

University of Central England in Birmingham

NOVEMBER 2005

Preface

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

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

The purpose of institutional audit

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

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

Judgements

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

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

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

Nationally agreed standards

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

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

The audit process

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

The main elements of institutional audit are:

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

The evidence for the audit

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

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

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

From 2004, institutions will be required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The audit team reviews progress towards meeting this requirement.

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Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Central England in Birmingham (UCE or the University) from 21 to 25 November 2005 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University makes.

To arrive at its conclusions the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout UCE, to current students, and it read a wide range of documents relating to the way UCE 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 UCE is that:

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

Features of good practice

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

- the clear link between student feedback and action at all levels within the institution and its collaborative partners
- the participation of a wide range of staff, including visiting tutors, staff on fractional contracts and staff from collaborative partners, in staff development activities
- the information and support provided by staff to facilitate student learning.

Recommendations for action

The audit team also recommends that UCE 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:

- make use of internal data relating to entry qualifications and final achievement at institutional level to monitor academic standards more effectively.

It would also be desirable for the University to:

- continue the process of streamlining its quality systems to make optimum use of the institution's available resources
- consider the development of an enhancement-led approach to quality management
- consider the further use of external benchmarks in monitoring and enhancing academic standards
- improve participation in, and monitor the effectiveness of, the training provided for student representatives
- consider the means by which part-time and distance-learning students can more effectively contribute to student representation processes.

Business and management; engineering; media studies; music

The audit team also looked at the following specific areas of provision by undertaking discipline audit trails in business and management; engineering; media studies; and music, to find out how well the University's systems and procedures were working at the

discipline level. The University provided the team with documents, including student work, and here too the team considered that the standard of student achievement in the four discipline areas was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), published by QAA. The team considered that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the awards.

National reference points

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

The institutional audit process includes a check on the reliability of the information published by institutions in the format recommended in HEFCE 02/15, *Information on quality and standards in higher education*, and in HEFCE 03/51, *Final guidance*. The audit found that the University was meeting its responsibilities in respect of the requirements set out in HEFCE 02/15 and 03/51, and the information published by the University about the quality of its programmes was reliable.

Main report

Main report

1 An institutional audit of the University of Central England in Birmingham (UCE or the University) was undertaken during the period 21 to 25 November 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility for its awards.

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

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

Section 1: Introduction: the University of Central England in Birmingham

The University and its mission

4 The University traces its origins back to the 1840s when the Birmingham School of Design and the Polytechnic Institute were founded. A series of amalgamations and mergers of specialist and technical colleges led to the formation of Birmingham Polytechnic in 1971. This then became the University of Central England in 1992 when the institution was granted degree-awarding powers and university title. Local National Health Service colleges merged with the University in the 1990s extending its provision in health-related disciplines.

5 UCE is a substantial multi-sited urban university offering a broad range of academic provision with a student body drawn predominantly from the city of Birmingham and the West Midlands region. The University is situated on eight campuses of varying sizes across the city. In 2004-05, it had a total population of 23,677 students, of which 14,285 were full-time, 19,121 undergraduate and 3,595 postgraduate students (3,378 on taught programmes and 217 research students).

6 The University is currently organised into seven faculties which vary considerably in size, ranging from just over 7,000 students in the largest, the Faculty of Health and Community Care, to 516 students in the Birmingham Conservatoire. The Birmingham School of Acting (BSA) joined the University with effect from 1 May 2005. At the time of the audit, the BSA was a freestanding school with 132 students. Whilst it was attached to the Birmingham Conservatoire at that time, it was planned that it would formally become part of the Conservatoire's faculty structure over the next few months. The Technology Innovation Centre (TIC) is both an academic faculty and a wholly owned subsidiary. Organisational changes during 2004 and 2005 have resulted in the realignment of some disciplines and the disbanding, at the end of 2004-05, of the former Faculty of the Built

Environment. Curriculum development takes place predominately within faculties which are the key organisational grouping at UCE.

7 Organisational structures below faculty level vary considerably as faculties have the freedom to establish their own scheme of governance (approved by faculty boards) within a framework set by Senate. However, each faculty has a dean (or equivalent) as its academic head and a faculty board with terms of reference set out by the University. There are approximately 800 students studying on franchised courses in local colleges, forming an eighth 'faculty' known as the Greater Birmingham Franchise Scheme.

8 UCE has a wide range of provision including art and design, business and management, education, engineering and computer technology, and health. The majority of the University's portfolio is professionally and vocationally oriented; a significant proportion of provision is accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). UCE validates Foundation Degrees for its further education (FE) partners and offers a small number itself; the New Technology Institute, a joint enterprise which is led by the University and involves higher education (HE) and FE institutions in Birmingham, is seen as important to the future development of Foundation Degrees. About 4 per cent (reduced from 7 per cent in 2003-04) of the University's students are studying FE programmes; professional certificates and awards and a range of level 0 or foundation year programmes are offered. UCE houses the only Conservatoire that is not an autonomous institution in the United Kingdom.

9 The present Vice-Chancellor plans to retire in autumn 2006 and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) (Academic) will retire at the end of the current academic year. It is also anticipated that four of the seven faculty deans will retire before 2009.

10 UCE describes its character as being 'a large and diverse urban University with a long tradition of providing higher and further education for the people of Birmingham and beyond'. Its mission is to develop in accordance

with the following values:

- Quality - The University aims to be excellent at what it does.
- Employability - The success of UCE's graduates over their professional lifetimes is of major importance in guiding what the University does.
- Community - UCE's programmes and services should be available to all who can benefit from them, irrespective of social, economic, cultural, and ethnic differences.
- Learning and Teaching - Excellence in teaching and the promotion of independent learning take priority. The University exists to promote success and should be judged by the value it adds to the lives of its students.
- Lifelong Learning - The provision of education in as many modes and styles as are appropriate to the particular needs of its diverse clientele is a characteristic of programme provision at UCE.
- Research, Scholarship and Development - Research and scholarship are essential for the support of academic programmes and will continue to be actively encouraged.
- Partnership - UCE will continue to work closely with employers, community groups, and other educational institutions, for the development and delivery of its services. Partnership is also valued in and for itself.

Collaborative provision

11 The University's collaborative provision, which takes the form of local partnerships with FE colleges and international partnerships, amounted to approximately 1,600 students in 2004-05. UCE offers both franchised and validated arrangements and also has a number of articulation agreements enabling entry with advanced standing to its programmes. The number of local partnerships is declining as direct funding and other external changes have reduced the importance of collaborative FE/HE partnerships as a mechanism for widening participation. The University intends to focus

its FE links on two strategic partners, South Birmingham College and Sutton Coldfield College.

12 The University describes its approach to international partnerships as cautious. It has developed relationships with a small number of partners where it is confident in the standing of the institutions involved. The Birmingham Institute of Art and Design (BIAD) has one overseas franchise partnership whilst another overseas franchise partnership, managed through the Business School, is now coming to an end. Collaborative provision was considered at both institutional and discipline level within the audit (see paragraphs 111 to 117, 134, 148, 150 to 163, 165, 170 and 173 below).

Background information

13 The published information for this audit included:

- the report of a quality audit of the University conducted in December 2001 by QAA which was published in July 2002 (the 2002 report)
- the audit report of an overseas partnership involving the University and Informatics, Hong Kong which was published in November 2001
- reports of reviews by QAA of provision at subject level, published since 1996
- information on the respective websites of the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), Higher Education Research Opportunities (HERO), HEFCE, and the University.

In addition, unpublished reports relating to a review of a Foundation Degree in Management (March 2003) and in Early Years (June 2005), and three developmental engagements in Law (April 2003), Social Policy and Administration and Social Work (February 2004) and in Computing (May 2004) were made available to the audit team.

14 The University provided QAA with the following documentation in hard copy and on

CD-Rom:

- the self-evaluation document (SED), July 2005
- Academic Regulations and Policies, October 2004
- Operations Manual for Franchised Programmes based in the UK, 2004-05
- Handbook for External Examiners, January 2005
- Handbook for Academic Auditors, September 2005.

It provided QAA with the following documentation in hard copy:

- UCE Annual Accounts and Statistics 2003-04
- Undergraduate Prospectus 2005
- Prospectus for part-time programmes (all levels); postgraduate and professional programmes 2005
- University Quality Assurance Handbook, 2005-06.

In addition, the following documentation was provided on CD-Rom:

- Vice-Chancellor's papers to Deans/Directorate about organisational change, October and November 2004
- Senate agendas, appendices and minutes for 2003-04 and 2004-05
- Committee for Academic Regulations and Policy agendas, appendices and minutes for 2003-04 and 2004-05
- Collaborative Partnerships Committee agendas, appendices and minutes for 2003-04 and 2004-05.

Customised versions of the Quality Assurance Handbook for the Birmingham Conservatoire and the Business School were made available to the audit team which also had access to a range of material, including PSRB reports, through the University's intranet.

The audit process

15 Following preliminary meetings with staff and students at the University in March 2005, QAA confirmed that four DATs would be conducted during the audit visit. QAA received the SED in July 2005 and the discipline self-evaluation documents (DSEDs) in October 2005. The audit team selected DATs in business and management, engineering, media studies, and music. The DSEDs were prepared specifically for the DATs.

16 At the preliminary meeting held with student representatives of the University, students were invited, through the Students' Union (SU) at UCE, to submit a separate document commenting on the student experience and identifying matters relevant to the quality of programmes and the standard of awards. The SU provided the audit team with the students' written submission (SWS). The SWS, which was not confidential, was based on student feedback and the experiences of officers representing students. A range of consultation exercises were undertaken to gather student opinion across the eight campuses of the University. The submission did not include students on collaborative programmes. The team is grateful to all those involved in the preparation of the SWS

17 The audit team conducted a briefing visit to the University from 18 to 20 October 2005 when it met student representatives, senior members of staff and the Vice-Chancellor to explore matters raised in the SWS and in the SED. At the end of the briefing visit the team identified the further documentation required and agreed a programme of meetings for the audit visit with the University. The team did not select any area for a thematic enquiry.

18 The audit visit took place from 21 to 25 November 2005 and involved further meetings with staff and students of the University, both at institutional level and in relation to the DATs. The audit team comprised Professor K Hurst; Mrs J Lydon; Professor P Manning; Mrs S Middleton; and Miss R Pelik, auditors; and Ms M Sheehan, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr I Ainsworth, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

19 The 2002 report identified several areas worthy of commendation which included the effectiveness of the working arrangements between the University and its collaborative partners and the University's commitment to the professional development of its staff, both of which remain notable features. The 2002 report also identified a number of points for further consideration including the advisability of ensuring that all research students with teaching responsibilities receive appropriate training and support. The University is satisfied that a training programme now offered, and which has been made compulsory from 2004-05 for those without relevant experience, addresses this previous recommendation.

20 In addition, the University was asked to consider the desirability of reviewing the workload of Senate and its standing committee structure; introducing more detailed guidance to staff on level descriptors and writing learning outcomes; reviewing its guidelines on the timeliness of feedback to students on assessed work; reviewing and stating its expectations of the personal tutoring system, minimum entitlements for students and the monitoring of the effectiveness of its systems; further reviewing its systems for monitoring the progress of research students to enable the University Research Degrees Committee (URDC) to receive information based on a consistent approach across the faculties, and to provide detailed feedback for all research students on their progress; clarifying the objectives of the peer observation scheme; and making sure that training is available for student representatives.

21 The audit team was given the University's response on each of these points, as well as receiving a detailed update in the SED. It noted that action had been taken in respect of all the recommendations of the previous audit. More detailed commentary on the team's findings will be found in the relevant sections of this report. The University has also made a number of other key changes in its approach to the management of quality and standards.

The three main such changes involve the creation of an additional senior post of PVC with responsibility for student matters in 2003; a general move towards greater centralisation and the strengthening of the Academic Registry, led by the Academic Registrar (a new post) during 2004-05; and the co-location of the former Academic Quality and Support Department with the Student Record System team within the newly formed Academic Registry.

22 Since 2001 UCE and its partners have been involved in a number of interactions with the QAA, each of which resulted in positive judgements. These include developmental engagements in Computing, Law, and in Social Policy and Administration and Social Work; in addition to reviews of a Foundation Degree in Management and a Foundation Degree in Early Years. Strengths identified included the robustness of quality assurance arrangements and the value placed on obtaining student feedback. QAA and PSRB reports are considered at discipline, faculty and university levels and action plans are drawn up and monitored by the PVC with responsibility for academic matters and Senate. The audit team found this high level oversight of the progress of actions to be thorough.

23 Overall, the audit team found that the University gave serious and in-depth consideration to external review outcomes but that some responses were measured. Whilst the team noted the detailed level of Senate scrutiny and oversight of external review activity, including that by PSRBs, it would strongly encourage the University to continue to keep under review the workload of Senate as recommended in the 2002 report.

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

24 The SED stated that the University's 'approach to quality management is derived

from the objectives set out in the Educational Character and Mission Statement'. Faculties have 'first line responsibility for quality and standards' given that they 'are the units through which programmes are delivered, managed and resourced'. The University 'allow[s] Faculty Boards to determine the detail of how processes will be implemented at faculty level' but this devolved approach is balanced by 'centrally determined regulations, policies and procedures with which faculties must comply and guidelines that they are expected to follow'.

25 In summary, UCE provides 'an institutional framework within which faculties discharge their responsibilities' and sets out both 'to review this framework regularly' and 'regularly [to] review the balance between institutional control and responsibility and local autonomy'. Established mechanisms, such as internal academic and thematic audits, are used to conduct these reviews.

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

26 Senate is concerned exclusively with academic matters and is responsible for the quality and standards of the University's awards. It retains to itself the authority to approve and re-approve awards, acting upon recommendations and reports from programme approval and review and re-approval panels. Senate is also responsible for the approval of collaborative partnerships. Authority to award research degrees is delegated to the URDC. Faculty boards are subcommittees of Senate and elect teaching staff representatives to it, and deans are ex officio members of Senate. The University considers that these arrangements facilitate 'communication between the central committees and faculty committees' and ensure that there are members who are able to speak on behalf of faculties and to initiate action in response to Senate decisions. Senate is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor but corporate responsibility for quality management and collaborative provision, and for the student

learning experience, reside with the PVC responsible for academic matters and the PVC responsible for student matters respectively.

27 Senate is supported in its work by its subcommittees and standing working groups. These include the Committee for Academic Regulations and Policy (CARP) and the Collaborative Partnerships Committee (CPC). CARP advises Senate 'about the development of...academic policies and procedures for quality and standards and its regulations'. CPC is responsible for 'the monitoring, co-ordination and development of...collaborative academic partnerships' and provides regular reports on its activities and an annual overview report about the health of collaborative programmes to Senate. Significant working groups include that on quality assurance processes (WGQAP). In addition, the Academic Registry is identified as having a key role in developing and monitoring the University's academic quality processes, developing its academic regulations and policies (ARP) and in implementing and managing quality processes undertaken centrally.

28 The Vice-Chancellor is assisted by a senior management team, the Directorate, consisting of three PVCs, the Director of Finance, and the Secretary and Registrar. Beneath this lies the wider management grouping of Deans/Directorate including deans, heads of central departments and support services, and the General Manager of the SU. The SED identified this grouping as 'the executive arm of the University'.

29 Faculties are regarded as 'the key organisational grouping' responsible for programme delivery and management, and each faculty dean is responsible for 'the assurance and enhancement of the quality and standards of the faculty's programmes'. As organisational structure and management of faculties is a matter for the deans in 'consultation with the Directorate and their faculty colleagues', a range of differently named and defined sub-faculty units and management roles co-exist within the University.

30 The SED indicated that the University's 'quality processes operate within a

comprehensive framework, which is codified in the ARP'. The audit team found, however, that the ARP was difficult to navigate in the absence of an index of contents. The University identified a number of other key documents which included faculty quality handbooks (replaced during 2005-06 by University handbooks), operations manuals for collaborative programmes, a handbook for research degree students and a handbook for external examiners. These supporting handbooks were said to 'define for staff the requirements of the University and the responsibilities of key individuals and committees'. It was evident to the team that the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)* had been carefully considered in the preparation of the University's policies, procedures and regulations.

31 The ARP include separate standard assessment regulations for undergraduate programmes, postgraduate programmes, Higher National Diploma and Higher National Certificate awards, Foundation Degrees, Graduate Certificates and Diplomas and for Certificates, Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas in Professional Studies. The University had approached its regulations in response to its student profile and commitment to widening participation. It had therefore introduced a considerable degree of flexibility into the regulations to enable students to complete at different rates reflecting their particular circumstances. As a result, the University found that a significant proportion of students were not completing within the standard period for a programme and that this was having a detrimental affect on completion. Consequently, it had undertaken a review of its regulations and made them more stringent: an outcome which was supported by the audit team.

32 The University maintains central oversight of collaborative provision and the Academic Registry manages the approval, review and re-approval of such provision. The University

uses substantially the same quality assurance procedures as other aspects of its provision but with additional requirements where it is thought that further safeguards are necessary. Faculties manage approved collaborative academic links through faculty boards, and a faculty link tutor responsible 'for operational links between the University and the academic staff of a particular collaborative programme' must be appointed for each collaboration. The management and operation of UK collaborative programmes is governed by the Operations Manual for Franchised Programmes Based in the UK and the responsibilities of the parties involved in a partnership are set out in an academic agreement. For overseas collaboration, there are individual operations manuals tailored to the particular relationship. The audit team heard that the Academic Registry provides dedicated, effective and well regarded support for collaborative provision.

33 All faculties are involved in collaborative partnerships, however, most focus on FE partners within the Local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC) (Birmingham and Solihull) area. BIAD has collaborative links with a wider range of FE partners. According to the SED, although these used to be offered as indirectly funded franchised programmes, from 2005-06, art and design collaborative provision located outside the LLSC area will be defined as validated provision and will be required to be directly funded. BIAD has a designated member of staff to coordinate its UK activity and has also established a collaborative partnerships forum, reflecting the faculty's extensive engagement with collaborative activity.

34 Whilst arrangements for overseas collaborations are broadly similar to those within the UK, the University has additional requirements in acknowledgement of the greater challenges in the successful management of overseas partnerships. Thus, there are requirements to have a 'designated manager' responsible for coordination to make 'frequent and regular' visits to the partner institution and to draw up 'an annual schedule of visits'. The University draws a distinction

between teaching visits and those to review and oversee the operation of the programme.

35 In reviewing the University's approach to managing quality and standards, the audit team noted that the University, where appropriate, uses identical systems for both institutional and collaborative provision but where it was thought apposite to strengthen the procedures for partnerships, this had been done. The team came to the view that the University's processes and procedures were thorough but potentially onerous. Consequently, it considered that it would be desirable for the University to consider whether these might be streamlined, without loss of rigour or value to the institution, to enable it to make optimum use of the institution's resources.

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

36 The University's stated intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards centre on improving the student experience and are identified as support for widening participation; improving the learning environment; and monitoring and information. It plans to continue to invest in student support with the aim of providing a more uniform and timely service across all campuses with specific plans to establish faculty-based 'one stop shops' during 2005-06. These will be staffed by faculty administrative staff and will act as referral points for students. The SED referred to the continuing development of the University's estate and to the ongoing roll-out of its managed learning environment/virtual learning environment (Moodle) as part of the University's plans to enhance learning support. The SED indicated that basic tools for personal development planning (PDP) were to be available in the 2005-06 academic session but the University's intentions beyond this were not indicated.

37 While the University hopes that the roll-out of increased functionality of its student records system will assist in the efficient and effective monitoring of programmes, no details were given in the SED. The audit team noted

that the University intends to continue to evaluate new and revised procedures, such as those for annual monitoring, and to introduce reviews of service departments from 2005-06.

38 The audit team considered that, whilst the University sought to improve the quality of the student learning experience and placed particular emphasis on that experience, it had yet to engage with the development of approaches to enhancement seen in the wider sector which were placing increasing emphasis on enhancement alongside assurance, and on more future focused and enhancement-led approaches. In the light of its findings, the team concluded that it would be desirable for the University to consider the development of an enhancement-led approach to quality management.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Programme approval

39 UCE has almost identical documented procedures for the initial approval, review and re-approval of programmes. Review and re-approval takes place on a six-year cycle. Collaborative programmes are subject to the same requirements, except where specified within the University's Operations Manual for Collaborative Partnerships within the UK or the specific operations manuals for each overseas partnership, in order to ensure that University oversight is maintained. As indicated (see paragraph 32 above), collaborative programme approval, review and re-approval processes are managed centrally by the Academic Registry.

40 The approval and review processes involve three stages, notably: initial planning; consideration by a panel; and Senate approval. At the planning stage, the University seeks assurance that faculty proposals are supported by market research and are in line with the corporate mission. Documentation, including the programme specification, is introduced and resource requirements are also checked at this stage and discussed with the relevant event panel Chair. Discussions with employers or PSRBs to ensure the relevance of the curriculum

to vocational programmes are also expected to take place at the planning stage.

41 Panels are chaired by senior members of staff external to the faculty who must have collaborative experience if a panel is approving or reviewing a collaborative programme. Panels must also include internal and external subject specialists and, if possible, employers or other practitioners. For review meetings, a graduate of the programme is asked to be part of the panel and the Chair of the panel meets a group of current students to ascertain students' views on a programme. Panels are provided with award descriptors based upon the FHEQ and relevant subject benchmark statements.

42 Panel meeting outcomes are presented as a report agreed by all parties. Recommendations are considered by the relevant faculty board and are then submitted to Senate. The audit team noted that the presentation of panel reports to faculty boards provides an opportunity for faculty annual monitoring to identify, comment on and address any themes emerging from panel events. Essential action points relating to issues which must normally be addressed before enrolling students for the first time have to be submitted to Senate, and the team noted that body's close monitoring of the action points. Faculty boards monitor responses to other recommendations made by panels as part of the annual monitoring processes. Faculties are required to confirm that recommendations have been addressed, or if not, to explain why not in faculty overview reports.

43 The SED described the procedures as 'well-established, effective and clearly documented' and referred to the computing developmental engagement report, which commended the rigour and thoroughness of approval, review and re-approval of programmes. The SED noted that a WGQAP review of the University's processes had recognised the importance of the student handbook in improving the focus of panels on the student experience whilst, at the same time, reducing the burden on programme teams and promoting the programme specification as the official programme

descriptor. Consequently, a definitive programme document is no longer required.

44 In addition, extensive critical appraisal has been replaced by a short evaluative rationale on programme development and a template has been designed for the student handbook. Prior to the preparation of the SED only a small number of panels had completed their work using revised arrangements. The outcomes of feedback from those panels which have met to date have resulted in changes to enhance the process, notably the addition of a programme structure diagram to the student handbook, and a distinction being made in the content for different groups of students (for example, undergraduate, postgraduate, distance learning). These changes were passed to a Student Handbook Working Group for consideration. The University considered that its programme approval processes were secure and took account of the appropriate precepts in the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, and the audit team agreed with this view.

Annual Monitoring

45 The SED stated that 2004-05 was a transitional year for annual monitoring as the new processes were being introduced at that time. The processes sought to enhance critical analysis and evaluation by requiring programme teams to concentrate on three key indicators, namely external examiners' reports; student feedback; and student progression and achievement statistics. Each programme team is required to produce an annual report to be endorsed by the programme board of studies, which includes student representatives. Additionally, programme teams are expected to take account of staff feedback and the effectiveness of any minor modifications made.

46 Faculties are responsible for the peer review of the outcomes of annual monitoring whilst, at the same time, monitoring equal opportunities, student support and recruitment. Faculty boards have the right to design their own processes but CARP must approve the arrangements proposed. The template and associated guidelines for faculty overview reports have been reviewed to ensure that they

articulate with the new programme annual monitoring mechanism and were used for the first time in 2004-05. The SED indicated that the revised processes and procedures built on the strengths of the previous arrangements, for example, reflective programme teams identifying and addressing issues. External review reports have confirmed the efficacy of the faculty peer review and associated action planning processes.

47 From its discussions with staff and students, and consideration of a range of material at faculty and institutional level, the audit team was able to confirm that the SED accurately reflected practice within UCE and that the University's internal approval, monitoring and review processes were working well.

External participation in internal review processes

48 The SED emphasised the importance the University places on external participation, involving previous graduates, employers, academics, practising professionals and PSRBs at all stages of internal approval and review processes. In particular, the ARP require all approval panels to have at least one professional practitioner, one but normally two experienced academics and, where appropriate, a PSRB representative present. For review panels, there is the added requirement of up to two former students of the programme. The audit team noted that the minutes of the panel meetings confirmed that the panels were appropriately constituted and that, for review and re-approval, at least one former student was always present.

49 The audit team considered that the inclusion of former students in review and re-approval processes reflects the values embodied in the University's Educational Character and Mission Statement. On the basis of its consideration of the available documentation, including approval and review reports, the team was able to confirm that the SED provided an accurate representation of external participation in internal review processes.

External examiners and their reports

50 The ARP codify the University's requirements relating to external examiners. Faculty boards have delegated authority from Senate to consider and approve nominations from programme teams. Appointments are confirmed by the PVC responsible for academic matters. The assurance of standards has recently been strengthened with the introduction of an institutional Handbook for External Examiners, first used for examinations in 2004-05. The audit team found the Handbook to be comprehensive and informative, providing useful guidance on all aspects of the examining process, including institutional assessment policies.

51 The ARP permit two types of examination board structure, devolving responsibility for this choice to faculties. Where modules are shared across a number of programmes a staged examination board can be used. This arrangement ensures that cognate groups of modules can be assessed by module examination boards with specialist external examiners, marks and comments on the examination process then passing to the relevant final examination board, which considers student progression and the conferment of awards. The alternative structure, appropriate in the case of programmes that do not share modules with other programmes, consists of a freestanding examination board which combines both stages of the examination process.

52 External examiners review and comment upon samples of assessed work. Their scope to act as moderators, however, is closely regulated, the view being taken that the primary role of external examiners is to assure the processes of internal moderation. The permissible circumstances for altering individual marks are codified in the Handbook, the procedures being designed to ensure equitable treatment of all students taking the assessment. External examiner reports form a major component of the annual monitoring process, and are identified as one of three key indicators of quality and standards, along with student feedback and statistics about student

progression and achievement at programme and module level. Faculty responsibilities extend to the induction of examiners. In some cases a general briefing session for all of a faculty's external examiners may be arranged, to include induction for new external examiners. Alternatively, examiners may be individually invited for a discussion with a senior faculty member. The Handbook sets out the requirements of the induction process and these are clearly intended to secure consistency of application across the faculties.

53 The DATs facilitated a close study of the external examiner process at programme level and CARP records allowed the audit team to examine the monitoring processes that are subsequently carried out at an institutional level. On the basis of the written evidence provided and discussions held with senior staff, the team was able to confirm that the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining* is being observed. Following a recent review of procedures in the light of difficulties encountered with the BA (Hons) Architecture programme in 2004, the University is confident that appropriate mechanisms are now in place to ensure that issues of concern raised by external examiners will be addressed by individual faculties in a suitably consistent, effective and timely manner.

54 Although the quality and degree of information provided by external examiners was generally of a high standard, examples of more limited feedback were identified in one of the DATs (see paragraph 126 below). The introduction of a 'tick box' requirement for each question on the report form has ensured that all external examiners have to provide an explicit response to each question, but the absence of any specific requirement to substantiate these judgements, either on an individual basis or as part of a more general overview, limits the opportunity to engage in qualitative monitoring of this key indicator of standards in a suitably consistent manner, both at a faculty and institutional level.

55 Although the audit team found that the overall arrangements for appointing and supporting external examiners were secure and effective and appropriate use is made of the feedback thus provided, the team considered that there is scope to revisit the ways in which information is obtained and analysed in this context in order to facilitate more effective quality enhancement.

External reference points

56 The development of the University's academic framework has been shaped by the *Code of practice*, the FHEQ, and the subject benchmark statements, published by QAA. The 2002 report noted that 'the University is alert to external developments', paying careful attention to external reference points, and it was clear to the audit team that further steps had been taken to enhance the assurance of standards in this context over the intervening period. A more recent developmental engagement report, for example, identified key strengths directly allied to the *Code of practice Section 4: Assessment of students*, as well as the FHEQ. The working group originally established to review the University's quality assurance processes (WGQAP) was re-convened in June 2002 to ensure that any further recommendations made were harmonised with QAA's new methodology and responded to the recommendations made in the 2002 report.

57 The WGQAP continued its practice of making interim recommendations and suggesting that detailed aspects of its work should be delegated to other subgroups. So, for example, it recommended the establishment of a separate working group to propose detailed revisions to the University's award definitions in the light of the FHEQ and to respond to a recommendation in the 2002 report regarding the need for more guidance about learning outcomes. WGQAP also made recommendations about the University's approach to the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) initiative as it developed.

58 The final set of recommendations produced by the WGQAP, and endorsed by Senate in February 2004, included the introduction of revised award descriptors following the publication of the FHEQ; the introduction of a process at institutional level for the scrutiny of statistics about the retention, progression and achievement of students; streamlining of the processes for annual monitoring at programme level to concentrate on the key indicators of quality and standards; and enhancements to the processes for programme approval and review, notably a greater focus on the student experience and the development of programmes in the light of external reference points.

59 During the course of the visit the audit team was able to consider the use made internally of the *Code of practice* and FHEQ in a number of contexts, from the DATs to the institutional procedures and practices implemented by Senate and its subcommittees, notably the CARP and the CPC. In terms of more recent developments, the team noted that consideration of external reference points pertaining to postgraduate degrees, including the more recent, *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, have been devolved to the URDC. UCE intends to produce an institutional code of practice for research degrees, but this task has yet to be completed. In the meantime, faculties have been asked to review their own policy documents to ensure that they reflect the precepts in the amended *Code* and, if necessary, further changes will be made to the University's Handbook for Research Degree Students. The University is currently reviewing the content of its training programme for research supervisors to ensure that it takes full account of the requirements of the new section of the *Code*.

60 The audit team concluded that the University's engagement with external reference points was timely and appropriate in the context of quality assurance. It noted, however, that the approach taken was generally limited to that of compliance, thus missing opportunities to engage more proactively with these

important reference points for the purposes of quality enhancement. An exception to this is Module Designer (see paragraph 86 below) which was demonstrated to the team and is used within UCE to enhance programme and module design. Significantly, Module Designer is also being considered for introduction by a number of other higher education institutions. Nevertheless, the University may wish to consider reviewing its approach to these important indicators in order to derive the maximum advantage for the quality and standards of the programmes offered.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

61 PSRB and Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) requirements impose additional requirements which are monitored by CARP alongside those of QAA. Over 30 professional bodies are involved with programmes at the University. All reports arising from PSRB visits and other external agencies such as Ofsted are submitted to Senate, together with the resulting action plans drawn up by the relevant faculty. Visits by external agencies are subject to a strict protocol, approved by Senate in 2002, which is articulated in the ARP. Whilst it is recognised that relationships with PSRBs are often forged at subject level, the protocol is designed to ensure that the formal relationship is established and ultimately assured at University level.

62 Where an external body insists on a separate approval or review meeting from those of the University, faculty deans must inform the PVC. In general, though, the internal processes for approval, re-approval, monitoring and review of programmes are designed to respond to the varying demands of external agencies.

63 Draft reports are submitted to the PVC (Academic) or Academic Registrar and then to the appropriate faculty. Following any comments by subject staff, faculty deans approve the responses on behalf of their faculty and forward these to the PVC for approval. At this point, if appropriate, a University perspective is added and either the Academic

Registrar or the relevant faculty dean, depending on the protocol, will submit the response to the PSRB. The final report must be circulated to the PVC, Academic Registrar and relevant faculty dean. Deans are responsible for ensuring that subject staff receive a copy of the report and that their action plan is attached to the report for submission to faculty boards and Senate. Faculties are responsible for monitoring their plans through the annual monitoring process. If appropriate, action plans must be forwarded to the Academic Registrar for submission to the PVC for approval before submission to external bodies.

64 On the basis of its review of documentation, the audit team was able to confirm that the University responds appropriately and in a timely manner to reports by external agencies.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

65 The aims of the framework for quality and academic standards are partly achieved through quality processes which are designed to facilitate the participation of staff and students. Elected SU sabbatical officers are full members on the Board of Governors, Trustee Committee, Senate (four representatives), CARP (two representatives), International Students Committee and the Standard University Assessment Regulations Group (see also paragraph 28 above).

66 Following a re-organisation of the duties of members of the Directorate, a new PVC now has management responsibility for student matters, with a brief which includes activities related to widening participation, student rights and responsibilities, student complaints and appeals, and oversight of the commissioning of the Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS) and its associated management response cycle. SU officers welcomed this appointment and the regular opportunities for consultation with the PVC. The Academic Registrar holds regular informal meetings with permanent and sabbatical officers of the SU and issues raised with the Academic Registrar are often brought

to CARP and/or discussed with the relevant PVC. There is no student services committee and the audit team was told that it was not always clear to students what action had been taken on issues raised at institutional level as they are not always provided with feedback on action taken.

67 Students are represented on taught programme boards of studies, on faculty boards, and some faculties also have staff/student forums. The SU and CARP have agreed a number of measures aimed at improving student participation in faculty committees, and part-time student representation in particular, without significant success to date. Students who met the audit team indicated that there was effective communication and involvement in the academic committee structure where issues are followed through. The audit team met research students who indicated that there were two-way informal feedback mechanisms, questionnaires and all receive a copy of the annual report on the experience of postgraduate research students. Research students are represented on faculty committees and faculty forums and representatives who met the team confirmed that comments did lead to actions. The team heard that UCE is trying to increase the number of students willing to serve as representatives, particularly part-time students.

68 The 2002 report expressed the desirability of making training available for student representatives or supporting the SU in providing such training. Although the SU took on responsibility for this with University support, it is acknowledged that there is scope for further improvement in this area and the SU Executive has set this as a priority for 2005-06. A variety of approaches has been tried in relation to the training of student representatives, and the SU has completely redesigned the programme during the last two years to improve the support provided for student representatives and to encourage more students to serve in this capacity. This training is supplemented by regular contact with

sabbatical officers, electronic discussion and peer support.

69 The annual monitoring process for the last two years has highlighted concerns about the inconsistency of student representation, difficulties in attending board of studies meetings for representatives and those representatives being unsure of their role. The Academic Registry is working with the SU to improve this. All faculties reported difficulties in engaging postgraduate research degree students in faculty committees or faculty forums. These students are mainly part-time, mature and/or distance learners, combining work with study. Faculties are reviewing their approach in the light of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes* and the audit team learnt that some may introduce a board of studies for research degree students as a more effective way of obtaining involvement and feedback.

70 The audit team noted that the SWS indicated that representation was the area of lowest student satisfaction with students, suggesting that the effectiveness of the system could be improved, as could the impact of student feedback on changes and improvements. The team considered that it would be desirable for the University to improve participation in, and to monitor the effectiveness of, the training provided for student representatives. In addition, it came to the view that it would be desirable for the University to consider the means by which part-time and distance-learning students can more effectively contribute to student representation processes.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

71 The University Educational Character and Mission Statement places emphasis on monitoring and responding to student feedback. In 2004-05, WGQAP recommended that programme teams should concentrate on evaluating key indicators of quality, including student feedback. The SED stated that there are comprehensive and well-established processes for gathering student feedback with evidence

that this feedback is used to shape policy. The University annual SSS has evolved over a period of 17 years and samples 50 per cent of the student population. The annual report produced includes many trend charts and enables analysis of changes in student perception over time. The results enable faculties and central services to identify actions based upon student views. The action plans are submitted to Senate and the Board of Governors.

72 According to the SWS, the SSS and the annual action plans are valuable tools for gauging student opinion. They also inform the feedback report which is sent to all students participating and are made available via libraries, resources centres and the University's Centre for Research into Quality website. The audit team was told that a feedback 'flier' covers the main issues raised in the SSS. This flier, which is sent to all students, is attached to the questionnaire for the following year and is also placed on the website. The detailed results of the SSS for the last five years, including 2004-05, are available for all to view on the University's website. The University's internal SSS is being reviewed in the light of the National Student Survey (NSS) and low numbers of electronic returns received. The team noted evidence of feedback fatigue given that students are involved in NSS, SSS, SU, programme and module surveys. Despite the many methods of dissemination of the SSS to students, students who met the team indicated that they did not find the communication of the results and actions to students at institutional level to be effective.

73 Faculties relate feedback from the SSS to feedback obtained at programme and module level. The principles governing the evaluation of student feedback are set out within the ARP and require, for example, faculties to survey student opinion at module level annually, each module being considered every two years. Each central service is included in the UCE survey every two years. Central services augment this with a variety of other feedback mechanisms, including focus groups and evaluation forms. Collaborative provision feedback is carried out

using the same module evaluation feedback form as that used for internal feedback.

74 The University is focused on providing education geared to the professions. Staff work closely with employers from the public, private and voluntary sectors, with PSRBs and with Advantage West Midlands (the regional development agency). Most programmes have a vocational emphasis with graduates working in a variety of professions and links have been established with a wide range of employer organisations. The audit team found evidence of strong employer involvement in a range of programmes. Many students take placement opportunities, which provide useful feedback concerning employer expectations, and the extent to which students and graduates from UCE are meeting those expectations. Faculties involved in health or teacher-training programmes engage employers actively, particularly in the design of the curriculum, other faculties find this more challenging. Working closely with PSRBs helps overcome some of these difficulties but faculties are keenly aware of the need to refresh their mechanisms for engaging with employers.

75 The SED indicated that links with business and the community are underpinned by research, which provides professional and industry esteem and helps to sustain networks that seek to achieve common goals. Applied research sustains the University's relationships with business and the communities. The SED stated that initial planning for a new programme includes thorough market research by faculties with includes the involvement of employers and PSRB representatives at an early stage in the planning process to ensure the relevance of the curriculum. The formal panel review process reflects the University commitment to peer review, through the inclusion of external peers. Panels include employers, practitioners and former students, as appropriate. UCE has recently established an alumni society which may enhance the feedback received from graduates of the University. The audit team found that while the University places considerable value on the

views of students, and puts a great deal of resource into gathering them, it is not similarly systematic in seeking the views of graduates and employers. The team considered that the clear link between student feedback and action at all levels within the institution constituted a feature of good practice.

Progression and completion statistics

76 The 2002 report noted that the University considers its track record on widening participation as one of its most distinctive features and that this commitment underpins much of its policy development and strategic planning, helping to define the character of the University. Standard undergraduate assessment regulations (SUAR) have been designed to recognise and facilitate students in this position, and significant reliance is placed upon progression and retention statistics to monitor and review progress. All data are generated from a single student record system, but responsibility for generating statistics varies according to the context. Admissions statistics are generated by the Academic Registry, whereas faculties generate progression and retention statistics.

77 In 2001 the University introduced a standard methodology and template for the calculation and presentation of programme and module statistics with a view to ensuring a greater degree of consistency. Faculties, however, could still generate these statistics either from central student data records or local records, the results being subject to checking by the former Planning and Systems Development Department. These arrangements led to delays in the production of institutional analyses and, in February 2005, a management information systems (MIS) officer was appointed to the Academic Registry to take responsibility for the preparation and checking of statistics. The post became vacant during the summer, however, and at the time of the audit visit arrangements had yet to be made to appoint a successor. Key issues such as the future role of faculty MIS officers and the management of the roll-out of the new methodology for extracting

and manipulating data from the new student record system piloted in 2005 for the Business School and the Department of Computing thus remain to be resolved.

78 Notwithstanding the delays that have occurred in the generation of institutional progression statistics hitherto, the audit team found a high level of engagement with the data by CARP, prior to Senate consideration, taking full account of progression at programme level both with and without the various resit conditions allowed by SUAR, benchmarked against the performance indicators generated in the previous year. One outcome of this process was the decision to limit to three the number of times modules, or a failed element of assessment within a module, can be retaken for all students enrolled for the first time from 1 September 2005 onwards.

79 Aside from progression statistics the University makes very limited use of other internally-generated data, relying instead on the HEFCE benchmark statistics as a primary reference point for measuring success. The latter statistics, however, do not give a sufficiently up-to-date picture for the University to monitor recent trends and, where appropriate, take timely action. Admissions statistics, for example, are not subject to analysis in terms of key features such as the variations and trends in entrance qualifications and differing socio-economic backgrounds at programme level, and the possible impact of this diversity on progression. Similarly, there appears to be very little engagement with student destination data that would normally be directly acquired by university careers services. The introduction of TQI also creates an opportunity for a greater level of engagement with student achievement and the qualitative and quantitative data which underpin this key indicator. Based on its findings, the audit team considered that it would be advisable for the University to make use of internal data relating to entry qualifications and final achievement at institutional level to monitor academic standards more effectively.

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

80 The Human Resources (HR) strategy, reflecting the principles of the 2001 to 2004 policy, was under revision at the time of the audit, however, a draft of the proposed strategy for 2005 to 2009 was made available to the audit team. One of the most significant developments in staffing matters since the last audit has been the development and implementation of a job evaluation for all UCE staff, resulting in additional payments to a number of staff. The TIC conducts its own personnel policies.

81 The HR Department provides support in the form of a recruitment service for the appointment of all staff. The SED claimed that special effort has been made to improve access to the recruitment process to members of ethnic minorities and people with disabilities which can now be monitored more effectively by the enhanced functionality of the electronic personnel system. Staff participate in an annual individual performance review (IPR) through 'which managers interview staff and review the previous year's agreement and set new targets and developmental objectives'. All academic staff participate in peer observation of teaching including those on fractional contracts, reflecting developments since the last audit.

82 New, inexperienced full-time academic staff are required to complete study of the Postgraduate Certificate (Education) programme within their first two years of employment. Accredited by both the Higher Education Academy and the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA), the programme includes a compulsory peer review of teaching and is also available to, and is undertaken by, staff on fractional contracts and visiting lecturers.

83 The introduction of teaching fellows in 1999 is an important component of the University's learning and teaching strategy in recognition of good teaching. The significant growth of teaching fellows since the last audit

(from 19 in 2002 to 41 in 2005) would appear to confirm this. To recognise further the contribution of excellence in learning and teaching, the University has appointed an additional 10 professorships on this basis out of a total of 26 appointed since the last audit; of the total new professors 11 are female and three are from black and minority ethnic groups. In addition, three types of enterprise fellowships have been introduced to reward innovation and knowledge transfer - KT Fellowship, Midlands Medici Fellowship scheme (with other universities) and the Enterprise Fellowship.

84 The audit team found that the processes in place for the appointment, appraisal and reward of staff in support of teaching were appropriate and reflected the HR strategic principles adopted by the University.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

85 In addition to the centrally supported provision of staff development by the Staff and Student Development Department (SSDD) and Academic Registry, faculties and central departments determine staff development budgets 'typically to support staff taking long award-bearing programmes, professional updating and attending conferences'. The IPR, peer observation and annual monitoring processes enable UCE to identify and prioritise staff development. Staff who met the audit team in the course of the DATs confirmed the availability of support for staff, including those on fractional or visiting lecturer contracts, and provided examples of support for a visiting lecturer in submitting a bid to the Arts and Humanities Research Council, for undertaking the Postgraduate Certificate (Education), and for foreign language study to further support students.

86 The University also offers the opportunity for staff to undertake study of the Postgraduate Certificate (Education), Postgraduate Diploma (Education) or subsequent master's programme as part of their staff development. The programme includes the opportunity for study

in one of three specialist areas, namely innovation; academic programme design using Module Designer, an electronic tool 'to help academic staff design modules which align the curriculum in accordance with best practice and with guidance given in the QAA academic infrastructure'; or quality enhancement. The Postgraduate Certificate (Education) is also available, without charge, to colleagues in partner institutions teaching on collaborative programmes, colleagues from a local teaching training institution and to NHS staff employed as nurse tutors/lecturers.

87 The University has developed four non-award bearing programmes to acknowledge the personal and staff development work undertaken by staff other than teaching staff. All four programmes have been accredited by SEDA. One programme, specifically designed for support staff, commenced in 2004-05 'Designing and Implementing Student Support'.

88 The SED claimed considerable investment in staff development since 2001 through the implementation of the Rewarding and Developing Staff Strategy 2001-04 with priorities agreed by the Board of Governors. The programmes provided by the SSDD cover a range of areas under the following headings: management development; business development and project management; equal opportunities; recruitment and selection; course directors' programme; health and safety; performance management; and student disciplinary hearings. The audit team was given information relating to staff participation in these programmes and it noted a high level of participation from some faculties, particularly for those aspects which underpin health and safety requirements. The delivery of programmes offered by the SSDD has been redeveloped to be delivered by in-house staff and offered on a day or half-day basis in response to feedback from staff and managers.

89 The SSDD also provides personal development workshops and one-to-one consultancies for faculties, including staff from partner colleges. Examples arising from annual monitoring resulted in support for the Faculty

of Law, Humanities, Development and Society relating to assessment and plagiarism and, for the TIC, further staff development was provided to support its change to terms from semesters. The SSDD does not keep formal attendance records so it is not possible to identify how many staff in total have participated; it may be useful for the SSDD to consider keeping such records to inform faculty and institutional developments as well as providing evidence of staff engagement.

90 Academic Registry staff provide a number of staff development support activities for partner colleges. These include annual briefing sessions for college administrative staff on enrolment and student administration processes; review and re-approval processes; the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements and programme specifications; in addition to changes to the standard assessment regulations.

91 The audit team came to the view that the participation of a wide range of staff, including staff on fractional contracts and staff from collaborative partners, in staff development activities constituted a feature of good practice.

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

92 The SED referred to the University's very limited range of distributed and distance-learning programmes. There are two such programmes and these are approved, reviewed and monitored using standard University procedures. Responsibility for the regulatory policies for this area resides with CARP. Following the mapping of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, UCE defined four criteria for assessing whether a programme fell within the scope of flexible and distributed learning. Such provision is described as 'off-campus' and requires approval by Senate before being offered.

93 A number of implications for the ARP and student handbook template have been identified, in particular, programme teams must

demonstrate that they have carried out a risk assessment on the security and reliability of the proposed delivery methods; have contingency plans in place in the event of failure of the designed mode of delivery; and can demonstrate that the proposed delivery method(s) are appropriate. Additionally, they must also provide panels with samples of learning support materials and explain how inter-learner discussions will be facilitated and managed. Other issues included the need to amend the procedures for the electronic submission of assessments which should be reviewed to incorporate the submission of assignments through Moodle; and the need for faculties to produce regulations and guidance notes for the use of Moodle. The Birmingham Conservatoire has its own Code of Practice, which Senate considered to be an example of good practice, and this Code has been distributed to members of CARP for dissemination.

94 Student feedback in one of the DATs suggested that distance-learning students did not always receive the same level of assessment feedback as other students or did not always have the same opportunities to give feedback to the institution. However, the introduction of Moodle was seen as a positive improvement in two way communication. The mapping of the Code of Practice and the resulting changes to regulations and procedures should ensure that all students receive the same experience. The audit team welcomed the work undertaken to ensure that the University is prepared for developments in distance and flexible learning. It took particular note of the sharing of good practice through CARP's decision to disseminate the guidance provided by the Conservatoire and would strongly encourage the further sharing of good practice in this area as expertise is developed across the University's provision.

Learning support resources

95 The audit team met students who were generally positive about the provision of learning support resources, particularly those located in the faculty learning resource centres which contextualise the more generic support materials

available in the library services. Faculty librarians provide the linkage between central and faculty provision, for example, in the Business School, the faculty librarian is based in the faculty learning centre to support students for specified hours each week. The library provision operates remote and on-site access from eight libraries across seven sites reflecting the diversity of the University campuses. Developments since the last audit include the improved quality of paper-based and electronic collections, alongside 'the ongoing development of the Digital library', the University of Central England Electronic Library (UCEEL) which 'will be the main repository for Moodle resources'. Students on collaborative programmes are able to use library facilities and to access the University's electronic library resources. Regular newsletters and faculty librarians ensure that staff are informed of developments within the library service.

96 Student evaluations of the learning support resources provision, particularly those drawn from the University SSS, have clearly informed the development of these resources in relation to access, opening hours and computer facilities, for example. However, the audit team found that the variability of some of these learning resources across the University sites remains of concern to students. This was particularly so in the context of general computing facilities where those supported by local servers were, in some cases, seen to be less reliable than those provided within the libraries. Following discussions with staff it was not clear to the audit team how the University plans for the future development of network support to improve the consistency and reliability of general information technology (IT) support. The team considered that the provision of specialist IT facilities was generally appropriate but the University may wish to consider the possibility of all general IT support provision and network support being provided by a central unit.

97 Students who met the audit team confirmed that the teaching accommodation, which includes specialist facilities, was generally adequate. There has been considerable

development of the University's estate since the last QAA audit with the relocation of the TIC to purpose-built accommodation at Millennium Point; the Faculty of Education moving to refurbished accommodation at the Perry Barr Campus and the extension and reconfiguration of facilities here to facilitate the integration of the Postgraduate certificate in Art and Design; extensive extension and refurbishment of the Westbourne Campus to enable the delivery of Nursing, Midwifery and Women's Health Studies provision on one site; and the complete upgrade of the Bournville Campus in 2002. The introduction of a University-wide set of standards for the teaching and learning estate to ensure that all accommodation is fit for purpose is being rolled out with new developments and major refurbishments. HEFCE funding for a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) will assist in achieving these standards as well as supporting the further development of more student-centred learning.

98 A phased implementation process of the new student record system (called QLS) has taken place over the period 2003 to 2005. Whilst acknowledging some teething problems with its implementation, the SED claimed that the University has seen benefits in terms of more extensive and accurate data about admissions for faculties and senior management, and that plans to transfer assessment, conferment and placement modules are being implemented gradually. There were problems with the production of statistics for the Business School postgraduate programmes during 2004 (see paragraph 124 below); however, the University is aware of the issues and is awaiting staff appointments to further address the information needs of this provision from the Academic Registry.

99 The University development of a virtual learning environment (VLE) is based on the 'development of the open-source Moodle as a bottom-up process through encouraging pilots and partial secondments and the employment of students'. The audit team found that students were increasing their use of Moodle,

particularly those in the early stages of their study programmes, where it is a welcome development; the staff use of the VLE is growing with an estimated 48 per cent of staff engaged in some way at the time of the audit. Whilst not directly linked to the student record system, the password access to Moodle is verified through the student record. The team was informed that the development of staff and student portals is at a very early stage and it considered that, as the planned development of Moodle progresses, the University may wish to consider further how it can assist staff in the setting of protocols and minimum standards for the learning support materials available through the VLE.

100 The audit team found that the University learning resource development plans were generally well judged, appropriate and reflected student evaluations.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

101 Following the previous QAA audit, the University undertook a pilot thematic audit of the arrangements for student support in the School of Computing and Information, and in the Faculty of Health and Community Care during 2004-05. The thematic audit confirmed the view expressed in the SED that 'because of the diversity of our provision, we believe that a 'one-size fits all' approach to the academic and personal support of students is not appropriate' and that the approach adopted 'is matched to and commensurate with the needs of the particular student group and type of programme'. The thematic audit recommended the establishment of a statement of the minimum entitlement to support and reinforced the requirement for each faculty to report to Senate. The audit team found evidence of the development of these minimum statements and noted that students, including those undertaking postgraduate research programmes, spoke positively of the effectiveness of their academic support arrangements.

102 Programme directors and year or stage tutors provide general academic guidance to

students on induction, assessment, option choices and progression. As module tutors and supervisors, they also provide module-specific advice, including feedback on assessment. Feedback to students on assessed work viewed by the audit team was generally found to be appropriate, providing some examples of very constructive, helpful comments across the range of marks. Whilst students who met the audit team confirmed that assessment feedback was acceptable, they agreed with the SWS that there was scope for greater consistency of practice across the University in relation to assessment feedback.

103 Academic staff are available at scheduled teaching times and other times, either pre-arranged or through scheduled drop-in sessions, or via email. Faculties also provide more specialist forms of academic support in the shape of, for example, learner support facilities, placement support units, academic skills and language development in conjunction with central support services. The audit team found examples of high quality support for placements and work-based learning in some areas but considered that there was scope for further consideration by the University of the means by which good practice in one area might be further disseminated and embedded across the programmes.

104 Centrally, the Learner Development Unit (LDU) which is part of the SSDD, provides additional academic support for students; for home students it provides study skills and communications workshops; for international students it provides support to enable such students to improve their English language and study skills. This provision includes a Foundation Certificate in English for Academic Purposes which allows students to undertake preparatory study in their chosen study area, while studying to reach the requisite English language standard. Pre-sessional programmes are provided for those international students who have not yet met the University's English language requirements. The Times Higher Education Supplement awards for 2005 recognised the contribution to widening

participation of the 'Breakthrough to Learning' programme which is aimed at helping applicants and students to develop their understanding of academic English.

105 Students also told the audit team of the value of mentoring and minority ethnic placement schemes aimed at enabling greater employment of graduates from these backgrounds. The students who met the audit team valued highly the range, access, availability and support provided by these various academic support arrangements and the team concluded that the support arrangements in place for students constituted a feature of good practice (see also paragraph 110 below).

Personal support and guidance

106 The arrangements for personal support and guidance are based on the central role of academic staff where the personal tutor has established a relationship with the tutee via such activities as induction, placement or practice support, project or dissertation supervision. For most students on part-time programmes, personal tutor support is provided by the programme director or year/stage tutor. However, with the development of alternative modes of delivery, such as distance learning, the programme administrator is often the first point of contact for students. Postgraduate research students who met the audit team confirmed that they were satisfied with their personal support arrangements but indicated that they would welcome consideration of an arrangement whereby they can meet as a community outside faculty structures.

107 Acknowledging the challenge in ensuring that its support arrangements work consistently and effectively, the SED indicated that 'faculties have been encouraged to experiment, with a view to enhancing effectiveness and ensuring greater consistency'. The University uses student feedback and the annual monitoring process to continually evaluate the effectiveness of these arrangements. Commenting on the importance of peer support, the SED referred to examples of such activity, citing examples of

the development of the Peer Assisted Student Support Scheme (PASS) in the Faculty of Health and Community Care, and T-groups, in which students on the joint degree undergraduate programme in the Business School are organised into tutorial groups including members from each year of the programme and a T-Group tutor.

108 Faculties with significant numbers of international students have developed supplementary support mechanisms to those available centrally, relating to English language, study skills, personal support and activities to facilitate social integration of such students. The TIC has learning support tutors from the same ethnic groups as international students 'to ensure a culturally empathetic support service and to provide a role model for these students'. The University has also recently established the International Office as part of a process of ensuring a more consistent and equitable support service for international students at the recruitment stage. This office has introduced a programme of seminars for applicants in their home countries and a team of current students is being assembled to act as 'friendly contacts' for overseas applicants. Discussions with staff confirmed the transitional nature of this development in that recruitment and admissions activities for international students are incrementally being transferred from faculties to the new central unit.

109 Centrally, Student Services focus on personal support and provide a wide range of services relating to careers advice, disability, counselling, mental health and student finance. Student Services operate a system for its staff to link with a faculty to assist in the interface between centrally provided services and faculties. The thematic audit of student support arrangements undertaken during 2004-05 concluded that there was much evidence of effective working between the centre and faculties but that it was vulnerable to changes of staff. To address this, and the difficulty of providing all services across all campuses, Student Services are developing formal agreements with faculties relating to the nature

of the interaction. The audit team considered that it may be useful for the University to consider whether such agreements may be helpful in avoiding possible duplication in other areas where there appear to be both central and faculty support, for example, such as the learner development units.

110 The thematic audit report of student support arrangements concluded that Student Services and SSDD should be required to report annually on the delivery and effectiveness of their services. It was too early in the implementation of this requirement for the audit team to comment on the added value of such reporting, but the team found that the students valued highly the personal support and guidance arrangements available to them and it formed the view that these arrangements provided accessible and appropriate support to a diverse range of students. The team considered that the personal tutoring arrangements, whilst varied across student cohorts, provided effective support to students and constituted a feature of good practice.

Collaborative provision

111 The University has established three types of partnership: franchised, validated and articulation arrangements which are clearly defined in the ARP. Currently, all collaborative partnerships have to be sponsored by a faculty. The locus of responsibility for collaborative programmes rests with Senate but it has devolved the development, coordination and monitoring of its provision to the CPC which provides an annual overview report on the operation of these programmes and any areas of concern to Senate. Overseas programmes are monitored and coordinated by a CPC overseas working group, chaired by a head of school with experience of collaborative provision but with no overseas provision within his/her faculty. The University deemed that this arrangement would ensure a pragmatic and dispassionate approach to overseas partnerships.

112 The SED highlighted the University's approach to collaborative partnerships which is to limit the scope of its UK partnerships to those which fall within the LLSC (Birmingham

and Solihull) area. The only exceptions are those programmes covered by agreements with BIAD which, because of its status as a major provider of art and design education, may continue the partnerships, albeit as validated rather than franchise provision. At the time of the audit the University had 10 UK partners, five of which offered a total of 30 franchise programmes and six which offered 14 validated programmes. Foundation Degree programmes form a very small part of the University provision and the approval and review processes for such provision are overseen by the CPC, although programmes may be offered by faculties rather than collaborative partners.

113 The University has a comprehensive Operations Manual for Franchised Programmes Based in the UK covering the *Code of practice*; the standard University academic agreement on partnerships; the responsibilities of the University, its staff and those of partners; guidance on quality assurance processes; and associated templates and guidance on managing programmes. Faculties manage the academic links between the University and its partners and faculty deans are required to appoint a faculty link tutor for each collaborative programme. In BIAD, which has the largest number of partnerships, there is a faculty link tutor and a collaborative partnership forum where all link tutors, including those from the partner institutions meet to discuss issues and good practice. A board of studies must be established within faculties for programmes with more than one partner to enable experience and good practice to be shared. The roles and responsibilities of faculty link tutors are set out in the Operations Manual and include oversight of quality assurance; assisting the partner in approval, review and re-approval; advising on the annual monitoring procedures; and ensuring a smooth transfer of students to programmes at UCE, where appropriate.

114 There are additional approval, review and re-approval requirements for collaborative provision including the preparation of a separate resource template requiring the link

faculty to define the minimum resources needed. This information is used by panels to confirm with the partner that they can deliver the necessary resources. For collaborative panels, the chair and/or the University representative have direct experience of collaborative provision within their own faculty. Collaborative panels meet at partner institutions and view the resources to enable them to confirm the liaison arrangements and resources to Senate. Panels also recommend the maximum intake of students. They are specifically required to consider the section of the *Code of practice*, relating to collaborative provision in their discussions with partners and faculty link tutors. Collaborative programme reports are submitted directly to Senate, after publication to sponsoring faculties and partner institutions.

115 Senate does not devolve any responsibility for the quality assurance of collaborative programmes and the Academic Registry manages the approval, review and re-approval processes on its behalf. The Academic Registry also provides support to link tutors and partners in the implementation of the University's policies and procedures, ensuring that partners are kept informed of changes to regulations and documentation. Programme teams at partner institutions continue to use the more extensive annual report as recommended by WGQAP, in order to assure the quality of the provision. Annual reports are discussed through the sponsoring faculties' annual monitoring processes and guidance is given on improvements, as appropriate. The Academic Registry receives copies of all collaborative reports for the CPC. The latter also receives progression and achievement statistics and information on modules where the pass mark has fallen below the University benchmark. The CPC submits overview reports to Senate and these are sent to senior staff in the partner institutions, drawing attention to any issues pertinent to them. The Deputy Director of Academic Registry holds meeting with colleges to discuss these reports.

116 At the time of the audit, the University

was involved with two overseas partner organisations enabling students to study for awards of the University overseas. Whilst one of these links was closing due to falling numbers, the second collaboration, involving BIAD and an institution in Hong Kong, was offering art and design programmes for the first time in 2004. The University also had a well-established articulation relationship with Nanjing University of Science and Technology (NUST) in China, enabling students from that institution to join the second year of an engineering programme offered by the TIC at UCE.

117 In meetings with staff of the University and some of its partners, the audit team heard that the relationships were built on a foundation of mutuality and reciprocity of benefit which ensured that the student experience was valid and appropriate. Staff from partner colleges confirmed that they had very close links with the University at all levels. The team also received very positive feedback on the communication between the University and its partners through formal scheduled meetings and frequent liaison on the day-to-day operation of programmes. The team noted that the arrangements in place to support the articulation relationship with NUST provided a model which had been used for other partnerships. On the basis of its findings, the audit team concluded that the SED provided an accurate account of the University's approach to collaborative provision.

Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline audit trails

Discipline audit trails

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

Business and management

119 The DAT covered a suite of taught postgraduate programmes which fall broadly into three groupings: full-time MBA and MSc Management providing broad-based management education where the majority of students are international and the learning and teaching strategy is more structured, giving attention to the development of intellectual skills and cross-cultural perspectives; a part time Postgraduate Diploma Management (leading to possible further study of MBA or MSc Organisational Development and Management Learning or MSc Leadership and Change Management) which is orientated to management development with an emphasis on action and experiential learning; MA Marketing, MA Human Resource Management and MSc Audit Management and Consultancy which are linked by the common theme of professional development and PSRB recognition and qualifications. In each case the audit team confirmed that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the named awards and their location within the FHEQ.

120 The DSED comprised a short summary document written for the audit which provided a largely descriptive account of the provision, including the aims; learning outcomes; curricula and assessment; teaching and learning; admissions and progression; learning resources and arrangements for managing standards and quality of the provision within the scope of the DAT. The appendices included some useful diagrams on committee and procedural arrangements within the UCE Business School (UCEBS) which has faculty status. The DSED included programme specifications and the annual monitoring overview report for postgraduate programmes for 2003-04. Programme specifications refer to the *Subject benchmark statement* for master's awards in business and management, published by QAA, and learning outcomes have been clearly mapped to those of the benchmark. This mapping process forms an integral part of the review and re-approval process.

121 A considerable proportion of the DAT provision is closely aligned to the appropriate professional body and the DSED indicated that UCEBS is an accredited centre for the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), Institute of Internal Audit and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). In the course of the audit, staff and students provided the audit team with examples of the way in which professional and academic requirements were integrated within the curricula.

Assignments reflected the professional nature of the provision and, for the MA Marketing programme, the practical nature of the assessments was positively regarded by external examiners, CIM and students. For students on the full-time MBA and MSc programmes, the vocational nature of the curriculum is further enhanced by scheduled faculty supported careers development sessions. The audit team formed the view that the practical nature of the assessments reflected the professional orientation of the provision, and the integration of the PSRB requirements into the curricula was effective and well judged.

122 The University revised its statements of expected attainment to reflect the publication of the FHEQ in 2003-04. Staff indicated that, whilst these revisions have informed the work of re-approval panels, they were not seen to present any significant change from the previous statement requirements. The audit team viewed the re-approval report relating to the distance-learning mode of the MSc Audit and Consulting and saw evidence of the University's mapping of its regulations against the precepts of Section 2 of the *Code of practice* informing practice within the Business School.

123 The DSED stated that postgraduate programmes have 'simple structures without a proliferation of options or sharing of modules with other programmes'. Consequently, consideration of progression and achievement 'is straight forward'. The annual monitoring process includes consideration of progression and achievement statistics as well as external examiner comments and feedback from students. The audit team found that the

student achievement data enabled UCEBS to identify both good practice and areas of concern and served to inform developmental plans, as in the case of the development of English language provision for full-time MBA/MSc students, for example. UCEBS's monitoring reports identify work pressures and the flexibility provided by the regulatory framework to defer completion as the major reasons for the tail of weaker performing students on some programmes.

124 The processes reviewed at DAT level indicated the general soundness of internal monitoring and review processes. Annual reports provide clear evidence of consideration of student evaluations; external examiners' reports; previous year's action plans being reviewed; and future action plans reflecting the revisions made during 2004-05 to enhance the monitoring process. Annual monitoring of the master's provision takes place in the spring term, as approved by Senate, reflecting the non-standard academic year for much of the provision. The DSED referred to difficulties in obtaining data from the University's systems to underpin the monitoring process in 2003-04 arising from the departure of the UCEBS management information systems coordinator. UCEBS referred this matter to CARP and the audit team was given to understand that the University is addressing this data problem for non standard calendar postgraduate programmes.

125 Monitoring is conducted through peer review by the UCEBS Academic Planning and Development Committee's scrutiny of reports which informs the Business School Board approval of an annual report of outcomes as required by the University. This overview annual report of the Business School's monitoring process is presented to CARP. Staff who met the audit team considered that the process provided for 'bottom-up' commentaries, scrutiny and sharing of good practice. Programmes are normally reviewed every six years. The DSED indicated that the Business School had been subject to a UCE academic audit of faculty procedures for programme approval, review and

re-approval in 2004-05, which had resulted in a positive outcome, and had demonstrated that the Business School was 'fully compliant with University requirements'. The audit team saw reports which confirmed that the Business School's internal monitoring and review processes reflect the University's requirements.

126 All master's programmes have at least one external examiner and external examiner nominations are considered within the Business School using the University's criteria for the appointment of external examiners. New external examiners are briefed and development days are held for both new and existing examiners. The audit team saw evidence to indicate that external examiners welcomed the development days and the team considered that this constituted good local practice, aiding communication and contributing to the quality process. The Business School's senior management scrutinises external examiners' reports and timely, appropriate responses are prepared by the Chair of the relevant examination board. These reports and responses are an important element in the monitoring and evaluation process and are discussed by UCEBS committees. Generally, external examiners' reports have been positive with all confirming the appropriateness of the standards set by UCEBS and the practical nature of some of the assessments, although the team noted that a number of reports are quite brief in their commentaries.

127 At the time of the audit UCEBS had a draft assessment procedures and policy document which was under consideration. The draft document restates relevant aspects of the University's ARP in addition to providing further guidance for staff on the operational arrangements for the management of assessment. This includes clear statements on the arrangements for setting, conduct, coursework submission, expected return date of feedback to students on coursework assessments and internal moderation. The audit team noted, from assessed work seen, that each coursework assessment used a standard assessment feedback form providing students

with information on how to improve their work. For all assessments it was clear how the marks had been derived from the work submitted and how the outcomes of the assessment process had informed the module report.

128 Each programme has a specific student handbook in accordance with the requirements of a University template, which incorporates statements of expectations and students' responsibilities for their learning as well as procedures for making complaints or representations. In addition, since 2004-05, students receive a copy of the 'Essential' guide to the Business School, supported by an 'Essential' website. The DSED stated that the guide 'complements the induction process, and ...provides guidance on study skills, avoidance of plagiarism and referencing'. At module level students receive module handbooks which provide clear guidance on the expectations of the assessments, the structure and schedule of the teaching support. Students who met the audit team found these information sources very useful, accurate and accessible. They are well complemented by the readily available and accessible support of UCEBS staff. The localised UCEBS material is further supported by information from a number of central support functions such as the library services. Students commented positively on the increasing availability of remote access to these information sources.

129 The DSED stated that programme directors 'play a central role in provision of both academic and pastoral support and guidance' with some 'variation around this role depending on specific circumstances'. From a student perspective, the programme administrator was considered to be a critical link between the student and support mechanisms within the University for students on the distance-learning mode of the MSc Audit and Consultancy Management, mediating access to resources and support as appropriate. Student induction, extending over two weeks for full-time students, and including introductions to all major support functions and to each module of the programme, is provided for each

programme. For part-time students, induction is necessarily of a more condensed nature with a greater focus on UCEBS-based student support.

130 Students who met the audit team had used both UCEBS and central support facilities and particularly welcomed the focused support within the UCEBS learning resource centre (LRC). They explained that this resource, whilst sometimes duplicating those available within the library services, provided specific, contextualized learning resources for their programmes and assessments. During 2004-05 the increasing use of the Moodle to provide support to distance-learning students had enabled more immediate access to learning materials.

131 The audit team came to the view that student support arrangements, and the learning resources underpinning the study opportunities available to students, are appropriate, accessible and useful to students. The team heard that the VLE development would facilitate access to some of the resources currently available in the UCEBS LRC, and it agreed with the Business School's view of the need to review the continuing appropriateness of the current LRC arrangements.

132 Student feedback is sought at module level, programme level (through student representation on boards of studies) and through the UCE Student Satisfaction Survey. Students were very complimentary about the process and the speed with which UCEBS takes action in respect of issues raised. The DSED indicated that student feedback arrangements for the MSc Audit Management and Consultancy had been problematic but the audit team heard that the increasing use of Moodle was being explored as a mechanism to improve the arrangements. The team was informed that steps had been taken to improve the response rate to formal feedback processes by part-time students. Students contribute to programme development; consideration of annual monitoring reports; and minor modifications by virtue of their representation on boards of studies. Programme review and re-approval panels also include a representative

from the alumni.

133 On the basis of the evidence available to it, the audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

Engineering

134 The DAT in engineering (located in the Technology Innovation Centre, a wholly owned subsidiary of UCE) comprised the following award-bearing programmes: BSc (Honours) degree programmes in Media Technology; Sound and Multimedia Technology; Sound Engineering and Production; Music Technology (involving collaboration with the Conservatoire); Television Technology and Production; Computer Networks; Computer Networks for Business; Computer Networks and Security; Software Design and Networks; Information and Communications Technology; Computing and Electronics; Computer Aided Design; Computer Aided Automotive Design; Engineering Product Design; Computer Aided Design with Multimedia; Management Technology; Management Technology with Multimedia; Management Technology with Communication Networks; Internet Technology; e-Commerce and BSc Foundation Certificates in Computer Technology and Media Technology. A 2 + 2 articulated joint education programme with Nanjing University of Science and Technology (NUST) in the Peoples' Republic of China was also considered. In each case the audit confirmed that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the named awards and their location within the FHEQ.

135 The DSED which was specifically produced for the audit, included sample programme specifications and useful students' and employers' guides. Intended learning outcomes reflect the FHEQ and the *Subject benchmark statement* for engineering informs the programme specifications. TIC staff have taken the opportunity to respond to QAA regarding the draft revised engineering subject benchmark statement (July 2005). The Institution of Incorporated Engineers (IIE) has accredited all the BSc programmes for a full five years with

the exception of Management Technology which was deemed to contain insufficient technology. Accreditation covers only students studying the full programme at UCE, a fact which was clearly understood by students on the 2 + 2 programme (see paragraph 134 above). The *Code of practice* provides a reference point for the assurance and maintenance of academic standards and the student experience.

136 Trend analyses are used to improve student retention, progression and achievement through consideration at both module and cohort levels. The TIC Learning Quality Committee (LQC) reviews module pass and retention rates, together with student feedback. Modules with pass rates below the threshold set by Senate and modules attracting negative external examiner comment or student feedback are subject to thorough review by LQC, and programmes giving cause for concern are placed in special monitoring which involves internal faculty monitoring. The audit team also noted, that during 2005 Senate had placed the BSc Television Technology and Production in special monitoring, with specific reference to the student experience, as a result of a review event. The TIC Dean meets the VC, PVC (Academic) and the Academic Registrar each year to review progression and achievement statistics and actions taken within the TIC.

137 Measures taken to improve progression include the collection of attendance data via the swipe card access building control system, marrying this with assignment submission information obtained from the My-tic intranet system coupled with an electronic course management system. This effective use of data was seen by the audit team to represent good local practice as students can be given appropriate and timely support. Other measures being taken include de-semesterisation to allow timely referrals and efforts to increase the social cohesion of student cohorts.

138 The University's ARP regulate programme approval, monitoring, review and re-approval processes within TIC which has established its own policies to ensure that these are aligned with the University's regulations. Programme

review has externality involving, typically, a panel chair from another faculty; two to three external academics; two industrialists; an IIE representative; and student and graduate representation. The LQC reviews TIC procedures annually and CARP reviews an overview report of the outcomes of annual monitoring of all TIC programmes. A 2002 academic audit conducted by the University confirmed compliance with UCE requirements. Student participation in annual monitoring is low, particularly among part-time students, and measures are being undertaken to address this situation.

139 External examiners receive thorough briefings on their role. Their reports often include useful commentaries and are considered in detail by boards of studies. Students attend boards of studies and the audit team found evidence of responsiveness to both student and external examiner comment. LQC reviews the minutes of boards of studies and action plans are developed and monitored to ensure that issues raised by external examiners are addressed and that timely written responses are sent to the examiners in accordance with the *Code of practice*.

140 The University's standard assessment regulations (SUAR) provide a framework ensuring a consistent approach to assessment across TIC. Each level is consistent with UCE level descriptors, the *Code of practice* and the FHEQ. Assessment strategies are reviewed during re-approval meetings. The annual monitoring process and a review of assignment briefs in 2003-04 revealed variability in assessment and to address this, staff development was provided through TIC 'away days'.

141 The audit team viewed samples of assessed work and noted that a standard module control sheet ensures compliance with TIC procedures for providing module and assignment information, as well as feedback to students. Coursework assessment briefs include the assessment rationale and all those seen by the team had been internally verified. Each piece of work has an accompanying submission and record form, on which variable amounts of feedback and marks are entered. Sampling (moderation) of marked

student work is set at 10 or 10 per cent. The team found the TIC individual project guidance notes to be clear and comprehensive. The team viewed several student handbooks and agreed with the students' perception that they are significant aids to developing students' understanding of learning and assessment expectations and their responsibilities.

142 There is a placement-learning TIC Code of Practice that is based upon the University's framework for sandwich degrees, regulations and policies. Each student is provided with an industrial placements pack, there is a dedicated industrial placements officer, a job description, skills specification, health and safety checklist and a placement review. TIC also provides an employer guide covering sandwich placements, records of progress, record of complaints and student feedback forms. Sandwich placements are monitored within the TIC annual monitoring overview report. The audit team considered that the management of student placements within TIC is comprehensive and effective. There is an acknowledged difficulty in finding relevant placement opportunities for all students and the audit team heard evidence of staff and students working hard to successfully identify placements.

143 Students have a generic introduction to the University and TIC followed by specific induction into their programmes. Part-time students have a separate and comprehensive induction tailored to their particular requirements. Students are encouraged to engage in on-line personal development planning but this is not compulsory. Students receive a variety of handbooks produced at institutional, faculty, programme and module level. Students who met the audit team considered that all the information they were given was accurate and useful.

144 Human and physical learning resources are based upon student recruitment and appeared to be appropriate and sufficient to the audit team. Students who met the team confirmed that staff are very friendly and supportive. The Learning Centre is staffed seven days a week and is rated highly by students. TIC has been responsive to student computer needs by providing sufficient

hardware and software and a seven-day a week help-desk. The My-tic intranet and e-assisted learning provide students with flexible access to learning support. There is high level industrial involvement with TIC and collaborations with companies, such as CISCO and Microsoft, ensure currency of equipment.

145 An IT steering group develops and manages TIC's IT strategy and provision, ensuring implementation of the University's IT strategy. Additional specialist student support is provided for particular groups of students, as appropriate, for example, students with disabilities and the Nanjing students. The effectiveness of student support arrangements is monitored through student feedback at boards of studies and reviewed by LQC.

146 The University's annual report on student experience, based upon student feedback, consistently showed TIC students to be the least satisfied in almost every category in previous years. However, since 2003, there has been significant evidence of improved student satisfaction and the 2005 results were very encouraging. Students who met the audit team indicated their satisfaction with all aspects of support.

147 Boards of studies minutes contained many examples of timely and effective responses and actions resulting from student representative comments. General issues included delays in returning course work to students, although the introduction of the Electronic Coursework Management System which allows tracking is a response to this matter. Students who met the audit team praised the quality of feedback they received. One resource-related problem, raised by almost all student representatives, concerned access to specialist computing facilities. The team noted action taken by TIC in response to the student feedback received.

148 In the case of the collaborative link with NUST, UCE staff visit regularly, contribute to the teaching programme, hold individual student interviews and attend examination board meetings. NUST staff have been seconded to

UCE and, consequently, understand the nature of the experience students from Nanjing can expect to receive when they join UCE. TIC has engaged a Chinese member of staff who teaches transfer students at NUST before their arrival at UCE, and the students are provided with English language support following their transfer. The audit team found the articulation arrangement to be comprehensive and considered it to be well conceived.

149 Academic enterprise is a major activity and academic staffing levels have almost doubled in the last six years, with no significant increase in student numbers. Students confirmed a richness of the curriculum and placement opportunities partly as a result of this activity. Overall, the audit found that the quality of learning opportunities is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

Media studies

150 The following provision which is within the remit of the Department of Media and Communication, located within the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design (BIAD), fell within the scope of the DAT: BA (Hons) Media and Communication; BA (Hons) Media and Communication (Culture and Society); BA (Hons) Media and Communication (Journalism); BA(Hons) Media and Communication (Media Photography); BA (Hons) Media and Communication (Multimedia); BA (Hons) Media and Communication (Public Relations); BA (Hons) Media and Communication (Radio); BA (Hons) Media and Communication (Television and Video); Postgraduate Diploma/MA Broadcast Journalism; MA International Broadcast Journalism; MA Media Production (Multimedia); MA Media Production (Print); MA Media Production (Radio); MA Media Production (Television); MA Media and Communication; HND Media and Communication (offered through Sutton College); HND Media, Communication and Production (offered through South Birmingham College). In each case the audit confirmed that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the named awards and their location within the FHEQ.

151 The DSED was written specifically for the audit and was primarily a descriptive commentary with programme specifications as appendices. Appended to each of the programme specifications was a brief outline of the programme for students and another for employers. The undergraduate programmes were referenced directly to the relevant subject benchmark statements and the postgraduate provision takes cognisance of them. The documentation referred directly to the programme teams' reference to the FHEQ descriptors in developing the curriculum for each programme. Additionally, the MA in Broadcast Journalism has matched its learning outcomes with the requirements of the Broadcast Journalism Training Council in order to achieve accreditation.

152 Progression data were provided within the documentation and it was clear that progression and achievement data are considered in annual monitoring and that programme teams and BIAD, more generally, use these data in identifying good practice and areas of concern, which then inform action plans for improvement. The Departmental Academic Monitoring Committee (DAMC) considers all annual monitoring reports, including those from partner colleges. DAMC members are able to disseminate good practice from the various programmes across the provision. DAMC produces a report for the BIAD Board which, in turn, presents an overall BIAD report to CARP.

153 The audit team found that the internal programme monitoring and review processes were robust and followed the University's regulations. Annual monitoring reports seen by the audit team showed that previous action plans had been reviewed and commented upon; external examiners' reports and programme committee discussions had been considered; and student and staff feedback had informed the process. Action plans are produced as part of annual monitoring reports and these are monitored by DAMC and the BIAD Board. Collaborative partners complete a standard annual monitoring form and this is

also reviewed by DAMC.

154 BIAD produces its own guidance for programme teams preparing for approval or review activity and also holds workshops for staff. The audit team noted that all undergraduate programmes were reviewed in 2005 and the programme specifications were developed in line with the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice*. The review panel included external subject specialists and was chaired by a senior member of the University from another faculty. The collaborative provision at South Birmingham College was also reviewed and the processes were identical except that they were managed through the Academic Registry on behalf of the CPC, as required by the University's regulations on collaborative provision.

155 BIAD has undergraduate, postgraduate and collaborative forums which provide the opportunity for programme leaders and, in the case of collaborative provision, link tutors, to discuss issues of mutual concern and to share good practice. The audit team noted that these groups were designed to build synergy amongst individuals with similar problems and responsibilities and they make a valuable contribution to the dissemination of good practice and the sharing of concerns.

156 All programmes have at least one external examiner and the appointment of external examiners is managed via the BIAD Board on behalf of Senate, in line with UCE policy. The Department also provides induction and training days for all of its external examiners. External examiner reports are read by the Vice-Chancellor, PVC (Academic) and the Academic Registrar. At institute level, the BIAD Dean and Associate Dean read all reports and programme teams provide written responses which are reviewed by the Associate Dean and DAMC. Although external examiners' reports are positive overall, there has been an issue with one collaborative programme which was subject to special monitoring by the University as a result. The audit team noted the content of the special monitoring report, minutes of meetings between staff responsible for the

programme, BIAD and the external examiner concerned. Noting that good progress had been made in addressing the issues raised, the team considered that the University's procedures for managing the situation were robust and appropriate.

157 BIAD has an assessment policy which clearly restates the University's ARP whilst contextualising them in terms of the Institute's structures, broad subject requirements and additional staff guidance. This policy requires departments to reflect on the principles set out in the policy in their assessment practices and criteria. DAMC's assessment practice documentation was in draft at the time of the audit as BIAD documentation had been revised in May 2005. The documentation provided clear guidance on aligning learning outcomes, assessment criteria and feedback to students. The Department considers the sharing of good assessment practice to be essential and, to that end, the BA (Hons) Media and Communication assessment guide for staff is being disseminated across BIAD and partner institutions.

158 The audit team viewed samples of assessed work from across the postgraduate and undergraduate programmes in the DAT. The work reflected assessment in relation to coursework, examination, dissertation and project work. All coursework has a standard feedback form which clearly explains the reasons why marks have been awarded and also where they have been lost. Of particular note was the fact that feedback on how coursework could be improved was provided for students who had achieved a mark of over 70 per cent. The audit team found appropriate levels of moderation across the range of work seen. The external examiners' reports, with the exception already mentioned, and the review of the assessed work confirms that the standard of student achievement is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. The most recent external examiner's report for the programme subject to special monitoring suggests that it is now achieving the appropriate standard overall.

159 Student handbooks are produced using the University Handbook template. They contained a

range of programme specific information, notably timetables; module information; special requirements; and generic information on how to learn; student responsibilities; and student support services. Module specific information, including weekly lecture and tutorial schedules and outlines of their content, assessment structure and guidance, and module team details, is also provided. The audit team's discussion with students indicated that students considered the documentation to be very useful and accurate. Additionally, students confirmed that staff were always willing to provide additional support.

160 The programme director is the mainstay of academic and pastoral support and guidance but the students affirmed that all staff were approachable. Similarly, module staff were supportive when approached for advice and guidance. Collaborative students confirmed that their experience was equivalent to those students at UCE. All students were aware of how they could obtain specialist support from central services.

161 The Departmental Resource Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that there are sufficient resources at module delivery level. Resources are standing items on boards of studies' agendas and student representatives are able to raise concerns about resource availability. Staff confirmed that the Department and BIAD have been successful in attracting significant funding over the past few years, resulting in considerable capital resources including a range of specialist facilities for the Department and its students. Students confirmed the findings of the 2004 and 2005 student surveys that the library facilities were very good and further confirmed the availability and high standard of IT and other technical facilities. Collaborative programme students are also able to access UCE's library facilities and the audit team heard of the support given to one student embarking on a programme at a partner college.

162 Students suggested that stronger support was needed in the area of work placements. This is a core requirement of undergraduate and some postgraduate programmes and yet, with the exception of a 'placement pack', there

appeared to be little support. The onus for finding and achieving placements lies with the students, who clearly believed that they should receive additional support. Whilst recognising that placements could be made of up of a range of short experiences, they were of the view that specialist support should be available. The audit team would therefore suggest that BIAD might wish to consider drawing on good practice elsewhere within the University to enhance the support available for students seeking placements.

163 The University seeks feedback through student surveys, module feedback sheets and boards of studies meetings. Collaborative students participate in the UCE student surveys, as well as through their own equivalent college feedback processes. The BIAD Board discusses student survey outcomes and student representatives are able to contribute to the debate in this forum. The audit team heard from students, however, that they were unaware of the 'flyer' of the survey results that is sent out to students who participate. Students commented that their feedback on modules and programme experience had resulted in fundamental programme change at the recent review. Student representatives on BIAD and Department Boards are the conduits for the dissemination of the responses to student feedback. This means that students receive feedback on a regular basis and changes are made quickly or responses provided as to why no changes have been possible. Overall, students who met the audit team were happy with the feedback mechanisms and the speed of response from BIAD and the Department.

164 In the light of its findings, the audit team was able to confirm that the quality of the learning opportunities available to students is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

Music

165 The DAT covered provision offered by the Birmingham Conservatoire. As a faculty in its own right within UCE, the Conservatoire has a fully integrated administrative structure that

enables it to satisfy quality assurance requirements at both programme and faculty level. The DAT included four undergraduate and two postgraduate programmes offered as follows: BMus (Hons); BMus (Hons) Jazz; BSc (Hons) Music Technology (a cross-faculty programme, managed by the Conservatoire and the Technology Innovation Centre (TIC); HND (Popular Music) (a franchised collaborative partnership, delivered by South Birmingham College); Graduate Diploma (Jazz); and MMus/Postgraduate Diploma/Postgraduate Certificate in Music. In each case the audit team confirmed that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the named awards and their location within the FHEQ.

166 The DSED described the educational aims, the rationale informing the development of the curricula including learning outcomes, and an appraisal of the quality of learning opportunities in terms of the processes of teaching and learning, student admission and progression, and the provision of learning resources. The key features of each programme were described in the associated programme specification, students' guide and employers' guide. The quality assurance processes within the Conservatoire were demonstrated by additional appendices consisting of the programme statistics, the annual monitoring overview report, and the BMus annual evaluation report for 2003-04. This information was augmented by additional documentation provided at the time of the audit, including validation reports, external examiners' reports and examples of students' examination work.

167 The BMus programmes were last reviewed in 2002, before the publication of the definitive *Subject benchmark statement* for music. The programme teams, however, were confident that the learning outcomes and the programme specifications for these programmes meet the expectations of the music benchmark statement, and that any remaining points of clarification will be resolved as part of the 2006 review of these programmes. The audit team agreed with this view, and was able to confirm

that the programme specifications for all the programmes considered as part of the DAT provide concise and suitably comprehensive information on the design and content of each programme, making appropriate use of the relevant subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ. The intended learning outcomes are clearly articulated in terms of the acquisition and application of knowledge and understanding, generic skills, and subject-specific skills, and the associated methods of teaching, learning and assessment.

168 The examples of students' examination work seen by the audit team confirmed the appropriateness of the procedures employed for marking and moderation. UCE's expectations in this regard are fully met, and there was evidence of good practice in terms of the quality and extent of feedback information provided to students. As a Conservatoire, offering degree programmes in music with a particular emphasis on performance, the very nature of the assessment processes that are required in the latter context presents special challenges. Hitherto, the recording of final year recitals, for example, has not been considered either necessary or desirable. Both external examiners, however, raised this issue in their 2003-04 reports and consideration is now being given to changing this practice in the interests of quality assurance. Although the external examiners are able to assure standards by attending a representative cross-section of recitals, they are not currently in a position to offer any views on issues that might arise in the case of those recitals which they have not attended. From their reports, however, it would seem clear that they consider the standards of the examination processes in both written and practical examinations to be secure, the majority of their recommendations being concerned with issues of quality enhancement rather than achieving the required thresholds of quality assurance. It was evident, from a study of the documentation, that external examiners' recommendations form a major component of the annual monitoring process leading, where appropriate, to revisions and improvements in teaching, learning and assessment processes.

169 One issue raised in this context may warrant further consideration as part of the forthcoming reviews of both BMus programmes. A strong case was made in the 2002 validation of these programmes for basing the classification of the degree predominantly on the examination outcomes achieved in the final (fourth) year. From a study of the progression and completion statistics, however, it has subsequently become evident that a number of students are underperforming in terms of the outcomes they achieve for modules taken in earlier years. It is anticipated that recent revisions to the Standard Undergraduate Assessment Regulations (SUAR) limiting the number of times a module may be retaken in the event of failure will encourage weaker students to engage more productively with supporting modules in both their second and third years. The increasing evidence on credit accumulation, however, suggests that the current emphasis on examination outcomes in the final year might usefully be revisited.

170 As part of the study of learning opportunities the audit team met a group of students and, subsequently, members of staff, including representatives from South Birmingham College associated with the HND in Popular Music. Although the primary focus of attention concerned the experiences of students studying at the Conservatoire, the opportunity to draw comparisons with students studying at the College allowed the team to come to the view that quality of provision in both institutions was broadly commensurate. Students spoke very positively about their experiences, both in terms of teaching and learning and also academic and pastoral support. Every student is assigned a personal tutor and these arrangements are highly valued. Since every student is interviewed before the offer of a place, a process that also includes an audition (in the case of performers) and written tests, the Conservatoire has useful advance knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses before they arrive. Students found the process of induction to be effective, including the arrangements made for assigning music tutors for their first study, and particular attention was drawn to the warm and friendly

atmosphere and the accessibility of staff. Although the quality of information provided was generally felt to be appropriate, some students expressed the view that some areas needed further development, notably the information provided to assist their understanding of assessment criteria, especially those relating to performance modules.

171 In terms of the curriculum, students indicated that the scope and nature of subject areas covered in addition to the principal study were appropriate and supportive, with the sole exception of professional development. Here students felt the content was over-extended with a significant degree of repetition, and could more usefully be concentrated into a shorter period of study in the penultimate and final year. Staff agreed with this view and the audit team was informed that improvements along these lines are being considered as part of the forthcoming programme review. Students also considered the overall provision of resources to be appropriate, particular attention being drawn to the quality of the recording facilities, the specialist equipment provided for the study and application of music technology, and the accessibility of practice rooms outside normal office hours. In the case of library resources, whereas the overall level of provision was considered to be suitably comprehensive, students suggested that support for some areas of more specialist study could be usefully enhanced. In terms of more general purpose IT facilities, students considered that the level of provision was of a more variable quality, with considerable scope for improvement in key areas such as printing.

172 Discussions with staff usefully enhanced the perspective of the audit team in terms of the learning environment and also the effectiveness of the mechanisms used for quality assurance and enhancement, notably the annual evaluation report and the steps subsequently taken to rectify any deficiencies that come to light. Students are well represented on the relevant committees of the Conservatoire, notably the Student/Staff Committee and the Faculty Board and the team

was able to confirm, from the minutes of meetings, that student views and feedback are taken fully into account in the annual evaluation of programmes.

173 The Conservatoire has made a major commitment to Moodle, the University's VLE, and is in the process of developing an extensive range of subject-specific VLE in-house to support teaching and learning at all levels. In this context, the audit team particularly noted the effective use of Module Designer by the Conservatoire. The training and support of the necessarily significant numbers of part-time specialist teachers is considered of paramount importance, and the audit team identified this aspect as a feature of good practice (see paragraph 91 above). The arrangements for inducting and mentoring part-time staff are well developed and effective, and several part-time teachers are taking the postgraduate teaching certificate offered by the University. These opportunities extend to staff teaching the HND in Popular Music at South Birmingham College.

174 The mission of the Conservatoire appropriately reflects the University's mission, with particular attention being paid to widening participation and accessibility. The Junior Department has an important role to play in this context, and there is a major commitment to outreach to local schools and developing partnerships with performing organisations such as the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, with a view to enhancing the support given to students in preparing for their future careers.

175 On the basis of its findings, the audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for programmes of study leading to the named awards.

Section 4: The audit investigations: published information

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

176 A range of publications is provided for prospective and current students. Two prospectuses are published annually; part-time (all levels) postgraduate and professional (full and part-time); and the undergraduate prospectus. The other main university-level marketing publication is the website supplemented by programme-specific publicity material. Comprehensive and definitive student handbooks are distributed to new students during induction. Based upon a standard University template, these handbooks include programme-specific information and a wide range of information about the University. All of the students who met the audit team confirmed that they are provided with helpful and accurate information.

177 According to the SED, the Marketing and Educational Liaison Department (MELD) is responsible for the prospectuses and for the design and maintenance of the University's website. Faculty deans (or their nominees) and the Academic Registry perform quality checks and approve the information about programmes, including that for collaborative programmes, before publication. Each faculty has a marketing officer, who is part of the MELD team, to further ensure the integrity of the information. Some faculties maintain their own website and do not provide duplicate information for the University's website. This can lead to variability in accessibility of information although distance-learning students who met the audit team expressed satisfaction with information access.

178 Programme specifications which have specific sections for both students and employers, 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. Some students described the existing programme specifications as detailed and structured, and noted their importance to students.

179 Students told the audit team that programme and module handbooks or guides are useful and easy to understand. In relation to handbooks, the SWS reported satisfaction 'with both the clarity and usefulness of the student handbook as well as individual module/programme handbooks'. The team saw a range of handbooks and found them to be appropriately informative. Research students confirmed the accuracy and usefulness of handbooks and electronic and published information. A comprehensive research supervisor handbook is provided by the Academic Registry. Part-time students particularly welcome remote access to information, including electronic journals. Students indicated that they have been involved in the development of many of the University's publications including guides for mature students, new applicants and the prospectuses. The team saw examples of these guides and considered that they cover a range of useful information in an accessible and informative way.

180 On the basis of its consideration of a range of material and its discussions with students, the audit team formed the view that the information provided for students facilitates student learning. The information provided for students by the University, faculties, departments, divisions and partner institutions was found to be accurate, appropriate and consistent.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

181 The University has an information strategy based upon corporate requirements. An important part of this strategy is to ensure that no publication leaves the University without proper scrutiny given the need for accuracy and completeness. The audit team noted lengthy discussion at Senate and CARP with regard to the TQI initiative and the WGQAP

determined the University's approach to TQI. CARP has delegated responsibility from Senate for the website for all information except that relating to review events, which remain the direct responsibility of Senate.

182 Statistical information and reports based upon TQI data seen by the audit team appear to be accurately representative of UCE. These are married with other data, such as data from HEFCE, UCAS and the Nursing and Midwifery Admissions Service. Statistical data on progression are quoted in Senate and CARP minutes and reports and, in the view of the team, the data appeared to be robust.

183 The audit team found that the University was engaging appropriately with, and was well placed to satisfy its responsibilities in respect of TQI. Substantial progress on all documentation required, including programme specifications, external examiners' reports, the teaching and learning strategy and links with employers, is evident. As an example of progress, the University's Handbook for External Examiners explains TQI requirements. Current proposals include posting a summary of the new learning, teaching and assessment strategy and the linking of programme specifications to the TQI website. At the time of audit the University was awaiting a decision on the inclusion of information relating to programmes that are closing. The team concluded that, on the basis of the evidence available to it, the information currently published by the University about its programmes and standards was accurate and reliable.

Findings

Findings

184 An institutional audit of the University of Central England in Birmingham (the University or UCE) was undertaken during the week 21 to 25 November 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility as a UK degree-awarding body. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals and Universities UK, four audit trails were selected for scrutiny at the level of an academic discipline. This section of the report of the audit summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and recommendations to the University for enhancing current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

185 The University procedures for assuring the quality of its programmes are documented fully in the University's Academic Regulations and Policies (ARP). Formal responsibility for quality assurance is vested in Senate which is supported in its work by the Committee for Academic Regulations and Policies (CARP) and the Collaborative Partnership Committee (CPC). CARP and CPC working groups have primary responsibilities for monitoring the effectiveness of faculties in the discharge of their responsibilities for the delivery and management of programmes they offer. In turn, faculty deans are responsible for the assurance and enhancement of the quality and standards of the programmes in their faculties (or equivalent).

186 Programme approval, review and re-approval involve three-stage processes which are almost identical. Stage one involves consideration by the Faculty Academic Quality Committee (or equivalent) and the Faculty Board which takes account of the rationale for the proposal, the resource implications and the potential market. Stage two requires scrutiny of

detailed proposals by a panel which is chaired by a senior academic from another faculty. Panels include external membership and, in the case of review and re-approval, a former student. This stage also includes a meeting between panel chairs and current students. Panel reports are circulated to programme teams for comment and confirmed reports are submitted to Senate for approval. Review and re-approval is carried out on a six-year cycle.

187 Programmes are subject to annual monitoring that includes consideration of student feedback, staff feedback, data on student performance, external examiners' reports and the production of an action plan. The process also seeks to encourage critical evaluation by programme teams. Faculty boards monitor the process, feeding the outcomes of the reports into a faculty overview report which is presented to CARP. CARP, in turn, produces an overarching report to Senate.

188 The University has established a process of two types of academic audit: regulatory and thematic. Regulatory academic audits provide Senate and the Board of Governors with evidence of faculties' conduct of approval, review, re-approval and annual monitoring. They occur on an annual basis when there is a review of the conduct of approval and review procedures in two faculties and a review of the conduct of annual monitoring in two others. Reports of the academic audits are discussed by all faculties and any UCE-wide recommendations, if approved, must be implemented across the University. CARP and Senate receive synopses of recent academic audit recommendations and these are forwarded to faculties, with notes on good practice for discussion at faculty quality committees (or their equivalent). Where appropriate, the outcomes of quality processes applied to collaborative programmes are also considered. Thematic audits are based upon the processes used in QAA developmental engagements and evaluate UCE practice in other areas such as student support and feedback on assessed work.

189 The University gathers student views from all levels within the University. Formal feedback is by module questionnaires for each taught module. The University also undertakes annual student surveys which include collaborative students. Ad hoc surveys of research students and students undertaking studies through collaborative partners are also carried out. Students are represented on key committees and boards at University and faculty level. The main vehicle for securing employer feedback is through informal discussions with employers on their expectations of students and graduates and the extent to which UCE students and graduates are meeting these expectations. Employers are also involved in the approval, review and re-approval of programmes. Graduate feedback is provided through their inclusion in review and re-approval panels. The establishment of an alumni society is expected to contribute to the enhancement of graduate feedback.

190 UCE has over 30 collaborative partners, including six overseas, and its collaborative links encompass validated, franchised and articulated provision. The University has maintained a cautious approach to the delivery of Foundation Degree programmes and currently has one Foundation Degree collaborative partner (two Foundation Degrees are offered by faculties of the University). Recognising that it retains responsibility for the quality and standards of all programmes of study leading, or contributing to, awards of the University, wherever and however these are delivered, the operation of all collaborative provision is subject to an academic agreement setting out the responsibilities of both the University and its collaborative partner. The University's UK partnerships all involve validated or franchise programmes. The procedures for approval, review, re-approval and annual monitoring for collaborative provision are almost identical to those for internal programmes but the University requires a more detailed resource document and the processes are managed by the Academic Registry on behalf of CPC. In addition, all panels established in relation to partnership arrangements are chaired by senior

academics with experience of collaborative programmes. A link tutor from the University is appointed when a programme is provided by a collaborative partner. The audit team noted the University's considered approach to the management of collaborative provision was supported by appropriately detailed procedures and processes. Documentation governing the management of the range of partnerships involving the University was clear and comprehensive and further confirmed the team's view that the University's approach to collaborative activity was appropriate to safeguard the quality of its provision.

191 The University has also adopted a cautious approach in relation to distance and flexible learning programmes and has very little provision of this type. Such provision that exists is described as 'off-campus', is subject to the University's quality assurance processes, and requires Senate approval before being offered. Currently, the University does not have an overarching policy for flexible and distributed learning but it has disseminated good practice in relation to faculty policies, which were being prepared at the time of the audit. Although there is no University-wide policy for distributed and flexible learning, the University was confident in its ability to assure the quality of such provision. The role of CARP and the Moodle working group in providing faculties with guidance, regulations and examples of good practice in developing their own policies coupled with the small number of programmes which fall into this category contributed to the team's perception of an area of activity that was carefully managed.

192 The University places considerable emphasis on student feedback and has also actively sought to engage graduates and employers in the programme review process. Student representatives are members of boards and committees at University, faculty and programme level and provide a conduit for the exchange of information between the University and its student body. Annual student satisfaction surveys are used to inform the University's strategic planning process and to

enable it to respond to problems in a timely manner. Whilst arrangements for securing feedback from students and graduates on the quality of programmes offered by the University are generally appropriate, the audit team considered that it would be desirable for the University to consider the means by which part-time and distance-learning students can more effectively contribute to student representation processes.

193 Whilst the ARP provide the overall institutional framework and are comprehensive, the audit team found them difficult to navigate. The University has recently developed a series of more accessible handbooks, notably a handbook for quality assurance procedures, a handbook for external examiners, and operations manuals for collaborative programmes which are designed to define for staff the requirements of the University and the responsibilities of key individuals and committees. The team considered, however, that the ARP clearly defined central control and the devolution of authority and responsibility. The team was also able to verify the rigorous and comprehensive manner of the implementation of quality assurance processes which include independent external representation. It came to the view that there is an appropriate balance between devolved responsibility and central accountability in the University's approach to quality assurance. On the basis of the evidence available to the team, it concluded that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

194 The previous audit report, published in July 2002, made a number of recommendations relating to the effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards. These included, in particular, the desirability of reviewing the workload of Senate and its standing committee

structure and monitoring the effectiveness of its systems. The working group established to review the University's quality assurance processes (WGQAP) considered how the University's processes might be streamlined to ensure a more appropriate alignment with the expectations of subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA. In addition, the University made a number of other key changes in its approach to the management of quality and standards. The changes included the creation of an additional senior post of Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) (Student Affairs) in 2003, and a general move towards greater centralisation and strengthening of the Academic Registry during 2004-05, bringing together the responsibilities of the former Academic Quality and Support Department with those of student records, and the appointment of an Academic Registrar.

195 The audit process enabled the audit team to view the operation of external examiner process at programme level, and the monitoring processes that are subsequently carried out at an institutional level. Following recent improvements in internal procedures for monitoring the evaluation of external examiners' reports, the University is confident that appropriate mechanisms are now in place to ensure that issues of concern raised by external examiners will be addressed by individual faculties in a suitably consistent and effective manner. The team noted the consideration given to external examiners' reports at senior levels within the University and at local levels of programme delivery. On the basis of its findings, the team concluded that the University is taking appropriate account of external examiners and other external reference points in securing the standards of its awards.

196 Significant reliance is placed upon progression and retention statistics to monitor and review the progress of students. Standard undergraduate assessment regulations (SUAR) have been designed to recognise and facilitate students in this position, and all data are

generated from a single student record system. Responsibility for generating statistics, however, varies according to the context. Admissions statistics are generated by the Academic Registry, whereas faculties generate progression and retention statistics. In 2001 the University introduced a standard methodology and template for the calculation and presentation of programme and module statistics with a view to ensuring a greater degree of consistency. Faculties, however, could still generate these statistics either from central student data records or local records; the results being subject to checking by the former Planning and Systems Development Department. In February 2005 a management information systems officer was appointed by the Academic Registry to take responsibility for the preparation and checking of statistics for all stakeholders. At the time of the audit, however, this post was vacant and no arrangements had been made to appoint a successor.

197 Notwithstanding the delays that have occurred, hitherto, in the generation of institutional progression statistics and the implementation of more effective procedures to produce these centrally, the audit team found evidence of an effective level of engagement with these data by CARP, prior to consideration by Senate. Aside from progression statistics, however, the University only makes very limited use of other internally-generated data, relying instead on the HEFCE benchmark statistics as a primary reference point for measuring success. In the audit team's view, these statistics do not give a sufficiently up-to-date picture for the University to monitor closely recent trends in key areas such as admissions, for example, the variations and trends in entrance qualifications and differing socio-economic backgrounds at programme level, and also the employability of graduates. The team concluded that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards. However, the University may wish to consider reviewing its arrangements for acquiring and analysing statistical information internally to ensure a more consistent use of

such data at institutional level and to enable it to monitor academic standards more effectively.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

198 The University aims to keep the student experience at the centre of its activities through evaluation of the students' learning experience directly informing action plans and their effectiveness. The audit team found that the University, through a number of developments in learning support provision, has realised this aim. The development of the physical infrastructure to support learning is evident from the new build and refurbishment of a number of campuses, library and support functions. The effective use of student feedback from a number of sources, including UCE's own student satisfaction survey and annual monitoring, had informed development plans in such areas as the provision of academic skills support and English language for international students. The development and use of the Managed Learning Environment/Virtual Learning Environment (known as Moodle) has been welcomed by students, particularly those in the early stages of study, reflecting the roll-out of this development from 2005-06.

199 Students receive effective academic and personal guidance and support through a variety of tutorial mechanisms. Tutors can refer students to a wide range of specialist support facilities offered centrally, and by faculty support units. Students' views about the effectiveness of these arrangements are positive, with many commenting on aspects of the support and its value to their learning. The variety of arrangements for academic and personal guidance, mainly reflecting the mode of delivery, was not seen as problematic by students who appreciated the approachability of all staff. Other noteworthy features include the award winning 'Breakthrough to Learning' programme which provides support for applicants and students in understanding academic English; the high quality of support for placements in parts of the University; work-based learning in some faculties; and support for international students.

200 Staff development enables a wide-ranging group of all staff, academic and support staff, those on fractional or visiting lecturer contracts and those from partner organisations, to access and participate in a number of activities which reflect the outcomes of student and staff needs. Of note is the development of four non award-bearing programmes to acknowledge the personal and staff development work undertaken by staff other than teaching staff; one programme is specifically designed for support staff.

201 The audit team concluded that the University had effective procedures in place for supporting learning.

The outcomes of the discipline audit trails

Business and management

202 From its study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports, professional body accreditation reports and the annual monitoring process, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team concluded that the standard of student achievement in business and management is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Programme specifications are available and are referenced to the appropriate subject benchmark statement.

203 Students who met the audit team confirmed that they were satisfied with their programmes and the information given to them. The access to, and availability of, learning support provided by central and faculty staff and facilities were highly valued. Many students referred to the regular use they make of the range of learning support facilities, particularly the information sources and tutoring support, which were said to be very effective. The team concluded that the quality of the learning opportunities available to students is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

Engineering

204 From its study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports, professional body

accreditation reports and the annual monitoring process, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team concluded that the standard of student achievement in engineering is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. The audit team noted in particular the comprehensive and effective management of student placements, the high level of industrial involvement, measures taken to improve student progression, the careful management of the articulation agreement with Nanjing University of Science and Technology and the range of helpful information provided to students.

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

Media studies

206 From its study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and the annual monitoring process, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team concluded that the standard of student achievement in media studies is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. Programme specifications set out appropriate educational aims and learning outcomes.

207 Students, including those from collaborative partners, were satisfied with the mechanisms for feedback and representation, confirming that they received information on action taken in response to matters that they raised. The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

Music

208 From its study of samples of assessed work, external examiners' reports and the annual monitoring process, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team concluded that the standard of student achievement in music is appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. Programme specifications are

available and provide concise and suitably comprehensive information on the design and content of each programme, making appropriate use of subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ.

209 Students are very positive about their experiences, in terms of both teaching and learning and the academic and pastoral support they receive. The warm and friendly atmosphere and the accessibility of staff facilitate effective communications and, with few exceptions, the quality and range of resources provided were also considered highly appropriate to the specialist requirements of a Conservatoire. The audit team concluded that the quality of the learning opportunities available to students is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

The use made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure

210 The development of the University's academic framework has been shaped by the *Code of practice*, the FHEQ and the subject benchmark statements, all published by QAA. The requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) and the Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted) impose additional requirements for some programmes, and responsibility for implementation and monitoring all aspects of the academic framework resides with the CARP, which in turn reports to Senate. In the light of the recommendations of the 2002 audit, the WGQAP produced a series of recommendations endorsed by Senate in February 2004. These included the introduction of revised award descriptors following the publication of the FHEQ, the introduction of a process at institutional level for the scrutiny of statistics about the retention, progression and achievement of students, streamlining of the processes for annual monitoring at programme level to concentrate on the key indicators of quality and standards, and enhancements to the processes for programme approval and review, notably a greater focus on the student experience and the development of programmes in the light of external reference points.

211 The outcomes of developmental engagements have been identified as key indicators of effectiveness, with strengths highlighted in relation to the assessment of students and the FHEQ. The audit team considered, however, that such events do not provide a basis for systematic evaluation across the University as a whole and the developing agenda of quality enhancement suggests a more proactive approach might be taken by CARP. The foundations for such an approach already exist in terms of a practice whereby each year one meeting of CARP is devoted to discussion of a section of the *Code of practice*. So far these discussions have covered research students, collaborative provision, external examiners, assessment and placements. Good progress has also been made in mapping regulations and procedures to the *Code*, as and when, revised sections are produced. The emphasis thus far, has been generally limited to one of compliance rather than enhancement.

212 The processes of implementing new elements of the Academic Infrastructure have been devolved to the faculties which, in turn, are required to review their own policy documents to ensure that they reflect the precepts in updated sections of the *Code of practice*. Work is currently in progress, for example, to produce an institutional code of practice for research degrees, and the University is currently reviewing the content of its training programme for research supervisors to ensure that it takes full account of the requirements of the new section of the *Code* relating to postgraduate research programmes. Further opportunities to monitor the effectiveness of the Academic Infrastructure are embedded in internal processes for programme approval, re-approval, monitoring and review which are designed to respond to the varying demands of external agencies including the QAA and, where appropriate, PSRBs and Ofsted.

213 The structure of the University places a high degree of reliance upon faculties to ensure that the use of the Academic Infrastructure is consistent and appropriate. In the case of collaborative partners, the University

requirement that all validated programmes are subject to the same processes of approval and monitoring as internal programmes ensures a consistency of assurance for all programmes.

214 The audit team concluded that the University's engagement with external reference points is timely and appropriate in the context of quality assurance. It noted, however, that the approach taken was generally limited to that of compliance, thus missing opportunities to engage more proactively with these reference points for the purposes of quality enhancement. The University may thus wish to consider reviewing its approach to these important indicators in order to derive the maximum advantage for the quality and standards of its provision.

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

215 The self-evaluation document (SED) was a carefully written, clear, descriptive and factual account. Whilst the University keeps its processes under review and has made a number of important organisational decisions (such as the appointment of an additional PVC two years previously), there was little in the SED about the University's views on the effectiveness of its approaches and decisions. Although the SED did include some self-reflection and correctly stressed a broadly cautious and risk averse approach, there was not much evidence of evaluation.

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

216 The University's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards are to continue to place the student experience at the centre of development plans and policies. A number of quality assurance processes, and/or the reflection upon their outcomes, can result in improvements to processes and the spread of examples of good practice. It was not, however,

always evident that the approach would result in the systematic identification of good practice and in deliberate, coordinated improvements to the student learning experience.

217 The audit team considered that the University's plans were appropriate but cautious; they represented 'business as usual' rather than any intention to change or to re-think and could lead to processes becoming increasingly complex and onerous. The team would encourage the University to review its quality assurance procedures to see if they can be streamlined without loss of rigour or value to the institution (and indeed the team was told that this had been recently done for annual monitoring). As part of this reflection on its approach to the management of quality and standards, the team would encourage the University to give due consideration to the growing emphasis on more future-focused and enhancement-led approaches in the higher education sector and the need to achieve a better balance between costs and benefits. In making this recommendation, the team considered that the University had good reason to be confident in its processes and the wide ownership of quality by staff across UCE and its partners, and thus could consider greater streamlining where this can be achieved without loss of benefits or accountability.

Reliability of information

218 The audit team was able to confirm that the University is taking seriously its responsibilities in respect of HEFCE 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*. CARP has delegated responsibility from Senate for the Teaching Quality Information website for all except review events, which remain the direct responsibility of Senate. The team also concluded that reliance may be placed in the information the University publishes about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

219 The following features of good practice were noted:

- i the clear link between student feedback and action at all levels within the institution and its collaborative partners (paragraphs 75, 100)
- ii the participation of a wide range of staff, including visiting tutors, staff on fractional contracts and staff from collaborative partners, in staff development activities (paragraph 91)
- iii the information and support provided by staff to facilitate student learning (paragraphs 100, 105, 110).

Recommendations for action

220 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:

- i make use of internal data relating to entry qualifications and final achievement at institutional level to monitor academic standards more effectively (paragraph 79).

It would also be desirable for the University to:

- i continue the process of streamlining its quality systems to make optimum use of the institution's available resources (paragraph 35)
- ii consider the development of an enhancement-led approach to quality management (paragraph 38)
- iii consider the further use of external benchmarks in monitoring and enhancing academic standards (paragraph 60)
- iv improve participation in, and monitor the effectiveness of, the training provided for student representatives (paragraph 70)
- v consider the means by which part-time and distance-learning students can more effectively contribute to student representation processes (paragraph 70).

Appendix

The University of Central England in Birmingham's response to the audit report

We are pleased with the outcome of our institutional audit. The QAA officers and the audit team acted throughout the process with great professionalism, courtesy and care and we thank them for the consideration they showed during the audit.

We are also pleased that many of the features of good practice the auditors identified were focused on the student experience, which is at the heart of this University.

With regard to the single advisory recommendation: the University is committed to the further development of its new student record system and these matters had already been identified for action as soon as resources permit.

The recommendations identified as desirable are either the continuation of current work or will be included in the next stages of reflection on strategic matters.

