

Liverpool Hope University

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.

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Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Liverpool Hope University (the University) from 23 to 27 May 2005 to carry out an institutional audit. At the time of the audit the University had the title 'Liverpool Hope University College'. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

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

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

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

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

Outcome of the audit

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

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

Features of good practice

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

- the University's distinctive mission and ethos, clearly expressed and understood

by staff and students and exemplified by the weekly Foundation Hour

- the strongly collegial culture that underpins excellent academic and personal support for students
- the engagement with the community, exemplified by local outreach into schools and international outreach through the University's overseas education charity, Hope One World
- the opportunities for widening participation afforded by delivery of the University's programmes by its own staff through the Network of Hope colleges
- the procedures for induction, support and continuing development of all teaching staff, including striking an appropriate balance of duties.

Recommendations for action

The audit team advises the University to:

- ensure that a suitably strategic approach is taken to the provision of staff, library and other resources to support its development and avoid inadequacies and inequalities in its provision
- undertake more systematic analysis of data at the University level in order to identify and address university-wide issues, including benchmarking award and progression statistics against other institutions to help to assure standards.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- review its processes of monitoring and oversight to ensure that the accumulation of approved minor changes in modules does not result in unapproved major changes in pathways or programmes
- adopt methods to ensure that consistency is maintained among deaneries as they implement agreed University systems and procedures in the context of greater devolution
- review whether the multiplicity of committee stages in the University's quality procedures achieves not only effectiveness but also efficiency.

Taught programmes in computing, creative arts and design, education, and social studies

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

National reference points

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

From 2004 the institutional audit process has included a check on the reliability of the information sets published by institutions in the format recommended in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) document 03/51 *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*. The University is making good progress with the development of its information sets and with meeting the requirements set out in HEFCE's document 03/51.

Main report

Main report

1 An institutional audit of Liverpool Hope University (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 23 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), which 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 examples of institutional processes at work at the level of the programme, through discipline audit trails (DATs), together with examples of those processes operating at the level of the institution as a whole. The scope of the audit encompassed all of the University's provision, including collaborative arrangements.

Section 1: Introduction: Liverpool Hope University

The institution and its mission

4 The University originated in three teaching training colleges. The Warrington Training College (later named St Katharine's) was

founded in 1844 by the Church of England, and Notre Dame College by the Roman Catholic Sisters of Notre Dame in 1856, to promote mass education through the training of women teachers. In 1964 the Catholic Education Council established Christ's College as a teacher training college for men and women. The institutions diversified their curricula during the 1970s and a federal ecumenical body, the Liverpool Institute of Higher Education, was founded in 1980 and located on a single site, Hope Park, in the Childwall area of the city. A further campus has subsequently been developed at Everton and there is also an outdoor education and residential study centre in North Wales. The name Liverpool Hope was adopted in 1995 and the institution became Liverpool Hope University College in 2002, following the award of taught degree awarding powers. An application for university title was made in 2004 and, following separate QAA scrutiny prior to the institutional audit, the application was being considered by the Privy Council at the time of the audit. University status was granted by a decision of the Privy Council in spring 2005 followed by acceptance by the Privy Council of the institution's suggested renaming as Liverpool Hope University. This report uses the institution's most recent designation.

5 The University has been offering awards of the University of Liverpool since 1974 and gained accredited status for undergraduate provision in 1994 and for postgraduate awards in 1998. Liverpool Hope degrees were first introduced in 2003 for Foundation Degree (FD) students and for education and theology awards in 2004. From 2006 students will be admitted for Liverpool Hope awards only, with the exception of those enrolling on research degrees.

6 There has been a large growth in student numbers in the last decade and there are currently 5,119 undergraduate and 1,050 taught postgraduate full-time equivalents (FTEs). There are some 600 overseas students from 67 countries. Many students come from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland but the Merseyside region provides the largest number of students. A key feature of the

University is the Network of Hope, an outreach programme to higher education (HE) 'cold spots' in Lancashire (areas of low HE participation) through a group of Roman Catholic sixth form colleges. Over 600 FTE students study Liverpool Hope programmes through the Network of Hope.

7 The undergraduate modular scheme (UMS) provides some 50 pathways and programmes. Over 2,500 full-time students take the Combined Subjects BA or BSc degrees, offering students a largely free choice of subject combinations. In keeping with its history, the University is also a major provider of initial teacher training (ITT) at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, the fifth largest nationally. Four FDs have been developed in partnership with employers and/or professional bodies. There are 18 taught postgraduate programmes with 744 students and 43 research students.

8 The staff number 746, of whom 268 are in academic and 478 in support roles. Academic activity is headed by deans who manage academic activity through five deaneries. All deaneries offer research programmes. The IBITE Deanery contains the University's Management & Business Centre and information technology (IT) programmes, together with master's programmes attracting large numbers of international students. The Arts and Community Deanery, based mainly at Everton, delivers programmes in a range of creative and performing arts. The Education Deanery includes ITT, FDs, master's and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes, together with relevant undergraduate courses that do not confer Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). The Humanities Deanery has undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and the Deanery of Sciences and Social Sciences includes subjects such as health, sport, psychology and sociology. Central services are managed through two senior staff, the Chief Operations Officer, and the Registrar and Secretary and Clerk to Governing Council.

9 The current Rector and Chief Executive joined the University in 2003 and launched a new corporate plan for 2004-08. While the

University remains committed to widening participation, it sees itself as offering an alternative to some of the unintended consequences of mass HE and sees its future as being an excellent liberal arts institution with a personal and holistic approach which can be summarised as educating the whole person 'body, mind and spirit'.

The University's mission statement is as follows:

10 'Liverpool Hope is an ecumenical Christian Foundation which strives:

- to provide opportunities for the well-rounded personal development of Christians and students from other faiths and beliefs, educating the whole person in mind, body and spirit, irrespective of age, social or ethnic origins or physical capacity, including in particular those who might otherwise not have had an opportunity to enter higher education; to be a national provider of a wide range of high quality programmes responsive to the needs of students, including the education, training and professional development of teachers for Church and state schools;
- to sustain an academic community, as a sign of hope, enriched by Christian values and worship, which supports teaching and learning, scholarship and research, encourages the understanding of Christian and other faiths and beliefs and promotes religious and social harmony;
- to contribute to the educational, religious, cultural, social and economic life of Liverpool, Merseyside, the North-West and beyond'.

The mission statement reflects the faith values of the University's name and origins, with the prevailing ethos of community and social justice reflected in many distinctive features of the institution. The University is the only ecumenical Christian HE institution in the UK, and its unique history and values are celebrated in the publication *The Foundations of Hope*. It celebrates its foundation annually and holds a weekly Foundation Hour when all other

activities give way to an opportunity to reflect on the University's values. The setting aside of the Foundation Hour as a protected period reflects the University's commitment to its founding and continuing values. The hour takes a wide variety of forms, with the programme for the current term including a memorial service for the late Bishop David Sheppard who was a prime supporter of the federation. Recent talks include 'Being a Sports Chaplain', 'Representations of Slavery', 'Working with Asylum Seekers', 'Intelligent Tutoring' and 'the History of the Saint Francis Xavier Community', now part of Hope at Everton. A Foundation Hour has also featured recently a presentation by Network of Hope students (see below) testifying to the transformative experience of HE and their appreciation of being able to study part-time in a friendly, local and supportive environment.

11 The University has its own international charity, Hope One World, which has been a recipient of the Queen's Anniversary Prize. The charity runs 17 projects in South America, Africa, Sri Lanka and Asia, involving staff and students in, for instance, CPD for teachers working with Tibetan refugee communities. The University is also concerned with regeneration projects locally. The Education Deanery, for instance, runs English courses for asylum seekers, and the establishment of the Everton Campus was conceived in part as a contribution to social renewal in a deprived and run-down area of Liverpool. The corporate plan envisages a major role for the University in preparations for Liverpool's selection as European City of Culture in 2008. For these mission-related projects, the Mission and Values Group, chaired by the Rector, is charged with providing focus and leadership. In exploring the mission of the University the audit team was frequently told by staff and students of the collegial atmosphere and unique community spirit of the institution. The team formed the view that the internal cohesion of the University went hand in hand with the wide collective effort that is invested in community and international projects.

Collaborative provision

12 The Network of Hope, which began in 1998, is the most significant of the University's partnerships. With teaching and assessment undertaken by the University's academic staff, albeit associate lecturers in some cases, no delegation of academic authority is involved in the relationship with other colleges. The pathways offered are mainly within the BA/BSc Combined Studies programme and are delivered with local pastoral support in denominational sixth form colleges with similar missions and ethos. These colleges are St Mary's College, Blackburn; Holy Cross College, Bury; St John Rigby College, Wigan; and Aquinas College, Stockport. Another college, Widnes and Runcorn Sixth Form College, is also an outcentre working on the same model, and other centres are being considered for this role. The Network of Hope is a key part of the University's activity and makes a significant contribution to the University's mission of widening participation for under-represented social groups.

13 There is one other type of partnership, that with Wirral Metropolitan College (WMC) where the University has validated small programmes in media and cultural studies previously operated in collaboration with another HE institution. The University is mindful of the risks involved in collaborative ventures and states that it is proceeding cautiously in exploring developments with other potential local and overseas partners. The University affirms that collaborations will be agreed only if they are mission-central.

Background information

14 The published information available for this audit included:

- the report of the previous quality audit of the University undertaken by the Higher Education Quality Council in 1996
- QAA reviews of provision undertaken at subject level
- a summary of outcomes of publicly available information, including quality inspections conducted by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)

- the information on the University's website.

15 The University provided QAA with the following documents:

- the self-evaluation document (SED) .
- discipline self-evaluation documents (DSEDs) or the four areas selected as DATs.

16 The audit team was also given ready access to internal documents of the University, in hardcopy or on the intranet, and to a range of documentation on the selected DATs, including samples of student work.

The audit process

17 Following a preliminary meeting at Hope, QAA confirmed that four DATs would be conducted during the audit visit. QAA received the SED in January 2005 and the DSEDs in April 2005. The audit team's selection of DATs was computing, creative arts and design, education, and social studies. In some cases the DSEDs described recent internal reviews.

18 The audit team visited the University from 9 April to 21 April 2005 to explore with the Rector, senior staff and student representatives, matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the SED and other documentation provided by the University. During this visit the team developed a programme of meetings for the audit visit which was agreed by the University.

19 Students were invited through the Students' Union (SU) to submit a separate document giving their views on the student experience at the University and to identify any matters of commendation or concern. They were also invited to comment on the level of representation afforded to them. In January the SU submitted such a students' written submission (SWS) to QAA on the basis of consultations with students, chiefly via a questionnaire. This document had been shared with appropriate University staff and there were no matters of particular confidentiality. The audit team is grateful to the SU for preparing the SWS.

20 The audit visit took place from 23 to 27 May 2005, and involved further meetings with staff and students, both at institutional level and

in relation to the selected DATs. The audit team was: Professor C Clare; Dr F Corner; Professor R W Munn; Ms K Southworth; Dr A White, auditors, and Miss M Chalk, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mr A Bradshaw, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

21 The University sees it as part of its ethos to treat any external engagement as a learning opportunity. There was no continuation audit, since during the scheduled period the University was following another QAA procedure to seek taught degree awarding powers. In 2002 the University achieved these powers and subsequently reflected on the outcomes of the scrutiny process. Action taken following this consideration included an increase in library spending of £50,000 for one year and the appointment of a Professor of Education.

22 The 1997 report, following the audit begun in 1996, commended several aspects of practice by Liverpool Hope, including change management, enhancements to the quality assurance framework and commitment to the wider community. The report also set out recommendations relating to the return of student work, degree classification arrangements and simplifications to annual monitoring. Following the 1996 audit report changes were instituted to achieve more consistent treatment of students, including a University-wide policy to return written work within four weeks. Review processes were simplified by discontinuing subject-level review in favour of pathway and programme review. The re-accreditation report by the University of Liverpool in 2003 commended a number of features, including the strong University ethos and approach to holistic education, the development of the Network of Hope and the supportive and proactive nature of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit (QAE). Recent Ofsted inspections have resulted in the maximum grade of 1 (Very good) for Management and Quality Assurance both in primary and secondary ITT provision. The SED

also reported on QAA developmental engagements in history and English which led, among other developments, to a clearer description of the role of the external examiner, clearer information to students beyond the first year about tutorial arrangements, and the enhancement of monitoring data.

23 The audit team found much evidence that the University is indeed responsive to external and internal views on the quality of its provision, that it is characterised by a self-reflective culture and serious about quality assurance and enhancement. However, the team questioned whether the University is firmly proactive and strategic in some aspects of its operations (see below).

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

24 The University maintains that quality is one of its three principal performance indicators and it has confidence that its systems for quality assurance are robust and effective. Its assurance is based on its engagement with the Academic Infrastructure, published by QAA, the reports of external examiners (recruited to represent the diversity of the sector), and the reports of external scrutiny processes such as the separate applications for taught degree awarding powers and university title, and developmental engagements with QAA. The University also cited in its SED the involvement of its staff in national peer groups as external examiners and QAA auditors.

25 The University sees as one of its strengths the balance between being a genuinely self-critical community and one which is enthusiastic in celebrating its achievements, for instance, in the good practice database on the intranet. The University suggests that its quality assurance mechanisms focus on developing systems and a culture in which all staff recognise their individual responsibility for a

high-quality service. Recently it has moved from an 'assurance-based' approach to one fostering risk awareness and enhancement and there has been more devolution to deaneries to allow for responsiveness and flexibility.

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

26 Academic Board has overall responsibility for academic matters, including academic resource issues. It has three committees that undertake detailed work. The remit of Planning and Strategic Support Committee (PASS) includes considering deanery curriculum development plans and the supporting business cases, and student recruitment and retention. The remit of Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) covers most academic matters apart from research and resource issues. The remit of Research Committee includes policy matters for research students.

27 LTC has two sub-committees. The Quality and Academic Standards Sub-Committee (QAS) has a broad remit across the areas implied by its title, including support services that affect the student experience. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee (TLA) considers policy development in its area, including enhancement. Research Committee considers policy recommendations from the Research Students Management Committee. Other committees report to Academic Board. The Partnerships Committee (PAC) considers procedures and proposals for formal partnerships (see below). The Progress Committee oversees appeals against termination of studies.

28 Awards are managed by four separate committees, for HEFCE-funded undergraduate awards, for Teacher Training Agency (TTA) funded undergraduate awards, for Postgraduate Certificate in Education, and for postgraduate studies. Deanery boards have a wide range of responsibilities, particularly for annual monitoring and for pathways and programmes within their area. Reporting to the deanery boards, pathway and programmes teams meet

to consider detailed issues of implementation. In addition, five part-time associate deans operate with University-wide responsibilities for teaching and learning, quality, postgraduate, international, and research matters. These matters are brought together with deanery issues at monthly meetings of the Committee of Deans, comprising among others the Rector, the deans, sub-deans and vice-deans, and the associate deans.

29 Deanery boards have general oversight of programmes and pathways, including responsibility for approving the submission of new proposals and for external examiner nominations to higher committees, approving new modules, overseeing staff-student liaison and annual monitoring, and considering resources. These responsibilities and responsibility for resources have been progressively devolved to deaneries. Pathway and programme teams meet at least once each term.

30 Procedures are documented in a Quality Manual, a substantial document which is mainly virtual. It consists of a series of guides to processes including programme and pathway approval, monitoring and review, student liaison and feedback, and peer observation of teaching. The document is largely self-contained, but additional supporting documentation, examples and external links are available on the QAE website. Operation of many of the procedures is the responsibility of the QAE, which also seeks to ensure consistency between deaneries. QAE reviews its own performance at an annual away day. The Director of QAE sits on relevant committees, including the Committee of Deans.

31 The decision-making system was reviewed by Academic Board in June 2004. The revised system is designed to enhance decision-making, accountability, consultation and the following of audit trails while reducing staff time spent in meetings. The revised system takes account of the increased devolution of responsibility to deaneries. The matrix structure within and across deaneries allows expression of both University and deanery concerns. However, senior staff who met the audit team commented that the system

involved a multiplicity of meetings with overlapping membership.

32 The Quality Manual is helpfully structured and comprehensive, and is written in an approachable style. Other guides to processes are readily available on the University website. QAE has responsibility for ensuring that procedures are carried out consistently, and fulfils this role effectively.

33 The assurance of standards appears in the remit of QAS. The University places some reliance on external means to ensure that its standards are appropriate and are maintained. For example, it has reviewed the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by the QAA, to identify where there was already good practice and where improvements were required. It has also reviewed its provision, including learning outcomes and assessment, in the light of the subject benchmark statements set by QAA; and it has made sure that its own frameworks articulate with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*. Further, the University has also used commentaries from QAA developmental engagement teams, external examiners, its validating body, and applications for taught degree awarding powers and for university title.

34 Assessment principles agreed by Academic Board in 2002 form an appendix to the Learning and Teaching Strategy and action plans produced in relation to the HEFCE Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF). Staff are expected to express, support and assess all intended learning outcomes (ILOs), but are advised to ensure that they express a reasonable number of ILOs per module and programme. The pattern of assessments across a programme is monitored for range and balance. For the year 2002-03, the chief external examiner raised issues concerning assessment, but these concerned procedures rather than standards. The student survey has recorded the students' views of the appropriateness of assessment and academic standards.

35 In managing and enhancing quality features more extensively the University has engaged systematically with the Academic Infrastructure.

36 Collaborative provision is the responsibility of the PAC, which reports to Academic Board. PAC is responsible for advising on strategy and policy and, more specifically, for quality assurance procedures. It also approves proposed new outcentres and changes in the provision at existing outcentres in the Network of Hope. Approval is made via an Outcentre Approval Panel which reports to PASS and is presided over by the chair of the PAC. A register of collaborative provision is maintained. The University refers to its arrangements being informed by the *Code of practice*.

37 The quality assurance framework is comprehensive, well documented, carefully operated, and well understood by staff. Staff seen by the audit team repeatedly commented that the University was small enough for various informal and personal mechanisms to operate effectively. These mechanisms operate to reinforce more formal mechanisms which include a very comprehensive set of levels of formal scrutiny, for example, a reporting line from programme level to Deanery to QAS to LTC to Academic Board, in which matters may be considered by committees with significant overlap of membership.

38 The audit team is satisfied that the University's processes for managing quality and standards are effective for their purpose. The approach to collaboration is careful and systematic.

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

39 The University subscribes to a philosophy of continuous improvement. Responsibility for enhancement lies with the LTC (as currently titled), with detailed operations delegated to QAS and, in learning and teaching matters, to TLA. The University has recently used TQEF money in order to contribute to learning and teaching fellows, the Writing Centre, the

Pedagogic Research Action Group and the introduction of Personal Development Portfolios. Teaching standards are being developed through support for staff taking the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCLTHE), attending Higher Education Academy (HEA) subject centre events and in the production of the in-house pedagogic research journal which the audit team noted is distributed to all academic staff. The learning and teaching week and teaching awards are also contributions to quality enhancement. Peer observation of teaching is expected and linked with performance review for staff. The team noted that associate lecturers are encouraged to take the Certificate in Learning and Teaching and are paid to attend staff meetings.

40 Improvement measures in quality and standards continue. Provision of reliable data in the area has been a concern to the University and the implementation of a new student management system is enabling improvements, such as daily updated cohort reports available on-line.

41 New software has been purchased to improve timetable construction and allocation of rooms. Growth in student numbers and academic provision has put pressure on available space and it is the intention to use the full modelling capacity of the software system to create the timetable for 2005-06. The audit team explored this development with staff and welcomed the prospect that this could be a contribution to solving these resource difficulties.

42 The University is taking many initiatives concerning student retention. The Certificate (C) level curriculum has been restructured into year-long modules in order to provide students with more feedback and to facilitate greater reflection on studies. This change will be extended to level I in 2005-06. At the same time, the subject modules and personal development planning (PDP) are to be brought together, a move welcomed by staff and students. Non-residential students are to be attached to halls of residence to assist their identification with the campus. The audit team noted the eight-point plan for

student retention, particularly its emphasis on the use of lecturers recognised for their excellence on first year courses and on the careful evaluation of each initiative to improve retention. However, information supplied by the University did not make it entirely clear where the responsibility would lie for coordinating the implementation of the eight-point plan.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

43 Procedures for programme approval are described in a detailed Guide. The procedures are designed to articulate with the precepts of the *Code of practice* published by the QAA, and the articulation is monitored annually. New or significantly revised programme proposals are considered first within the deaneries. They are then reviewed by PASS for viability and consistency with corporate objectives. Approval by PASS is followed by a validation event that normally involves two external panel members. Development of new proposals is supported by a Critical Friend Event, in which the approval panel, minus the external members, reviews the documentation with the proposer to help to make the document clear and persuasive for the final validation event with the external members. Approvals are fed into the committee system by QAE. An annual meeting of the Director of QAE with each dean and key administrators reviews procedures.

44 For provision of new programmes within the Network of Hope, the Outcentre Approval Panel (see above) plays a role similar to that of the Deanery in making recommendations to PASS. Theme reviews are a mechanism used to consider non-teaching provision in the context of an identified problem or pressure. Recent examples of areas subject to theme reviews are the UMS and provision beyond the Hope Park and Everton campuses.

45 The University welcomes the responses of external panel members to the validation process (see next section). Most of these comments are positive. The University considers theme review to be a particular strength that combines assurance of quality with enhancement.

46 The University has a clearly defined two-stage process for approving new programmes or extending them to additional outcentres within the Network of Hope. The first stage ensures that the necessary resources are available before detailed approval can be sought. This first stage of the process may need refinement as the practicalities of budgetary devolution to deaneries become clear, but meanwhile, PASS maintains effective oversight over the strategic development of programmes, and the audit team saw evidence of proposals significantly changed after the Critical Friend Event. Theme review offers a means of reviewing issues that affect the student experience beyond teaching and learning, narrowly conceived. Overall, the intended articulation with the *Code of Practice* is achieved.

47 The procedures are accurately described in the SED. Overall, they constitute an effective system, well engaged with the University's deliberative and management structures, and suitably articulated with the *Code of practice*.

48 Procedures for annual monitoring are described in a detailed Guide. They are designed to articulate with the precepts of the *Code of practice*.

49 Annual monitoring centres around critical reflection and identifying risk. Reflective meetings at programme or pathway level are held in June and September after exam results appear. Minutes of the meetings are submitted to the dean, who combines them into a Deanery Annual Monitoring Report and action plan. From these and similar annual monitoring reports on student services the Chair of the LTC and the Director of QAE compile an overview report for QAS and (where relevant) PASS. The overview reporting serves to highlight not only concerns but also good practice. QAS reviews progress on deanery action plans halfway through the academic year, and this allows cross-University issues to be identified and acted upon.

50 The University has sought to improve its annual monitoring process and, in particular, the reports, in order to enhance staff engagement. It is aware that the current sometimes descriptive approach could lead to

inconsistencies, and is monitoring the effectiveness of the reports. One issue has been the availability of reliable data. This problem has been addressed by the implementation of a new student information system which staff said was a great improvement on its predecessor. The University intends to improve its data analysis and benchmarking against external indicators.

51 The University considers its annual monitoring system to be a strength in reinforcing the reflective culture of subject teams. The procedures are appropriate and well understood. There is a clear process for deciding whether changes to modules are minor and for approving such minor changes. The audit team asked whether an accumulation of minor changes in modules could lead to a significant change taking place in a programme without formal approval, and was told that such a danger would be detected by the dean or by QAE. The team felt that, given the large amount of business handled by deans and their deanery boards, there was a risk that significant change in programmes could take place without approval by an accumulation of minor changes in modules. The University might therefore consider it desirable to develop means to assure itself that it has sufficient academic oversight to stop unapproved major changes to programmes being created unintentionally by the accumulation of approved minor changes.

52 Periodic review is normally conducted every five years. Two former processes have now been combined into one, and the new periodic review is described in a detailed Guide. The process is sufficiently flexible to allow for variation in special circumstances such as major curriculum change or concerns about a particular programme. External members are involved in the review panels and are expected to be able to comment on how the programmes relate to the Academic Infrastructure, published by QAA. The external members may be academics or, in relevant areas, practitioners (for whom the University recognises extra support may be needed). The SED affirmed that external members commend the periodic review process as robust and challenging.

53 The evidence available to the audit team indicated that the processes were conducted systematically and with a clear view of their intended goals. There is a clear process of preparation, collection and distillation of reports to facilitate identification and tracking of areas for improvement and for the dissemination of good practice.

54 The University's processes are fit for purpose and are operated with care, including regular reflection on their effectiveness.

External participation in internal review processes

55 As described above, external members are involved consistently in programme approval and periodic review processes. The selection of external members is carefully regulated. Teams may not include current or recent external examiners, but may include practitioners as well as academics, in keeping with the vocational nature of many of the University's programmes, and work is in hand to supplement the University's standard Guides with information to help them contribute more effectively. The identity of the home institutions and the subject status of external members are monitored in order to ensure that a suitable external participation profile is maintained.

56 The University commented in the SED that external involvement is valued by academic teams, especially because the externals are carefully selected. The arrangements described in the SED are supported by the documentary and oral evidence collected by the audit team. The involvement of external members in validation and review is well explained, well regulated and consistently carried out. The extension of external membership beyond academics to practitioners has been carefully thought out and adds value to the process, especially with the supplementary information that it is intended to provide for such non-academic external members.

57 The University's arrangements are well conceived and conducted. The involvement of external members is regarded by the University

and its staff as beneficial and is rigorously carried out. As a result, the audit team was readily able to conclude that it could have broad confidence in the procedures.

External examiners and their reports

58 The University's virtual Quality Manual provides detail on the procedure for the nomination and appointment of external examiners, notes for their guidance and general detail on how their reports are considered. The role of the undergraduate external examiner is given in the UMS regulations agreed by Academic Board in October 2004. It is to ensure that assessment processes and standards are applied appropriately, consistently and fairly across all modules by all internal markers and in line with the University's regulations and guidelines; to judge whether or not the learning outcomes of each module have been met; to ensure that the learning outcomes are appropriate in the light of national standards (including the National Qualification Framework and its statements about levels) and benchmarks within the subject; and to measure the outcomes against the appropriate pathway/programme specifications. A similar statement exists for external examiners of postgraduate programmes/pathways.

59 The University operates a University-wide UMS which has two categories of regulations: Programme Regulations and the General Regulations for Assessment, Examination and Awards. The Programme Regulations govern registration, duration, structure, progression, completion, eligibility for awards, and the procedures for calculating degree classifications. Regulations differ across programmes, and so programmes have their own set of Programme Regulations. The General Regulations for Assessment, Examinations and Awards are a common set of Regulations that apply to all programmes within the UMS. Academic standards are addressed in this latter document including the procedures for dealing with alleged breaches of regulations and procedures for dealing with alleged cases of plagiarism. In the knowledge that the proliferation of

regulations at the level of the undergraduate programme is a potential source of confusion for a student the University provides clear guidance on its website in order to enable students to locate the set of regulations relevant to their programme.

60 The University operates three sets of regulations for postgraduate students: Regulations for the Postgraduate Certificate of Education (which apply to students who began their programme after September 2004); the University Postgraduate Studies Modular Scheme (which apply to students on the MA/MSc Education Studies and the MA Theology Studies); and the Postgraduate Studies Modular Scheme Regulations for University of Liverpool Awards (which apply to all other postgraduate awards).

61 Each pathway (element of the combined honours BA or BSc) and single subject programme in the UMS has its own Examination panel and external examiners are members. The Examination panel considers and confirms module results and, at levels Intermediate and Honours, the grades for each module. The panel also decides the form that any reassessment of failed modules will take. The panel identifies and considers generic issues that need to be drawn to the attention of the appropriate Board of Examiners. The Chair of the Examination panel is responsible for ensuring that its meetings are conducted in accordance with University regulations concerning examinations. Following the meeting agreed marks are forwarded to relevant Boards of Examiners.

62 Boards of examiners include relevant subject specialists as well as the Chief External Examiner for undergraduate awards. Boards of examiners are responsible for making recommendations for progression, intermediate awards and final degree classifications to Academic Board. The boards of examiners receive agreed full profiles for each student and agreed module grades from examination panels. The boards also receive recommendations from examination panels for the treatment of students who have submitted medical evidence or other

extenuating circumstances. The boards of examiners will normally accept the recommendations of examination panels on such matters but boards of examiners have the final jurisdiction. At postgraduate level the University operates one Assessment and Award Board per programme which confirms grades and makes awards. The University provides external examiners with guidance notes which are reviewed annually. From 2005-06 the role of Chief External Examiner at boards of examiners is being replaced by a team of Scheme Examiners who will share the task of providing a University-wide overview of progression and awards.

63 The SED explained that the administration of external examiners moved to the QAE from deaneries at the start of the 2003-04 academic session. The University also put in place a web-based resource for all external examiners and instigated an induction event for all new examiners. This briefing has now been broadened to include current external examiners. The University feels that, given the current complexity of its modular system, bringing together new and current external examiners is a virtue. The audit team noted that the modular regulations will be simplified in phased steps over 2005 and 2006 following the adoption by the University of the recommendations of a review of the UMS.

64 The SED stated that 'The reports produced by external examiners are considered the mainstay and main source of evidence in the safeguarding of academic standards.' External examiners present their report on a standard form which includes the components required for the publication of Teaching Quality Information (TQI). All reports receive formal response from the programme/pathway leader who outlines in the response what action is being or will be taken to address issues identified by the external examiner. The reports and the teaching team's response form part of the University's annual monitoring portfolio for each programme/pathway, and are scrutinised by the relevant dean. If a dean is not content with the team's response or deems that a further institutional response is required, the

dean will make contact with the external examiner and discuss any issues raised in the external examiner's report.

65 External examiners' reports are read by the Director of QAE, and an overview report containing issues of cross-college relevance is considered annually by QAS. Each year, the overview report contains key recommendations for the University on action that should be taken in response to comments arising from the reports. The audit team noted that the processes for dealing with external examiners' reports are clear and are understood and accepted at the local level.

66 From what it heard in meetings and read in documentation the audit team concluded that the University is engaged in a dialogue with its external examiners, that external examiners' reports are given due consideration, and that, where necessary, required action is taken at the level of the Deanery and the institution. In the view of the team, the use made of external examiners' reports supports the judgement of broad confidence in the University's management of quality and standards.

External reference points

67 The SED stated that the University's initial response to the publication of the *Code of practice* involved the creation by the QAE of a working group for each section. These groups reviewed existing provision in relationship to the QAA precepts and identified areas for development. Subsequently, in 2003, the University devolved ownership and responsibility for institutional engagement with sections of the *Code* to pertinent committees and units. The audit team note that this process of devolution of responsibility over key areas of quality and standards is part of a general process within the institution and that the University believes it to reflect its increasing 'academic maturity'. QAS is formally responsible for oversight of the institutional engagement with the *Code* and reviews this annually. The institution is currently preparing a consolidated document called the Liverpool Hope Framework on the QAA Code of Practice which

will be placed on the University website and which will help to inform its collaborative partners' understanding of the *Code*.

68 The University requires all programme teams to engage with subject benchmark statements through definitive documents and programme specifications. An assessment of this engagement is a mandatory element of the University's process of initial validation and periodic review and the SED states that 'external subject specialists ... will be asked to comment on the appropriateness of the provision in the light of the published benchmarks.' The SED stated that the University offers many subjects in combined mode only and therefore it has not been possible for these subjects to reflect all elements of the benchmark statements.

69 The SED stated that the University has reviewed its academic provision to ensure that it articulates fully with the FHEQ. The University has incorporated the FHEQ level descriptors into its documentation for module approval and initial validation and is confident that they are 'well understood amongst academic staff and their use is enshrined in several College procedures'. The University has its own Credit and Qualifications Framework statement showing the exit level for each award, and is confident that this articulates fully with the FHEQ. From its meetings with staff and scrutiny of documents, the audit team is confident that the University has given careful and consistent consideration to the FHEQ and that it has in place robust systems in initial validation and annual review to ensure that programmes/pathways engage with it.

70 Following a decision of the Rectorate team in 2003 programme specifications have been in place for all programmes/pathways in the University since summer 2004. The University provided support for the production of the specifications over the course of the 2003-04 academic year and specifications were approved at a validation or periodic review event or via deanery boards. The SED stated that updating programme specifications will become part of annual monitoring. Some

programme teams publish complete programme specifications in a student handbook or on their shared websites but most teams distribute only the most relevant extracts (including aims and learning outcomes) to students and make reference to the fuller version on the web. All programme specifications have been available on the University website from the start of the 2004-05 academic year.

71 Programme specifications seen by the audit team contained reference to subject benchmark statements and a mapping of pathway learning outcomes onto the levels of the course although the team did note some variation in the format of the specifications. The team explored through the DAT meetings and through documentation the understanding at a local level of the incorporation of external reference points into the procedures for validation and review at the University and formed the view that staff consistently engage with them. The team also reached the view that staff groups routinely make use of programme and module learning outcomes in their handbooks to convey to students the principles of their programme/pathway and that students are aware of these. However, the team found variation in the understanding of when the accumulation of incremental changes in modules would trigger a review of the programme/pathway between periodic review. Senior staff assured the team that a member of QAE was present at any deanery board where changes to modules or programmes were considered. However, the team noted variability in practice with some deanery boards considering changes without a QAE officer present. The team was told that the QAE representative on the deanery board monitored changes to modules to ensure that they did not become major changes to programmes. However, some deanery minutes record approval of modules as core or optional on programmes, sometimes retrospectively and sometimes through chair's action, with no QAE officer present. The team encourages the University to review its procedures in this area.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

72 Since the 1996 audit, QAA subject reviews awarded scores of 3 or 4 in all aspects of all disciplines scrutinised (with only one exception). Student support and guidance scored 4 in every review, and business and management achieved the maximum possible score of 24. Developmental engagements in history and English indicated a growing use of the Academic Infrastructure from 2003 to 2004, but also reported a continuing need to follow up issues raised in annual monitoring.

73 External recognition is especially important for ITT for QTS, where outcomes are generally positive. For example, the most recent Ofsted inspection awarded the maximum grade of 1 to quality assurance and management across all the University's primary and secondary provision. As witness to the importance that it attaches to external recognition which applies to nearly a quarter of its provision, the University has a separate Award Management Committee for TTA-funded programmes.

74 Recognition is sought for other programmes where it is thought appropriate. The University aligns its own review processes with those of the external body where possible. Results of external recognition and review processes are considered by QAS.

75 The University deliberates formally on the results of Ofsted inspections in the Award Management Committee for TTA-funded programmes, because such programmes are a large fraction of its provision (it is the fifth largest provider of ITT in the country) and so recognition is essential. Consideration of these reports forms a major part of quality assurance and maintenance of standards endeavour of the University. Overall, the outcomes of external recognition and review are kept under scrutiny by QAS. QAS stewardship has led to enhancements following the University's two developmental engagements.

76 Overall, the audit team finds that the University has well-defined procedures for engaging with and responding to the results of external reports.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

77 The University's approach to student representation is enshrined in the Quality Policy where 'students and other stakeholders are entitled to contribute to the shaping of University policies and mechanisms in the area of quality and standards'. Students are represented at all levels of the University's governance, quality management and committee structure, including periodic review, theme reviews, and working parties. All central University committees, apart from the Research Committee have among their ex-officio members at least one student representative. At programme or pathway level membership is normally made up of elected student representatives. There are formally constituted staff/student liaison committees (SSLCs) at programme and pathway level. These have prescribed guidelines and are established to discuss the quality of the academic student experience. There are also SSLCs for each Network of Hope college. The audit team gathered evidence that confirmed the accuracy of the SED's descriptions of the University's formal representation systems and of the SED's evaluation that they enabled effective representation. The team was able to confirm that representation was occurring and that the informal and formal mechanisms enabled effective responses to matters raised by students. The team received examples of how issues raised had resulted in course improvements.

78 The SED set out how this range of mechanisms ensured that 'the student voices are heard' and how the role of the SU is 'fundamental to the success of student participation'. The University recognises where further work needs to be undertaken with regard to research students. The audit team also heard that the SU has had difficulties with ensuring full student representation, but that informal staff/student communication ensures that feedback takes place effectively. The team found evidence that students feel 'they are able to be critical of their experiences and that staff members are trusted to react to that information'. The team heard that the SU and

University were working together to address the issue of comprehensive student representation and in meetings with students the team heard that student representatives were supported by the SU. The team confirmed that the University has recently introduced formal SSLCs for research students and that these committees generally provide a channel for students to raise concerns.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

79 The University uses a number of methods to gather student feedback including module evaluation, SSLCs and student surveys. Module evaluations are not standardised in form, but modules are required to be evaluated regularly. University-wide student experience surveys have been conducted and outcomes broken down by deanery and central service providers. These surveys are conducted both for the whole University and for sub-sets of students, for example, the Network of Hope 2003 survey. The Library, Student Services and Careers undertake surveys although the University is mindful that students can experience questionnaire fatigue and encourages coordination of surveys. The SU is involved in survey design to ensure questionnaires are student-friendly. The University acknowledges that while feedback mechanisms such as the surveys work well, wider involvement of the student population in consultation activities and dissemination is 'an ongoing challenge' which it aims to meet with the SU. The University also recognises further action to secure feedback needs to be taken with regards to research students, and is establishing a virtual graduate school.

80 The audit team gathered comprehensive evidence of a range of mechanisms to ensure feedback from students and was able to confirm the University's view that these mechanisms are effective. The team found evidence that module evaluations were being collected and discussed as part of the annual monitoring process. This evidence was confirmed by students who reported that their

views were sought and acted upon. Although students acknowledged that the subsequent actions were not always reported to them, they confirmed that they were able to identify changes that had taken place.

81 First destination information is provided by the Careers Service and this is analysed annually. The audit team gathered evidence of links with local and national employers to support employer feedback and involvement; these include close links with small and medium-sized enterprises in Merseyside and projects such as 'Job Zone' or 'Teacher Zone'. Labour market intelligence is disseminated to subject areas, and employers are invited to contribute to the development of curricula. The Careers Service hosts employer-led fairs. At subject and programme level there are well-established links with employers including strong/sector industry links although the University acknowledges that the making and sustenance of employer links need a more systematic fostering across the deaneries. The team gathered evidence of employer involvement in course development and of innovative projects, including work placements, with employers to give current students experience of employment and career possibilities and to embed the work of the University within the social and economic community.

Progression and completion statistics

82 The SED stated that the University expected academic reflection and planning to be 'informed and evidenced by a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data reports.' To further this aim in September 2004 the University replaced its student management system in order to provide academic managers with data that was more 'accurate and easily accessible'. The SED goes on to say that the University is now considering how to strengthen the use of external benchmarking information in the analysis of student data as hitherto University practice has been to leave individual teams to identify and provide their own benchmarking information. The Annual Monitoring Working Party is due to report in the course of 2004-05 with the aim of making

a set of benchmarking data from sources such as the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and Universities and Colleges Admissions Services available to all teams.

83 The audit team learned that Academic Board considers statistics on degree classification, progression and achievement annually. The SED stated that the University's performance in the percentage of First class and Upper Second class degrees awarded is in line with benchmark institutions from the SCOP-sector and reflects its mission-driven student profile. However, the University accepts that student retention is one of the main challenges arising from its mission to widen participation.

84 The audit team gained the view that staff at all levels of the University are concerned that its retention/progression rate as published by HESA compares unfavourably with the sector as a whole. The team learned through the SED that the University has launched a number of initiatives to address this situation. These include the setting up of a Retention Working Party, a return to year-long modules for Level C students, reviewing the modular structure, introducing PDP as a compulsory module for all Level C (non-QTS) students, introducing a new on-line student monitoring system and the creation of the Institute for Higher Education Research and Development. The team learned that the Retention Working Party has taken a strategic approach to the problem and that the University accepts that this represents a significant and substantial cultural shift both for the institution overall and for individual members of staff. The team noted the intention of the University to introduce for 2005-06 a research-based Eight Goal Plan to address the issues of retention and completion.

85 The audit team confirmed, mainly through the DATs, that progression and completion data receives active consideration through Annual Monitoring Portfolios at the level of the programme/pathway, and through Annual Monitoring Reports at the level of the Deanery. However, the team considers that the view expressed by one Dean in an Annual Monitoring Report that currently commentaries

on cohort data consist of 'lots of description of the figures but little real analysis' is a fair account of some but not all such reports within the University. The team also felt that the University would benefit from making greater use of sector-wide benchmarks to locate its performance and to measure the impact of institutional policies. The team recommends the University to undertake more systematic analysis of data in order to identify and address University-wide issues, including benchmarking award and progression statistics against other institutions to help to assure standards.

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

86 There is a Human Resources Strategy with a section dedicated to the recruitment and selection of staff and to equal opportunities. The document outlines a series of targets for recruitment and retention of staff through procedures for promotion and reward and for encouraging staff to become more research-active. The strategy includes targets for various ethnic groups using a series of benchmarks.

87 The identification of the need for teaching staff arises at subject group level and involves making a business case to the Dean. If supported, the case is forwarded to the Human Resources and Finance Departments and then to the Rector for final approval. The person specification for academic posts has been recently refined and the setting up of selection panels is scrutinised to ensure it is appropriate for posts at different levels. Guidance on the interview process and conduct is given to all panel members before interviews take place. Individual coaching sessions on recruitment and selection can also be given to panel members. The documentation provided in the appointments process was accurate and the process efficient and timely.

88 Newly appointed members of academic staff are normally appointed on contracts requiring them to undertake teaching, research and administration. All appointments have a probationary period, during which staff are

required to achieve specific targets detailed within the Probationary Guidelines for Managers. Members of staff on probationary agreements are reviewed after six months with final confirmation of appointment after 12 months.

89 Newly appointed members of staff are expected to attend the institutional induction programme. It includes sessions on IT, equality and diversity (including working with disabled students), as well as an introduction to University life and key people within the organisation. Deaneries supplement the central induction event with their own activities. Associate lecturers based either at the main campuses or in the Network of Hope are also invited and encouraged to participate in the induction processes and a simplified on-line induction is available for them on the intranet. New staff members are appointed a mentor (who is not their line manager) and there is no set period for the mentoring. On occasions, a member of staff will still seek advice from the mentor after the end of the probationary period.

90 Normally, new members of academic staff are required to undertake the University's PGCLTHE if they do not have experience that could be accredited for membership by the HEA. The audit team met members of staff who had benefited from this programme. Newly appointed staff members are given a reduced teaching load to enable their participation in the CiLTHE and other developmental programmes.

91 The University revised its appraisal procedure and introduced a new Performance Review and Development Scheme in 2002-03 for all staff. The aims of the scheme are to ensure that members of staff understand what is expected of them and to ensure that they receive appropriate development to increase their effectiveness. Measurable performance targets are agreed as an outcome of a Performance Review meeting along with a PDP. Those development needs can be in the subject, in learning and teaching or other categories. Performance review takes place annually and training and briefing in performance review are offered to reviewers and appraisees respectively.

In addition there is a comprehensive section on the performance review and development scheme in the staff handbook.

92 In 2003 the University introduced a promotion scheme by which academic staff could apply for promotion to Associate Professor or Professor. This was followed in 2004 by the introduction of a formal scheme for promotion to Senior Lecturer. Staff promotion is an annual process and the procedures are clearly advertised in the Human Resources section of the website, together with details of the criteria for promotion. The criteria for promotion to Senior Lecturer are based on the extent and quality of the contribution to teaching, research, scholarship and administration. To assist candidates, workshops are held to help with the process.

93 Excellent teaching is also recognised through a scheme of awards for excellence in teaching and learning which was introduced in 2003-04. These awards can be made in various categories, including experienced staff with a national profile, experienced staff with local influence, 'rising stars' (with less than six years experience) and Learning Support Staff. The criteria used to assess applications for these awards reflect those used in the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme.

94 The audit team formed the view that the University's systems and procedures for the appointment, induction, appraisal and reward of staff were sound, provided equality of opportunity and were a feature of good practice.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

95 The University has a staff development policy that appears within the Human Resources Strategy. It seeks to recognise 'the crucial importance of providing appropriate support and development opportunities for all staff.' There is a central staff development programme that is organised by the Human Resources Office. As a supplement to this, there are deanery-led staff development initiatives which are seen as an 'essential component of

an overall structured approach to the professional development of staff'. The University attempts to encourage the sharing of experience, expertise and good practice through staff development events at institution, deanery and pathway level.

96 There is scope for the allocation of relief from teaching duties for departmental roles and staff development through the application of a work allocation model. The model can also be used as a mechanism for providing time for research and other agreed scholarly activity, and to militate against the difficulties of staff travelling between venues in the Network of Hope.

97 Each deanery has a Learning and Teaching Fellow whose role it is to promote excellent practice. Fellows are also expected to work as part of a University team to contribute to the more general enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment. Their role involves working with staff to promote excellent teaching through workshops and presentations, often based on their own pedagogical research or linked to institutional objectives for learning and teaching. In addition, they are responsible for the design, teaching and assessment of the PGCLTHE.

98 The University reviewed its policy on peer observation of teaching in 2002. The new policy placed greater emphasis on 'peer learning' and since then, each deanery is responsible for setting up its own peer observation schemes. Summaries of the observations, including aspects of good practice and areas to be addressed, are produced and the deans review this evidence each year. The aim is to identify development needs at deanery level and to highlight good practice. The deans can also highlight issues that may be appropriate for institutional staff development initiatives. The implementation of the scheme varies between deaneries and in some instances is regarded as 'informal'. Members of staff reported that the peer observation process is proving useful in informing their teaching practice and developing their skills. Staff development initiatives that have emerged include the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE), large

group teaching, and the use of presentation software. Peer observation is a regular feature on the PGCLTHE programme followed by new staff. The feedback and identification of staff development needs is appropriately more immediate through interaction with the individual's mentor.

99 Associate lecturers are invited to take part in the review, peer observation and staff development schemes. They are not always able to participate due to time constraints but the University pays them to attend when available. The audit team felt that the volume of staff support and development provided by the University represented a general strength and signalled in particular the full opportunity for involvement of associate lecturers in the activities.

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

100 Programmes in the Network of Hope are delivered by distance teaching and by University staff teaching at the partner colleges. Originally such staff were from Hope, but they are now supplemented by staff employed by the University but based at the partner colleges. Programmes delivered in the Network of Hope colleges are a subset of those delivered at the University itself and are subject to the same quality assurance methods, with the addition of a process (via the Outcentre Approval Panel) to ensure that any partner college has the resources necessary to support delivery there. As a result, for many purposes, students in the Network of Hope are not distinguished from those at the University itself, but some efforts are taken to obtain separate information, for example by a separate student survey in spring 2003.

101 The University is still exploring the implications of the *Code of practice* for flexible distributed learning including e-learning. QAS will take an overview on the area, and e-learning will be considered in detail by TLA.

102 The University is progressively increasing delivery of materials through its VLE, predominantly for blended learning that offers

student enhanced support and more flexibility. Only two programmes are delivered entirely by e-learning, both with relatively small numbers and both validated in the last two years: the FD Management of Childcare Provision and an e-learning version of the BA Nursery Management. Such programmes are subject to the usual approval and review processes, and also require at least one external assessor experienced in e-learning and its pedagogy. The resource requirements have been kept under review and initial problems resolved, while student engagement with the programmes has been monitored on line.

103 The University recognises the different implications of e-learning for pedagogy, for resources, and for staff and student expectations and skills. The SED noted that the external examiner for BA Nursery Management commented on the high standard of work by the e-cohort and the 'trailblazing' nature of this initiative.

104 The University is developing blended learning systematically through its VLE, and is cautiously developing programmes delivered entirely by e-learning. The University makes systematic and successful efforts to ensure that teaching in the Network of Hope is fully equivalent to that at the University's own campuses.

105 The University's efforts to widen participation through the Network of Hope initiative succeed in providing an experience that is effectively equivalent to that of students at its own campuses.

Learning support resources

106 The University has two main campuses, Hope Park and the newly opened Everton Campus. In addition, students are studying at other colleges through the Network of Hope partnership. Growth in student numbers has put pressure on teaching accommodation. However, the University has made significant improvements over the past five years in its estates provision, for example, the Sheppard-Worlock Library, through adaptations of existing space to include three new high quality

lecture spaces, and new residential accommodation. The quality of the teaching accommodation is monitored and space managed by a timetable office. The University acknowledges that the growth in student numbers has put pressure on space and that while there have been qualitative and quantitative improvements in space, in the view of the University, there needs to be further upgrading. The University is in the process of introducing a new timetabling system to ensure better allocation of teaching spaces.

107 Learning Support Resources are provided by the Learning Resources Department and the IT Services Department. The learning resources for the Network of Hope students are provided in partnership with the relevant Network of Hope college. The Sheppard-Worlock Library at Hope Park is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year with services providing a mix of full, self-service and computer access only. Library support is available through the enquiry desks and the relevant deanery librarian, and all staff and students are offered induction, with additional development sessions when necessary. There is a comprehensive learning resources website which gives direct access for students and staff to the Library and IT resources including, for example, the Writing Centre, e-Learning Centre and VLE.

108 The library provides physical print items, datasets, periodicals, electronic books, journals, and information sources. Library resources are allocated to deaneries proportionate to their student FTEs model with extra weighting for Network of Hope students. These resources and those for the Network of Hope partners are supplemented by local, regional and national reciprocal access and borrowing arrangements. However, in meetings with students, the audit team found systematic evidence of concern about the level and quality of library stock and its accessibility.

109 The University's IT is managed by IT Services. Customer support is paramount with, for example, an IT Help Desk and a separate help-line for Network of Hope students; and customers are able to contact the services on site, by email or telephone. To ensure better

support for Everton campus students, a dedicated IT technician is now based there. The level of investment of previous years resulted in problems with infrastructure reliability. However, increased investment in recent years is addressing these issues. In meetings with students the audit team heard that there is good access to computers and that the computers are up to date with technical support available.

110 The audit team found evidence that the learning support staff seek feedback from both staff and students through a variety of mechanisms. There are Library and IT User groups with representatives from deaneries, Network of Hope colleges and the SU to consider issues of policy and practice. Continuous liaison between deaneries and the Learning Resources Department is assured by the deanery librarians. This feature of the University was positively highlighted in previous QAA engagements.

111 The University acknowledges that there are areas of relative lack of investment and inequality of access. The Everton campus has no dedicated library and students are required to go to Hope Park, although students also have access to the libraries of other HE institutions in Liverpool. The team heard evidence of new arrangements to supplement this provision including the piloting of the mobile supply of reading for Everton students and extended loan periods for staff and students. The students acknowledge that there have been improvements in the quality of the learning resources and in IT provision but there were criticisms of the level of library provision and problems with, for example, old stock and lack of key texts.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

112 The University has a variety of mechanisms to provide academic guidance, with academic support primarily subject based. Deaneries operate tutorial and academic guidance procedures with access for students outside formal sessions and systems through, for example, lecturers' published office hours. The advice provided through personal contact is

supplemented by guidance in written form and the University website.

113 The students are provided with a range of documentation including programme and pathway handbooks to support their learning. In general, the examples of documentation seen by the audit team were helpful. Although undergraduate handbooks varied in the level of detail contained all students spoke positively about the quality of the information that they received and felt there was sufficient information to meet their needs. There is a students guide for Network of Hope students which highlights essential information and emphasises the 'flexible learning opportunities for lifelong learning to fit in with a variety of lifestyles'.

114 The students have access to clear assessment criteria through their module and programme specifications. While students highlighted concerns about the slow rate of return of some assessment feedback, they recognised that some improvement has been made. The audit team gathered evidence about the dedication of staff and their willingness to meet students outside scheduled time to discuss work. There was evidence in the DATs of the good use of assessment criteria and during the DATs, the team saw many examples of full and helpful comments made by tutors in their assessment feedback to students which ensured students were clear about their academic progression. The team also learnt that assessed work was often returned to students in individual tutorials. However, there was also evidence that there was some variability on the timeliness of assessment feedback.

115 The subject-based guidance is complemented by central academic support including the UMS advisers who offer daily appointments in the UMS Office at Hope and who liaise with Network of Hope Link tutors to ensure comparable advice can be offered to students on all sites. Other sources of academic support are listed in the Students' Guide which is made available to students as hard copy and on the University website. The audit team gathered evidence of the additional support including literacy and writing workshops provided by the

University's Writing Centre established in 2002 as part of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. The team also saw evidence of the implementation of the TQEF. The Writing Centre aims to 'offer supplementary support for students requiring extra guidance on reading and writing for academic purposes'.

116 Taught postgraduate students receive advice from the module tutor, award director and associate dean postgraduate. The key mechanism for the monitoring of the academic progression of research students is the annual end of year report and interview with their supervisors which includes feedback on their student-led seminar. With growing numbers of postgraduate research students the University is currently considering introducing threshold expectations for the frequency of interaction between postgraduate research students and their supervisors, but students who met the audit team expressed satisfaction with the frequency of interaction.

117 The University aims to ensure 'that guidance is aimed at the "whole person"' through the integration of academic and pastoral support and learning and teaching via the 'Personal and Academic Tutor'; the PDP Module; the common hard disk drives on the intranet and the VLE; and through the weekly meetings between UMS Office and senior staff in the Registrar and Secretary's office'. During DAT meetings the audit team heard a variety of student responses to the use of the VLE. For some students it provided a positive and useful supplement to their studies; for others it was not sufficiently embedded. The team found evidence of institutional commitment to the use of the VLE and that a well considered approach had been developed, but the team felt that there was less success in the sharing of good practice to help students understand the relevance of the VLE to their learning.

Personal support and guidance

118 All deaneries operate a personal tutor system located within the University's PDP module. Personal tutors are allocated to students following registration with tutors

allocated to a group of eight first-year students. The audit team heard that students retain this tutor throughout their studies, although students have not always been aware of this to enable them to take full advantage of this system. The team also heard a variety of student responses to the benefits of the PDP module with a number of students unclear as to its benefits to their overall learning. However, there was acknowledgement that its greater integration into the subject modules at level C had been to the advantage of students.

119 The audit team gathered evidence that the University has developed a number of systems to monitor students and allow them to check their progress. This includes a system for monitoring attendance at formal teaching sessions, an on-line alert system which triggers contact with the student by trained fellow students. The team heard how this central monitoring system identifies those students not meeting attendance or assessment regulations, and encourages students to contact their module tutors and/or UMS adviser. From 2004 all academic staff are provided with access through the intranet to the electronic alert system to allow them to flag up students causing concern, a feature that the University considers will be of particular benefit to Combined Studies students. The team confirmed that students are able to access information about their status through the Information Portal which has been designed to meet 'new and changing information requirements' and will allow students to check their personal and programme details and exam results.

120 The general Student Support Services operate under COMPASS which brings together in one location a help desk for general enquiries as well as offices for the relevant student services. COMPASS acts as the primary focus for helping students gain their bearings and it provides a comprehensive selection of student support services, including chaplaincy, accommodation, finance, counselling and health, career advice and support for international students and students with disabilities. International students receive a comprehensive induction and information supported by dedicated sections of

the University's website. Students with disabilities are supported by the Disability Advisory Team which ensures that support for students is well managed. There is a newsletter to update students with disabilities on practical issues and initiatives to provide them with support. The audit team heard evidence of a variety of mechanisms to support students, for example, international and new residential students are provided with a bridging programme prior to the start of their level C studies to help them make the transition to HE study and the Network of Hope Colleges have a dedicated disabilities adviser and a range of monitoring and mentoring systems to help support their non-traditional student origins.

121 The University recognises that the support for the Network of Hope students and for part-time and postgraduate students is not as structured, but the audit team heard evidence that the University is making progress on addressing this through, for example, the use of link tutors and regular attendance at Network of Hope Colleges by COMPASS staff.

Collaborative provision

122 The University's main collaborative arrangements are with the Network of Hope, whereby Roman Catholic sixth-form colleges provide venues for distance teaching by University staff on programmes also delivered at the University's campuses. Some 80 per cent of the students in the Network of Hope fall into widening participation categories. Collaborative provision is the responsibility of the PAC, which reports to Academic Board. It is responsible for advising on strategy and policy, and more specifically for quality assurance procedures. It also approves proposed new outcentres and changes in the provision at existing outcentres in the Network of Hope via an Outcentre Approval Panel, chaired by the chair of the PAC, which reports to PASS. All Network of Hope students are registered with the University itself and not with the college where the programme is delivered. In effect the institutions in the Network of Hope function as outreach centres and there is no delegation of academic authority or standards.

123 The University's engagement with the Network of Hope colleges is an effective means of widening participation. The partner colleges host the activity but do not provide any teaching which is all done by University staff. The procedures governing the collaboration with the partner colleges allow them to engage fully with the academic issues within a clear framework, and this was confirmed by comments from staff (including those employed by the partner colleges) and students in the Network of Hope. This engagement also allows the University full oversight of the activity. Since the University was granted taught degree awarding powers, it has started to develop other collaborative activity with due caution.

124 Outside the Network of Hope, in July 2003 the Academic Board of the University agreed a framework for building relationships with other institutions which was subsequently codified into an institutional handbook. Currently the University has one such link, with WMC, but is in discussion with other 'international providers of higher education'. Prior to 2002, collaborative provision involving teaching other than by University staff was not favoured by the University of Liverpool, then the College's validating institution. In the case of the two programmes validated by the University at WMC, the SED states that the University has supported WMC with the appointment of a moderator for the provision, by arranging for staff development in key aspects of learning, teaching and assessment, and by regular dialogue on issues surrounding programme regulations, good practice in HE (examples are given of the *Code of practice* and the Academic Infrastructure).

125 The SED stated that the University 'recognises that distance and delegation of academic authority invite risk and expose the University to challenges for which it will need to continue to develop new management strategies.' The University has established a Partnership Committee to manage collaborative links. The membership includes all five deans. The SED explained that 'University policy and practice in the area of collaboration are informed

by the revised section of the QAA Code of Practice on collaborative provision.¹ Partnerships with overseas institutions are being explored.

126 The audit team examined the University handbook for collaborative links and the minutes of the Partnership Committee. The team confirms that the procedures currently in place are in full engagement with the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*. There are memoranda of understanding (currently under revision) with Network of Hope colleges. The college principals are members of the University's highest academic body, Academic Board, and also meet the Rector regularly.

127 Similarly, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) governs the collaboration with WMC, in this case based on the MoU that WMC had with its previous validating institution, the University of Sheffield. The University says that this served to help develop the formal approval process for validated provision within its framework for collaboration. It was felt possible to approve the arrangement, but only for one year in the first instance, and a second validation event is due to be held in June 2005 focusing particularly on the curriculum and involving discussion with students.

128 The University says that it is currently engaged in exploring the implications of the revised Section 2 of the *Code of practice*. Nevertheless, it is confident that in the development of its procedures hitherto it has built on best practice in the sector and has made good use of experience from outside sources, including the *Code* and experience at other HE institutions in the UK and abroad.

129 The University has appropriate procedures that work well in assuring the quality and standards of its very small amount of conventional collaborative provision. While not risk-averse, the University exercises due caution. Its procedures for the less conventional collaboration in the Network of Hope are careful, well thought-out and well executed.

Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline audit trails

Discipline audit trails

Computing

130 The DAT covered the following programmes: Combined Subjects pathways in: IT (this pathway is also delivered across the Network of Hope); Internet Technology; Multimedia Technology and Gaming Technology. There is also a single honours programme in Multimedia. At postgraduate level there are the MSc in Computing and the MSc in Distributed Systems.

131 The DSED was prepared for the DAT and mainly consisted of a narrative section based on the Critical Appraisal Document submitted for the Periodic Review of Undergraduate IT, held on 8 March 2005. The DSED was accompanied by the draft report of Phase 1 of the periodic review, programme specifications for the undergraduate programmes covered by the DAT and statistical analyses of cohorts.

132 The programme specifications for the postgraduate courses were supplied at the visit and supplemented those included within the DSED documentation. These had been produced and approved in 2003-04 and the specifications for the undergraduate programmes had been updated in line with the University's guidelines for periodic review or revalidation. However, there are some variations in layout and in the detail of the content.

133 The University SED described the process for the development and approval of new programmes in detail. Programme and module approval processes are initiated by groups of staff within the subject area. Most programmes within the DAT were originally approved as pathways, being upgraded to programmes (and revalidated) where there was identified demand. Proposals are presented to the Deanery Board and other University committees for outline approval, before being sent to the QAE in order for it to arrange a validation event. According to

staff, the alignment with FHEQ and benchmark statements is part of the development process by the course team. The template for the programme specifications asks for a statement of external reference points used. The subject teams use employers and other institutions as part of course development and review.

134 There is an annual monitoring system operating in the Deanery, which 'is the mechanism by which all teams ensure that provision remains current and in a good state of academic health... outcomes are reported through the committee system with detailed discussions at Quality and Academic Standards Committee and Academic Committee'. Monitoring at pathway and programme level is 'conducted by thorough reflective meetings, usually held in June and September, to move away from monitoring reports which are written by one individual, possibly without reference to wider team discussions'. The documentation for this process showed evidence of presentation of module-level statistics. However, cohort-level analysis was limited and it was claimed that part of the reason for this was the difficulty in monitoring students on combined schemes and that the current student record system cannot easily track these.

135 Cohort data were supplied as part of the DAT documentation and these did contain limited achievement and progression data. However, there is evidence of some form of progression monitoring because the DSED provided a comprehensive commentary on the comparative progression rates between the pathways. The DSED also commented, 'Problems remain with retention. Many students appear to be self-financing and a number of those who start their studies find the workload coupled with their other commitments impossible to cope with'. The audit team noted that, despite the level of concern expressed, there was a lack of a fully systematic progression monitoring at cohort level as part of annual monitoring.

136 Programmes in the subject area are subject to the institutional internal periodic review process which incorporates review of the

modules contributing to the programmes. One example given in the DSED was where the review had led to the withdrawal of the MSc IT. The description of the review process was also given in the staff meeting. There is also documentary evidence of effective review in the form of the draft periodic review report for the undergraduate IT pathways and programmes and this follows the process described in the University's SED.

137 In the opinion of the audit team, both validation and review processes appropriately reference the Academic Infrastructure. The *Code of practice* is directly referred to in the documentation for periodic review. The subject benchmark statements also form part of the documentation used at periodic review. The undergraduate programme specifications scrutinised by the team contained reference to subject benchmark statements in section 7. The DSED commented on the importance of externality: 'Externality is also provided at all validation and review events which have external panel members as a matter of course'. The team found evidence of the application of this in the documentation for Periodic Review.

138 The DSED stated that 'External examiners' reports are a fundamental part of measures to maintain and enhance quality' and described the process of dealing with reports. They are considered at the September reflective course meetings and also at a full subject team meeting. A response is drafted by the Vice-Dean to each external examiner. This response is approved at a subject team meeting and by the IBITE Dean, and is then sent to the external examiner. This process is in line with the description given in the University SED and with the *Code of practice*, published by QAA.

139 There was an instance of an external examiner criticising some of the level 3 assessments for the levels at which they were set and marked. Scrutiny of student work by the audit team found assessments to be generally appropriate for the intended level, although there were instances that supported the external examiner's view. The Dean had made a comprehensive response to these comments of

the external examiner, and the Deanery has instituted a more rigorous form of internal moderation of assessments. It is the team's view that the response meets the issues raised, and notes the University's recognition that the new process needs to be carefully monitored to ensure that standards are maintained.

140 Students initially received information about their programme of study through the prospectus and other programme or pathway-specific information. Students thought that this information was helpful and accurate. Induction is well organised with input from course teams and the SU. Early in some programmes, there is a weekend programme at the University retreat in Snowdonia which proved particularly useful in getting the groups to work together. In the view of the audit team, these arrangements worked well and were enthusiastically supported by the students.

141 Once enrolled, the students' main source of information on their programme or pathways, modules and university regulations and procedures was through paper documentation, although an increasing amount of support information was also available through the University's intranet and VLE. The content of the information was judged accurate by the students, and access was not reported as problematic but there were inconsistencies in layout and content between module guides. There were no adverse comments by students on the accuracy of any information provided by the Deanery, although there was some evidence of inconsistencies in the application of the regulations on assessment extensions within the Deanery.

142 There is a peer observation system that has recently been changed. Originally, it was based on paired peers but fell into some disuse as 'In a period of heavy workload, staff were reluctant to engage in an activity that was not seen to be as valuable as initially expected'. However, the Computing staff reviewed the situation and in December 2004 'agreed to adopt the system recently agreed by the Business Team'. The full effects of this change cannot yet be assessed and at the staff meeting it was described as 'informal'.

143 The University has replaced an appraisal scheme with a 'Performance Review and Development Scheme' and this appears to be operating in the subject area. The scheme involves the elaboration of a staff development plan, with associated objectives and review mechanisms. Visiting lecturers are included in induction and appraisal. Staff claimed that both peer observation and performance review inform staff development at individual, Deanery and institutional level.

144 There is no separate Deanery teaching, learning and assessment strategy although these do feature as part of the overall Deanery strategic plan. Various methods are used for learning, teaching and assessment, including use of the VLE. There is no institutional regulation on maximum feedback times on assessments, although there is a guideline of a maximum of four weeks. The subject staff aim for a two-week deadline. However, students commented on there being variability in terms of both the quality and timeliness of feedback on assessments. There is no Deanery policy on assessment moderation at the setting or marking stages. However, staff stated that borderline cases are double-marked. Evidence suggests that this is applied in some cases although there was some inconsistency demonstrated by the assessed work presented.

145 The DSED described the system of personal tutoring under the section on Student Support. All new undergraduate students are assigned a PDP tutor with whom they make contact during the first teaching week; failing this, the tutor contacts the student to arrange a meeting. PDP tutors act as personal tutors throughout the student's time at the University, and, as such, are the student's first point of contact when seeking advice on either personal or University matters. Postgraduates used their module leaders or dissertation supervisor as their main tutor. The students were very complimentary about the availability of staff for both academic and pastoral support. The system as described was not fully used by students but they felt that they could always find appropriate support.

146 There are opportunities for students to evaluate the quality of the provision through end-of-module questionnaires. These contribute to the annual monitoring process, although the students were not given any feedback on the results of the module surveys. Students are also able to raise issues through their representatives on the SSLCs. Students commented that these committees were effective, with minutes produced and actions followed up.

147 According to the SED, the University Library 'currently opens 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Services are offered in phases, providing an appropriate mix of full service, self service and access to computing facilities only'. Although students commented favourably on the library opening hours, they were extremely critical of the stock, both books and journals. The audit team felt that the institution should undertake a review of its provision of library resources. The IT provision is also discussed with the claim that 'Significant investment in hardware and software, together with the development of a strategy for specialised laboratories has provided a high-quality environment'. However, the students were critical of the provision's limited storage allocations and the amount of technical support available. There is provision of a VLE and students generally welcomed it, commenting particularly favourably on the module delivered entirely through the VLE.

148 On the basis of the written evidence examined and its meetings with staff and students, the audit team was satisfied that the quality of the learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the awards covered as part of the DAT. The standard of student achievement on the programmes investigated in the DAT was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

Creative arts and design

149 The DAT was based on two of the programmes within the Deanery of Arts and Community: the Drama and Theatre Studies Combined Subjects Pathway through the BA (Hons) Combined Studies Programme and the non-modular Bachelor of Design (B.Des).

150 The DAT was supported by a DSED prepared for the audit. The DSED included the programme specifications for the programmes being reviewed. The programme specifications had been produced within the University's requirements and included reference to the subject benchmark statements that the programmes refer to. The audit team observed that the level outcomes are appropriate with reference to subject benchmarks and with assessment strategies and criteria relevant to the level and subject.

151 The audit team noted that a periodic area review in 2002 had been undertaken for the design programme and in 2004 for the drama and theatre studies programme and the DSED included the periodic review reports. The team found evidence that the periodic reviews had been used to inform the development of the curriculum and programme structure and had included an appropriate use of externals. The team also noted that the University is able to recognise and respond to the particular needs of a programme, evidenced in, for example, the two staged periodic review processes for drama and theatre studies. This allowed the programme to create 'clear streams of progression from level C to H' underpinned by staff research and specialisms, including community and popular theatre. The other example is continued acceptance by the University that the design programme is able to remain outside the University's modular framework.

152 The audit team had access to annual monitoring reports for the previous academic year. The team found evidence of the effective use of the two reflective meetings that inform the University's annual monitoring process. Minutes of these meetings contain a detailed analysis of the issues facing the course including, external examiner reports, module evaluations, resource issues, quality of the learning outcomes, staff activities, data analysis and an action plan for the coming year. The team was given access to external examiner reports over the previous two academic years. The externals all confirmed the standards of the programmes and the team noted the careful monitoring and response to

external examiner reports in the annual review processes. The audit team found evidence that the programmes use quantitative and, in particular, qualitative data to inform annual review and enhance the provision with course teams using module evaluations and the annual monitoring reflective meetings to study student satisfaction with their programmes. The Dean prepares a composite annual monitoring report, which includes a detailed action plan for the coming academic year, which refers to the previous action plan and is based on the pathway and programme annual monitoring reports and the fortnightly meetings of the Course Leaders and the Deanery Board. This report also contains a detailed data analysis and the team found evidence in the meeting with staff that data informed discussions about retention and progression. The team recognised that the use of data and the use of the structure of the reflective meetings could be more systematically applied across the programmes and pathways to encourage the sharing of good practice. The team found evidence in documentation and in meetings with staff that the management of the quality of students learning is taking place through the annual review process and that the provision follows the University's quality assurance framework.

153 Assessment arrangements include procedures for timely feedback to students, and internal marking and moderating procedures. The audit team found evidence of a wide range of assessment strategies and that assessment processes are supported by external examiners' reports. Student responses to the team indicated that students receive clear assessment criteria and timely, constructive feedback. The team reviewed a range of student work from all levels of the programmes. The team were satisfied that the nature of the assessment and standard of student achievement met the expectations of the subject benchmark standards associated with these programmes and was appropriate to the relevant awards and their location within the FHEQ. The work also demonstrated to the team that the students were acquiring relevant creative skills and that there were a variety of opportunities to engage students with the work of the local

community and to gain relevant professional experience. The team found evidence of a range of collaborations with for example, the Liverpool Theatres, the Crafts Council and through the Cornerstone Festival. In addition, students are encouraged to engage with the broader range of creative practices available on the Everton Campus, through the design and use of the new facilities, and the attendance of performances and exhibitions. This is a strong feature of these programmes and contributes to the strong sense of belonging to a vibrant academic community experienced by the students.

154 The audit team found evidence of the engagement of staff in the running of programmes and involvement with the broader Deanery business. The DSED described the use of regular team meetings, fortnightly team meetings of course leaders with the Dean and a Deanery Board, with an emphasis on curriculum review, planning, and implementation of University procedures. The team found comprehensive evidence of issues being raised and followed through. For example, concerns about student access to library resources has given rise to solutions being developed; these include adjustment to the resource allocation and piloting of a system for Everton-based students to order and have delivered books to the campus. These meetings are also used to disseminate staff research and scholarship activities. The team found evidence of a commitment to those staff working as practitioners of effective staff development, appraisal and mentoring support for staff and the positive use of staff balance of duties to develop staff research.

155 The Deanery recruits students from a variety of non-traditional routes. The audit team found evidence of an effective approach by programmes to personal tutor support including the integration of the PDP module with Professional Practice activities, and the close monitoring of students at level I. There was evidence of retention and progression rates being given priority in staff discussions, curriculum design and student support and that the area uses a range of devices to manage the student learning experience, for example

the VLE, clear assessment criteria, close student monitoring and initiatives to improve PDPs.

156 The audit team was provided with copies of student handbooks. The handbooks provided information about the programmes and students who met the team were content that the information in the handbooks was relevant and current. Student induction is given emphasis, with students introduced to the various forms of support available to them, including the Bridge to Hope programme. The team found evidence of a variety of mechanisms being used to collect the views of students. These include SSLCs where student representatives raise a range of issues and module evaluations. Meetings with students indicated that students feel well informed about their courses and are able to communicate their views to staff. The team found evidence that information gleaned from student feedback and external examiners is used to effect change.

Education

157 The scope of the DAT was the education studies pathway which is a half programme within the BA Combined Studies.

158 The basis of the DAT was a DSED based on the critical review document produced for periodic review which had been brought forward by a year in the light of considerable change to the programme since its inception in 2001. A programme specification was provided as an annex.

159 The programme specification was written in accordance with the institutional template and makes reference to both internal and external reference points which include: the University's corporate plan, learning and teaching strategy and modular scheme regulations, external examiners' reports, the *Subject benchmark statement* for education studies and the *Code of practice*, particularly the assessment of students. The audit team considered that the specification demonstrated that the programme followed the criteria of the FHEQ.

160 Statistical information on student progression and attainment is becoming more available within the University but provision of

data is still 'under development'. Only one cohort has so far completed and there has been limited analysis of the completion data. There is better discussion of progression statistics, especially student attrition, with comparisons being made within the Education Deanery and in relation to the University benchmark. The audit team noted that at the level of the module student achievement was regularly discussed by the subject team and used to monitor quality and standards.

161 Programme monitoring is conducted annually and through periodic reviews. The audit team was able to observe the process of periodic review in the procedures undertaken for the first pathway review in 2005. This involved the production of a critical appraisal and definitive course document by the subject and review by a University team including senior staff from outside the deanery and two external advisors who also met with staff and students. Their report identified some areas where minor weaknesses could be eradicated, and approved the continuation of the pathway subject to the programme specification being updated to include changes which will be put into operation for 2005-06. They also identified strengths, such as the way in which part-time staff were managed, and commented on the quality of the subject's self-assessment which they judged 'genuinely reflective and self-critical'. The audit team agrees with these findings.

162 Annual monitoring is conducted at subject level through two reflective meetings in June and September, minutes from which form the basis of an annual monitoring portfolio which is considered at Deanery Board. The Dean's synoptic report is then scrutinised at institutional level. The audit team was able, on its reading of the minutes of the reflective meetings and the Dean's report, to confirm the effectiveness of the annual monitoring process.

163 External examiner reports are considered at the reflective meeting and responded to formally by the pathway leader. The Dean will contact the external examiner directly if an issue raised in the report requires an institutional response. The formal response by the pathway

leader forms part of the annual monitoring portfolio and the external has acknowledged 'the openness of the staff in addressing issues'. The audit team was able to trace action taken by the team through minutes of their meetings.

164 Arrangements for assessment are set out in detail in module handbooks available in print form and through the VLE. The staff who met with the audit team indicated that they collectively review the design of assessment to ensure that it is appropriate to the intended learning outcomes and that the criteria are completely transparent to students. The students confirmed that they were aware of what was expected of them and that the basis of the grades they received was clearly indicated through the detailed criteria on the assessment feedback sheets. The students observed that feedback was useful but could be sporadic in its timeliness. However, it was evident that feedback through tutorials at level C was very effective. Moderation of presentations was identified as a concern by students, a point which had been raised during the periodic review. However the staff assured the audit team that they now had in place methods for moderating presentations. The external examiner has declared that she is 'impressed by the standards achieved by students.' From its reading of a sample of assessed work and examination scripts, together with feedback comments, the team was satisfied that the sample matched the expectations laid out in the programme specification and that the nature of the assessment and the standard of student achievement were appropriate to the title of the award and its location in the FHEQ.

165 The education studies staff frequently team-teach and regard this practice as a form of peer observation. They operate the University's performance review and development scheme which enables both institutional and personal objectives, including research and scholarship, to be monitored and developed. The Education Deanery Teaching and Learning Fellow has been a member of the staff team and has shared good practice, particularly in helping

understanding of the pedagogic challenge of widening participation, and in designing out plagiarism. The Education Deanery is promoting a research culture and the staff team contributes to the British Education Studies Association which it helped found.

166 There have been challenges to the resources available for the subject pathway. First of these is the unexpected popularity and rapid growth of the programme, including growth based in the Network of Hope centre at Bury. Secondly, it has been difficult to sustain a consistent staff base, especially given the competing demands of the ITT programme for staff with qualified teacher status. The range of experience offered by a disparate team has enhanced the programme but the lack of continuity has been an anxiety for programme management. Thirdly, the programme, as it has developed, has had to accommodate the vocational expectations and experience of its first student cohorts, developments in the subject nationally, and the changing curriculum structure of the University, for instance the move to year-long 50 credit and, shortly, 60 credit modules. As the Dean of Education has observed in the annual monitoring summary, 'a terrific amount of change has been "weathered" and is ongoing'. A particular challenge has been providing suitable placement opportunities for students, especially since school placements have to be prioritised for ITT students. However, a wide range of placements has now been secured, particularly in partnership with Jaguar and Everton Football Club. Staff see placements as having been a success at all levels of study, and the audit team heard from staff that students were much in demand from local organisations. Students suggested in their meeting with the team that placements worked particularly well at level C. The team formed the view that this community engagement was operating to the benefit of all parties.

167 There is some evidence that learning resources have been stretched. Teaching rooms were not always suitable, although the audit team was informed that new timetabling software should enable a more efficient

allocation system. Library budgets have been very variable although the University made a large injection of funding in 2004-05. Students told the team that books could be difficult to obtain from the library, although they applauded the extensive opening hours, self-issue of materials and good provision of electronic books and journals. They also confirmed that there was good access to computers and students were particularly appreciative of the subject's use of the VLE. In their meeting with staff the team learned that the VLE was considered integral to learning and not simply a repository of materials. It had been particularly useful in maintaining communication with students, and students studying through the Network of Hope contributed, alongside students at Hope Park, the larger of the two physical university campuses, to virtual seminars and discussion forums. Two modules were delivered substantially on-line, with one giving students an opportunity to engage with five other universities in Europe and the USA. This module can be followed by a subsidised semester of study abroad. The team formed the view that the use of the VLE in the subject was an area of growing strength.

168 The DSED engaged extensively with discussion of the non-traditional nature of most education studies students at the University and of their academic and other support needs. The DSED contained case studies of students and reflections on their experience. The pathway is often the second choice of students who would have preferred to take an ITT programme, and they therefore require careful initial counselling. In their meeting with students, the audit team noted that most students felt that they had been appropriately informed about the nature of the subject and the opportunities that it offered. Some students said that the course had led them to change their career plans. Several of the students had come to the course from access programmes, through the HE admissions clearing system or following redundancy, and these were very appreciative of the way in which staff had facilitated the transition to higher

education. The team saw this as a confirmation of the observation made by staff that 'The course has really added value to the lives of students who have often been rejected by other courses'.

169 The PDP module was designed, in part, to aid student retention at level C and combines personal and academic support. Currently, the student's tutor for PDP remains the student's personal tutor throughout the programme. From 2005-06, PDP will be integrated into the year-long subject modules, a development welcomed by the staff team. Other forms of support include the University Writing Centre and the monitoring of poorly attending students by student mentors. Members of the team are available for student consultation for several hours each week and are flexible in meeting students outside designated contact hours. In their meeting with the audit team students attested to the availability of staff and the effectiveness of both informal and formal systems of support. In the case of students with disabilities, needs had been especially well met.

170 Student feedback is elicited through module evaluations and SSLCs which have been established at each level but work best at level C. Minutes are considered at the staff reflection days and are checked at subsequent meetings, then posted on notice boards. An example of action taken in response to observations at the SSLCs is a slightly later start time to morning classes to accommodate childcare and travel difficulties. In their meeting with the audit team students confirmed that module evaluations are conducted in the course of every module. These take the form of a simple listing by the students of the best and worst features of the module and form part of module reviews considered at the reflective meetings. There is evidence from these meetings of the subject's responsiveness in making changes to subsequent iterations of the module. Students told the team that they are often told at the beginning of a module of change that had been undertaken as a result of the observations of students taking the module in the previous year. The team concluded that these mechanisms provided a good insight into

students' views, which were incorporated effectively into the annual monitoring process.

171 The audit team was satisfied that on the basis of the written evidence that it examined, and from its meetings with staff and students, the standard of student achievement in the programme covered by the DAT is appropriate to the title of the award and its location within the FHEQ. The quality of the learning opportunities is suitable for the programme of study in education studies, leading to the named award.

Social studies

172 The DAT covered the following programmes: at undergraduate level, sociology and identity studies, which are both pathways within the combined subjects programme, (although the latter is now closed to new recruitment) and, at postgraduate level, the MA in Criminal Justice. The sociology and identity studies pathways are delivered on campus and through the Network of Hope.

173 The DAT took the form of a narrative section made up of contributions from three critical appraisal documents which the programme teams submitted for their most recent Periodic Review; the most recent periodic review reports plus team responses; the programme specifications and cohort data. The cohort data presented were accompanied by little analysis.

174 The programme specifications were consistent in form, and contained detail useful to intending students and to other stakeholders on the content and structure of each programme/pathway, pathway aims, learning outcomes, generic and subject-specific skills and teaching and learning and assessment methods. Each programme specification contains a section for 'points of reference' divided into 'internal' and 'external'. In the latter section the MA Criminal Justice specification mentions use of the FHEQ, the *Code of practice* and external examiners' reports. The identity studies programme specification, as supplied to the audit team, lacked a section on external reference points; the sociology specification mentioned the British Sociological Association subject benchmark

statement and external examiners' reports. It is clear, though, from the periodic review reports that proper consideration is given to the FHEQ and the *Code* on all three programmes/pathways. The two undergraduate programme specifications refer to the relevant subject benchmarks. External stakeholders are involved in programme/pathway development where appropriate. The team confirms that the supplied programme specifications are fit for purpose.

175 The SED stated that 'The College has been concerned for some time that its retention/progression rate as published by HESA, particularly at Level C, has compared unfavourably with the sector as a whole...'. The DSED contained data on progression and completion rates for the three programmes/pathways but the use made of this in the narrative section is descriptive rather than analytical. The annual monitoring report for the Sciences and Social Sciences Deanery, 2003-04 notes 'In general the cohort commentary was disappointing with lots of description of the figures but little real analysis.' The staff are aware that increasing progression and completion rates is a University goal and staff teaching on the undergraduate programmes have helped shape the institutional policy on the skills-oriented level C modules and the introduction of PDP. The audit team noted staff concerns about inconsistent collection of data for the management information system. The team noted the forthcoming introduction of a new University-wide eight-point plan to address retention and progression. In the view of the team, the development of systematic and benchmarked procedures for the monitoring of progression and completion at the level of the Deanery would better enable it to monitor and influence these aspects of quality and standards.

176 The DSED confirmed that annual monitoring is carried out 'in accordance with QAE policy'. The audit team found evidence that the process of annual review in the DAT programmes/pathways is supported by staff and founded on a process of critical reflection. The team also found evidence that, as a

consequence, action plans were produced and reviewed annually.

177 The University operates a quinquennial periodic review process 'to confirm that it can continue to have confidence in the quality and standards of the provisions provided at pathway and programme level.' The DSED contained a report of the most recent periodic review, and a response from the staff, for all programmes/pathways in the DAT. The reports show that the process is thorough and that externality of scrutiny is obtained through the use of two external panel members and explicit consideration of the Academic Infrastructure. The review panel concludes by making conditions and recommendations. The DSED contained evidence that staff were responding to the conclusions of the panel. The view of the audit team is that the process of periodic review makes use of the Academic Infrastructure and of independent and external reference points.

178 The University is aware of the importance placed on external examiners' reports by the sector and the *Code of practice*. All reports are answered by the programme/pathway leader on behalf of the staff team. The report and the response form part of the annual monitoring portfolio and are reviewed by the Dean who makes contact with an external examiner if the Dean feels it necessary. The audit team found evidence that external examiners' reports were carefully considered and that responses were timely and appropriate. One external examiner's report commented on certain administrative weaknesses in the process for sending work. This issue was addressed and notice given of action taken in the response from the pathway leader. Mention also appeared in the Deanery annual monitoring report. The procedure for dealing with external examiners' reports is in line with the University's practice as described in the SED and with the *Code of practice*.

179 The audit team's scrutiny of assessed work found it to be generally appropriate for the location of the programme within the FHEQ and to reflect the expectations expressed in the programme specification. The level of detail in student feedback was generally high and the

students expressed their appreciation of this. The students also expressed their general appreciation of the two-week response time for the marking and return of assessed work, and the team consider this an example of the commitment of the staff team to their students.

180 Students felt that the prospectus was a useful and accurate source of information although students from the identity studies pathway commented that some advertised modules had not been offered as expected. The staff reported that all prospectus and associated advertising material was checked by the Dean for consistency and accuracy before it is used, and that there is a Deanery template for prospectus entries to ensure consistency. The students described induction as a useful source of information, with the tour of University facilities and the library being mentioned in particular.

181 The students reported that the University's student handbooks and module guides are the main source of information, and are generally helpful, although there is some inconsistency in the layout and content of module guides. The students mentioned the guidance given on how to avoid plagiarism in some module guides as being particularly useful. The students reported that they made limited use of the University VLE apart from one module site. Students from the Network of Hope confirmed that they also made little use of the VLE. Students expressed the view that University policy on such areas as mitigating circumstances and extensions on deadlines was implemented consistently across the DAT programmes/pathways.

182 The PDP system is consistently implemented across the programmes/pathways. At undergraduate level each student is allocated a personal tutor who stays with that student across the years of study. At postgraduate level the module tutor is responsible for PDP. The students were very positive about the University-wide support services, especially counselling and careers, and were extremely positive about the friendly and caring culture of the University. In the view of the audit team the University provides a supportive and welcoming environment for students.

183 There is a peer observation system in operation which pairs staff within the Deanery and, in order to facilitate the spread of good practice, across subject areas. The staff confirmed that this system operates in the Deanery. Staff new to the institution receive a one-week University induction, and are then allocated a mentor from their programme/pathway team.

184 Students commented favourably on the policy of keeping the library constantly open all year and on the reciprocal library arrangements with the University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University. With the exception of the postgraduate students, students were somewhat critical of the book stock and noise levels. Students from the Network of Hope commented that library access for them was particularly problematic. The audit team felt that the University should undertake a review of its provision of library resources.

185 The two undergraduate programmes/pathways in the DAT operate systems for students to give feedback through module review and at SSLC meetings. The postgraduate programme operates a system for collecting student module feedback, but due to the small size of the student cohort, uses some time at the start of each teaching session to collect further informal feedback. All students seen by the audit team reported completing module evaluation questionnaires but did not know what happened to the results. The minutes of SSLC meetings show evidence of a constructive dialogue between staff and students, but, with a few exceptions, did not show how issues raised at a previous meeting had been resolved. The students were, however, very positive concerning the willingness of staff to listen to and act on student comments.

186 The results of student evaluations are discussed at annual review meetings and can act as a stimulus to module modification. Modules can also be modified or replaced in the light of staff changes or other operational concerns. Staff were uncertain whether there was a University procedure to trigger annual

review as a consequence of module amendments. It is the audit team's view that the University should assure itself that the accumulation of approved minor changes in modules does not result in unapproved major changes in pathways and programmes.

Section 4: the audit investigations: published information

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

187 There are many types of information provided to students by the University from the time when they enquire about a programme to the time when they leave. The key publications for recruitment of students are the prospectuses and programme-specific material. The dean is responsible for the accuracy of the prospectus copy relating to the programmes and pathways within the deanery. Students in the DAT meetings were generally content with the accuracy and effectiveness of the prospectus information.

188 At induction, students are issued with a student guide which provides information about the academic support and guidance, the University's regulations, its policies and procedures, such as complaints and disciplinary procedures and institution-level services. They are also issued with programme or module guides that specify learning outcomes, assessment schedules and timetabling information, as well as module choice information. Although students found these documents useful, the audit team found that there is a lack of consistency in the presentation and content of module guides with the result that students have different experiences in terms of the quality of information presented to them. Students also have access to the electronic newspaper, Hope Virtually Daily which, apart from providing news, provides links to other information pages.

189 The SWS did not refer directly to the issue of published information, although there was

criticism of certain lack of communication regarding course changes, a criticism echoed in student meetings. The University affirms that it is aware that, although significant categories of published information are quality-controlled, its overall management of the large volumes of information generated across the institution has had limitations. This has sometimes resulted in duplication and lack of clarity about identification of those responsible for its maintenance and updating, particularly for information on the web. However, steps are being taken to address this issue by placing greater responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of information with the deaneries.

190 The students reported that they were aware of the assessment and grading criteria in use on their courses. The module descriptors contained details of the learning outcomes and assessment specifications often supplemented these by specifically stating the learning outcomes being tested. The audit team found little awareness among students of the programme specifications as a means of disseminating programme information to students.

191 Based on its examination of papers provided by the University, the University's website and discussion with staff and students, the audit team concluded that the information published by the University was useful to the students who saw it generally as detailed, accurate, and reliable.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

192 The SED indicated steady progress by the University towards meeting the requirements for TQI. A project group, chaired by the Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, has been established to consider the institution-wide implications and identify any new or additional information which needed to be generated to meet the TQI requirements. The project group is also in the process of establishing protocols for the continuing requirement for the generation of information. A wide range of information, including the corporate plan, policy documents

such as learning and teaching strategy, information for prospective and current students and pathway and programme specifications, is available through the University's website or in a printed form.

193 At the time of the audit visit the University had met the deadlines set for publication by Higher Education Research Opportunities in the UK (HERO) on behalf of HEFCE. The HERO template for summaries of external examiner reports was integrated into the external examiners' report form for 2003-04 and external examiners received guidance on its completion at a briefing. The University is providing voluntary commentary on the findings of external examiners' reports, a commentary based on the overview report produced by the Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement for the QAS. A summary statement of the institution's Learning and Teaching Strategy has been produced and will be updated periodically. Summary statements of the results of and subsequent responses to periodic programme reviews undertaken during 2003-04 and 2004-05 are available. Summaries of the institution's links with relevant employers have been produced and will be updated periodically.

194 From its study of the TQI site, the University's site and documentation provided by the University and discussions with staff, the audit team concluded that the University was meeting the requirement to publish information about the quality and standards of its taught programmes within the specified timescales. Overall, the team had confidence that the University had systems and procedures in place to ensure that its published information for TQI is reliable, accurate and complete.

Findings

Findings

195 An institutional audit of Liverpool Hope University (the University) was undertaken during the week 23 to 27 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 the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Standing Conference of Principals and Universities UK, three discipline audit trails (DATS) were selected for scrutiny. This section of the report of the audit summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and recommendations to the University for enhancing current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

196 The University has a comprehensive framework for approving, monitoring and reviewing programmes, documented by a Quality Manual and a series of guides to individual processes, and supported by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit (QAE).

197 Proposals for new programmes and pathways originate at the discipline level, possibly after prompting from a higher body that developing an area is of strategic importance. A business case must be approved by the relevant deanery, after which it passes to Planning and Strategic Support Committee (PASS) to verify that the necessary resources will be available. If so, the proposal continues within the validation procedure. This involves refinement of the documentation with help from QAE, and a Critical Friend Event to prepare for the final validation event, held with one or more carefully chosen external members, who may include practitioners. Thereafter, proposals proceed to Quality and Academic Standards Committee, to Learning and Teaching Committee, and finally to Academic Board, which is the University's highest academic body.

198 Proposed changes to modules are reviewed and classified as minor or major, and major changes go through a process similar to that for new programme or pathways. Where a module affects more than one programme or pathway, the leaders of each have to acknowledge that they have taken account of the effects of the change and approve it. Minor changes are noted in the annual monitoring process.

199 A special feature of the provision is that programmes or pathways may also be delivered by the University's own staff in the Network of Hope colleges. Approval for a programme validated for delivery at the University itself to be delivered additionally at a Network of Hope college proceeds via an Outcentre Approvals Panel which reports to the University's Partnerships Committee. The panel must confirm to PASS whether the college in question can provide the necessary infrastructure for that programme before the programme may be delivered there. The same process is required before a new college may be added to the Network of Hope.

200 Annual monitoring of programmes and pathways originates with reflective meetings of the relevant staff after the summer and autumn examination periods. Minutes of these meetings are distilled at deanery level and, in progressively refined form, these reports pass up through the committee system, receiving highlights of points of concern and of good practice. The data that support annual monitoring have been a matter of concern to the University, but a new student information system is proving more satisfactory.

201 Periodic review is normally conducted every five years, but the timetable may be modified if major changes are proposed or seem necessary. As with initial approval, the process involves external members, who may include practitioners.

202 The University is committed to gathering feedback and using it to bring about change, and it uses a variety of mechanisms to this effect. The University issues feedback questionnaires for all modules. Staff teaching

the module analyse the feedback and incorporate their analysis in their reflection on the module for the annual monitoring process. Feedback on more general issues is obtained via staff-student liaison committees which follow published guidelines. Surveys are also conducted on specific issues or with specific groups of students, as thought desirable. The audit team received good evidence of both formal and informal feedback mechanisms and readiness to act upon student concerns. All students seen by the team during the audit confirmed that their feedback to staff led to change, even if change was not always reported back to them formally.

203 The University has only two current programmes delivered entirely by e-learning, for which it involved external experts in e-learning as members of the validation panel. These programmes are subject to the University's standard processes of annual monitoring and review.

204 Collaborative arrangements are governed by memoranda of understanding, issued after the Outcentre Approval Panel process described above. Not all proposed collaborations are approved, but the University has recently agreed to validate two external collaborative programmes at Wirral Metropolitan College. These programmes will be subjected to the University's standard processes of annual monitoring and review.

205 The University adduces positive comments from external panel members and external examiners as evidence for the effectiveness of its procedures. It also points to evidence that it has engaged systematically and effectively with the precepts in the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA.

206 From the evidence available, the audit team concluded that the University's procedures are fit for purpose and carefully operated so as to be effective in ensuring that programmes were properly approved, monitored and reviewed, with quality assurance and enhancement sought. Documentation is

clear and helpful, and is updated regularly. The processes are overseen by a comprehensive system of committees that are responsible for much detailed work and have considerable overlap of their membership. The team felt that a leaner system might be no less effective while being more efficient, but noted the importance of supportive relationships among staff.

207 The University has had difficulties over the availability of reliable information on the performance of its students, but more reliable information is becoming available. However, the audit team felt that the University needed also to analyse the data more systematically and use the results to benchmark its performance against comparator institutions. The University has a well-defined system for ensuring that major changes to modules are formally approved by all those affected. However, the team felt that the University needs a reliable system for ensuring that major changes to programmes or pathways do not arise without formal approval through the cumulative effective of minor changes each approved by a less comprehensive process.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

208 The University secures the standards of its awards through a set of programme-specific regulations and the General Regulations for Assessment, Examination and Awards. Within this framework the external examiner system operates to guarantee academic standards each year.

209 At undergraduate level the University operates two levels of examination boards and external examiner appointment. Examination panels secure standards at the level of the module and subject specialist external examiners are members. Boards of Examiners secure standards at the level of the programme/pathway and make decisions on progression and awards. Subject specialist externals are members of the Board of Examiners, as is a Chief External Examiner who is responsible for ensuring standards at this level. The University is moving away from the

Chief External Examiner system towards the use of a team of Scheme Examiners. It has taken this decision to move the institution away from relying on one individual to secure standards at the level of the modular scheme. At postgraduate level the University operates a single board system where the external examiner secures the standard of both the module and the programme.

210 External examiners present their report on a standard form which includes the components required for the publication of Teaching Quality Information. All external examiner reports are read by the Director of QAE, and an overview report containing issues of University-wide relevance is considered annually by Quality and Academic Standards Sub-Committee. Each year, the overview report contains key recommendations for the University on action that should be taken in response to comments arising from the reports.

211 All external examiners receive a formal response to their report from the programme/pathway leader who must outline what action is being or will be taken to address issues raised. The reports and the team's response form part of the annual monitoring portfolio for each programme/pathway and are scrutinised by the relevant dean. If a dean is unhappy with the team's response or deems that a further institutional response is required, the dean will make contact with the external examiner and discuss any issues raised in the examiner's report.

212 Overall the audit team found that the institution makes good use of its external examiner system to secure the standards of its awards and is able to confirm that broad confidence can be placed in the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

213 The audit team was able to confirm that the formal arrangements for representation were effectively supplemented by informal channels of communication, that staff were

very accessible and willing to respond effectively to questions and concerns. The team was satisfied that the University has established ample opportunities for student representation that its arrangements were working effectively and that this contributes to the strong collegial culture and sense of community.

214 The audit team was satisfied that there were a variety of systems, both formal and informal, well embedded in the University to ensure feedback was consistently and effectively gathered and used to enhance the curriculum and students learning experience. The team also found evidence of engagement across a range of programmes with the wider business and local communities and took the view that these factors contribute to the collegial culture and engagement with the local community.

215 The University's confidence in its ability to value employees and the contribution that they make and its confidence in the range and quality of its staff development provision are well founded. The opportunities for developmental activities, and the level of participation in many such events were reported to be high. The audit team commends the University's systems and procedures for the appointment, induction, appraisal and reward of staff that are sound and provide equality of opportunity. The team also commends the opportunities for peer observation of teaching to inform the annual performance review process, and hence staff development. In particular the team felt that the involvement of associate lecturers in the review, peer observation and staff development schemes, where appropriate, was an element of good practice.

216 The audit team found that the University is addressing the issue of investment in the area of Learning Support Resources. In meetings with students and staff there was evidence of improvements, for example, access to information technology (IT), the new facilities at the Everton Campus, the Shepard-Worlock Library and the introduction of a new timetabling system. However, with regards to library provision, there is still a relative lack of investment, with evidence of real student

concern, including Network of Hope students, about the level and quality of the library stock. The team was concerned that current management arrangements do not allow for a sufficiently strategic approach as to how under-investment is to be targeted. While the team heard evidence of an emerging policy to ensure students understand there is now a complex range of learning resources available to them of which library stock is just a part, there was concern that there should be a clearer strategy to allow such policies to be considered at an earlier stage in the University's planning process.

217 All students interviewed by the audit team spoke positively about the accessibility of staff and the variety of tutors and academic advisers available to provide support. The team heard that students received sufficient information and support to be clear about their academic status and progression. The team concluded that the University accomplishes its aim that guidance be targeted at the 'whole person' and that the level of support for students contributed to the feature of good practice where the strong collegial culture is underpinned by excellent academic support.

218 The University aims to support the 'spiritual, social and personal aspirations of all members of the College community' and the audit team found evidence of the comprehensive nature of the personal support provided to all students with international status and students with disabilities speaking highly in meetings, of the support available. The team considered that these support and guidance mechanisms contribute strongly to the feature of good practice where the strong sense of community is underpinned by the range of academic and personal support systems.

The outcomes of discipline audit trails

Computing

219 From its discussions with students and staff, and its study of students' assessed work, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the Combined Subjects pathways in: IT; Internet Technology; Multimedia

Technology and Gaming Technology, and in the single honours programme in Multimedia, was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The programme specifications are referenced to the *Subject benchmark statement* for computing. In addition, the team found that the standards of student achievement in the MSc in Computing and the MSc in Distributed Systems were appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within (FHEQ).

220 Programme specifications were included with the discipline self-evaluation document (DSED). The audit team noted that there was some slight inconsistency in presentation but that the specification of learning outcomes and links to external references were appropriate.

221 Students who met the audit team confirmed that they were satisfied with their programmes and the information given to them. The quality of learning support resources and facilities is appropriate. The team concluded that the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students was suitable for the programmes of study, although the institution should undertake a review of its provision of library resources.

Creative arts and design

222 From its study of students' assessed work, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the drama and theatre and design programmes was appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. The programme specifications set out relevant educational aims and learning outcomes with appropriate teaching and learning strategies. There is comprehensive assessment, clear and timely feedback and appropriate moderation and grading strategies. The outcomes of the programme reflect the relevant subject benchmark statements.

223 Student evaluation was very positive with the responsiveness of the teaching staff, the academic and pastoral support mechanisms and the vibrant academic community at the Everton

Campus receiving particular mention. The students indicated that the information they had received relating to their programmes provided an accurate reflection of their experiences and the programme handbooks were useful and comprehensible. The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes.

Education

224 From its discussion with students and staff and its reading of students' assessed work, the audit team concluded that the standard of student achievement in education studies was appropriate to the title of the award and its location in the FHEQ.

225 The programme specification was included with the DAT. It is referenced to the *Subject benchmark statement* for education studies and its specification of learning outcomes is consistent with it.

226 Students who met the audit team confirmed that they were satisfied with their programme and that the information given to them was broadly accurate. The team concluded that the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students was suitable for the programme of study.

Social studies

227 From its discussions with students and staff, and its study of students' assessed work, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the Combined Subjects pathways in sociology and Identity Studies was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. The programme specifications are referenced to the subject benchmarks for sociology and cultural studies. In addition, the team found that the standard of student achievement in the MA in Criminal Justice was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

228 Programme specifications were included with the DSED. The audit team noted that there was consistency in presentation but that there was some inconsistency in the specification of links to external references.

229 Students who met the audit team confirmed that they were satisfied with their programmes and the information given to them. The quality of learning support resources and facilities are appropriate. The audit team concluded that the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students was suitable for the programmes of study, although the institution should undertake a review of its provision for library resources.

The institution's use of the Academic Infrastructure

230 The University has used the *Code of practice* to inform its activity and has developed institutional practice through a series of working groups looking at specific areas of the *Code*. The University has recently devolved responsibility for oversight of the various areas of the *Code* to the relevant functional areas of the institution with Quality and Academic Standards Sub-Committee maintaining strategic responsibility. The University considers that the *Code* has stimulated genuine self-critical reflection among staff and enhancement of practice. The institution is currently preparing a consolidated document called the Liverpool Hope Framework on the QAA Code of practice which when complete will be placed on the University website and which will help to inform its collaborative partners' understanding of the *Code*.

231 The University has incorporated the FHEQ level descriptors into its documentation for module approval and initial validation. Programme specifications are in place for all programmes/pathways in the University. Some programme teams publish complete programme specifications in student handbooks or on their shared web drives but most teams distribute only the most relevant extracts (including aims and learning outcomes) to students and make reference to the fuller version on the web. Programme specifications seen by the team contained reference to subject benchmark statements and a mapping of pathway learning outcomes onto the levels of the course. The audit team did note some variation in the format of the specifications.

232 The audit team considered that the University was using the *Code of practice* in an appropriate way as a framework for the continuing review of its own practice and considers that overall the institution is making effective use of external reference points and reflecting critically on current practice. However, the team has concerns that the accumulation of approved minor changes in modules may result in unapproved major changes in pathways or programmes and considers it advisable that the University review its process of monitoring and oversight of such changes.

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

233 The audit team noted that the self-evaluation document (SED) was a well-organised and comprehensive document which provided a good basis for the audit. The SED enabled the team to identify themes that it wished to follow through the DATs, through committee meetings and strategy documents and in meetings with staff and students. The team found the SED to be an accurate and honest account of the University which gave a good impression of the institution's view of itself. However, there were some limitations in its analysis of actions taken by the University.

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

234 The audit team found evidence that the University was pursuing its plans for enhancement, for instance in quality management of collaborative partnerships, in the structure of the undergraduate modular programme and in the provision of learning resources. Students suggested to the audit team that the University was responsive and monitored the effectiveness of new initiatives so that any scheme not working was very likely to be replaced quickly. The team concluded from its own discussions with staff and reading of

documentation that this was indeed the case and noted that new developments identified in the SED, such as the Personal Development Planning module, are already being revised for 2005-06. The team welcomes the emphasis of the report to the deans by the Retention and Progression Forum that 'All initiatives should be evaluated rigorously and reported back systematically'.

Reliability of information

235 The University provides a range of publications to support students from prior to application through to graduation. Documents include undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses, student guides, programme and module guides, and module choice information. The University has procedures to ensure that the information that it provides to students is accurate and current. Students expressed satisfaction with the volume, accuracy and utility of the information that they received, and with its availability in different formats both paper and electronic. The University has made substantial progress in developing its on-line services, including the adoption of its virtual learning environment, and the development of its website since 2003-04 to provide access to internet and intranet information. A useful part of this access is through the electronic newspaper, 'Hope Virtually Daily'. Based on its examination of material provided by the University, its website and discussion with staff and students, the audit team concluded that the information published by the University was accurate, reliable and generally full.

Features of good practice

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

- i the University's distinctive mission and ethos, clearly expressed and understood by staff and students and exemplified by the weekly Foundation Hour (paragraphs 10; 11)
- ii the engagement with the community, exemplified by local outreach into schools and international outreach through the University's overseas

- education charity, Hope One World (paragraphs 11, 81, 153, 166)
- iii the opportunities for widening participation afforded by delivery of the University's programmes by its own staff through the Network of Hope colleges (paragraphs 12, 105)
- iv the procedures for induction, support and continuing development of all teaching staff, including striking an appropriate balance of duties (paragraphs 39, 90, 94, 99, 143; 154)
- v the strongly collegial culture that underpins excellent academic and personal support for students (paragraphs 120; 145 to 147; 153; 169; 182; 185).
- iii adopting methods to ensure that consistency is maintained among deaneries as they implement agreed University systems and procedures in the context of greater devolution (paragraphs 139; 144; 188).

Recommendations for action

237 The University is advised to:

- i undertake more systematic analysis of data at the University level in order to identify and address University-wide issues, including benchmarking award and progression statistics against other institutions to help to assure standards (paragraphs 85; 134; 135; 173; 175);
- ii ensure that a suitably strategic approach is taken to the provision of staff, library and other resources to support its development and avoid inadequacies and inequalities in its provision (paragraphs 108; 111; 184).

238 In addition, the University may wish to consider the desirability of enhancing its quality arrangements by:

- i reviewing whether the multiplicity of committee stages in the University's quality procedures achieves not only effectiveness but also efficiency (paragraphs 31; 42);
- ii reviewing its processes of monitoring and oversight to ensure that the accumulation of approved minor changes in modules does not result in unapproved major changes in pathways or programmes (paragraphs 51; 71; 186);.

Appendix

Liverpool Hope University's response to the audit report

The University is pleased that the audit report provides such a strong endorsement of the institutional procedures in place at Hope to assure academic standards and the quality of provision. Hope welcomes the judgement of broad confidence [the highest category available] in the quality of its programmes and standards of its awards as well as in its ability to maintain this into the future. Two of the five examples of good practice in particular - the excellent academic and personal support for students and the University's engagement with the community as exemplified by its Network of Hope - are illustrative of the University's strong commitment to its distinctive ethos and Mission. The University takes its responsibilities to students very seriously and is glad to see acknowledgement of the reflective approach taken to student learning and the resulting positive outcomes. The University has benefited and learned from the audit process which, in addition to recognising its strengths, has offered advice on enhancement; it provides a good basis for future developments.

The University has taken immediate steps to address the issues raised by the audit team. Since the audit was completed the University has already taken the following action:

- Senior managers have already considered institutional-level data which compares the University in key performance indicators against its benchmark and the HE sector as a whole. Senate and Council will reflect on the University-wide issues identified in these statistics and will charge their key committees with addressing them.
- Within a month of the audit visit, the University took the opportunity to amalgamate its library, learning resource, and IT services. They have now been brought together into a unified service called Library and Information Services which will serve the needs of Hope's community of learners, teachers and researchers, wherever they study. The service will be customer focused and will provide a seamless quality service, offering responsiveness and value for money. A main advantage of the new service will be its ability to plan strategically the allocation of resources to support the student experience.
- As part of the annual monitoring process, all subjects are now required to report - via a 'change log' - all minor and major changes to the curriculum approved in the course of the previous academic session. This information will be held centrally and assist the Deans in ensuring that incremental drift of approved curriculum content does not occur.

In relation to the report's suggestions regarding the committee and Deanery structures, the University maintains that its academic management structures are appropriate to its institutional culture and ethos. As the University is keen to ensure that the system is efficient as well as effective, it will facilitate an institutional dialogue on this matter during the coming year.

In conclusion, the University appreciates the constructive and professional approach taken by the audit team whose findings have endorsed the University's approach to quality management. Within twelve months and as part of its approach of continuous improvement, the University intends to have completed much of the work it has already begun on addressing the suggestions from the auditors and to continue to build on the many exemplars of good practice commended in the report.

