University of Gloucestershire

MAY 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.

Contents

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Gloucestershire (the University) from 16 to 20 May 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 University's awards.

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

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

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

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

Outcome of the audit

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

- broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of its 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 in the context of the University:

- its arrangements for the induction of new members of academic staff

- the design of its management information systems which has enabled it to produce reports to support quality and academic standards management

- the introduction of Assessment Standing Panels across the institution

- the comprehensive design and thorough operation of the annual field review process

- the introduction of Student Information and Advice Centres across the campuses

- the process it has developed to support the withdrawal of fields

- the introduction of mid-module reviews in psychology

- its process of thematic review

- its development of its on-line journal of learning and teaching.

Recommendations for action

The audit team advises the University to:

- consider how it might achieve a fully effective academic counselling system for all students and how it might more closely monitor its implementation and operation

- reflect on the current effectiveness of its approach to the management of large-scale change in its academic and associated arrangements, and consider what steps might be required to ensure that in such cases, and more generally, measures it has identified for action are carried through, and that it is provided with clear and timely evidence of their effectiveness

- ensure for all its collaborative provision that, when identifying external contributors to validations and periodic reviews, and when identifying and appointing external examiners, such external peers are drawn from institutions representing the full breadth of the higher education sector in the UK; enable more direct University-level monitoring of the academic well-being of individual partnership links; and discuss with its partners measures which will assist with all aspects of their institutional development prior to putting the agreed measures into effect

- monitor carefully the changes it has made to the periodic elements of its enhanced annual review arrangements, in order to ensure that they provide clear evidence for itself, and external stakeholders, that the curriculum is being effectively refreshed and academic standards secured

- give thought to how it might ensure that the outcomes of external reviews of its provision and arrangements have the benefit of more penetrating consideration at University level.

It would also be desirable for the University to:

- consider what training opportunities it might wish to provide as a matter of course for staff appointed to academic and other management roles at a senior level

- consider how it might ensure better communications with student representatives, including those serving on senior institutional committees.

Outcomes of discipline audit trails

In the course of the audit three discipline audit trails were conducted: business studies; psychology; sports and exercise science. In each case, the audit found that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the relevant awards and their location within *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), published by QAA, and that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to those awards.

National reference points

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

From January 2005, the published information set for Teaching Quality Information will include the recommended summaries of external examiners' reports and of feedback from current students for each programme. The University has given careful attention to the requirements set out in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE's) document 02/15, *Information on quality and standards in higher education,* and to the implications of HEFCE's document 03/51, *Final guidance,* and is likely to be able to fulfil all its responsibilities in this respect.

Main report

Main report

1 An institutional audit of the University of Gloucestershire (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 16 May 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 the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of its academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study leading to those awards; and for publishing reliable information. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, the audit included consideration of an example of institutional processes at work at the level of the programme, through discipline audit trails, 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 including a sample of collaborative arrangements leading to its awards.

Section 1: Introduction: the University of Gloucestershire

The institution and its mission

4 The University can trace its origins back to the foundation in the early nineteenth century of a teacher training college in Cheltenham with a Christian Mission. In 1990, a merger between the former College of St Paul and St Mary, and the parts of Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology involved at that time in the provision of higher education, resulted in the formation of the Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education (CGCHE). The latter achieved taught degree awarding powers in 1992, research degree awarding powers in 1998 and University title in October 2001.

5 In 2003-04, 9,986 students were registered to study with the University, of whom 6,786 were registered to study full-time and 3,200 part-time. Of these, more than 750 students were studying for taught postgraduate awards and almost 150 students were registered for postgraduate research awards.

6 In the University's current arrangements there are seven Schools organised into four faculties: the Schools of Art, Media and Design, and Humanities comprise the Faculty of Arts and Humanities; the Schools of Education, and Health and Social Sciences, comprise the Faculty of Education and Social Sciences; and the Schools of Environment, and Sports and Leisure, comprise the faculty of Environment and Leisure. The fourth faculty comprises the University of Gloucestershire Business School. Among the schools, almost a third of the University's students are registered to study in the Business School with almost one fifth registered to study in the School of Sport and Leisure.

7 At the time of the audit a period of review and reflection about the University's structures and ways of working was drawing to a close and it was actively preparing to replace the faculties with campus-based structures (see below, paragraph 26).

8 The institutional self-evaluation document (SED) stated that the mission of the University is 'to create a dynamic and sustainable portfolio of learning opportunities for the communities it serves'. It's 'vision... is to be a high-quality community University with global reach, which is passionate about:

- the creation and transmission of knowledge

- its students and staff working in partnership for mutual benefit

- providing accessible opportunities for learning at all ages and levels

- diversity, sustainability and social justice

- building on its Christian foundation.

9   The University has a small portfolio of partnership links, through which at the time of the audit about 6 per cent of its registered students were studying for its awards. Each of the links is based around provision designed by the partner and validated by the University as suitable to lead to one of its awards. Through the University's present partnership links, students are able to study for its awards in the areas of health studies, initial teacher education, theology and ministry, with a small number of partnerships based around Foundation Degrees (FDs). The University's collaborative provision in health education and initial teacher education is scrutinised by means of Major Review, conducted by QAA, and Ofsted (for the Teacher Training Agency) respectively, and was therefore not included in the scope of the present audit. Similarly, at the time, of the audit the University was participating in a QAA review of its FD arrangements and partnership links based on FDs were likewise not considered (see below, paragraph 178).

Background information

10   The published information available for this audit included:

- the report of a first round audit of Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education conducted in 1995 by the former Higher Education Quality Council (the 1995 report)

- the report of a QAA overseas audit of the University's partnership with the Freie Theologische Akademie, Giessen published in 2003

- reports of reviews by QAA of provision at subject level published since 2000

- 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.

11   The University provided QAA with:

- an institutional self-evaluation document (SED) and appendices and three discipline self-evaluation documents (DSEDs) for the disciplines selected for the discipline audit trails (DATS), together with the relevant programme specifications

- its undergraduate and postgraduate Prospectuses 2004-05

- copies of its Quality Assurance Handbook, its Assessment Handbook and its Handbook for Collaborative Partners

- relevant internal review reports and relevant external reports, including recent Investors in People (IIP) accreditations

- access to its intranet.

12   During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was also given ready access to a range of the University's internal documents and to a large volume of internal information made available through a purpose-built web page. The team is grateful for the prompt and helpful manner in which the University responded to its requests for information and for its continuing support of the audit web page after the visit.

13   In addition to the self-evaluation documents and internal papers and reports provided by the University, the Students' Union (SU) also provided the team with a students' written submission (SWS). The team is grateful to the SU for its agreement to provide the SWS and to share its contents with the University.

The audit process

14   Preliminary meetings were held at the University in September 2004 with representatives of the University and students, who confirmed that they wished to support the audit through the provision of a written submission. QAA confirmed the number of DATs to be conducted shortly after the preliminary visit and QAA received the

University's SED in January 2005. At about the same time it received the SWS.

15   On the basis of the SED and other information provided, the audit team selected the DATs, and QAA subsequently confirmed to the University that they would focus on Business Studies, Psychology, and Sports and Exercise Science. The University provided QAA with DSEDs in March 2005.

16   The audit team visited the University in April 2005 and met the Vice-Chancellor and Principal (the Vice-Chancellor), senior members of the University and students' representatives. The briefing meetings enabled the team to explore matters discussed by the University in its SED and to discuss with students matters they had similarly raised in the SWS. At the end of the briefing visit the team proposed a programme of meetings for the audit visit and requested some additional information. The programme for the audit visit was agreed by the University. No areas were specifically identified for thematic enquiries.

17   The audit visit took place in the week beginning 16 May 2005. The audit team comprised Professor S Frost; Dr D Houlston, Professor G E Taylor and Dr R Tong, auditors, and Mr D Batty, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr D W Cairns, Assistant Director, Development and Enhancement Group.

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

QAA audit and review reports

18   The most recently available academic audit report for the institution was that published by the Higher Education Quality Council following the first round audit in 1995 of the University's predecessor, Cheltenham and Gloucestershire College of Higher Education. As a result of the latter's subsequent application for the grant of University title, the process of scrutiny which was carried out by QAA on behalf of the Privy Council in 1999-2000 took the place of the scheduled continuation audit. The outcomes of the scrutiny process for University Title are not published and were not available to the audit team or the University.

Since 1995, however, the University has participated in a number of QAA subject reviews and in the period 2002 to 2004 it took part in four developmental engagements (DEs).

19   The SED indicated that the University's predecessor had responded systematically to the 1995 report by seeking to maintain and develop the quality of its internal documentation, its quality assurance processes, its policies and activities in the areas of teaching, learning and assessment, the involvement of its students in evaluation and feedback and its staff development review scheme, all areas selected for commendation by the 1995 audit team. The present audit team was informed that the University retains a strong commitment to teaching and learning and that this had resulted in a recent successful bid for a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL).

20   Among the points for further consideration in the 1995 report which the audit team was able to confirm had been addressed were the possible duplication of roles in the committee system; the need for guidance to be provided on the preparation of annual field reviews; modifications to processes for monitoring collaborative provision; and changes to the standard form issued to external examiners to guide the writing of their reports.

21   The SED did not comment specifically on other points for further consideration in the 1995 report, including the necessity to consider securing and monitoring an effective academic guidance and support system. Papers from the follow-up to the 1995 audit, however, which were provided for the 2005 audit team at its request, included the report of an Academic Board Working Party compiled directly after the 1995 audit. This noted that a new scheme for academic counselling using academic advisers, which was to be put in place by October 1996, had been seen as addressing this particular recommendation (see below, paragraph 163).

22   With respect to the more recent DEs, the SED stated that although a number of useful potential enhancements to the practice of individual schools had been identified through the DEs and had been put into practice, the

reports of the engagements had not yielded any consistent messages meriting institution-wide changes (see below, paragraph 107).

23   A major change since the last audit has been the award of University title. Senior members of the University's staff noted that a less centralised approach to quality issues has since become possible and that the local business community had become more ready to engage with the institution in areas such as knowledge transfer.

24   The HEFCE Strategic Plan 'The Future of Higher Education' has been a significant driver for change and its publication, together with the University's own concerns (including concerns about recruitment and retention) led the latter in 2003 to embark on the review of its academic and professional portfolio and structures under the heading 'Framework for the Future'. This wide-ranging internal review was coming to its conclusion at the time of the visit. It had been marked by a series of newsletters from the Vice-Chancellor and there had been opportunities for staff to contribute.

25   The Academic Board met at the time of the audit visit to discuss and agree further reorganisation measures, some of which had been indicated in the SED. The University provided the audit team with the relevant papers, and members of staff briefed the team on the outcomes of the Academic Board meeting prior to the end of the visit. The team wishes to acknowledge the University's openness and helpfulness in these matters.

26   It is the University's intention to emphasise the role of campuses and to align individual faculties with particular campuses. Although the SED stated that Faculty Academic Standards Committees (FASCs) were to be replaced by Campus Academic Standards Committees under the new arrangements to be introduced from 2005-06, the University later informed the audit team that they were to be known as Faculty Academic Standards and Quality Committees (FASQCs). Schools are to be retained as academic units in the new structure. A further aim of the changes the University is making is to improve student retention rates, through linking the University's facilities management, Student Information And Advice Centres (SIACs) more strongly with the schools and the campuses.

27   The University informed the audit team that, throughout the process described above, it had sought to keep its staff aware of its intentions and the rationale underlying the changes it was making. It also stated that it had commissioned an external report from a consultant, who had interviewed more than 30 staff at all levels across the University and had consulted documentary evidence. This report had concluded that staff were satisfied with the genuineness of the consultations the University had undertaken, and that it had listened to their comments. The team was therefore surprised to find in its conversations with staff that many considered that their comments throughout the internal review had carried little weight, while other staff believed that although the review process had caused a great deal of internal turbulence, the end result had been to return the University to the status quo ante. As it continues to work through what it has identified for itself as 'a challenging agenda ...[requiring] careful management', the team encourages the University to continue to work closely with its staff at all levels to ensure that the rationale for the changes it is undertaking are more clearly understood.

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

28   The institutional self-evaluation document (SED) provided a clear description of University procedures and practices linked to the broad headings used for institutional audit reports, in which each section concluded with an evaluation reflecting the University's views as to its strengths and weaknesses. In the University's view, its strengths include its arrangements to seek and follow-up external advice (including from its

external examiners) (see below, paragraph 88), its introduction of thematic reviews (see below, paragraph 82) and appropriate and robust quality assurance systems at all levels, well matched to the University's commitment to sustaining the quality of the learning and teaching experience of its students.

29   The SED also suggested that some of the University's procedures, such as validation and approval, required streamlining (see below, paragraph 62), while others would benefit from further clarification. Consequently, at the time of the audit a number of the University's committee-based quality and academic standards processes were being modified. Other areas of strength identified in the SED included the University's use of level descriptors, programme specifications and assessment criteria, although the SED also acknowledged that anonymous-marking procedures need to be more consistently employed across the institution and that student completion rates in some areas also required closer attention.

30   Other institutional strengths identified and discussed in the SED encompassed the University's commitment to and support for learning and teaching, including support through Learning and Information Services (LIS), together with a broad and generally effective range of academic and personal student-support arrangements. In each case these observations were coupled with reflective comments on areas where development and enhancement might be beneficial. For example the SED observed that the University considered that it needed to update its staff-development arrangements, including those for senior operational staff such as field chairs and course leaders and more senior managers (see below, paragraph 143) and that in the area of student support, care was needed to ensure that all members of the University's increasingly diverse student population were receiving the kind of support they required. With respect to collaborative provision, the University believes that it has followed a careful approach which has been largely successful, while recognising that there is a continuing need to undertake

staff-development work with its partners in support of the quality of the provision which leads to the University's awards and to safeguard the academic standards of the latter.

31   The University's notable frankness in analysing and evaluating the appropriateness of its quality and academic standards arrangements also extended to a recognition that in some areas staff:student ratios are unfavourable; its ability to develop the learning environment for its students is constrained by the availability of resources to invest in its learning infrastructure and the development of key skills.

32   Overall, this frankness was matched by the willingness of the University to open its papers to the scrutiny of the audit team and to enter into discussions. This provided a sound basis for the team to establish the level of its confidence in the University's quality and academic standards arrangements.

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

Deliberative structures

33   According to the SED, the fundamental philosophy underlying the University's approach to the management of quality and academic standards is that quality assurance is a professional rather than simply a management matter and, so that action can be taken 'quickly and directly when necessary', responsibility for initiating such action should be devolved 'to the most appropriate level'.

34   Principles and structures for managing quality and standards are set out in the University's Quality Assurance Handbook (the QA Handbook). This has been revised and re-issued and, according to the SED, will be further revised as necessary. The QA Handbook is published on the University's intranet as well as in hard copy, and the University expects that, increasingly, its staff will make use of the electronic version. This development is seen by the University as likely to ensure that the QA Handbook retains its currency while avoiding the need for frequent (and costly) reprinting.

35   The Academic Board's responsibilities for implementing the principles set out in the QA Handbook are discharged through a three-tier hierarchy of committees and subcommittees at University, faculty and field level. Immediately below the Academic Board the tier of committees includes the Academic Affairs Committee (AAC); the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLAC), which also has a role in quality enhancement; the Access and Widening Participation Committee; and the University Research Committee.

36   In practice, responsibility for most quality and academic standards matters (including overseeing validation and review) has been delegated by the Academic Board to AAC, which is chaired by the Dean of Quality and Standards Development. The membership of AAC is drawn from across the University. As noted in paragraph 26, it is the University's intention to retain its current school-level arrangements and to replace FASCs, with FASQCs.

37   Within each faculty, overall monitoring of academic standards and quality is currently the responsibility of FASCs, which are chaired by members of each faculty who are appointed to their positions following formal application and interview by a University-level panel. Chairs of FASCs are ex-officio members of AAC and are responsible for ensuring that the work of their committees is carried out properly and impartially. Within the faculties, day-to-day matters linked to the quality of provision and the academic standards of the associated awards are dealt with by field or course boards and module teams. Below the level of the faculties most of the University's educational work takes place within one of the seven schools.

38   Overall, the greater part of the University's academic provision is delivered through its Undergraduate Modular Scheme (UMS) and its Postgraduate Modular Scheme (PMS) which at the time of the audit had been in operation for 15 and 12 years respectively. The SED helpfully described these arrangements, stating that within the UMS, 'subject-based areas of study are known as Fields, while defined routes within the PMS are referred to as Courses'. According to the SED, most fields may be studied within UMS as 'a Minor (25 per cent of a student's overall degree), a Joint (50 per cent) or a Major (75 per cent), and in some cases as Single Honours. In 2003 a further Scheme, the Foundation Degree Scheme, was added'. Major/Minor arrangements, which were being phased out, are addressed below. By prior agreement with the University, the scope of the audit did not include provision offered within the Foundation Degree Scheme.

Modifications to the structure of the academic session and the University's management of change

39   The UMS and PMS are overseen by Undergraduate and Postgraduate Modular Scheme Boards (UMSB and PMSB, respectively). UMSB and PMSB receive reports from the fields; they report directly to the Academic Board. Concern about the complexity of the original undergraduate modular scheme had led the University to undertake a further major review of its structure and operation in 2004. Following this review, the structure of the UMS was retained as the University's major regulatory framework, while at the same time it was agreed to define within this structure a series of single and joint honours combinations, with the intention of providing students with a more transparent and easily comprehended structure. Notwithstanding these aspirations, the audit team learned from the SWS and from its discussions with students that they continue to view the University's revised framework as difficult to work with.

40   At the same time that the structures described above were introduced, the University took the opportunity to modify its regulations and to amend the structure of the academic year, by removing the intersemester period. This period in late January/early February had come to be seen as difficult and 'demotivating' for students, in that little structured learning and teaching could be delivered. Again, notwithstanding the clear rationale for making changes to the University's previous semester arrangements, a number of students and staff told the audit team that they had found their rapid introduction

disconcerting, after what some considered to have been inadequate prior preparation. In particular, following the changes, some assignments had been marked and handed back up to four months late.

41   In view of these observations, the audit team sought to establish how the University had managed the introduction of change to the pattern of the academic session described above. From the information available to it, it seemed that although each faculty had been asked to prepare contingency plans to deal with any issues arising during the transition, little evidence was to be found that such contingency plans had been produced or implemented. Nor could the team find evidence that the University had systematically monitored the progress and impact of this significant change, or otherwise sought to update its understanding of the likely impact on students and staff. The only system-wide evidence the team could find that the University had attempted to deal with the consequences of the changes it had introduced took the form of a blanket extension to assignment deadlines of two weeks, which also applied to students within the UMS who had been required to resubmit work. This had been communicated to staff and students through field chairs. On enquiring about this, the team was told that matters associated with changes to the pattern of the academic session were primarily being monitored at field level, as the impact was likely to vary between fields. In response to the team's enquiries, the University was able to provide evidence that such monitoring at field level had been undertaken, although it was not clear to the team that the University had attempted to monitor the consistency with which students had been treated across the various fields. This suggested to the team that the University had not attempted to predict and manage difficulties for students and staff but had adopted a reactive approach.

42   In the week of the audit visit a scheduled meeting of the Academic Board reviewed progress in introducing the changes to the semester arrangements described above. At that meeting, the Board agreed to adopt a temporary arrangement for the 2005-06 session, in order to alleviate those problems of most concern to staff and students, and to review the structure of the academic session more thoroughly in the near future. As the University continues to work through the consequences of the changes it has introduced to the structure of the academic session, in order to safeguard students' learning experiences, the audit team advises it to reflect on the effectiveness of its current approach to the management of large-scale change in its academic and associated arrangements, and to consider what steps might be required to ensure that, in such cases, measures it has identified for action are carried through, and that it is provided with clear and timely evidence of their effectiveness.

Executive positions and structures

43   The University's chief executive is its Vice-Chancellor and Principal who is supported in her work by a Principal's Management Group (PMG), a large group of office-holders the membership of which includes: the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic); the Registrar and Secretary; the Director of Student Services and External Relations and the Director of Resources; the three Deans of Quality and Standards Development, Modular Schemes' Management, and Teaching and Learning Development; the heads of the seven schools; the Academic Registrar; the Project Manager; and the Head of University Development Centre. Among the responsibilities of this group is the approval in principle of new academic developments. Within the University's arrangements the Dean of Modular Schemes Management is responsible for monitoring and managing the development of the UMS and PMS. The Vice-Chancellor also holds weekly meetings with the Directorate and campus deans and routinely meets a wide range of staff and students, including student sabbatical officers.

QA Handbook and Assessment Handbook

44   The QA Handbook describes the University's deliberative and executive structures

to support and safeguard quality and academic standards, and lists its principles for the maintenance of academic standards. The University considers that it works through a clear framework of policies and procedures, with the primary function of the latter being to implement the principles, with consistency in assessment having primacy. The University believes that such consistency is assured through:

- the development of level descriptors in broad harmony with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ)

- the existence of programme specifications for each of the University's programmes, valued at a minimum of 120 CATS points and written with reference to relevant subject benchmark statements and (where relevant and applicable) the criteria of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)

- the provision of an assessment handbook which details assessment procedures and, in its most recent revision, includes guidelines related to students with disabilities.

45   The Assessment Handbook lists the University's principles and regulations for assessment and details associated procedures and codes of practice. Generic regulations govern the UMS and PMS, respectively which are listed in the UMS or PMS Handbook as appropriate. The University requires that assessment criteria for coursework assessments be set out in an assignment brief.

Arrangements for research students

46   At the time of the audit approximately 150 research students were registered to study for higher awards of the University and the SED noted that since acquiring research degree awarding powers in 1997-98, 81 higher degrees by research had been conferred. Prior to 1992, the University's predecessor had made research awards through the Council for National Academic Awards, and from 1992 to 1997 through the University of Bristol.

47   Policy and procedures to do with research degrees are handled by the University Research Committee (URC), a subcommittee of Academic Board. Within the faculties, Faculty Research Committees (FRCs) are responsible for overseeing the progress of research students on which they report annually to URC. Matters to do with research degrees are managed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) with the assistance of four faculty research directors and specialist research administrators. The post of Dean of Research was about to be filled at the time of the audit.

48   The supervision of research students is undertaken through supervisory teams of two or occasionally three supervisors, at least one of whom must have had prior experience of successful research supervision. Supervisors new to research supervision are generally attached to a supervisory panel with an experienced supervisor, and are required to undertake specified staff development to equip them for the role, by means of the University's Professional Development Programme for Supervisors.

49   A noteworthy feature of the University's arrangements for its research students is its designation of an experienced member of staff to the role of Research Student Advocate. The Advocate is charged with maintaining a general overview of the quality of the environment for research students and to serve as an adviser and contact for them, independent of the supervisory system. The Research Advocate presents an annual report to URC and there is evidence from these reports that students refer to the Advocate, although the overall number of matters where the Advocate has needed to call for action has been small.

50   The University monitors the progress of research students through bi-annual reports which are reviewed by the FRC and, through annual faculty research reports, by the URC. On the basis of the information it saw, the audit team came to the view that the University's arrangements for its research students and their supervision was consistent with the advice offered in the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*), *Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA.

Assessment Standing Panels

51   Within the University, the Gloucestershire Business School has pioneered the introduction of Assessment Standing Panels (ASPs) at field, supra-field and sub-field levels, as appropriate. ASPs are responsible for scrutinising examination papers for academic appropriateness in relation to intended learning outcomes, and to other elements of assessment within the same module, advised by the external examiner(s). ASPs are also charged with proofreading examination papers before approving them. The normal practice is for each ASP to be chaired by the field chair, and for its membership to include the relevant school teaching, learning and assessment coordinator. In addition to the responsibilities outlined above, ASPs are expected to check that assessments are consistent with the relevant validated module descriptors, that they conform to the University's requirements for the format of examinations and assessments and that they are consistent with the assignment brief. The University required the introduction of ASPs institution-wide from the beginning of Semester 2 in 2004-05.

52   In the course of the DATs, the audit team had opportunities to follow the work of several ASPs. The establishment of the latter appeared to the team to have provided the University with a useful means of enhancing the consistency with which its assessment processes are conducted across the faculties. The manner in which the University had identified an instance of good practice in quality and academic standards management from the work of its faculties, and had adapted and disseminated it across the institution appeared to the team to constitute a feature of good practice.

53   Notwithstanding the helpful innovation in assessment practice which the ASPs represent, from the material it was able to consult the audit team noted that a number of the coursework assignment briefs it saw had failed to detail assessment criteria, or had done so in a very general manner. This suggested to the team that the introduction of ASPs across the institution will require consistent and continuing support from the University if they are to become fully embedded across all fields (see below, paragraph 228).

The institution's approach to quality assurance and academic standards arrangements in collaborative provision

54   The University's regulations and procedures for quality and academic standards management in its partnership links are set out in its Handbook for Collaborative Partners (Handbook for CP), which was produced as part of the University's response to its thematic review of its collaborative provision arrangements in 2002. In each case, the University's collaborative links take the form of validated rather than franchised provision: hence, specific regulations are agreed for each at the time of validation. The University's arrangements for managing the quality and academic standards of provision and awards offered through partnership links is discussed further in paragraphs 178-196, below.

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

55   The SED emphasised the University's commitment to 'promote and develop high quality and accessible lifelong learning' through its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy, in which one of the key aims is 'to secure the establishment of quality enhancement and staff professional development activities'. The audit team also noted that enhancement of the quality of provision is a strategic theme in the University's forward plans for the development and enhancement of its portfolio and management, as set out in the Framework for the Future review (see above, paragraph 24). The University is committed to active participation in the work of the Higher Education Academy.

56   In the University's work overall to support the enhancement of the quality of its provision the audit team identified a number of key participants, including: TLAC; the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching Group (SoLT); the Professional Development Groups; the Quality Support Team and the school learning and teaching coordinators. In bringing together and mediating the work of these groups, it seemed to the team that the TLAC occupied a nodal

position. For example, TLAC receives and discusses the University's annually updated Forward Plan for Quality Enhancement (Forward Plan), which the SED identified as the University's central statement of its quality enhancement strategic priorities, and which is drawn up by the CLT together with the school learning and teaching coordinators, taking into account outcomes from recent internal monitoring and reviews, Staff Development Review (through heads of school) (see below, paragraph 132), and reports from external examiners.

57   The TLAC receives annual reports from each school on quality enhancement matters provided by their teaching and learning coordinator on the basis of which, together with other inputs, it updates its rolling plan for quality enhancement. School teaching and learning coordinators attend meetings of TLAC which enables them to speak to their reports and to report back to their school any comments, together with information from the reports of other schools. Further resources are available to staff at school and field level be means of the University's on-line learning journal: 'e-JOLT'. This has replaced its conventionally published predecessor the Journal of Learning and Teaching (JOLT) which the University initiated some seven years previously. In addition to e-JOLT, the purpose of which is to disseminate information about good practice across the institution, the University has also launched a refereed journal (which is published electronically and in hardcopy): Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (LATHE).

58   The University's establishment and support for the CLT has enabled the latter to provide staff with access to specialised support and advice and resources. The CLT also provides events to support dissemination of thematic reviews and pilot schemes. One example is the current bulletin on the findings of the pilot study the University has undertaken on Personal Develpment Planning (PDP) to inform field teams in developing this area. Material on such matters is available to staff through the pages maintained by CLT on the University's intranet, which the latter made available to the audit team. Following a review of the University's

Teaching Development Groups scheme in December 2003, the Professional Development Group scheme was introduced to promote improvement in pedagogy at School level. The SoLT, which operates across the University, was established in 1998 to promote scholarly activity in this area. It supports projects in learning and teaching and an annual seminar programme.

59   Within the schools the teaching and learning coordinators provide staff at field level with support and advice, organise campus events, and contribute to staff development activities. Quality enhancement activities at field level are also supported by the University's Quality Support Team, which meets with field teams to identify and discuss quality enhancement matters and provide updates. The University supports annual school symposia on teaching and learning and an annual University teaching and learning conference.

60   From the evidence available to it, the audit team took the view that the University had adopted an approach to quality enhancement which drew actively on the outcomes of its internal monitoring and review processes in the broadest terms. For example, the outcomes from thematic reviews were being systematically used for enhancement purposes as in the case of the thematic review of data systems which had led to the introduction of a management information system capable of tracking the progress of cohorts of students, and which now informs discussions in field reviews on the currency of the field's portfolio of provision and on recruitment and retention strategies being employed or developed. The University's establishment and support for its CLT has enabled the latter to provide staff with access to specialised support and advice and resources and that the development of the SoLT group constituted an interesting development. More particularly, the team came to the view that the University's development of its on-line journal e-JOLT constituted a feature of good practice that provides a flexible means to help staff learn from the experience and good practice of their colleagues.

61   In broad terms, the vitality and number of the University's activities in quality enhancement is admirable. In view of the number of initiatives taking place in this general area, however, careful monitoring might be wise to ensure that only overlaps in activities which are likely to prove fruitful are supported.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Approval of new provision

62   The University's processes for the validation and approval of new provision and for its subsequent review were subject to significant change during 2002-03, with the previous Validation and Review Handbook being replaced by the QA Handbook in September 2003. These included the replacement of the University's former 'event-based' approach to validation by what the University describes as 'continuous' validation, together with the replacement of two separate processes of annual monitoring and review, and quinquennial major review, with a single annual process. This provides for annual review (including the annual revalidation) of fields of provision, with a facility for enhanced review at broadly five-yearly intervals. The University has retained arrangements for event-based validations of provision where this is linked with the simultaneous or re-accreditation of a programme by a professional or statutory body, and for programmes offered through partnership links (see below, paragraph 178).

63   In most circumstances the development, validation and approval of a new field to be offered within the University, or the substantial modification of a field which is already in being, follows a two-stage process in which the end of the first stage is signified by the granting of planning approval by PMG, to be followed by a continuous process of development and validation. Proposals are expected to be generated at school level, in consultation with the University's Directors of Resources, External Relations and Student Services, the Dean of Quality and Standards Development and, if relevant, the Dean of Modular Schemes Management.

64   Requests for planning approval for new proposals are formally considered at the annual meetings of the University's Planning Subcommittee. The subcommittee is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and its membership is drawn from the PMG and the Academic Board.

65   The subcommittee's annual meetings are timed to coincide with other major events in the University's strategic and budget planning cycles, so that proposals can be appraised in the context of the University's Strategic Plan, school academic development plans and comments from major budget holders and an informed recommendation made to the PMG. If the latter approves the proposal for further development, the Academic Board is notified and a validation schedule is approved. In practice the University's development cycle for new proposals has a span of about 18 months, although this may be foreshortened where more rapid development would be to the benefit of the University.

66   Once planning approval has been secured the school originating the proposal will establish a development team and the relevant FASC will form a validation panel. The latter is chaired by a senior member from another faculty and its membership (which must be approved by AAC) comprises an academic or professional member external to the University and at least one other University member. Validation panels monitor proposals under development through receiving draft documentation from the development team and holding a limited number of meetings with some or all members of the audit team. These procedures allow the latter to receive progressive guidance from the validation panel as it works towards the completion of a prescribed and standard set of documents, which includes the programme specification and a set of module descriptors.

67   Once the validation panel is in a position to recommend to AAC that the proposal and the associated documentation have reached the standard required for approval, they are forwarded to a subcommittee of AAC, chaired by the Dean of Quality and Standards Development, the membership of which comprises the chairs

of the FASCs. The task of this subcommittee is to consider whether to endorse the recommendation of the validation panel and advise AAC to send the proposal forward to the Academic Board for final approval.

68   The University's procedures, as described above, possess several distinctive features, including their provision for an extended and cooperative relationship between the team developing the proposal and the validation panel. For this reason the audit team sought to establish whether the developmental aspects of the University's current validation and approval procedures might have the potential to compromise the robustness with which new proposals are scrutinised. It therefore reviewed the papers supporting a number of recent proposals across the University, and discussed the new procedures with members of staff at all levels. The information gathered by the team enabled it to establish that AAC is an active participant in the approval process. For example, in the case of a recent approval, the team noted that AAC had rejected the advice of a validation panel that a proposal be approved with an attached recommendation, and had advanced the recommendation to the status of a condition to be satisfied before the proposal could be approved. On the basis of this and the other available evidence, the team considers that the University's development, validation and approval processes for new provision are robust and that they are generally consistent with the advice offered in the *Code of practice*, published by QAA.

Monitoring and review

69   The University's annual review cycle centres on the production by each field board of a 'field review report'. This is expected to include a reflective evaluation of the operation of the field, an analysis of statistical information, and an action plan for the following year to address any matters requiring attention. Reports are drafted by field chairs (with contributions from other staff in larger subject areas) and discussed by the field board, usually at meetings held in October each year. Once approved by the field board, field review reports are submitted to the relevant FASC and

to external examiners. Items to be drawn to the attention of FASCs are specially marked and referred to as 'starred items' (see below).

70   The FASCs are expected to follow a consistent procedure for considering field review reports which involves their scrutiny by a panel, chaired by the FASC Chair. The membership of the panel should include at least two members nominated by the FASC from its membership, a member from outside the faculty, and must include an external member and a student representative, both of whom are appointed by AAC. The standard procedure followed by panels is for each field review report to be subject to the consideration and comment of two readers selected by the FASC Chair (not including the external and student members). The external member receives copies of all field review reports but is not expected to comment on them in detail, but rather maintain an overview of the whole process. In November, each panel normally convenes to discuss how fields are adhering to the University's regulations and requirements, to agree feedback to fields through the FASC and to make recommendations concerning the fields and whether the provision within their purview should remain in validation for a further year. At least once every five years, for each field, a panel will meet with staff and students, consider field review reports and other papers from field boards (see below, paragraph 79).

71   As noted in paragraph 69, where matters may require action at a level beyond the particular field they are identified in the report as 'starred' items, and may be directed to the head of the relevant school, or to the Heads of Learning and Information Services, finance and planning, the Dean of the Modular Schemes Management or elsewhere in the University's hierarchy as appropriate. An example was provided by the Head of LIS of such a starred item and how she had been able to respond positively, assessing the request (for provision of certain broadcast materials on a campus) not only in terms of the field which had made it, but also its usefulness to other fields.

72   Outcomes from field reports inform FASC annual reports. These are drafted by FASC Chairs for presentation to the relevant FASC at its January meeting. They are subsequently received by AAC at its February meeting. The intention is that the FASC annual reports should draw attention to any fields which should be subject to further University scrutiny and, more generally, highlight matters requiring consideration at institutional level. FASC annual reports are also expected to comment on the effectiveness of quality assurance in the faculty and to draw attention to examples of good practice. External panel members are invited to submit a separate report on their experiences and this is attached to the FASC report for submission to AAC.

73   In addition to FASC annual reports, the February meeting of AAC also receives reports from the UMS and PMS, drafted by the Dean of Modular Schemes Management, together with analyses of common themes arising from reports by external examiners and the FASC external members panel. Together, this ensemble of information is intended to enable AAC to provide the Academic Board with a synopsis of the annual review process, enabling the Board to discharge its responsibilities for the quality of the University's educational provision and the academic standards of its awards and to raise and respond to any matters requiring University-wide consideration.

74   Field chairs who discussed the annual review cycle with the audit team indicated that although they found the preparation of the annual field review report onerous, production of the latter is widely accepted as a necessity and that, more positively, the reports can help to frame the development agenda for the field for the next session. Similarly, while being aware that the system tends to lead to an emphasis on problems rather than good practice, they also saw the reports as providing an opportunity for the 'celebration of achievement during the year'.

75   From the evidence it gathered through reading the University's papers and from its meetings with members of staff, it seemed to the audit team that the University's annual review process is comprehensive and thoroughly conducted. Student membership of the FASC panel enables the views of students to be heard during consideration of the field reports, and the provision for separate reports from external panel members provides the University with access to an independent view which frequently added value by highlighting common issues and areas which the University might wish to consider, such as the need for a common University policy in some areas associated with assessment. In the team's view the design and implementation of the University's annual field review process constitute a feature of good practice.

76   The bringing together of FASC annual reports, modular scheme reports and the overview of external examiners' reports at its February meeting provides AAC with a wealth of information about the general academic well-being of the University's provision and offers an opportunity for AAC to fulfil its role in monitoring quality and academic standards. The device of starred items in the field review reports ensures that matters which can only be dealt with above the field level are rapidly drawn to the attention of the postholder likely to be able to deal with them. As part of the evidence it provided to support the audit, the University brought to the audit team's attention an example of an area where the outcome of the annual revalidation process had not been positive, which the team accepted as evidence of the general robustness of the process and how such negative outcomes are followed up. In general, such follow-up leads either to significantly enhanced review or (as in this case) to closure of the provision (see below).

77   At each stage, the University's annual review process leads to the production of action plans which are monitored as a part of annual review in the following session, but the audit team was unable to discern whether the University employed any formal means to monitor responses to action plans in the interim. This caused the team to question whether there might not be a risk that the University might remain unaware for some time of progress to meet the requirements of action

plans (or checks to their achievement) and that this might diminish the University's capacity to monitor and manage change. Overall, however, the team came to the view that the otherwise comprehensive features of the University's annual review process constituted an instance of good practice.

Field closures

78   The University has developed a process for field closure review where there is evidence to suggest that this is necessary. Such evidence can come from the outcomes of annual field reviews or from actual or projected student recruitment. The process is based on an action plan and is designed to protect the interests of students who will continue to take modules from the field as it is closed. The action plan must be agreed by the Academic Board and the design of the field closure process requires that the completion of the action plan is monitored by and reported to AAC, through the relevant FASC. As part of the evidence it provided to support the audit, the University made available to the audit team papers from a recent field closure which demonstrated the robustness of the process and its usefulness in enabling the University to adapt the contents of its portfolio while safeguarding the interests of students. The University's formal process for field closure seemed to the team to constitute a feature of good practice.

Periodic review

79   As indicated in paragraph 69 above, the University's annual field review process is seen by it as having replaced not only its earlier form of annual review, but also quinquennial review, with revalidation now an annual event. In view of what appeared to have been the cessation of the University's former process of quinquennial review, the audit team took care to establish whether its successor was providing the University with the opportunities for periodically reviewing the continuing validity and relevance of programme aims and intended learning outcomes that the *Code of practice* advises. In its discussions with senior members of the University it became clear to the team that the process by which fields receive a deeper scrutiny

as part of a five-year rolling programme is seen by the University as meeting this need.

80   One feature of the University's quinquennial 'enhanced' annual field review might, however, merit reconsideration. From the information it saw, the audit team could not be sure that the external member who would participate in such an 'enhanced' annual field review would necessarily have the subject expertise to assist the University and the field team to review the continuing validity and relevance of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes, since external members appointed by AAC to participate in the review of annual field reports are not primarily appointed for their subject expertise but are chiefly charged with monitoring and sustaining the integrity of the process.

81   Members of the University drew the audit team's attention to a recent change in the University's arrangements which had been signalled in the SED, that from 2005 written comments from one or more subject specialists be introduced as part of the process of five-yearly enhanced annual field review. In the team's view this is the least action the University could take to ensure the contribution of external peer subject expertise to enhanced annual field review, and so ensure that the University's arrangements for programme approval monitoring and review are fully consistent with the advice offered in the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme approval, monitoring and review*. The team therefore advises the University to monitor carefully the changes it has made to the periodic elements of its enhanced annual review arrangements in order to ensure that they provide clear evidence for itself, and external stakeholders, that the curricula are being effectively refreshed and academic standards secured.

Thematic review

82   An additional form of review, thematic review, was introduced by the University in 2003. Thematic reviews are initiated and overseen directly by the Academic Board, which approves topics (which might arise from the annual review

round, but can come from other sources including national external developments), how the review is to be conducted and the number of such reviews in any one session.

83   The outcomes and recommendations from each thematic review are formally reported to the Academic Board and the audit team was able to scrutinise a number of the reports from past thematic reviews. Matters covered included the issues associated with establishing and maintaining the anonymity of students in assessment, the admission of students with advanced standing, and the University's arrangements for supporting flexible and distributed learning (see below, paragraph 144).

84   From its discussions with members of the University, it seemed to the audit team that the outcomes of thematic reviews frequently led to the development of new policies, procedures or new (or revised) University codes of practice. On the basis of the evidence available to it, the team considers that the University's process of thematic review provides a valuable complement to its other internal review processes. The outcomes of completed thematic reviews, together with the use that has been made of their findings suggested to the team that the process should be viewed as a feature of good practice.

External participation in internal review processes

85   The QA Handbook identifies the roles of external members in programme or field validation panels, FASC review panels, and during programme development, but does not clearly identify separate criteria outlining the specific role and its distinctiveness from that of an external examiner. The University's view of its arrangements for securing external participation in its internal review processes is that they are robust and that the same external peers have endorsed the thoroughness of its procedures for validation and review.

86   The SED contained no evaluation of the role of the external member of FASC panels or within the annual review process. The audit team was able to conclude from a review of

FASC and AAC papers that engagement with external peers (other than external examiners) was carried out according to the guidelines in the QA Handbook and that consideration of their reports took place at meetings of AAC. The team was, however, unable to discern the criteria for the appointment of external peers to participate in the work of panels and how the University satisfied itself that their expertise would enable them to offer comments on the whole of the curricula.

87   In the course of its consideration of AAC papers, the audit team noted reports to the former that the comments of external participants in panels had lacked evaluation but was unable to identify how this matter had subsequently been followed up by the University. Overall, it seemed to the team that while external peer advice and scrutiny was to be seen in the appointment of external examiners and the participation of external peers in the development validation and approval of new provision, under the University's new augmented annual field review procedures it was less certain that the University's procedures would enable external peers with subject expertise to comment on the relevance and currency of the curricula (see above, paragraph 81).

External examiners and their reports

88   The University's scheme for its external examiners provides for their appointment to fields and to overall schemes. External examiners with field responsibilities are required to verify academic standards determine if the intended learning outcomes have been met and to confirm that the academic standards of the awards are comparable with those of like schemes across the sector. External examiners are appointed to a field by AAC on the basis of prior scrutiny and recommendations by a FASC.

89   At scheme level (for example, for the UMS) the University's practice is to appoint chief external examiners to ensure that standards and comparability are maintained across the scheme. Such arrangements do not, however, apply for those of the University's

awards linked to collaborative provision (see below). Chief external examiners are normally appointed from external examiners already appointed to fields, and the robustness of the University's arrangements in this matter is secured through appointing chief external examiners for four-year terms, the first two of which are served as deputy to the existing chief external examiner. Full and detailed guidelines concerning the appointment, briefing reports, rights and duties of the University's external examiners are provided in the QA Handbook.

90   From the evidence made available to it and from its conversations with members of the University, the audit team was satisfied that the University's procedures for appointing external examiners for provision that it delivers itself are in line with the advice contained in the *Code of practice*. The team noted with interest that the policy of some areas of the University (for example, the Gloucestershire Business School) was to seek to appoint external examiners from highly regarded business schools in other Universities. This approach stood in marked contrast to the practice seemingly followed with respect to the sample of partnership provision the team considered most closely, where external examiners appear to have been appointed from an overly narrow base. As noted elsewhere in this report (see below, paragraph 193) it would now be advisable for the operation of the University's arrangements for scrutinising and approving the appointments of external examiners to programmes delivered by its partners, and leading to its awards, to receive attention.

91   The University provides newly appointed external examiners with a briefing pack and they are offered the opportunity to attend an induction session which is normally conducted by the field chair and the chair of the FASC. The University requires its external examiners to comment on assessment and examinations, to scrutinise marked student work, to attend relevant assessment boards and to provide a report. The latter is produced to a standard template, supplied by the University, to be supported by detailed guidance notes. The

University requires external examiners' reports to be submitted to the Vice-Chancellor's Office.

92   Following their receipt by the Academic Registry, reports from external examiners are distributed to a specified list of postholders including the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic); the Field Chair; the Head of School, the Chair of the FASC, and the head of the relevant scheme. The Dean of Quality and Standards Development is expected to read each report on behalf of the Academic Board and to provide a synoptic report on their comments, identifying features of good practice and matters requiring attention, for consideration by AAC and the Academic Board.

93   The audit team read examples of such synoptic reports and noted that actions arising from them have provided the foci for thematic reviews. While the University expects that any matters in reports from external examiners which require urgent action will be made known to the Academic Board immediately, some common themes identified in the synoptic reports which the team saw did not seem to have been identified for wider consideration.

94   Matters raised by field external examiners in their reports are expected to be addressed in annual field review reports, while matters raised by chief external examiners relating to the UMS and PMS and their operation, are identified in a separate summary report produced by the Dean of Modular Schemes Management. All external examiners receive the field review which corresponds to their report and contains a response to it. Field external examiners and chief external examiners also receive a copy of the relevant summary Scheme Report. The University expects the FASC field review panels to audit that all reports by external examiners have been considered and to monitor that any action required has been initiated.

95   The University provides summaries of external examiner's reports as part of the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website. The audit team found evidence of one instance on the TQI website where an external examiner had reported that it had not been possible to confirm that the processes for assessment,

examination and the determination of awards were sound because they had not been involved in the process prior to the agreement of the awards. The University has provided a clear response to this report on the TQI website.

96   Overall, while the greater part of the reports from external examiners which the audit team saw confirmed the confidence of the former in the University's conduct of the assessment process, and the academic standard of the associated awards, and were generally very positive, there were some isolated expressions of concern, for example about the generosity of marking, and difficulties with University procedures, including the interval allowed for the external examiner to complete their duties before assessment boards. Although several staff who discussed external examiners' reports with the team regretted that the University's redesign of the template it provides for external examiners' reports had limited their ability to provide feedback and information on particular modules, the University later observed to the team that its redesign (occasioned by the requirements of the TQI website) had not removed opportunities for external examiners to provide feedback and information at the module level.

97   The SED made it clear that the University considered that its external examining arrangements had a central place in its quality and academic standards arrangements and that it considered its processes in this area to be robust. Overall, the audit team found that the procedures presented in the QA Handbook for working with external examiners, including their nomination and appointment, were generally employed consistently across the University, that external examiners were satisfied that the academic standards of the University's awards were comparable with those in similar institutions, and that reports from external examiners were also generally used appropriately to support quality and academic standards more generally.

External reference points

98   The University has stated its adherence to three essential principles for the maintenance

of the academic standards of its awards. These are that:

● academic standards of awards should be explicit and referenced to the national framework

● academic standards should be underpinned by the four elements of the Academic Infrastructure as specified by QAA

● a rigorous assessment system is to be applied to maintain academic standards and the integrity of the University's awards.

99   The SED included a section that summarised the University's approach to embedding the Academic Infrastructure within the University's processes and the University's position with regard to its use of external reference points in its work is provided in the QA Handbook. This stated, inter alia, that all the University's programmes of study had been located within the FHEQ and that the process for validating and approving new provision required that evidence be provided to show that the level of the qualification to which it leads is appropriately located within the FHEQ.

100 Following the publication by QAA of the 2003 report of the University's partnership with the Freie Theologische Akademie, Giessen in Germany, the University developed and published a Collaborative Partnership Handbook (the CP Handbook) which required the University's validation criteria for such provision to make clear reference to the FHEQ, the *Code of practice*, subject benchmark statements, and programme specifications published by QAA. The University has also produced level descriptors which refer to national credit frameworks: in the case of UMS to the Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System, usually referred to as NICATS and for PMS the framework of the Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer likewise generally referred to as SEEC. Staff told the audit team in the DATs that they found the University's level descriptors useful.

101 Programme specifications are made available to staff and students. The use of standard forms for the presentation of programme specifications,

which are available to staff on the intranet, is designed to ensure that all aspects of the advice offered by the Academic Infrastructure are considered when new programmes and provision are developed or existing programmes are reviewed. Programme specifications are now required for all programmes leading to a University award, irrespective of the number of CATS points involved.

102 The SED stated that initially all fields were required by the University to report to their respective FASC on the position of their programmes in relation to subject benchmark statements. Review and validation events now require that programmes be in alignment with the relevant subject benchmark statement and the most recently developed version of the template for reports from external examiners makes provision for a statement on the compatibility of the curricula with the relevant subject benchmark statement(s). Through its scrutiny of the evidence provided by the University, including materials provided to support the DATs, the audit team was able to confirm the accuracy of the University's observations in the SED.

103 With respect to the *Code of practice*, when a new section has been issued or an existing section has been revised, it is reviewed and the implications of its contents for the University assessed either by the relevant subcommittee of the Academic Board or the PMG. A report is then presented to the Academic Board which indicates the actions required to be able to confirm the consistency of the University's practice with respect to the *Code*. The SED stated the University's view that the advice offered by the *Code* has been embedded in the University's quality management and academic standards arrangements. From its consideration of the University's internal papers and its discussions with members of staff and students throughout the visits, the audit team was able to confirm that this appears to be the case.

104 In 1999 the University established a Professional Services Committee, part of the remit of which was to review the ways in which externality and benchmarking had been

considered for its central, professional and support departments. The audit team did not inquire into the work of this Committee in the course of its work. The way in which the University works with external reference points provided by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies is discussed below.

105 In general, the audit team came to the view that the University pays careful attention to external reference points including those provided by the Academic Infrastructure. As noted in paragraph 87 above, a sharper focus could, however, be given to the University's scrutiny of some of the external reports it receives.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

106 In addition to its participation in QAA subject reviews, DEs, and major review, the University's provision is subject to external review by a number of other PSRBs including Ofsted (for the Teacher Training Agency) and the British Psychological Society (BPS). The audit team was therefore able to draw on several strands of evidence in order to learn how the University analyses reports by external agencies on its arrangements and provision and uses the findings in its internal processes.

107 The SED stated that from the University's analysis of QAA subject reviews and DEs conducted between 2002 and 2004, 'no consistent messages' had emerged. It noted, however, that the reports of the University's recent DEs (which are not published but which were available to the audit team) had praised the involvement of external participants in its quality assurance processes.

108 The audit team found the University's view that 'no consistent messages' had emerged from its analysis of subject reviews and DEs surprising, since it appeared to be the case that all four of the University's DEs had reported some form of shortcoming in its communication arrangements with students, including feedback arrangements, personal tutoring, commentaries on assessments and student support and guidance. The team took care to examine the

minutes of a wide sample of committee meetings in order to understand better how reports from external agencies were scrutinised and considered. The content of the minutes of institution-level committees suggested to the team that they did not give reports from external agencies sufficiently penetrating consideration, although this perception might be a consequence of the way in which minutes are recorded. It is the University's view that consideration of the outcomes from subject level reviews, such as those followed by QAA's DEs takes place chiefly at field board level; nevertheless, the team advises the University to give thought to how it might ensure that the outcomes of external reviews of its provision and arrangements have the benefit of more penetrating consideration at institutional level.

109 Under the University's new arrangements for the development, validation and approval of provision, proposals for new fields or programmes with links to a PSRB undergo an event-based validation process, so that the University's requirements and those of such bodies can jointly be met. Where programmes or provision are subject to periodic review by a PSRB, the University expects to include practitioners as external members of the review panel. In each case the reports of validations and periodic reviews linked to the work of PSRBs are scrutinised by the relevant FASC and (as with other internal review and validation reports) are provided for AAC in summary form.

110 From the evidence it examined, the audit team was able to confirm that panels convened to validate provision with links to PSRBs, or to undertake periodic reviews of existing provision, included an external member with relevant practitioner experience, that FASCs received and considered the reports of such events and that, in turn, they reported to AAC on their findings. The team was also able to confirm that accreditation and other reports on the University's provision from PSRBs were widely circulated within the relevant faculties.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

111 Since the publication of the 1995 report, student representation has been confirmed on the Academic Board, AAC, TLAC and FASCs and a Student Experience Committee has been established, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. The work of the latter is intended to enable students to raise matters of interest and concern at the highest level. The audit team noted that as part of the its development of the Framework for the Future, the University had stressed its commitment to achieving a 'customer focus' and emphasised the need to ensure accountability to students using devices such as the University's student charter and individual charters prepared by departments, the importance of producing which had been a recommendation in the 1995 report.

112 In describing the University's student representation arrangements, the SED drew attention to the challenge of securing active participation from students in the representational opportunities available to them. It noted that the University's long-standing concerns in this area had caused it to instigate a thematic review into student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement. The report of this review had been considered by the Academic Board in December 2003 and the recommendations of the report were being implemented at the time of the audit. They included a student discussion forum, an e-notice board communication system for student feedback, the promulgation of a key issues agenda for module evaluations, and a joint project, with the SU, to support new student representatives. The audit team was also reminded that the University's arrangements provide for the participation of student representatives in the validation and review of provision (see above, paragraph 66). Members of the SU acknowledged to the team that student representation arrangements for those studying through collaborative arrangements were currently underdeveloped.

113 The audit team noted from the SWS that the SU shared the University's concerns about the level of student participation in University affairs. In its meetings with them, the team was told that students did not seem to be willing to act as representatives, a phenomenon which the SU attributed, in part, to apathy while at the same time noting that the formal manner in which many meetings were conducted was not 'student-friendly' or conducive to their active participation. Likewise, the volume of information and data available to students' representatives above the field level, may constitute an 'information overload' which makes it difficult for them to identify priorities for their attention and intervention. It may be that it would be worthwhile for the University to look further into these matters, in order to decide whether remedial action might be merited.

114 One observation by students about their current representation arrangements may be particularly relevant to the University's future plans for campus-based arrangements, in that a number highlighted variations in the nature and effectiveness of existing representation arrangements between the different campuses. In some cases, representation arrangements were described as 'complex', 'disorganised' or 'unreliable' while, in others, representation was described as 'straightforward' and 'consistent'. From its discussions with senior members of the University, the audit team found that such variations in the effectiveness of student representation arrangements from campus to campus had been identified as requiring attention, and that campus-based meetings with students were being conducted.

115 The SWS acknowledged the work undertaken by the University to improve student participation, including the new e-bulletin arrangements. SU officers also commented that they found the University's most senior staff to be approachable and responsive, but reported continuing difficulties in coordinating communications to new student representatives at field and programme level. Such poor coordination made it difficult for student representatives at that level to work

together and to be effective. Notwithstanding this apparently negative picture, in the course of its discussions with students' representatives at the briefing and audit visits the audit team learned of several examples where changes had been made to procedures and curricular content following student representations.

116 Students who met the audit team in the DATs freely acknowledged the willingness of the staff who taught them and supported their learning to solve any problems they encountered and to find support mechanisms that approximate to individual needs. They appeared to the team to be less convinced, however, that student representation at any level above that of the field would be likely to benefit them, and few students or staff who met the team, other than members of the SU Executive and senior staff, were aware of the existence of the Student Experience Committee (SEC).

117 The audit team was puzzled that the introduction of the SEC appeared to have had little or no impact across the University and sought to establish why this might be the case. In reading the minutes of the SEC (which, from discussions with students, did not seem to be widely accessed) the team noted that meetings appeared to take the form of reports from senior staff, with little active student participation. This suggested to the team that the committee itself might be seen by the University chiefly as a device for communicating information and its views to students, rather than for facilitating a two-way conversation, a possibility on which the University may wish to reflect further.

118 Overall, the audit team has no reason to doubt the sincerity and strength of the University's commitment to improve student participation and representation in decision-making, and it found some evidence of good communication and representation, particularly for master's level students. Such effectiveness does not, however, seem to extend uniformly to students at undergraduate level. One result is that (in very broad terms) many undergraduates seem to feel detached from the University's decision-making processes above

the field level. All students who met the team considered that the University's communications with them could be improved.

119 Reviewing the information available to it on the University's student representation arrangements, the audit team came to the view that while there is some scattered evidence that these are effective it would now be desirable for the University to give thought to how it might ensure better communications with student representatives, including those from programmes offered through partnership links, and those serving on senior institutional committees, and encourage and support their participation.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

120 The University's module evaluation process provides it with its primary means for collecting feedback from its undergraduate students on their learning experiences. Feedback from students at the level of the module is summarised by module tutors and reported to the appropriate field board, which includes student representatives. The outcomes of this process contribute to the annual field review reports that are presented to FASCs. There are equivalent arrangements for gathering feedback on their learning experiences from taught postgraduate students, and electronic surveys are used to gather feedback from distance-learning students.

121 The means through which feedback is to be collected from students at module level is not prescribed by the University, and the absence of a centrally provided specification for gathering module feedback has led to the use of a variety of means being employed, including questionnaires in several different formats and procedures based on focus group meetings. Since the conclusion of a thematic review, however, the University has recognised that it needs to be confident that a 'core set of issues' will have been covered in all module evaluations. At the time of the audit the University was moving towards incorporating the framework provided by the National Student Survey into its own feedback arrangements for 2005-06, by introducing

means for students to report on their overall experience within the University.

122 In addition to the information it gathers through module evaluations and their distillation in annual field reports, the University has recently established campus-based meetings with students in order to secure feedback on the student experience at that level. It also routinely includes student feedback arrangements when establishing project groups, for example, in connection with a recent project to redevelop its programme specifications template.

123 As noted elsewhere (see below, paragraph 190), the University's arrangements for collaborative provision have adopted annual monitoring procedures which are closely similar to those it follows for its own provision; hence, the results of feedback from students on programmes offered by its partners and leading to its awards are available to the University as part of the information it gathers to support periodic review and revalidation. As noted elsewhere, LIS also provides opportunities for students to provide feedback on provision through Learning Technology Skills Support (LTSS), surveys by means of the University's virtual learning environment (VLE), intranet student satisfaction surveys, bi-annual monitoring of PG Research students and the use of comment cards in Learning Centres.

124 Information from graduates and other former students is gathered by the Careers Centre and the SED stated that feedback and other information is sought from employers through a number of sources including the University's External Advisory Board (EAB), at which members of the senior management team meet representatives of local and regional industry and commerce to discuss their experiences of employing the University's graduates and to inform plans for the development of its portfolio. The SED also stated that the Careers Centre promoted 'close collaboration and information dissemination between employers and the University' through careers events and the Career Management Board. Less formal links with employers, for example, through placements, complement more formal links, for example

through participation in the development of new provision. From its comments in the SED it was clear to the audit team that the University has recognised that the range of formal and informal mechanisms it currently employs for gathering feedback from students, graduates and employers (and particularly the latter) across the University could benefit from further development.

125 The evidence available to the audit team suggests that where feedback information is gathered from employers and former and present students it is analysed, but it was not clear to the team how the outcomes of such analyses were fed back to those who had provided the initial information, and steps to improve such arrangements would assist the University to counter any perception that it is not a listening institution. Provisions in the existing process for developing new provision to consult employers, and in the proposed new campus-management structures to enhance the part played by employers in the University's quality management and other arrangements, have been made in part at least in recognition of the character of the University's mission, and the need to bring the importance of vocational study to the fore, and have the potential to complement the work of the EAB. The team encourages the University to take this work forward.

Progression and completion statistics

126 The SED reviewed the University's presentation and production of student data and statistical information on progression and retention as part of a substantial and thoughtful description and analysis. This noted that reports from DEs had commented positively on the progression and completion data the University collect and hold, and the uses to which the data and the resulting information have been put, particularly in the areas of student recruitment and retention. The SED noted that the availability of this data had enabled the University to identify priority areas for action. This section of the SED highlighted the work the University had undertaken to develop its management information arrangements to provide data at module, field and programme

level for its staff, needed in order to tackle poor availability of reliable and up-to-date student enrolment information and class lists for modules and programmes with which to monitor student attendance.

127 The audit team observed that the University's concerns about retention in particular areas has led it to invest in the production of datasets which make it possible to track the progress of cohorts of students as well as individuals. For registered students, progression and retention data is available to heads of school and field chairs and is used by them to inform management decisions. Prior to enrolment, the University's reporting tools now allow applications to be regularly and frequently monitored and enable student numbers to be scrutinised and analysed during the recruitment phase.

128 In the course of the visit, the University provided the audit team with a practical demonstration of the reports available to field chairs, heads of school, and those chairing field/course and scheme boards. It also provided access to internal management information reports. Together, these sources enabled the team to confirm that the University's management information system allowed relevant staff to map cohort progression from admission to employment for full-time undergraduate students. The analysis tools available to staff allow data to be organised by student characteristic as well as programme, and there is provision for data to be aggregated at field, school and University level. Bespoke reports can be provided on request to the Finance and Planning Information Manager, who maintains the student information system. At the time of the audit data for research, students was maintained on a spreadsheet, but is to be transferred into the University's main student information systems in the near future.

129 On the basis of the information available to the audit team it came to the view that the University had been wise to invest in the development of its student information systems, which should enable it to monitor

student progression more actively and enhance the timeliness and the likely effectiveness of its interventions to support student retention. Overall, the University's design for its student information systems, their implementation, and the work that has been undertaken to train staff at all levels in their use seemed to the team to be a feature of good practice. The team encourages the University to continue its work to embed the use of the systems across the institution, particularly at field level, paying particular attention to improving the capacity of staff to interpret the data now available to them. It will also be important for the University to continue to enhance the confidence of teaching and administrative staff at field, school, and faculty/campus level in the reliability of the data, and the security of relying on the University's central management and student information systems to support decision-making, rather than local solutions.

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

130 The SED stated that the University was committed to the recruitment of high-quality staff and to the provision of appropriate forms of induction and support to promote lifelong learning and career development. The appointment process for members of the teaching staff is normally handled at school level, with support and guidance from the Personnel Department. The process normally involves a presentation and a formal interview, and there is provision for questions to candidates for posts specifically linked to the promotion of learning (across the school or the University) to be prepared in advance with the advice of TLAC. In the appointment process it is the responsibility of the Personnel Department to ensure that schools fulfil the relevant legal requirements and follow the processes the University has laid down.

131 All new members of staff receive a two-day centrally provided general induction which is coordinated by CLT. This is supplemented by a two-day school induction event in the course of which those attending are allocated a

mentor. Newly appointed staff with fewer than three years experience of teaching are required to complete the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGCHE) which has recently been re-accredited by the Higher Education Academy for five years. Newly appointed staff who discussed their experiences of appointment, induction and mentoring to the audit team were complimentary and several indicated they had successfully completed the PGCHE. The University's induction arrangements for its staff appeared to the team to constitute a feature of good practice.

132 There are four elements to the University's Staff Development and Review process (SDR): self-evaluation, observation of teaching for members of the teaching staff, and interview and the feeding in of findings to department or school strategic planning. This process enables key developmental and performance targets to be set and agreed.

133 Members of the teaching staff who discussed SDR with the audit team were generally satisfied with its provisions, although the team noted that the University's recent Investors in People (IiP) accreditations had highlighted a need to ensure that the process was more transparent, as the SED acknowledged. The University has accordingly recognised that arrangements need to be put into place to enable staff to record their own continuing professional development and a new revised scheme the 'Review of Professional Practice: Teaching and Support Learning' is to be introduced in 2005-06. This scheme is to be based on peer review carried out by experienced staff and trained peers and the outcomes are to be used to identify and take forward the professional development needs of the staff.

134 The University describes itself as an institution which is teaching-led and has mechanisms for the promotion of teaching staff to principal lecturer and professor on criteria which include teaching ability and the contributions of individuals as teachers to the advancement of their subject and the development of student learning. There is provision in the University's arrangements for its

Promotions and Re-gradings Committee to consider applications for accelerated increments. This process is well established and the SED noted that a significant number of teaching staff had benefited from regradings or promotion. The University plans to complete the implementation of a formal job evaluation scheme by July 2005 with the aim of satisfying itself that all staff are appropriately graded for their responsibilities. Staff can be rewarded by appointment as a University Teaching Fellow and the University has successfully supported three National Teaching Fellow applications from its staff (see below).

135 Overall, from the evidence available to it and from its discussions with members of the University the audit team was able to confirm the University's view that it undertakes the appointment, development and reward of staff in a conscientious manner. Institutional overview of these matters is secured through reports to PMG.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

136 Staff development across the University is guided by its Staff Development Policy, which is applicable to staff at all levels whether they are employed on open-ended, term, or part-time contracts, including graduate teaching assistants. Under the terms of the University's Policy staff are allocated three days each year to update skills or knowledge which are relevant to their employment at the University. Staff who wish to study and prepare for the University's PGCHE or for the completion of a higher degree receive support from the University.

137 Central support for the continuing professional development of staff is provided through the Learning and Skills Support Team of the CLT which is now located within the newly established Academic Development Unit. At the centre, the Personnel Department also provides support for particular items of staff development while across the University these centrally supported staff-development activities are augmented by faculty and school-based

provision. All staff new to the University proposing to undertake supervision must undertake the University's Professional Development Programme for Supervisors.

138 The CLT manages the University's Teaching Fellowship Scheme and its Scholarship of Learning and Teaching Programme and acts as the holder of the support the University receives from the HEFCE Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund. The CLT also supports the Professional Development Group Scheme which is managed locally at a School level. For its own staff the Learning Technology and Skills Support team (LTSS) provides a weekly staff 'training hour'.

139 The University's Professional Development Group Scheme was launched in 2003 to promote the quality of the student experience through the engagement of staff in continuing professional development. In line with the University's strategy that staff support and development should be informed by the principle that quality is owned and takes place at the closest point possible to the actual process of teaching and learning, this scheme is managed at a school level by groups which address pedagogic professional development issues that are discipline-specific. From its consideration of the University's papers it seemed to the audit team that while there were examples of good practice to be found, the implementation of the scheme had not taken place consistently across the schools and that there were issues to be resolved around the commitment of staff to the associated activities and their time-management.

140 One of the responsibilities of school teaching and learning coordinators is to ensure that there is good communication between the CLT and staff at school level, and the University has adopted a number of ways of identifying and sharing good practice, including a twice-yearly internal journal made available to staff through the intranet: 'e-JOLT' (see above, paragraph 60). There is also an annual Teaching and Learning Conference and, at a local level, school symposia on pedagogic issues were welcomed by staff as a useful forum for sharing good practice. An example of good practice

that staff drew to the audit team's attention was the University's provision of developmental opportunities for research supervisors.

141 The University's policy on Teaching, Learning and Assessment commits it to 'developing the scholarship of learning and teaching through reflection and inquiry and making that knowledge public'. In support of this project, in 1998, the University established its SoLT scheme, which by 2004 had funded 40 projects based in pedagogy.

142 From the evidence available to the audit team, it was able to confirm the descriptions of the University's centrally and locally provided support and development arrangements for its staff and to confirm the positive contributions being made by CLT, LTSS and SoLT, the Teaching Fellows and the school teaching and learning coordinators. Staff-development opportunities for those leading fields programmes and for senior managers seemed to the team, however, to be more restricted. The University might therefore consider it desirable to reflect on what training opportunities it might wish to provide as a matter of course for staff appointed to academic and other management roles at a senior level.

143 The audit team came to the view that the range and nature of the opportunities for professional and subject development which the University makes available to its staff, the way these are linked to its perceived needs, together with the care with which the fitness of such opportunities to meet such needs is monitored, indicates that the University's staff-development arrangements are generally well matched to its requirements. In the area of staff-development support for senior managers there is, however, scope for further enhancement. While the University informed the team that the needs of such staff are identified through SDR and mentoring is available through members of the University's EAB there did not seem to be a planned management development programme to support senior managers. The University may wish to consider the desirability of introducing such a management development programme to support its most senior staff.

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

144 The University delivers three of its programmes by flexible and distributed learning, including e-learning. In each case, the programmes use a mix of printed materials to support learning and deliver teaching, together with an e-learning environment, residential schools and local support groups. The SED noted that the report of a recent DE had commented positively on the University's work towards developing an on-line community of learners embracing both on and off-campus students, and confirmed that the University's work with e-learning was growing steadily in volume. The SED also stated that there was 'a flourishing [internal] debate' on the costs and benefits of the development of distance learning. The audit team was able to explore some of the background to this debate in its meetings with members of staff during the visit. These discussions indicated that while the University believed that there was potential for the demand for e-learning to grow, its estimate of the likely demands of supporting this mode of study had led it to initiate a recent thematic review, the draft report of which it made available to the team (see below).

145 The University's arrangements for checking that the quality of the learning opportunities for students studying through flexible and distance-learning modes are identical to those used to validate and approve other provision and programmes. It is expected, however, that when designing provision to be delivered by means of e-learning, the proposing team will recognise that students studying away from the campus may need access to additional support and resources to counter any potential for isolation, and that panels validating such proposals will need to pay attention to this dimension. From the evidence scrutinised by the audit team it seemed to be the case that validation panels had scrutinised some of the materials used in flexible and distributed learning provision but perhaps not sufficient to reach a soundly-based judgment. While recognising that members of

validation panels, and of proposing teams, might not always see the need for such scrutiny at the point of validation, the team concurs with the findings of the University's recent thematic review that validation panels should be able to see and appraise the greater part (if not all) learning materials for the proposed provision, in order to be able to understand the detail of how tuition is to be delivered, and learning facilitated in this mode.

146   In the University's current model of flexible and distributed learning modes, learners are supported by email, telephone and direct tutorials. The University has sought to make particular effort to secure feedback and participation from students pursuing these courses and remains disappointed at response rates to evaluation forms. The audit team was able to review samples of the learning materials and information provided to students' learning through flexible and distributed learning modes. It found it to be clear and to include information designed to assist students to prepare for learning through this mode.

147 The audit team met staff responsible for supporting flexible and distributed learning to discuss the University's arrangements to support their work and, in turn, their work to support students studying through this mode. It found that the programme team was enthusiastic about flexible and distributed learning and committed to student well-being. The development of the programmes appeared to have been adventitious, however, and largely made possible by the committed support of those delivering the programme. Notwithstanding this point, the level of student support and personal tutoring and academic counselling made available throughout these programmes was seen by the team as a strength of the provision and might offer some scope for further development, for application in the University's conventional campus-based provision. Overall, the team found much to agree with in the report and observations of the University's thematic review of its approach to flexible and distributed learning, and particularly with comments about the need to

support and develop the infrastructure for this mode of provision across the campuses, and beyond the University; for it to be more clearly situated in the University's strategic thinking, and in the University's overall plans for the development of its portfolio. The team encourages the University to take forward the recommendations of the thematic review at the earliest opportunity.

Learning support resources

148 The University delivers library, academic computing and media support for learning and teaching through its LIS which reports to both AAC and the Professional Services Committee. The University's view is that LIS works closely with the schools through senior information advisers, based in the Learning Centre, to ensure that the learning support resources that each campus requires are provided.

149 The University has set out to ensure that each of its campuses enjoys comparable levels of service from its Learning Centre. The facilities offered in each Centre include a range of information and communication technology (ICT) facilities, print and electronic media, study space and other specialist equipment and learning support services such as those for disabled students, international students and those studying remotely.

150 Forward planning of learning-support resources, like the provision itself, is based around the needs of the individual campuses, with resources being allocated in line with student numbers. For each campus, the Dean works with the Head of LIS to coordinate learning-support provision, and they are also responsible for strategic planning. Following the completion of the Framework for the Future consultations, and the consequent restructuring, the model of learning-support resource allocation and management described above had recently been introduced at the time of the audit.

151 Conversations with members of staff in the visit suggested to the audit team that the University was aware that the shift from a resource allocation and management model

based on the schools to one based on the campuses would require sensitive management. It was less clear, however, that it had thought through what measures (following Framework for the Future) might be necessary to enable it to enhance its capacity to take a view of its overall learning-support needs to balance that taken by each of the campuses. This is presently a responsibility of meetings of the Deans and Directorate and PMG. The introduction of more clearly defined means to allow the University, in its new circumstances, to take such an overall view might now be wise.

152 There are opportunities for fields to acquaint LIS with their changing needs through annual field review and enhanced five-yearly annual field review, and LIS has been able to maintain an overview of developments in cognate areas through the participation of its staff in the work of FASCs. Within annual field review, items that relate to learning support can be 'starred' for the attention of LIS, and both LIS and LTSS make use of a number of means to gather feedback from the users in order to improve their services.

153 Following the Framework for the Future consultations, the University's central LTSS has been relocated from the LIS to form part of the Academic Development Unit. This is intended to enable a stronger focus on the provision and development of ICT for teaching and learning, with LTSS continuing to report directly to TLAC.

154 The SED stated that LTSS had sought to promote greater use of the University's proprietary VLE by students and staff and has taken a lead in improving the University's website to make more information available to applicants, students, and staff, partly through bringing together the University's website and intranet under one architecture. The LTSS has provided training programmes for students and staff on the use of the VLE in learning and teaching and provides day-to-day support through a helpdesk facility. Students with whom the audit team discussed the contribution of the University's VLE to their learning support observed that it was being increasingly used both by students and tutors to improve

communications, and by students to gain access to module information and to link to other internet-based resources.

155 The SWS reported that students were generally satisfied with their access to learning support resources (including teaching space) and their quality, and view the learning centres as a 'vital resource'. Both the SWS and SED acknowledged shortcomings in the opening hours for the learning centres and the availability of core texts for modules, and that there were occasional difficulties in the provision of suitable teaching spaces on all campuses.

156 The audit team's meetings with students enabled it to confirm the accuracy of comments on learning support resources in both the SWS and SED. Students confirmed the significance of the learning centres to their work, and the general availability and willingness of LIS and LTSS staff to support learning.

157 From its consideration of the evidence made available by the University, and from its discussions with staff and students, the audit team came to the view that while the University's arrangements for the forward planning of learning-support resources and their day-to-day management appear to have been effective, with the introduction of campus-based arrangements as an outcome of the Framework for the Future consultations, only cautious confidence can as yet be placed in the new arrangements. The introduction of clearer means to enable the University to monitor and manage its shift to campus-based arrangements, as it affects learning-support resources and their management, would be helpful and advisable.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

158 The University's approach to providing student support and guidance is based on their central coordination, but 'with local delivery and identity'. Responsibility for delivering academic support and guidance is devolved to the schools, with additional support from the University's learning-support and specialist services (see

above). On each campus, the learning centres provide a focal point for learning support, which is complemented by the campus's SIAC in which the campus's student adviser (SA) is based. The SAs provide specialist information and guidance on matters such as the structure of the UMS, programme planning and prerequisites for study.

159 The University's induction programme for new undergraduate students is provided at campus and school level, in the course of which new first-year students are allocated to a personal tutor, who is expected to serve as the student's first point of contact for academic support and act as an intermediary for other and specialist support services. Schools are responsible for appointing and assigning personal tutors and aim to ensure that each is responsible for no more than 15 level 1 students. It is expected that there should be not less than three meetings between each level 1 student and their personal tutor. One of the purposes of such meetings is to enable personal tutors to assist students with work in their PDP.

160 The SIACs are open throughout the year including during vacation times, and represent the University's ambition to adopt a 'one-stop shop approach', bringing together support for international students and students with disabilities, with services in counselling, welfare, student finance, accommodation, chaplaincy, medical centre and pre-school care under the umbrella of the Student Services Department. International and EU students have access to the International Student Adviser, and where schools include placements in their provision there are placement managers. Chairs of the fields are expected to provide support for distance-learning students working in their areas. The introduction of SIACs across the campuses seemed to the audit team to be a feature of good practice.

161 Part-time and non-EU students retain their personal tutor throughout their studies at the University. For other undergraduate students who progress to levels 2 and 3, responsibility for the provision of academic support and guidance shifts from a personal tutor to a senior tutor in each school. The latter are expected to coordinate

students' work on their PDP, provide academic advice as necessary, and coordinate career activities and the deployment of student mentors.

162 For taught postgraduate students, field leaders, module leaders or more specialist subject-based staff are expected to provide academic support in the first instance, with further support available from the Dean of Modular Schemes Management and the SAs on each campus. Research students have the support of at least two experienced supervisors and can gain access to specialist professional or methodological expertise if this is considered appropriate.

163 The University drew the audit team's attention to the high ratings it had received in QAA subject review reports, and it has itself identified the support it provides for students with special needs (which is monitored by means of the Student Experience Committee) as good practice. The SED noted, however, that the University considers that it needs to monitor provision for students with disabilities and international students more closely, and a paragraph in the Framework for the Future documentation that was provided for the team, acknowledged the need for further development of its academic support arrangements.

164 Although published QAA subject review reports have viewed academic support and guidance delivered through school-based and University-level processes as sound, the report of a more recent DE has suggested that more formal support for students might be necessary. The SWS reported significant variations in the levels of academic support available across the campuses and schools, and observed that such variations created uncertainty among students about where to turn for academic guidance and advice. The SWS also confirmed, however, that the campus learning centres and SIACs work provided a valued service, although it noted that SAs were not available full-time on each campus. The SWS praised the specialist guidance provided by the University for students with disabilities and students from overseas.

165 Members of the teaching staff and those leading modules programmes and fields who met the audit team emphasised the importance

of encouraging students at levels 2 and 3 to adopt a more reflective and independent approach to learning, and commented that the University's arrangements were designed in accordance with this view, with a closer level of support and guidance, through the personal tutors, at level 1, and more student-led arrangements subsequently.

166 From discussions with students and staff, it would appear to be the case that academic guidance, support and supervision across the schools operated through a range of formal and informal mechanisms, and that there were differences in operational procedures across schools and campuses. Individual students spoke positively of their access to tutorial support and guidance and rather more spoke appreciatively of the support available to them from the SIACs and the guidance and supervision provided for international and postgraduate students. The University itself has identified the need to support students' continuing participation in, and engagement with, PDP beyond level 1, and at the time of the audit the University was seeking to work with schools to identify how and where such support would be provided.

167 Students studying for awards within the UMS across more than one field seemed to the audit team to be less confident that the University's approach to identifying and assigning personal tutors worked well for them, and the team heard that such students commonly gravitated towards individual module tutors for academic guidance and support, and did not necessarily turn to the personal tutor to whom they had been assigned. Some students who met the team seemed unaware of the senior tutor arrangement that the University has adopted for students after the first year of their studies. While recognising that the University has recently reviewed its arrangements for the academic support and guidance of its students the team came to the view that arrangements for students studying across more than one field could benefit from review.

168 One consequence of a lack of awareness among students of the different arrangements

following the first year of study and subsequently is that the role SAs are having to play in providing academic guidance and support appears to go beyond the University's original intentions. Even with the contributions made by the SAs it seemed to the audit team that the effectiveness of the University's present arrangements for providing academic guidance and support for all its undergraduate students was open to question. The team therefore advises the University to give thought to how it might achieve an effective academic counselling system for all students, and how it might closely monitor its implementation.

169 For registered research postgraduate students, the lead member of the supervisory team the University identifies for them is expected to provide both academic and personal support. Postgraduate research students also have access to the Research Student Advocate, independent of the supervisory system, to whom they can refer queries or complaints which cannot be resolved locally. They also have access to university-wide support services such as the International Office, the Careers Advisory Service, and specialist student counsellors.

170 Research students are required to undertake a Postgraduate Certificate in Research Methods unless they have previously undertaken equivalent training and, as noted above, are subject to bi-annual progress reports which are monitored by FRCs and through annual reports from the latter by URC. Through the DATs, the audit team was able to meet several research students and to discuss their experience of the support arrangements provided by the University. It was able to confirm the University's requirements for completion of the Postgraduate Certificate in Research Methods, that the constitution of supervisory teams again met the University's requirements, that bi-annual reports on their progress were regularly submitted, and that they were aware of the availability of the Research Student Advocate to them should they need further advice. The process of supervision and support for research students appeared to the team to be consistent with the advice offered in the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*

published by QAA. With the University's current move to campus-based arrangements, however, it may wish to check that research students will continue to have access to appropriate resources for their research and support outside the academic session for undergraduate students.

Personal support and guidance for students

171 As noted above, elements of the University's arrangements for providing personal support to students are integrated with their companion arrangements for providing academic guidance and support. This is most visible in the shape of the University's personal tutoring arrangements where, generally, level 1 students (usually, but not always first-year students) are supported by a designated personal tutor who provides academic advice and when necessary can refer students to other forms of personal support. The University recognises the importance of communicating how students can obtain support and it has developed a useful guide, the 'A to Z of Student Services', which is available via a link from the University's Home web page.

172 Personal tutors are allocated time to perform their duties through the University's 'Balances of Duties Scheme' which sets off time to be spent in providing personal tutor support against other activities. In most schools, undergraduate students at levels 2 and 3 are supported by a senior tutor who provides academic counselling, and by campus-based academic student advisers (see above). Students undertaking postgraduate studies are normally supported by their course leader or supervisor and research students are also supported by their supervisor, with additional support available from the Research Students Advocate. The audit team learned that distance-learning students are provided with full access to all student services.

173 The aim of the rationalisation of student support services described above has been to ensure that while the services should be more centrally coordinated they should retain a local identity on each campus and be locally delivered. The Student Services Department

reports to the SEC which will also receive a report on the operation of the SIACs, 12 months after their inauguration.

174 The University's disability adviser works closely with the CLT and has produced documentation supporting staff training for working with students with disabilities. A further example of a recent development includes the addition of a section to the Assessment Handbook to offer advice on alternative assessment methods for students with disabilities. Students who discussed these and other support arrangements provided through the disability service with the audit team, indicated their belief that the service was working well. Likewise, and again echoing the SWS, they were generally more than satisfied with the support provided by the Counselling Services, international student advisers and Medical Services. The team noted with interests that the Business School, which has the largest number of international students, has appointed its own international student coordinator, to work alongside the SA located in its SIAC.

175 While the SWS voiced some concerns regarding students' access to advice and support in the areas of accommodation, catering, and financial advice, it observed that when its members had been asked for information to support the audit the area of student support that they had raised the most comment from had been personal tutor arrangements. Students who discussed their experiences of personal and pastoral support with the audit team spoke positively about the level of formal personal tutoring they received in the course of their level 1 studies, but subscribed to the views of the SWS that the support they received after level 1 was more variable and less structured (see below). Students also spoke highly of the support and guidance available from SAs based in the SIACs.

176 The University recognises the positive contributions SIACs have made to the provision of personal support for students, and that students across its campuses need to experience consistent levels of access to services and support. In the course of the audit, the

audit team was unable to test and confirm the levels of personal and pastoral support provided for students studying for the University's awards with its partners.

177 The University recognises differences in the nature and availability of personal tutor support from level 1 to level 2 and above, and the SED stated that it intended to provide further staff development with a view to improving such support for students. The audit team encourages it to keep this area under review, while recognising that tackling perceived difficulties with academic guidance and counselling represents a more immediate priority.

Collaborative provision

178 As noted earlier, the University has a small portfolio of partnership links, through which at the time of the audit about 6 per cent of its registered students were studying for its awards. Each of the links is based around provision designed by the partner and validated by the University as suitable to lead to one of its awards. Through the University's present partnership links, students are able to study for its awards in the areas of health studies, initial teacher education, theology and ministry, with a small number of partnerships based around Foundation Degrees.

179 The University has one overseas partner, the Freie Theologische Akademie, Giessen in Germany, which participated in a QAA overseas audit of the University's collaborative arrangements in 2001-02, the report of which was published in July 2003 (the 2003 report). All other partnership links are UK-based, many of them local or based in the University's home region.

180 In initiating a collaboration the University seeks to check:

- the consonance of the collaborating organisation's mission and values with its own

- the financial soundness of the potential collaborator

- the partner's ability to provide students with a learning experience comparable to that available to the University's campus-based students

- the degree of alignment between the subject content of the proposed partnership provision and relevant subject expertise available to the University from within its schools, and the willingness and ability of a designated school to accept responsibility for overseeing the collaborative activity.

181 These principles are set out in the University's Handbook for Collaborative Partners (the Collaborative Handbook) which, as noted earlier, was produced in response to advice offered in the University's 2002 thematic review. The Collaborative Handbook details the procedures to be followed in initiating a new partnership and in validating provision to be delivered by partners and leading to the University's awards, together with the processes to be followed for monitoring, evaluation and review.

182 Development of a new partnership is in three stages. In the first of these, steps are taken to ensure at Directorate level that the proposed collaboration fits with the University's principles for the development of such proposals. The second stage may take one of two forms, dependent on whether the partner is new to the University or not. In the former, once Directorate approval has been obtained a visit to the organisation, involving the Vice-Chancellor and/or a member of the Directorate (or a nominated representative) must take place, but there is no formal and separate stage of institutional recognition. In the case of an existing partner or an established body within the public sector a Directorate visit is not normally required. In all cases, financial and legal due diligence checks on the suitability of the partner must be carried out by the University's Director (Resources). If these are broadly satisfactory, work begins on costing the proposal.

183 Before the proposal can proceed to the third stage the main matters to be considered are:

- the resource base within the partner organisation

- the partner's understanding of the requirements of quality assurance in higher education and, if overseas, within UK higher education,

- the availability of appropriate resources within the relevant University school to support, maintain and enhance the collaboration.

There is no external input at this point. If the information on a proposed new link is satisfactory, including the outcomes of the due diligence checks, it may proceed to the final stage when the process of validation becomes identical to that for internal courses/fields except that, as indicated in paragraph 62, above, all such validations follow the event-based rather than the continuous model.

184 Since programmes which have been validated to be offered within a partnership link do not form part of the UMS or PMS they are not bound by the University regulations for the Schemes, and it is a requirement that a set of assessment regulations be considered at the validation event which must nonetheless be consistent with the University's principles for assessment. Similarly, as part of the validation process, procedures for appeals and complaints must be presented for approval which are expected to be no less rigorous than those of the University.

185 Under the University's procedures for validating provision to be offered through partnership links, the matters to be considered by a validation panel for such a link are more extensive and technically demanding than those for panels validating provision to be offered within the University. For this reason the audit team sought to understand how the University ensured that validation panels for such links would be able to discharge their responsibilities and was told that the University relied on the membership of all such validation panels of the chair of a FASC.

186 The audit team noted the presence within the University's portfolio of collaborative provision of several unrelated validated programmes, leading to identical award titles. It was told that such awards could be distinguished by the name of the institution at which they were studied that appeared on the associated award certificate, but it might nonetheless be wise for the University to

satisfy itself from time to time that the academic standards of awards with identical titles are themselves equivalent.

187 A 'memorandum of agreement' is provided for each partnership, together with a financial agreement. The audit team was concerned to note that those memoranda of agreement which it scrutinised appeared not to have been updated on a regular basis, and the financial agreements seen by the team did not appear to reflect the likely cost to the University of providing quality assurance and quality enhancement support for the partnership. Attention to this area might be wise in the interests of underpinning the sustainability of individual partnership arrangements.

188 Each validated programme within a partnership link has two lines of communication to the University: one for quality assurance and one for the subject element. Where an individual member of staff is held by the University to be appropriately qualified to advise the partner on both quality assurance and academic standards matters, and on subject-specific matters, these responsibilities may be vested in a single individual.

189 Members of the University with subject expertise who are designated to act as link persons between a validated programme and the University are ex-officio members, the former's programme committee and are expected to participate in meetings of the relevant board of examiners. They provide the most important day-to-day link between the University and the programme team, delivering the provision for the partner, and they are responsible for ensuring that the programme operates within University principles for assessment, quality and standards. Such University staff are also responsible for ensuring that any marketing material produced by collaborative partners is up to date and accurate (see below, paragraph 195).

190 Annual monitoring and review processes for programmes offered with collaborative partners are identical to those used for provision offered on the University's campuses,

with the additional opportunity for the partner to 'star' items which it considers it is unable to address itself (see above, paragraph 71). Annual reports are now submitted by the relevant school rather than, as previously, directly to the centre, a change introduced by the University in response to comments in the QAA Overseas audit report on the University's partnership with the Freie Theologische Akademie, Giessen. The University's grounds for having programmes offered collaboratively considered at school and faculty level are compelling and the audit team accepts that this approach provides a means for programmes validated by the University to be scrutinised alongside comparable programmes offered on its own campuses. The University's present arrangements rely, however, on the FASCs and AAC to look across the range of collaborative provision holistically, either to identify and spread good practice or to identify common issues, and here the team was less sure that the University's present arrangements provide it with a sufficiently robust view of institutional matters in its partnerships.

191 As part of its evidence for the audit, the University made available a sample of minutes from the meetings of programme committees based in partner institutions. On the basis of its scrutiny of this sample, it seemed to the audit team that considerable importance is attached to monitoring the conduct and outcomes of such meetings, and that this was particularly important where the partner collaborating with the University was used to imposing a more punitive approach to assessment regulations than that sanctioned by the University-approved regulations for the programme.

192 The University appoints external examiners for validated programmes offered through partnership links on the basis of a recommendation by the partner. Guidelines for appointment of external examiners in these cases are identical to those for internal appointment and the information provided for the audit team on the University's external examiners for its partnership links generally met the University's guidelines.

193 The data described above provided the audit team with information on the institution hosting the partnership link and the institution from which the relevant external examiner(s) were drawn. This showed that the University's partnership links based around programmes in theology and ministry are almost wholly with small specialist colleges and that the external examiners appointed by the University to work with such links were, again, almost wholly based in similarly small specialist colleges. Overall, the team considers that where the University is appointing external examiners for programmes provided through partnership links with small specialist institutions, and external peers to validation and review panels for such programmes, it would be advisable for such external peers to be drawn from the full breadth of the UK higher education sector. This would enable the University to ensure that a broad perspective can be brought to bear on the curricula, and that the academic standards of the awards are comparable with those in the UK higher education sector at large.

194 The University provides some development opportunities for staff in partner institutions; for example, the audit team noted that a member of University staff had visited partner institutions to advise on their obligations as a result of the enactment of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act. This briefing did not appear, however, to be part of a planned programme of developmental opportunities for partner institutions, and their staff and the audit team feels that it would now be advisable for the University to consider, together with its partners, what support for their institutional development, including staff development, it might be appropriate for it to provide.

195 As noted above, the University's link person(s) are expected to monitor the accuracy of any marketing material produced by the partner with respect to validated provision leading to the University's award. In this connection, the audit team was concerned to note that the website of one established partner still referred to validation by 'Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher

Education' suggesting that the website contents had not been checked by the University, or updated by the partner, for at least four years. The University may wish to reflect on the effectiveness of its current arrangements for checking the promotional materials made available by its partners.

196 From the instances considered by the audit team, it was clear that in each case the link person was providing consistent support to the partners and conscientiously safeguarding the University's interests. At the time of the audit, however, the team could not establish how the University might routinely take and maintain an overview of the totality of its collaborative arrangements, and how it could satisfy itself that they are operated in a manner that is wholly consistent with its expectations. The team advises the University to consider what steps it should take to enable more direct monitoring of the academic well-being of individual partnership links.

Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline trails and thematic enquiries

Discipline audit trails

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

Business management

198 The scope of the DAT agreed with the University-comprised provision leading to undergraduate awards in Business Management with the following titles: BA (Hons) Management (Major); BA (Hons) Business Management (Major). The DAT also covered taught postgraduate provision in Business Management leading to the following awards:

MA Management; Master in Business Administration; and MA Leading Change by Action Research. Management and business management major fields are available in combination with up to 30 minor combinations.

199 The DSED provided to support the DAT covered all the business management programmes offered by the University and therefore included briefing information on business management provision offered in the School of Sport and Leisure. Following the submission of the DSED and discussions at the briefing visit this latter was excluded from detailed consideration by agreement with the University. The focus of the DAT was therefore on business management provision offered by the Business School, which is based at the Park Campus.

200 The DSED was prepared specifically for the purpose of the DAT. Programme specifications were provided with the DSED and a wide sample of programme field and module documentation, and material directed to students, was made available by the University. The programme specifications had been prepared with reference to the University's standard template, which requires a statement of the aims of the field, course, and programme. The programme specification is treated as the authoritative source of information for compiling module guides, which are handbooks for students. The programme specifications showed that the *Subject benchmark statement* for business and management had been referred to.

201 For the MBA the programme specification refers to the master's level *Subject benchmark statement* in business and management published in September 2002. The MBA has also been mapped against the criteria of the Association of MBAs (AMBA) which were said to correspond to a sector standard. The University's MBA is not accredited by AMBA (although some MBA students mentioned this to the audit team) but the University is currently seeking accreditation by the European Foundation for Management Development. The programme specifications make reference to

the academic level of programmes derived from the PMS, which uses the FHEQ as its benchmark. The content of programme specifications is reviewed (and may be updated) by means of annual field review.

202 There is a good deal of commonality at level 1 across the Business School suite of management fields. Above level 1, options in the major:minor programme permit 30 different combinations. Students who met the audit team told it that they found this matrix of possibilities complex and difficult to navigate. Those students who had made recourse to the SIAC based in the Business School reported that they valued the flexibility the scheme matrix offered for specialisation and differentiation. Students who had not made use of this facility, however, seemed to the team to have found themselves overwhelmed and unaware that they may have limited time to make changes if they wish to transfer across minor combinations. The team came to the view if students could be more actively encouraged to seek the support of the SIAC for academic guidance (see above, paragraph 158).

203 The Business School actively encourages its students to undertake a placement and operates a placement unit. Support for placement students has been enhanced through the provision of a mid-placement seminar, to ensure that students are kept in touch with developments in the institution and have access to support when recommencing their studies at the University. In the course of each placement, a member of staff will visit the student on not less than two occasions.

204 Recruitment to the taught postgraduate field has been successful in attracting international students and the postgraduate area recruits well overall. Applications to programmes leading to the undergraduate awards have been less buoyant in recent years and the Business School has responded by developing new feeder routes through a suite of HND and HNC provision.

205 The team of staff delivering provision in the Business Field has access to a

comprehensive set of recruitment, admissions and progression data through which they can track the performance of cohorts of students across all years of the full-time suite of programmes, and analyse retention and progression. Members of the Business School also use the data and information available to them through the university's information systems, to monitor the composition of the student body in terms of ethnicity, gender, age and additional needs for the purposes of field review reports to the Business School FASC.

206 As with annual monitoring elsewhere in the University, the process begins at the module level where each module leader prepares a module evaluation report which describes the methods of evaluations used and summarises comments. Matters for the attention of the module team are identified, as are areas of good practice. The response to external examiners is also included in the module evaluation. Module reports vary in the quality of their evaluation with some examples of critical reflection, while others solely provide a minimal description of student comments. Module evaluations contribute to the annual Field review report.

207 The Business Management Field Chair prepares an annual report that is submitted to the FASC review panel for consideration. The Field review includes a summary of key data and a commentary on performance for the academic session. Module evaluations, reports from the external examiners and summaries of the outcomes of student feedback are included in the Field review report, together with analyses of admission statistics, demographic data, summary award statistics and first-destination information for all students. Matters requiring attention are identified in action plans that are attached to the Field review for the attention advice and approval of the FASC.

208 The audit team was able to confirm that matters, such as the need for resources in order to invest in new approaches to recruitment, a request for a review of the template for external examiners' reports and the need to reserve places on modules for students who enter later

in the academic year, had all been 'starred' in order to bring them to the attention of the University. The team was also able to confirm that the Business Field review reports it saw had been considered by the FASC, and that information on good practice had been sent forward to TLAC. It noted that in 2003-04, the FASC had noted that it could not express confidence in a particular field, which had subsequently been withdrawn. The team also noted that the University's exit procedure to safeguard the interests of students in such circumstances had been invoked.

209 Reports from external examiners are considered as part of the annual review of each field. Overall, the external examiner reports for the Business Field which the audit team saw were positive about the provision, and the contribution of staff all confirmed the appropriateness of the academic standards of the relevant awards. There was evidence from the report of the most recent field review and associated follow-up activity, however, that there is the possibility that key points in external examiners' reports may not always be fully appreciated. The Field review report itself observed that responses to expressions of concern in external examiners' reports 'are mainly explained by a lack of familiarity with the Management Field's practices or insufficient time to review work before the assessment board.' The report itself did not explain how this view had been reached.

210 The assessment arrangements for each module are developed by the module teaching team and approved by the Field Board, which reports them to the FASC. They are laid out in the relevant module guide and are also available on the University's intranet. As noted in paragraph 51, the Business School pioneered the development of ASPs in the University and the ASP for the School receives all proposed assessments, and ensures that each module assessment is consistent with the UMS and PMS respectively, and that they link appropriately to the intended learning outcomes. From the audit team's consideration of the papers of the Business School ASP, it appeared that the latter

was making a signal contribution to strengthening the quality and coherence of assessment practice within the field. The University has itself identified the development of the ASP in the School as a feature of good practice, and now requires the establishment of ASPs in all schools. The team came to the view that in the context of the University the manner in which ASPs had been identified as a feature of good practice and disseminated across the institution was itself a feature of good practice.

211 The number and nature of the assessments the audit team saw for the sample of modules it considered conformed to the advice set out in the University's Assessment Handbook and generally reflected well the intended learning outcomes. Completion and failure rates for assessments are reported to the FASC and assessments are reviewed where necessary. From the information available to the team it appeared that a range of approaches to assessment is followed including essays, projects, reports and group presentation. In the case of the MA by Action Research, assessment is located in work-related problem-solving. Students who met the team valued the approach to learning and assessment which had been adopted in this course.

212 All student work made available to the audit team had been marked and moderated in accordance with the University's requirements and had been scrutinised by the relevant external examiners. In all cases, the academic standards of the student work seen by the team was consistent with the level of award. The assignments set showed a requirement for progression to be demonstrated from level to level and the team found that failing work had been marked appropriately.

213 All modules included grade descriptors which are set out in the student module guide. The marking criteria were presented with some helpful examples, detailed explanations including, in the postgraduate programmes, of how to meet the required standard. All assignment briefs made clear to students what was required in order to secure a pass.

214 Feedback to students is normally available on all course work but there is no feedback on examination scripts. The quality of feedback on marked work seen by the audit team varied from a minimal level of comment to detailed annotation and discussion, and there were some examples of particularly good and detailed feedback. The University may wish to consider how it might work with the FASC and the School to ensure the dissemination of the best practice in feedback on assessed work in the School.

215 Student guides are available for each module and provide good support for students. In addition to providing details of assessment requirements, many provide indications of week-by-week reading to match specific lecture topics, and give helpful information on tutor contacts and other materials available.

216 The learning environment provided for business students in the Business School is generally appropriate to the provision, although since learning support and access to library and ICT provision is optimised for the needs of undergraduate students such support is more limited outside their periods of study. Master's students who had returned to study after an interval described to the audit team how they had been supported by the School. Learning resources for the Business School students are a standing item in field review reports.

217 There are opportunities for students to raise matters for consideration by the school or the University through module evaluations. Examples of recent matters raised by students through evaluation and feedback information have included the complexity of module content in one instance, and more generally the disruption to the academic year, referred to in paragraph 41. Such matters are picked up when the FASC reviews the field and should lead to an action plan to tackle them. In one instance the audit team noted that a number of students on a particular module had reported difficulty in gaining access to an item of literature required for the module. The module team had identified this as a matter to be followed up and it had been included in the review action list. Students who met the audit team considered that staff

generally responded rapidly and helpfully to indications of students experiencing difficulties.

218 The audit team was not made aware of a formal student:staff liaison committee but students participate actively in committees within the Field. There was evidence of student contribution to the field review. Students who met the panel spoke well of their involvement at Field level generally but felt they had little influence at levels above the School.

219 Overall, the audit team came to the view that the quality of learning opportunities was suitable for provision leading to the awards listed in paragraph 198 above.

Psychology

220 The scope of the DAT comprised provision in psychology leading to the following awards BSc (Hons) Psychology (Major/Joint/Minor); MSc Psychology in the Workplace, with interim postgraduate diploma and postgraduate certificate awards, recently renamed MSc Business Psychology (see below). The University's provision in psychology is delivered by its School of Health and Social Sciences, which was based in the Faculty of Education and Social Sciences at the time of the audit. The School's health provision is based at the Oxstalls Campus and its psychology provision is chiefly delivered at the Francis Close Hall Campus.

221 The DSED was written specifically for the audit and incorporated programme specifications for the taught psychology programmes. These conformed to the University's revised template and had been subject to internal scrutiny and approval by the FASC as part of the approval process. The undergraduate programme specification made explicit reference to the FHEQ level descriptors and explained how the aims of the field and the curricular framework related to the British Psychological Society (BPS) Graduate Basis for Registration. The undergraduate provision which leads to the psychology major award has been accredited by the BPS and enables the graduate basis for registration for those students who successfully complete the required modules. The programme specification for the MSc did not provide explicit links with the

FHEQ master's level descriptors, although programme aims and outcomes were broadly congruent, and the specification identified requirements for the interim awards.

222 Admission, progression and completion data for undergraduate students was not provided in the DSED but such data, which was available from the University's management information systems, is routinely collated and presented within the annual Field review reports, which were made available to the audit team. The 2003-04 Field review report provided clear evidence of trend analysis, which had been subsequently evaluated by staff and student representatives at the field board. It was clear from the papers for the undergraduate provision available to the team that the data for the 2003-04 session had been compared to that for previous sessions and to University norms. Cohort analysis for taught postgraduate provision in psychology is not yet available from the University's central management information systems, but the team was able to confirm that such information had been used to inform the annual review of the PMS, including psychology modules within the Scheme.

223 Part of the evidence for the University's major review of its psychology undergraduate provision, which had been undertaken in 2003, had comprised a critical view of student progression and completion data for psychology over a five-year period and this information was also made available to the audit team. This showed that a high proportion of the students enrolling for the undergraduate psychology provision were mature, white, and female, and that an increase in applications for 2005-06 had followed a slight downturn in recruitment in the previous session. The School of Health and Social Sciences has identified the need to recruit a more diverse student population, while maintaining recruitment targets for the new single honours and major undergraduate psychology programmes to enable conformity with the staff/student ratios demanded to retain BPS accreditation. Members of staff told the team that retaining BPS accreditation was of central importance in sustaining undergraduate

recruitment. They also commented that recruitment considerations had played an important part in the decision to change the title of the postgraduate taught programme to 'Business Psychology'.

224 Undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision and programmes are reviewed annually by Field and course boards of study, the operation of which appeared to the audit team to conform to the University's requirements as set out in the QA Handbook. The team's consideration of Field review reports, School action plans and the minutes of the FASC enabled it to confirm the effective operation of these arrangements. As part of the development of the University's quality monitoring arrangements, the School had been visited in 2004 by the University's Quality Support Team (see below).

225 The annual Field review reports for psychology which the audit team saw were comprehensive and evaluative, and psychology staff and students reported an active involvement in the annual review process, which had been coordinated by the Psychology Field Chair. The annual Field review reports for psychology programmes had been scrutinised by a FASC field review panel, which had also received an action plan developed by the Psychology Field team intended to enhance programme provision. While the audit team was able to see the report of the FASC panel and the associated action plan, it was not clear how the implementation of the latter was monitored by the school or the University, although some matters such as responses to specific recommendations of external examiners in their reports were considered routinely at Field boards.

226 The audit team was interested to note that the Psychology Field team invited undergraduates to evaluate their modules midway during their delivery and at the end of the module by means of a module evaluation questionnaire. Information from mid-module evaluations is collated and reported to the next meeting of the Field Board, and module summaries are considered in the annual Field review process and are also made available to

external examiners at examination boards. Students who discussed the Psychology Field team's evaluation practices with the audit team were able to point to specific instances of changes which had resulted from mid-module evaluations which had been identified as good practice by the University's Quality Support Team and which the audit team also considers to be a feature of good practice. Additional qualitative feedback is available to the Psychology Field team and the Field Board from student representatives (who attend meetings of the latter) and direct to module tutors, course leaders and the Field Chair.

227 Reports from external examiners are considered within the annual Field review process and incorporated in the subsequent report to the FASC Field review panel. Comments from external examiners which the audit team saw, spoke warmly of the quality of the psychology provision and its management, and confirmed the academic standards of awards in psychology. Matters raised in reports from external examiners are also considered through the internal review process. The external examiner receives a copy of the report from the Field review panel on the psychology provision and maintains contact with the Field Chair throughout the academic year on matters such as assessment and outcomes from meetings of the ASP (see below). Reports from external examiners have confirmed the effectiveness of the assessment tasks in discriminating student achievement at the appropriate levels of provision. The team found the expectations of students identified in module outlines, and associated assessment tasks, conformed to the requirements of the FHEQ level descriptors and the respective awards.

228 As part of the evidence for the DAT, the University made available to the audit team a sample of mainly undergraduate assessment items from modules at all levels. The team was able to confirm that a range of assessment modes was used and that the recent establishment of an ASP in the School to consider the appropriateness of module assessment items was making a positive

contribution to its assessment practice. This instance provided additional evidence that the work of the ASPs across the University constitutes a feature of good practice.

229 The Field has established a professional development group, and papers from that group and from Field Board meetings indicated to the audit team that consideration of assessment strategies and policies formed an important element of annual programme review. The team found that assessment information provided to students in the overwhelming majority of module outlines did not, however, conform fully to the guidelines offered by the University's Assessment Handbook. The latter requires there to be specific criteria for each assessment brief, although modules in psychology only align assessment tasks with level/grade descriptors. This matter had been independently identified by the University's Quality Support Team in the course of its recent visit.

230 The audit team found that the University's restructuring of the academic year in 2004-05 had presented problems to some students because of the delay in the return of assessments and related feedback. This had proved particularly difficult for first-year students seeking to confirm their combined programme subjects and who were expecting to be able to make choices informed by feedback on their performance and progress throughout their first year of study. Under normal circumstances, however, it seemed to be the case that assessment feedback was available to students from module tutors, although the quality of the written comments provided on coursework varied from tutor to tutor. No written feedback is provided on marked examination scripts. While external examiners have reported that feedback to students is of good quality, students told the team that it was sometimes necessary for students to instigate the contacts with module tutors through which such feedback could be received. This could prove particularly difficult for students studying psychology as a minor subject who might be based on a different campus.

231 Undergraduate students receive a comprehensive Field guide and a course

handbook is provided for taught postgraduate students. These provide information on a range of important items such as curricular design and progression, assessment procedures and grade descriptors, research and ethical guidelines, the academic calendar, and programme specifications. These documents are updated annually and sit alongside the more specific module outlines, the quality of which was justifiably praised in the recent report of the University's Quality Support Team. Increasingly, this information is being made available to students through the University's intranet.

232 Learning resources to support psychology modules and courses are provided by LIS and by the School, with the core text and journal collections being held at Francis Close Hall. To supplement this support the School provides a range of specialist resources for psychology including teaching and computer laboratories, research space, testing cubicles, an advanced student laboratory, and related equipment and software. The University's VLE is predominantly used to support work at level 1 and, at the time of the audit, the School was investigating further use of this resource. Staff and students who met the audit team approved of their location because it placed them close to the key learning resources for psychology.

233 Personal tutors provide support and guidance to students at level 1, where student attendance is closely monitored in the first semester. Academic counselling at levels 2 and 3 is provided by a senior tutor, together with the Field Chair and module tutors, and through the Course Leader for the postgraduate provision. A student advocate is available for postgraduate students and pastoral support is provided through a range of University structures.

234 Students who met the audit team emphasised the approachability and helpfulness of staff, although students in levels 2 and 3 were less certain how to seek support from the Senior Tutor. From its discussions with staff and students, the team came to the view that while systematic academic counselling and support for PDP was available throughout level 1, beyond that level the onus was placed on students to

seek appropriate academic guidance and support within the School. This had the potential to translate into students consulting whichever member of staff was most immediately available, or returning to seek advice from tutors to whom they had previously been assigned.

235 The Psychology Field team gathers feedback formally from module evaluations and through the involvement of student representatives on the Field Board. Student representatives who met the auditors reported gaining additional feedback from peers during teaching sessions and providing feedback in a similar way or directly to individual students. The students were able to identify recent items that had been drawn to the attention of the Field Board, including the impact of the relocation of psychology resources to Francis Close Hall and child-care arrangements for mature students. Feedback information provided by students representatives contributes to the annual Field review in which there is section for recording such information. While the Psychology Field conducts end-of-module evaluations in line with the University's expectations it has also begun to make use of mid-module evaluations to enable it to respond to the views of students more promptly. This arrangement seemed to the audit team to constitute a feature of good practice. Overall, it seemed to the team that students representatives considered that conversations with the Field Chair provided them with a direct and effective (and less formal) means of communicating the views of those they represent.

236 Overall the audit team came to the view that the quality of learning opportunities was suitable for provision leading to the awards listed in paragraph 220 above.

Sport and exercise sciences

237 The scope of the DAT comprised undergraduate provision in single honours and in major/minor combinations leading to BSc (Hons) Sport and Exercise Sciences (Major and Joint); Sport Science; Sports Development; BSc (Hons) Exercise and Health Sciences (Major) with more than 20 minor fields. Postgraduate awards included in the DAT were PgCert,

PgDip, MSc Physical Activity and Health Development; PgCert, PgDip, MA Sports Development. Research postgraduate students based in the School are registered to study for awards at MSc, MPhil and PhD level. The DSED was specially produced to support the audit.

238 Programme specifications were provided with the DSED. For the relevant programmes and provision they showed evidence of having been informed by the *Subject benchmark statement* for hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism. Likewise, the construction of the programme specifications made reference to the FHEQ. There was evidence in the papers the School provided to support the DAT that reference had been made to other external reference points when constructing the programme specifications, and from its discussions with members of staff it was clear to the audit team that they were familiar with relevant sections of the *Code of practice*.

239 The School has adopted the University's generic level descriptors to place modules at the appropriate level and these are used to ensure academic progression. The School is 'teaching-led', although the curricula are underpinned and informed by research and scholarly activity, and expects to participate in the next RAE in 2008.

240 Statistical data and information on progression and completion is available to Field chairs through the University's Management Information System, and each year the School's Management Team reviews a report on student progression and achievement. Retention has improved in recent years, from a withdrawal rate of 23 per cent in 2001-02 to one of 17 per cent in 2003-04. In the largest Field, which is Sport and Exercise Sciences, 58 per cent of the students gained their intended award; this compares well with the figure of 47 per cent in the University as a whole. Staff in the School are pleased with these improvements and, although they accept that more work remains to be done in the area, were able to point to the work that had been done to improve communications with students (see below, paragraph 245). Staff cited the School's recent move to the

University's new purpose-built campus at Oxstalls as one of the major contributing factors to improved student retention.

241 Programme aims and learning outcomes are reviewed annually through Field review and are communicated to students through Field guides. Internal monitoring follows the principles provided in the QA Handbook. The links between Field boards in the School, the FASC, TLAC and AAC appeared to the audit team to work well. Field boards normally meet at least three times each session and they receive summaries of all module evaluations, including action points. Although students were aware of the processes for presenting issues to the School by means of the appropriate committees, the majority of matters that were raised appeared to be dealt with more informally, but no less effectively. Staff and students were able to point to instances where actions had resulted from the analysis of student evaluations.

242 Members of the School were able to confirm that all assessments are based on the principles and procedures set out in the University's Assessment Handbook and the evidence available to the audit team demonstrated that assessment briefs are scrutinised by the School's ASP. Students receive relevant sections of the University Assessment Handbook in the School's student handbook. Reports from external examiners are considered at the Field Board. Reports from the sample provided for the team appeared to meet the University's requirements in all particulars and to be provided in a timely manner.

243 The audit team reviewed a range of marked and moderated student work at all levels and was satisfied that the nature of the assessments and the attainments of students were consistent with the intended learning outcomes set out in the programme specifications and were appropriate to the awards and their location in the FHEQ. This view coincided with that of the external examiners.

244 There was clear evidence that students received formative feedback on their work. Students told the audit team that such feedback

was useful, timely and relevant. In the samples of marked student work reviewed by the team there was, however, some variation in the use of assignment pro formas and feedback sheets between staff. The most recent QAA subject review had commented critically on this area of the School's work and although the School's assessment practice seemed to the team to have progressed since that report, staff told the team that they were aware of variations in the way assessments are conducted, and recognised that there were opportunities for further improvement.

245 Students who met the audit team were aware of the University's Student Handbook, although not all of them appeared to be aware of Field guides. Students who had used the Field guides considered that they had assisted them in understanding the intended learning outcomes and assessment requirements for the awards towards which they were working. As part of the School's work to improve student retention it has introduced a student newsletter which is produced on a six-weekly basis, copies of which were provided for the team.

246 In line with the University's mission, staff based in the School are committed to provide an accessible, high-quality learning environment which is innovative, challenging and enterprising. Students commented positively on the work provided by staff within the school, and although this was not provided by the VLE but by a customised system developed by the School, it appeared that the dissemination methods used by the School were satisfactory. Students spoke positively of the additional features in the School's bespoke set-up, which included an electronic notice board. The School plans to move this and other material to the University's VLE in due course.

247 Students told the audit team that they welcomed the new learning and practice facilities available to them on the new Oxstalls Campus, including the learning centre. One external examiner had stated in their report that the new facilities at the Oxstalls Campus, including subject-specific and generic elements, were 'excellent and will undoubtedly enhance the student experience'. Again students told the

team that staff in the School made themselves freely available and were approachable. Students spoke of the high level of commitment of all staff and singled out the level of dissertation support provided for final-year students for comment, identifying the availability of additional discipline-based dissertation workshops for particular praise.

248 Newly appointed members of staff described their experiences of induction and subsequent support (including mentoring) which corresponded closely to the University's expectations. Conversations with staff enabled the audit team to confirm that all those newly appointed with less than three years teaching experience had been required to undertake the University's PGCHE (see above, paragraph 136). Likewise, there was evidence that graduate students undertaking teaching have the opportunity to participate in training and support to enable them to carry out the role.

249 Staff acknowledged to the audit team that there was still some progress to be made with the annual staff-development review, but they spoke positively of the newly formed professional development group scheme which seeks to support improvements in student learning through continuing professional development for staff. The latter appreciated the discipline and school-based focus the groups have adopted, which they felt had been more successful than the previous (multidisciplinary) approach. There was also evidence of external links and the School is currently involved in projects funded by the Higher Education Academy Learning and Teaching Support Network for Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism in developing approaches to PDP for students, continuing professional development and peer review.

250 The School regards the Field Board as the most appropriate body to act as the staff:student liaison committee and there are student representatives on all field boards. Student representatives who met the audit team spoke positively of the approachability of staff and their readiness to deal with matters raised informally. They also complimented the training they had received to enable them to

fulfil their roles as students' representatives on the field boards and were satisfied that matters that they raised were treated seriously. They were able to provide instances to show how matters they had raised had been resolved. Overall, students who met the team were broadly satisfied that their voice was heard through formal and informal channels within the School, and that their opportunities to contribute to the development of their courses and modules were satisfactory.

251   Staff who are members of supervisory teams for research students are supported in their roles through internal staff-development sessions, and all staff new to the University who propose to undertake supervision must undertake the University's Professional Development Programme for Supervisors. Research students who met the audit team were confident that they were receiving the support and supervisory guidance they needed.

252   Overall, the audit found the quality of learning opportunity available to the students was suitable for programmes of study in Sport and Exercise Sciences, leading to the awards identified in paragraph 237 above.

Thematic enquiries

253   No thematic enquiries were undertaken in the course of the audit.

Section 4: The audit investigations: published information

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

254   A considerable amount of material is available to students in hard copy and on the web both before and after they join the University. The accuracy of the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses as well as other marketing material is formally the responsibility of the Director of Student Services and External Relations. While prospectuses are centrally produced, schools may also produce brochures relating to specific provision. The latter must be checked with External Relations and the audit team was told that this process was secured by budgetary controls. The University has begun to move from a separate external website and internal intranet to an integrated website, with password protection for restricted material. New guidelines on the University's corporate identity are being produced that will continue to inform the design and quality of material to be placed on the University's website.

255   The University expects that students will be provided with a module guide for each module and that its contents will include reading lists, learning outcomes and details of assessments. As noted elsewhere in this report, the module information the audit team saw in connection with each of the DATs always included such a guide but these did not always provide information about assessment criteria. The University also makes available two booklets to prospective student representatives: 'Whose Course is it Anyway' and 'Speaking up for Students'. These are clear and well written, but students who met the team during the briefing visit indicated that their distribution was not always as well organised as it might be.

256   All students are issued with the UMS or PMS Guide, as appropriate, which explain the scheme and course structures respectively, assessment principles and rules for progression and (for undergraduate provision) award classification. Many students who met the audit team appeared to find the information in the UMS Guide difficult to follow. For example, the team was told of cases where students had not been able to establish from the information they understood to be available to them what modules they needed to complete in order to obtain an honours degree. Similarly, meetings with students in the course of the audit visit suggested that the information with which they had been provided had left them confused about how their degree awards would be classified. Such apparent deficiencies in the printed information available to students seemed to be compounded by the clear impression the

team received from students that they did not always feel confident about approaching teaching staff with respect to questions about the UMS, particularly after the first year. Diffidence on the part of students about approaching members of the teaching staff to talk about matters to do with the UMS (which the team found to be a general phenomenon) may, however, be partly compensated by the SA's helpfulness and detailed understanding of the UMS (see above, paragraph 158).

257   Overall, the audit team came to the view that the University's intentions for the information it considers it should provide for its students are sound, but that the accessibility of the information it provides for registered students, and the accuracy of some of the detail, could be improved. The team was unable to satisfy itself as to the extent of the students' apparent difficulties in getting assistance with queries about the UMS (in particular) from members of the teaching staff, while recognising the substantial assistance that the campus-based SAs are able to provide for individuals who consult them. As noted elsewhere in this report, the team considers that it would now be desirable for the University to undertake work to ensure better communications with its student representatives.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

258   The University has committed itself to meet the requirements of HEFCE documents 02/15 and 03/51, which set out the items of Teaching Quality Information (TQI) that higher education institutions in England are required to provide to the Higher Education and Research Opportunities in the UK (HERO) portal. At the time of the audit it was proceeding to deliver the necessary information within the framework set by HEFCE.

259   The audit team was able to confirm that University information had been made available to HERO comprising summary information in each component of the TQI data set, including a summary of reports by external examiners. Information is presented by individual fields rather than in a grouped format in order to be helpful to enquirers. The University has found that the structure of its provision, and difficulties for HERO/TQI in dealing with large multidisciplinary provision, have made it challenging to provide TQI formatted to match the headings of the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS). There are some residual issues with the major/minor weighting for awards used by the University, which the latter intends to resolve shortly. The University has a group to implement and oversee the institution's production of TQI progress and intends to address any outstanding matters in the course of its continuing evaluation of the relationship between the UMS, faculties, schools and fields.

260   The audit team was able to view the information the University had already published to the TQI website and the team was told that all required information will be made available before July 2005. The published information includes the University's strategic plans for teaching and learning and the team noted that the University has yet to complete the (optional) commentary on HESA data as part of its TQI information. Likewise, the University has yet to publish internal reports to the TQI site, although there is a working group that continues to develop the information submitted including internal reports. In view of the University's particular arrangements for periodic review, the team noted that the intention is that the report of the enhanced annual scrutiny at the five-year point will be used to provide periodic review information for each field, as required by TQI. As part of the annual reporting process, the University asks its external examiners to confirm in their report their confidence in the quality and standard of assessment and the approach the University has adopted is to publish these statements with direct comments. With respect to the University's collaborative provision, however, it would now be wise for the University to work with its partners to check that all items of information they publish (including through their website) which relate to provision leading to the University's awards is up to date and accurate (see above, paragraph 195).

261   From the information and data the University made available to the audit team, the latter is confident that the institution's arrangements to publishing information to the TQI site will enable the University to meet the requirements of HEFCE in the timescale it has set.

Findings

Findings

262 An institutional audit of the University of Gloucestershire was undertaken during the week 16 May 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 HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, three 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

263 The University adopted new procedures for developing, validating and approving new provision in 2002-03. These replaced its previous 'event-based' approach with a process of 'continuous' validation which follows two stages: in the first, approval is sought by the sponsoring school from the University's Planning Subcommittee and the Principal's Management Group, and endorsed by the Academic Board for development in principle. In the second, development of the proposal is monitored by a validation panel formed by the relevant faculty academic standards committee (FASC) with external peer members, and chaired by a senior member of the University from another faculty. The external membership of the validation panel is subject to the approval of the University's Academic Affairs Committee (AAC), a subcommittee of the Academic Board. The progress of the proposed development is monitored by the validation panel through receiving documents, including drafts of the programme specifications and module descriptors, and a limited number of meetings with members of the proposing team. Once the validation panel is satisfied that the proposal has reached the standard required for approval it

notifies the AAC, which is required to satisfy itself that it can support the validation panel's recommendation, before seeking the approval of the Academic Board. The procedures are fully described in the University's QA Handbook which was published in September 2003.

264 The University's new validation and approval procedures allow for an extended and cooperative relationship between the team developing the proposal and the validation panel. Careful scrutiny of several proposals which had proceeded to validation and approval under the new procedures enabled the audit team to satisfy itself that these more cooperative arrangements have not compromised the rigour with which the University scrutinises proposals for new provision. The AAC, chaired by the Dean of Quality and Standards Development, has taken an active interest in the work of validation panels and it has been prepared to reject or modify their advice when it has considered their recommendations for approval have been insufficiently rigorous.

265 Where the outcome of an annual field review or changing circumstances (such as student recruitment) suggest to the University that a field of study should be closed, it may have recourse to a specially developed field closure process. The design of the process is intended to protect the interests of students who may continue to take modules from a field which is being closed. It is based on an action plan that is presented to the AAC and which the latter must agree before the closure of the field can commence. The University provided the audit team with several instances of how it had handled a field closure using this process on the basis of which the team came to the view that it represented a feature of good practice.

266 The University's annual field review process operates at the subject level to review the performance of a field of study over the session just concluded. It is based on the production of an annual 'field review report' together with an action plan to address any outstanding matters, produced initially in October by the Field Chair, with the assistance of colleagues in larger subject areas. Where a field board considers that an item in its report may require action which is

outside its remit, for example by the Faculty or the University, there is provision for the item to be 'starred', which identifies it for special attention. The audit team saw evidence of the effectiveness of this arrangement.

267 The annual field review report is discussed initially at a meeting of the field board. Completed field review reports are subsequently read at faculty level by members of a panel convened by the FASC chair, usually in November. The panel must include at least one member from outside the University, who is charged with monitoring the process overall, and a student member. Reports from these review panels are used by FASCs to compile their annual reports to the AAC which the latter receives at its February meeting, together with annual reports from the Undergraduate Modular Scheme (UMS) and Postgraduate Modular Scheme (PMS), and analyses of reports by external examiners and of reports from external validation panel members, in each case highlighting any common themes. The AAC expects to monitor progress in implementing the action plans attached to annual field review reports through the field review report for the following session.

268 Staff at all levels of the University who discussed its annual field review arrangements with the audit team were satisfied that it enabled the AAC (and through the latter, the Academic Board) to monitor the quality of undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision and the academic standards of the University's awards. The team came to the view that the University's annual review process is comprehensive and that it is thoroughly conducted. The arrangement whereby action plans are monitored through the next annual field review report is, however, a potential weakness in the present arrangement, in that the University might remain unaware for some time whether progress was being made in addressing outstanding items. Overall, the team came to the view that the design of the University's annual monitoring process and the manner in which it is conducted constituted a feature of good practice.

269 The University does not operate a separate process for the periodic review of its provision,

relying instead on an augmented form of its annual field review process which takes place at regular intervals, generally every five or six years. The audit team's enquiries to establish whether this process was providing the University with opportunities to periodically review its process and refresh the curricula led it to the view that in most particulars the way in which this deeper, five-yearly annual field review is conducted, is consistent with the advice of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme approval, monitoring and review*, published by QAA. The annual field review process provides for the participation of an external peer member in the work of the FASC panel, who is expected to monitor the rigour of the process and its conformity to the University's requirements. This individual might not, however, possess the necessary subject expertise to enable them to comment on the detail of the curricula and to assure the University that they are current. The team therefore advises the University to ensure that the measures described in the self-evaluation document (SED) to incorporate external peers with subject expertise into 'enhanced' annual field review, from 2005-06, are brought into effect.

270 In addition to annual field review and its augmented form, the University also operates a process of thematic review which was introduced in 2003. Thematic review is overseen directly by the Academic Board, which identifies the topics and prescribes the process to be followed. Reports from thematic reviews are formally reported to the Academic Board. Former thematic reviews have covered such matters as the anonymity of students in assessment, the admission of students with advanced standing and arrangements for supporting flexible and distributed learning. The calibre of the reports, their general usefulness, and the manner in which the University has used their findings to enhance its provision appeared to the audit team to constitute a feature of good practice.

271 Module evaluation constitutes the principal means used by the University to secure feedback on the quality of its provision from its students. The University does not prescribe the form in

which feedback information is to be gathered or the format in which it is to be presented. Module tutors summarise the feedback for modules for which they are responsible and the summaries are received by the relevant field board of which students' representatives are members. A recent thematic review (see above) of student feedback arrangements has convinced the University that it needs to be confident that there is a degree of consistency in module evaluations, and that they will each address a 'core set of issues'. From 2005-06, the University intends to incorporate the framework provided by the National Student Survey into its own arrangements, and to provide means for its students to report on their overall experiences of the University. In addition to feedback by means of module evaluations the University has also begun to gather feedback from its students at campus-level through campus meetings with students, and from time to time it makes use of student focus groups and project groups.

272 The University seeks feedback from former students through its Careers Centre, and the SED stated that the University sought feedback and other information from employers through a variety of methods including meetings of its External Advisory Board, at which senior members of the University meet representatives of local industry and commerce. The remit of this Board seemed to the audit team, however, to be focused on external fundraising and entrepreneurial activity rather than other matters. From its conversations with members of the University, it was apparent to the team that the former were aware of the need to strengthen the institution's feedback links with the employers of its graduates and former students, and the team encourages the University to take forward this work, as part of which it will no doubt wish to ensure that information on analyses of feedback information provided by students and any responses from the University is fed back to the students.

273 The University has a small portfolio of provision delivered through flexible and distributed learning, including e-learning, but expects that such provision will grow steadily. At the time of the audit, the University was seeking to assess the costs and benefits of facilitating learning and delivering teaching by e-learning, along with other flexible and distributed methods. It had also recently concluded a thematic review for this purpose, the draft report of which was made available to the audit team. This had concluded that validation panels for proposals for new provision to be delivered by flexible and distributed learning should be accompanied by the greater part of the learning materials, to enable the panel to assess how tuition will be delivered and learning facilitated, and that successful development in this general area would require investment in the University's infrastructure. The thematic review had also identified the need for flexible and distributed learning and e-learning to be more securely situated in the University's strategic planning if it is to become a significant feature of its portfolio. The team found the advice offered to the University by the thematic review report to be persuasive and encourages the institution to take forward its recommendations.

274 One aspect of the University's overall management arrangements which has consequences for the quality assurance of its provision is its capacity to manage large-scale change. For example, through a series of responses to a central initiative, 'Framework for the Future', it has recently modified the structure of the academic session and it is modifying its internal academic and management arrangements to achieve a closer alignment between its faculties and its four campuses. Comments in the Student Written Submission, and from students and staff in the briefing and the audit visits, suggested to the audit team that the University's approach to managing changes that it had initiated, and which have the capacity to affect large numbers of students and staff, could benefit from further development. The team therefore advises the University to reflect on the effectiveness of its current approach to the management of large-scale change in its academic and associated arrangements; to consider what steps might be required to ensure that, in such cases, measures it has

identified for action are carried through and that it is provided with clear and timely evidence of their effectiveness.

275 The University has a small portfolio of partnership links which are mostly local or based in the University's home region. Most of the links are in the areas of health studies, initial teacher education, theology and ministry, with a small number of links based around Foundation Degrees. The University has one overseas link in Germany, which participated in a QAA overseas audit in 2001-02. When opening a link with a new partner, the University carries out a series of checks designed to enable it to satisfy itself that its own aims and those of its prospective partner are compatible; that students will enjoy a learning experience comparable to that which is available to its campus-based students; that there is a correspondence between the subject focus of the proposed partnership and subject expertise available in one or more of its schools; and that one of its schools is willing and able to accept responsibility for overseeing the partnership link.

276 The audit team reviewed the University's procedures for opening a new link and for validating the provision which is to form the focus of the link, and found that these were broadly sound and consistent with the advice offered in the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA. One feature of these arrangements could, however, benefit from further development. Where the University has validated unrelated programmes in different partners that lead to identical award titles the team considered that it would be wise for it to satisfy itself from time to time that the academic standards of such awards are equivalent.

277 Arrangements for monitoring the development of partnership links are School-based. It is the University's intention that there should be two lines of communication between partners and the University: one based around the subject element and the other for quality assurance and academic standards. The University's Handbook for Collaborative Provision indicates that these two roles may be

discharged by a single individual, and the audit team found several instances where this was the case. In the instances the team saw where roles had been combined, it was satisfied that both were being discharged responsibly. There is a risk in such arrangements, however, that communications between the University and its partner may become too reliant on a single person, who may find the range of roles they are required to discharge burdensome. There is some evidence to suggest that some of the detail of the quality management of partnership activities (for example, checking the accuracy of marketing material produced by the partner) could be undertaken with greater attention to detail. The team also considered that the University's school-based approach to managing individual partnership links could benefit from the introduction of arrangements to allow it to maintain an institution-level overview of the totality of its collaborative arrangements more easily.

278 Several of the University's partnership links are with small colleges specialising in theology and ministry. In these links, in the event-based process the University follows for approving any instance of collaborative provision, the audit team noted that the external peer members of validation panels generally seemed to be drawn from similarly small institutions. Likewise, external examiners appointed to programmes in these institutions also appeared generally to be drawn from small institutions. Such practice differs from the procedures the University follows for its own programmes and has the potential to limit opportunities for its partners to benefit from perspectives and practices across higher education in the UK. The team advises the University to ensure that when appointing external examiners for programmes provided through partnership links, and external peers to validation and review panels for partnership programmes, such peers are drawn more broadly from across the UK higher education sector.

279 While identifying several areas in the University's quality management arrangements which would benefit from improvement overall, the SED stated that the University had

confidence in its arrangements to safeguard the quality of its provision. On the basis of its enquiries the audit team came to the view that the arrangements merited broad confidence and that several areas of these arrangements including the design and operation of the University's annual field review report process, thematic review and field closure arrangements constituted features of good practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

280 The University takes the view that its maintenance of the academic standards of its awards requires that the academic standards of each award should be explicitly stated and referenced to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), that it should operate a rigorous assessment system to maintain the integrity of those awards, and that academic standards more generally should be underpinned by reference to the Academic Infrastructure.

281 The University's assessment arrangements are set out in its Assessment Handbook, where it is stated that it is the University's intention that its assessment arrangements should be consistent with the advice of the *Code of practice* and with five key principles: the promotion of learning; transparency; equity; validity and reliability. Each of these principles is spelled out in detail. The Assessment Handbook also provides detailed information on assessment procedures, including where responsibility rests at each stage of the assessment process, for example for drafting assessment tasks, whether coursework or examination, their approval, who is responsible for disseminating information on assessments, and how coursework assessments should be received and returned. The Assessment Handbook also provides staff with information on how boards of examiners at field and scheme level should be conducted and on liaison with the external examiner. A separate appendix provides detailed guidance to external examiners on their role in the University's assessment arrangements and its requirements.

282 The University has recently begun to introduce Assessment Standing Panels (ASPs) which were first introduced in the Business School. The ASPs are intended to operate below field level, and at field level and above, and to assume responsibility for checking examination papers and summative assessment tasks for consistency with the intended learning outcomes and module descriptors, advised by the external examiner, and with proofreading examination papers before approving them. The ASPs are normally chaired by the field chair. It seemed to the audit team that the University's identification of the work of the Business School's ASP as good practice and its decision to introduce ASPs across the institution had provided it with a useful means of ensuring that schools operate their assessment procedures in a more consistent fashion. The introduction of ASPs seemed to the team to constitute a feature of good practice, and the team encourages the University in its endeavours to embed them in all its schools.

283 The University has developed comprehensive means to gather data on student progression and retention. These include the development of datasets which make it possible to track the progress of cohorts of students as well as individuals. For students prior to enrolment the university's management information tools allow applications to be regularly monitored. Registered students, progression, retention and first-destination data are available to heads of school and field chairs, and can be used to generate up-to-date student enrolment information, class lists for modules and programmes, and to inform annual field review. The audit team came to the view that the design of the University's student information systems, their implementation, and the work that has been undertaken to train staff at all levels in their use constituted a feature of good practice. Notwithstanding the substantial progress that has been made in this area, the SED acknowledge the need for further work to embed the use of these facilities at school and module level and the team encourages the University to continue with this, and to continue to enhance the confidence of teaching and administrative staff at field,

school, and faculty level in the reliability of centrally-provided data.

284 External examiners are appointed by the AAC on behalf of the University following consideration of their nomination by the relevant FASC, and may be appointed at field level or to be responsible for overseeing a scheme. External examiners at the field level are required to verify the academic standards of assessments, check that the intended learning outcomes have been met, and to confirm that the academic standards of the resulting awards are comparable with those of like schemes across the UK higher education sector. At scheme level, the University appoints chief external examiners (normally from among those already serving as external examiners at field level) to be responsible for ensuring that academic standards and their comparability is maintained across the scheme.

285 For provision it delivers itself, the University usually seeks to appoint external examiners with outstanding qualifications from well-regarded institutions. External examiners are given clear guidance on what the University expects their reports to cover. Reports are received by the Vice-Chancellor's Office and are then distributed to senior postholders, including the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic), the Field Chair, the head of the relevant school, and the Chair of the relevant FASC.

286 Annual field review reports are required to address points raised by external examiners in their reports, and FASCs are expected to check that such responses are appropriate to the matter raised by the external examiner. The University expects the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) to read the report of each external examiner and to prepare a synoptic report on their comments for the AAC and Academic Board, identifying features of good practice and matters requiring attention. Several of the matters the Academic Board has identified for thematic review have been highlighted through such synoptic reports, although from its own reading of external examiners' reports from 2002-03 and 2003-04 the audit team noted that several other matters which had been raised by a number of external examiners, and which had

figured in the synoptic reports, did not appear to have been identified for further inquiry or action.

287 The University's view is that its external examining arrangements are central to its quality and academic standards arrangements and that its processes in this area are robust. Overall, the audit team found that the procedures presented in the QA Handbook for working with external examiners, including their nomination and appointment, were employed consistently across the University, that external examiners were satisfied that the academic standards of the University's awards were comparable with those in like institutions and on like programmes, and that reports from external examiners were generally used in a satisfactory manner to support quality and academic standards.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

288 Library, academic computing and media support for students is delivered through the University's Learning and Information Services (LIS) which is led by the Head of LIS and reports to the AAC and the Professional Services Committee. The LIS works closely with the schools and learning centres have been established on each campus to provide learning and teaching support. It is the University's express intention that the facilities in each campus learning centre, and the services it offers, should be broadly comparable.

289 Following the University's consultation on Framework for the Future, planning for learning support resources has been switched from the former system which was School-based, to campus-based arrangements with resources largely allocated on the basis of student numbers. Since the conclusion of its Framework for the Future consultations, the University has relocated its central Learning Technology Skills Support (LTSS) team from LIS to form part of its Central Academic Development Unit, with the intention of enabling a stronger focus on the provision and development of information and communication technology support for learning and teaching. The work of the LTSS team is overseen by the University's Teaching Learning

and Assessment Committee (TLAC). As part of its work, LTSS is seeking to promote wider use of the University's proprietary virtual learning environment (VLE) by students and staff. This has involved improvements to the merger of the University's intranet and its central website to make information more readily available to applicants, students and staff.

290 Discussions with students about the part played by the VLE in supporting their learning and teaching suggested to the audit team that the University had some way to go in order to embed the VLE equally firmly in all schools. Students were, however, generally satisfied with their access to learning support resources and praised the development of the campus-based learning centres, which they considered to be a 'vital resource'. The University has hitherto monitored the alignment of its learning resources provision with its portfolio of programmes and courses through deans and directorate meetings and through the Principal's Management Group. As the University's new campus-based resourcing model takes effect, it would now be advisable for it to establish more settled arrangements to allow it to take a view of its overall learning support needs to balance that taken for each of the campuses.

291 The University's predecessor was advised in a previous institutional audit report, published by the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), of the necessity to review its academic guidance and support arrangements for students. The University introduced new arrangements shortly after the publication of the HEQC report which were intended to match the level of support to be made available to the perceived need of students at different stages of their studies. First-year students are therefore allocated to a personal tutor and students in subsequent years are directed to seek academic guidance from senior tutors based in each school. Students at any stage of their studies can seek additional support from the University's small corps of academic student advisers (SAs). They work from Student Information and Advice Centres (SIACs) based on each campus although, at the time of the audit, it appeared to be the case that there

were insufficient SAs to staff the SIACs on each of the campuses on a full-time basis.

292 From its consideration of the University's papers and its discussions with staff and students, the audit team came to the view that arrangements for academic guidance and support differed between the schools and operated through a range of formal and informal mechanisms. It seemed to the team, however, that even with the contributions made by the SAs, the effectiveness of the University's present arrangements for providing academic guidance support and supervision for all its students, and particularly those studying across more than one field, was open to question. The team therefore advises the University to consider how it might achieve a fully effective academic guidance and support system for all its students and how it might monitor its implementation.

293 Elements of the University's arrangements for providing personal support to students are integrated with its present system for academic guidance and support, with personal tutors able to refer students to the University's central and campus-based services. The University's aim is to coordinate the delivery of personal support services centrally, but that they should continue to be delivered locally. Students who met the audit team praised the support available for students with special needs and spoke warmly of the support provided by the Counselling Services, the International Student Advisers and the Medical Services.

294 From its own reviews, the University has identified differences in the nature and availability of personal tutor support from level 1 to level 2, and above and it intends to provide further staff development in order to improve support for students after level 1. The audit team encourages it to keep this area under review, while recognising that tackling perceived difficulties with academic guidance and counselling might represent a more immediate priority.

295 The University seeks to underpin the quality of teaching through its arrangements for staff support and development which are set out in its Staff Development Policy. Key

features of the Policy include an allocation to each member of staff of three days each year for continuing professional development; support for staff who wish to study for the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education; and a series of initiatives and specialist centres. These include a University Teaching Fellowship scheme, a Scholarship of Learning and Teaching Programme, a Professional Development Group Scheme and Support for staff through the LTSS team of the University's Centre for Learning and Teaching. Each of these initiatives is intended to provide opportunities for staff to update or extend their skills, but responsibility for taking forward some developments (for example the Professional Development Group Scheme) are based in the schools and have been implemented in different ways and with varying degrees of effectiveness. The University's development of its former Journal of Learning and Teaching into an electronically distributed peer-reviewed journal: 'e-JOLT'. This provides staff with the opportunity to debate and learn from advances in learning and teaching, and is a feature of good practice. The University has also launched a refereed journal (which is published electronically and in hardcopy): Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (LATHE).

296 The audit team was able to confirm that members of staff are able to take advantage of a comprehensive induction process delivered at University and school level which is a feature of good practice. Staff also have access to a number of staff-development opportunities, including a guarantee of not less than three days of professional development each year, but corresponding opportunities for the continuing professional development of those leading fields programmes and for senior managers appeared to be more restricted. The University might therefore consider it desirable to assess what training opportunities it might wish to provide as a matter of course for staff appointed to academic and other management roles at a senior level.

297 In general, the SED provided a fair account of the University's arrangements to support learning in the course of which it identified a number of areas which, in its view, needed further development. Overall, the audit team found itself in agreement with the University's assessments of these matters although, with respect to the provision of academic guidance and support for students, the team came to the view that the University might have underestimated the gap between the advice and support it believes its present arrangements can provide for students after level 1 and the need of students in the UMS for better advice and guidance, particularly where they are studying across more than one field.

Outcomes of discipline audit trails

Business and management

298 The scope of the DAT comprised provision offered by the University's Business School leading to undergraduate awards in Business Management with the following titles: BA (Hons) Management; BA (Hons) Management (Major) with Human Resource Management (Minor); BA (Hons) Management (Defined Route) and taught postgraduate provision in Business Management leading to the following master's awards: MA Management; Master in Business Administration; and MA Leading Change by Action Research. In each case the audit confirmed that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the respective awards and their location within the FHEQ.

299 The first ASP to be established in the University was a Business School initiative, which has since been extended across the institution. There is clear evidence that assessment processes are actively and carefully managed by the Business School and that they conform to the requirements of the University's Assessment Handbook. Reports from external examiners are received in a timely fashion, but it seemed to the audit team that some comments from external examiners had not been given sufficiently close attention.

300 In general, the learning environment provided for business students in the School matches the requirements of the provision, and although it is optimised to meet the needs of

undergraduate students, taught postgraduate students were satisfied that it also met their needs.

301 Programme specifications for all the University's business management provision (including that offered through the School of Sport and Leisure) were provided for the audit. In all cases, the programme specifications were in line with the University's requirements, and were consistent with the advice offered by the Academic Infrastructure, including the subject benchmark statements. Students contribute to the management of their provision by providing feedback through module evaluations, and through their attendance at committee meetings within the Business Management Field; there is no separate staff-student liaison committee. Students are nonetheless confident that their views are taken seriously at School level, but are less confident that this is the case at levels above the School.

Psychology

302 The scope of the DAT comprised provision in psychology leading to the following awards BSc (Hons) Psychology (Major/Joint/Minor); MSc Psychology in the Workplace, with interim postgraduate diploma and postgraduate certificate awards, recently renamed MSc Business Psychology. In all cases the standard of student achievement was found to be appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within FHEQ.

303 Scrutiny of reports from external examiners and samples of marked and moderated student work show that assessment arrangements across the field generally work well and that matters raised by external examiners are given careful attention. It would, however, be wise for the Field and the School to check that in all cases the University's expectations are being met that assessment criteria will be set out in detail. The Psychology Field has recently established an ASP and this might be an early item for its attention. There was evidence that the University's restructuring of the academic year in 2004-05 had caused problems in that delays in returning marked work with tutors' feedback to first-year students

had limited their opportunities to the marks and the feedback to inform their choices of modules for their second year of study.

304 Learning resources for psychology are provided by LIS and the School. Staff and students alike consider the learning resources available to them to be satisfactory and welcome the School's location on the same campus as the University's main repository for psychology texts and journals. The programme specifications for the taught undergraduate psychology provision were consistent with the University's requirements, made appropriate reference to the FHEQ and other elements of the Academic Infrastructure, and to the requirements of the British Psychological Society, which accredits the provision that leads to the psychology major award as suitable to lead to graduate registration.

305 Students contribute feedback on their learning experiences by means of module evaluations and through the participation of their elected representatives in meetings of the Psychology Field Board. In an interesting development, the Psychology Field has begun to supplement end-of-module evaluations with mid-module evaluations to enable it to respond to students more rapidly. This seemed to the team to be a feature of good practice.

Sport and exercise sciences

306 The scope of the DAT comprised provision in the School of Sport and Leisure, within the Faculty of Environment and Leisure, and included undergraduate provision in single honours and in Major/Minor combinations BSc (Hons) Sport and Exercise Sciences (Major and Joint); Sport Science; BSc (Hons) Exercise and Health Sciences (Major) with more than 20 minor fields. Postgraduate awards included in the DAT were PgCert, PgDip, MSc Physical Activity and Health Development; PgCert, PgDip, MA Sports Development. Research postgraduate students based in the School are registered to study for awards at MSc, MPhil and PhD level. In all cases, the audit found that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the relevant awards and their location within the FHEQ.

307 From the reports of the external examiners and the marked student work made available for the audit it was clear that assessment practices within the School are satisfactorily managed and conform to the University's requirements as set out in its Assessment Handbook. The School has recently introduced an ASP.

308 The School of Sport and Leisure is based on a purpose-built campus at Oxstalls on the outskirts of Gloucester, about five miles from the main campus in Cheltenham. Staff and students consider that the quality of the learning opportunities available to them on the Oxstalls Campus to be very satisfactory, and one external examiner has described them as 'excellent'. The programme specifications for provision in sport and exercise sciences had been informed by the relevant subject benchmark statement and made reference to the FHEQ.

The use made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure

309 The University is committed to ensuring that all its provision is managed in line with the advice of the *Code of practice* and that all awards are located within the FHEQ, and validation panels are expected to check these matters when considering proposals for new provision. Programme specifications have been developed and are readily available to staff and students and subject benchmark statements have been carefully considered. Again, the University expects programme specifications to be provided as part of the standard documentation when proposals for new provision are considered, and programme specifications are required for all provision leading to the University's awards. Likewise, validation and review panels are expected to confirm with subject teams that they have referred to the subject benchmark statements in developing the provision for which they are responsible. Overall, the audit team came to the view that the University continues to pay careful attention to the advice of the Academic Infrastructure in all its work.

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

310 The SED provided a clear description of University procedures and practices linked to the broad headings used for institutional audit reports, in which each section concluded with an evaluation reflecting the University's views as to its strengths and weaknesses.

311 The University's notable frankness in analysing and evaluating the appropriateness of its quality and academic standards was matched by its willingness to open its papers to the scrutiny of the audit team and to enter into discussions. This openness provided a sound basis for the team to establish the level of its confidence in the University's quality and academic standards arrangements.

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

312 The University's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy commits it to secure the establishment of quality enhancement and staff professional development activities and its Framework for the Future consultations, and confirmed that the enhancement of the quality of its provision is a strategic theme in the University's forward plans. The TLAC is charged with maintaining and updating the University's forward plan for quality-enhancement activities drawing on the advice of the learning and teaching coordinators based in each of the schools. The latter are responsible for providing staff with support and advice and for organising campus-based staff-development and enhancement activities. Quality-enhancement activities at field level are also supported by the University's Quality Support Team.

313 Across the University initiatives linked to quality enhancement are being taken forward by many different committees, working groups and specialist units. For example, there is a

Centre for Learning and Teaching; a Scholarship of Learning and Teaching Group; a Professional Development Group Scheme which works with learning and teaching coordinators in each of the schools; and a central quality support team. The number and vitality of the University's enhancement initiatives testifies to its commitment to enhance its support for learning and teaching. Careful monitoring of the totality of these activities might be wise, to ensure that only overlaps in activities which are likely to prove fruitful are allowed to continue.

314 The SED was able to point to several initiatives which the University was taking forward as a result of its analysis of reports produced through its quality assurance work, among the most significant of which has been its identification of the value of the Business School's ASP as a device for working towards greater consistency in assessment procedures. Other schools have now been required to establish ASPs. This development suggested to the audit team that the University had successfully used the outcomes of quality assurance as a basis for quality enhancement and as such it represents a notable success.

Reliability of information

315 The University has committed itself to meet the requirements of HEFCE documents 02/15 and 03/51, which set out the items of Teaching Quality Information (TQI) that higher education institutions in England are required to provide to the Higher Education and Research Opportuniutes (HERO) portal. At the time of the audit, it was proceeding to deliver the necessary information within the framework set by HEFCE. The University has found that the structure of its provision, and difficulties for HERO/TQI in dealing with large multidisciplinary provision, have made it challenging to provide TQI formatted to match the headings of the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS). There are some residual issues with the Major/Minor weighting for awards used by the University, which the latter intends to resolve shortly. With respect to the University's collaborative provision, however, it

would now be wise for the University to work with its partners to check that all items of information they publish (including through their website) which relate to provision leading to the University's awards is up to date and accurate; however, from the information and data the University made available, there can be confidence in the institution's arrangements to publish information to the TQI site and to meet the requirements of HEFCE in this matter.

Features of good practice

316 The following features of good practice were noted in the context of the University:

i   the introduction of Assessment Standing Panels (ASPs) across the institution (paragraphs 51 and 210)

ii   its development of its on-line journal of learning and teaching (paragraph 60)

iii the comprehensive design and thorough operation of the annual field review process (paragraph 75)

iv   the process it has developed to support the withdrawal of fields (paragraph 78)

v   its process of thematic review (paragraph 84)

vi   the design of its management information systems which has enabled it to produce reports to support quality and academic standards management (paragraph 129)

vii its arrangements for the induction of new members of academic staff (paragraph 131)

viii the introduction of Student Information and Advice Centres across the campuses (paragraph 160)

ix   the introduction of mid-module reviews in psychology (paragraph 226).

Recommendations for action

317 As the University continues to develop its quality and academic standards management arrangements it may wish to consider the advisability of:

i   reflecting on the current effectiveness of its approach to the management of large-scale change in its academic and associated

arrangements, and considering what steps might be required to ensure that in such cases, and more generally, measures it has identified for action are carried through and that it is provided with clear and timely evidence of their effectiveness (paragraphs 42, 151 and 157)

ii monitor carefully the changes it has made to the periodic elements of its enhanced annual review arrangements, in order to ensure that they provide clear evidence for itself, and external stakeholders, that the curriculum is being effectively refreshed and academic standards secured (paragraph 81)

iii considering how it might ensure that the outcomes of external reviews of its provision and arrangements have the benefit of more penetrating consideration at University level (paragraph 87, 108)

iv ensuring for all its collaborative provision that, when identifying external contributors to validations and periodic reviews, and when identifying and appointing external examiners, such external peers are drawn from institutions representing the full breadth of the higher education sector in the UK (paragraphs 90 and 193); enabling more direct University-level monitoring of the academic well-being of individual partnership links (paragraph 196); and discussing with its partners measures which will assist with all aspects of their institutional development prior to putting the agreed measures into effect (paragraph 194)

v giving thought to how it might achieve a fully effective academic counselling system for all students and how it might more closely monitor its implementation and operation (paragraph 168).

318 The University may also wish to consider the desirability of:

i ensuring better communications with student representatives, including those serving on senior institutional committees (paragraph 119)

ii considering what training opportunities it might wish to provide as a matter of course for staff appointed to academic and other management roles at a senior level (paragraph 143).

Appendix

The University of Gloucestershire's response to the audit report

The University welcomes the audit report and its expression of broad confidence in the management of the quality of our programmes and the standards of our awards. We are also pleased to note the positive outcome of each of the three Discipline Audit Trails (in Business and Management; Psychology; and Sports and Exercise Sciences).

We are delighted that the audit report highlights many examples of good practice:

- The arrangements for the induction of new members of academic staff

- The design of management information systems which has enabled the production of reports to support quality and academic standards management

- The introduction of Assessment Standing Panels across the University

- The comprehensiveness of the annual field review process

- The introduction of Student Information and Advice Centres across the campuses

- The processes developed to support the withdrawal of fields

- The introduction of mid-module reviews in Psychology

- The process of thematic review

- The development of its on-line journal of learning and teaching.

We believe that this is evidence of our commitment to the continued enhancement of our teaching and learning environment and the quality of the student experience. It is also pleasing to note the audit team's positive view of many aspects of our quality assurance and internal review processes.

The audit process was a valuable complement to our ongoing scrutiny of the quality of our provision, and the audit was conducted near the end of a period of significant change within the University's academic management structures. We consider that our decision to move to a more campus-based structure, with an increased degree of devolution of academic development and ownership, will enable us to provide better student support services and an enhanced academic infrastructure. We have put in place, from September 2005, a revised faculty and committee structure to facilitate this development and to ensure that we maintain an effective University-level overview of all matters relating to quality and standards.

We are aware of the need to ensure continued improvement. At the time of the audit, our own internal review processes had already indicated the need for further action in a number of areas noted in the report, including the establishment of a more effective counselling system for students. We have taken steps to improve communications with and between student representatives, and the new committee structure affords greater opportunity for student representation and feedback. Discussions have already taken place with the Students' Union on methods of improving training of student representatives and enhancing their input to committee deliberations. Action is under way to address other recommendations in the report, in particular those advising modification to our processes for external input to collaborative links, and the monitoring of changes to annual review.

The University wishes to thank the audit team for the professional manner in which the audit visit was conducted.