who met the audit team considered the handbooks to be very helpful. The Virtual Campus is used for additional student access to handbooks as well as other programme and unit administrative materials, and some learning materials. The student cohort on the BA (Hons) Social Policy programme is relatively small, and this fosters a considerable degree of informality in student feedback to tutors and, subsequently, back to the relevant student body. The team considered that informal communication between students and staff was working well in the interests of the majority of students, although it would encourage watchfulness to ensure that informal processes do not overtake formal ones. On the basis of the evidence available, the team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities was appropriate for a programme of study leading to the award of BA (Hons) Social Policy.

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

256 The University has responded to the *Code of practice* by commissioning analyses comparing its current practices with the precepts of the *Code of practice*, and taking action where gaps have been identified. For every section of the *Code of practice*, either a new quality assurance document forming part of the University's Quality Assurance Manual had been produced, or a gap analysis had been submitted to ASC. In some cases gaps had been identified which have yet to be addressed in full, but the intention is that in due course a report will be provided to ASC indicating that the *Code of*

*practice's* precepts have been fully implemented. The University may, nevertheless, wish to consider systematically specifying time limits for reporting that all outstanding actions have been completed.

257 The University requires programme specifications to be produced for all programmes leading to awards of the University, with the acceptable exceptions in the case of validated provision which is being discontinued. Programme specifications are expected to show how content aligns with the relevant subject benchmark statements, and how academic standards locate within the *FHEQ*. Students who met the audit team reported that they found the programme specifications, and in particular the statements of learning outcomes, useful in supporting their studies.

258 The extent to which proper regard is given to the academic infrastructure is tested in internal review and validation or revalidation events, all of which involve academic experts external to the University. The audit team saw evidence of the academic infrastructure being considered as part of review or revalidation events. Faculties are expected to report in their annual reports to the ASC that programme specifications taking account of the *FHEQ*, and the relevant subject benchmark statements had been produced for existing programmes for which no revalidation or internal review event has yet taken place. The team was satisfied that the University is taking appropriate account of the Agency's academic infrastructure.

### **The utility of the SED as an illustration of the institution's capacity to reflect upon its own strengths and weaknesses**

259 The SED provided the audit team with a good overview of the University's procedures for assuring the quality of programmes and for securing the academic standards of its awards. It included a section on 'managing change', which provided a helpful insight into the major changes that the University has undertaken in recent years, and into the way that it had approached, and continues to approach, change management. That section concluded by saying that 'continuing to manage these changes well underpins the University's strategies. The University is not complacent and... is confident that these challenges will continue to be met successfully'. The findings of this audit suggest that the University is justified in drawing those conclusions.

260 Given that the University's structural, managerial and procedural changes had taken place very recently, it was to be expected that the



University was not yet in a position to evaluate the effect and effectiveness of all these changes. Nevertheless, the SED concluded with a listing of the University's perceptions of its current strengths, both overall and particular, and its current limitations, many of which were expanded upon in the main text of the SED with indications of plans for addressing them. The broad alignment between the strengths and limitations identified by the University and the findings of the audit supports confidence in the University's capacity for institutional-level reflection and self-evaluation.

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

261 The University acknowledges that there are areas where plans are still in progress to enhance quality assurance processes. The SED provided a list of identified limitations which are informing and setting its agenda for the future enhancement of process. Most of these limitations are being addressed and need to be seen through to completion. Further enhancements of process are intended to complete and build on the work to absorb the remainder of the external quality and standards framework, while further embedding the internal quality and standards framework within the University.

262 The Peer Observation of Teaching Scheme, introduced in June 2001, is intended to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. The University believes that the scheme is operating well in some departments, but the major restructuring and relocation of several academic departments has resulted in 'differential effectiveness'. Measures to 'reinvigorate' the scheme and thus address this 'limitation' had just begun to be put into place at the time of the visit.

263 The termination of much of its UK collaborative activity, all its overseas collaborative activity, and the moratorium, imposed in November 2002, on any new overseas franchise arrangements for at least three years, is seen by the University as an opportunity to focus its energy on the quality enhancement of its provision at Lincoln and Hull campuses, and with UK partner colleges through consortium arrangements. The audit team considered that the University had taken an appropriate step in making this bold decision, and one that is likely to enable it to consolidate its approach to quality assurance and stimulate quality enhancement.

### **The reliability of information**

264 The audit process included a check on the progress made by the University towards production of the information set in the format recommended in HEFCE's document 02/15, and the reliability of those elements currently published by the University. The University reported that it is on target to achieve full compliance with the recommended dataset during 2004. All of the required quantitative data are available for publication. Sample testing by the audit team of the quantitative data showed no evidence of unreliability or inaccuracy. Certain limitations deriving from the current management information system were acknowledged by the University, which is developing a new management information system to remedy the deficiencies of the current system.

265 The published information set will include the recommended summaries of external examiners' reports and of feedback from current students for each programme. The University's external examiners' report form has been redesigned to facilitate this, and summaries will be published by the end of 2003. An overview report of external examiners' findings is already available on the University's web site. All programme specifications are available on the Virtual Campus, and will be available on the University's web site by the end of 2003. Summary statements of the outcomes and follow-up of internal periodic review will be published on the University's web site, but were not available for testing at the time of the audit visit.

266 The pilot institution-wide Student Satisfaction Survey had recently been carried out at the time of the audit. The preliminary analysis of the outcomes seen by the audit team appeared likely to enable the production of reliable and useful summaries. The University is awaiting the outcome of the development of the national survey before attempting to gather feedback from recent graduates for publication.

267 Those elements of the dataset specified in HEFCE's document 02/15 which were available during the audit were found to be broadly reliable and complete. The University's approach to the production of the remaining elements is measured and demonstrates proactive engagement with these requirements.

### **Features of good practice**

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

- i. the use being made of programme specifications to specify learning outcomes and criteria of assessment (paragraphs 74 and 207);
- ii. the University's constructive relationship with its local partner colleges (paragraphs 110 and 137);
- iii. the academic and personal support available to students (paragraphs 122, 128 and 130).

### **Recommendations for action**

269 The University is advised to:

- i. clarify roles and responsibilities in the academic approval of new and amended programmes (paragraph 51);
- ii. give priority to the development of its management information system so that it has the ability to be an effective tool for the evaluation of student progression and achievement at both institutional and programme levels (paragraph 95);
- iii. consider whether it is making full use of staff development and appraisal to support its institutional priorities (paragraphs 101 and 109).

270 The University might wish to consider the desirability of:

- i. making sure that actions that have been identified to strengthen the management of academic quality and standards are completed within a specified time (paragraphs 41, 52 and 72);
- ii. defining the acceptable level of variation in the content and analysis contained in reports that contribute to annual monitoring (paragraph 57);
- iii. using the information available from internal and external review more systematically at institutional level to support quality enhancement (paragraph 81);
- iv. building on the good practice that exists in some programmes for timely feedback to students on academic performance so that this becomes the expectation for all programmes (paragraph 149).

## Appendix

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

The University welcomes the Agency's institutional audit report and thanks the team for the courteous way in which the audit was conducted.

We are pleased that our strong commitment to quality management is recognised in the judgments of confidence in our standards and quality. The University is emerging from a period of significant redirection, and we particularly welcome the audit findings that this has not lessened our 'proper attention to quality assurance' and its endorsement of our capacity to manage change.

We were also gratified that the report acknowledges our strengths in the academic and personal support of our students, our constructive relationships with local partner colleges and our use of programme specifications. These strengths go right to the heart of the University's mission.

We acknowledge, however, the opportunities for improvement that the report has highlighted. We are addressing these as follows:

- following audit, we have instigated a full review of our committee structure and attendant management responsibilities. This will, *inter alia*, clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various quality committees and of the senior staff in respect of quality assurance matters, and facilitate the proper flow of information from faculty to university level;
- we recognise that our present management information system is limited in its capacity to meet fully the needs of the University. Specification and tendering for a new system are well advanced, with implementation scheduled for 2004-05. Meanwhile, we are continually modifying the present system to improve the quality of information available;
- a new performance appraisal, staff development and reward scheme is already scheduled for introduction in 2004. This will bring greater direction and coherence to our existing initiatives, for example the peer observation of teaching and sabbatical leave schemes;
- for 2003, we are introducing a more transparent document tracking system to identify actions and log completions against set time limits, and have revised the calendar of meetings to ensure timely consideration of reports;
- we have developed a new annual report template and guidance notes for the 2002-03 monitoring exercise to ensure greater consistency between the reports. Faculty boards have been charged with ensuring the reports contain the full analysis required;
- revised assessment regulations for 2003-04 give a more transparent framework for providing students with consistent, timely and relevant feedback and enhance existing good practice.

The profound changes we have undergone since the audits of 1995 to 1997 are now behind us. We are looking forward to developing a culture of continuous improvement for our students and our staff, within a stable and supportive management framework and in the confidence of a clear sense of direction, purpose and energy.

