

De Montfort University

MARCH 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 02/15 *Information on quality and standards in higher education* published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The audit team reviews progress towards meeting this requirement.

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Summary

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

Provision offered by its partners which leads to the University's awards will be the subject of a separate collaborative provision audit at a later date.

Outcome of the audit

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

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as being good practice in the context of the University:

- the support given to student representatives in the faculties
- arrangements for training supervisors of research students and the University's leadership and management training programme for its staff
- the quality of the data gathering, analysis and report generation tools available to staff across the University to support quality and academic standards management
- its requirement that with specified exceptions, no proposed programme be validated later than March when it is the intention to recruit students in the following September.

Recommendations for action

The audit team advises the University to consider:

- measures to ensure that its internal documents and web-based guidance on the roles and responsibilities of its external examiners are up to date and accurate and are consistent with the advice of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, published by QAA
- how it might ensure consistency between subject authority boards (SABs) in the way in which they approach marks which are missing or received late, and how to lessen the need for students to be progressed through extraordinary measures.

It would also be desirable for the University to consider:

- how it might ensure that all areas across the institution produce SAB reports and programme journals in a timely fashion, and that all members of staff share the same understanding of the purpose of SAB reports and programme journals in the University's quality management arrangements

- clarifying its requirements for the convening of staff-student consultative committees and/or staff-student liaison committees and promulgating them to staff and students
- how to provide its external examiners with evidence that marking and moderation has taken place for all modules
- how best to continue with its work to ensure that staff and students across its Bedford and Leicester campuses enjoy a fully comparable and consistent experience
- how it can ensure that staff across the institution make use of the facilities available through its strategic planning and management information systems and that they are provided with training to support the greater use of statistical information in securing academic standards and managing the quality of modules and programmes
- how to give effect to its intention to develop a strategy and policy for employability, linked to its Teaching and Learning Strategy, and consider how its engagement with the employers of its students can be made more visibly a part of its quality management arrangements
- how it might ensure that consistent and equivalent procedures are followed for handling requests from students for extensions to deadlines for the submission of coursework.

Outcomes of discipline audit trails

In the course of the audit five discipline audit trails were conducted in architecture; computing; performing arts; pharmacy; and sociology. The audit found that the standard of student achievement in all the programmes was appropriate to the titles of the relevant awards and their location within *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*, published by QAA and that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to those awards.

National reference points

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

From 2005, the published information set will include the recommended summaries of external examiners' reports and of feedback from current students for each programme. The evidence provided for the audit shows that the University has taken the necessary steps to be able to meet the requirements of the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*.

Main report

Main report

1 An institutional audit of De Montfort University (the University or DMU) was undertaken during the week commencing 28 February 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility for its awards. The audit was carried out using a process developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and Universities UK (UUK), and has been endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills. For institutions in England, it replaces the previous processes of continuation audit, undertaken by QAA at the request of UUK and SCOP, and universal subject review, undertaken by QAA on behalf of HEFCE, as part of the latter's statutory responsibility for assessing the quality of education that it funds.

2 The audit checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of its academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study leading to those awards; and for publishing reliable information. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, the audit included consideration of an example of institutional processes at work at the level of the programme, through discipline audit trails (DATs), together with examples of those processes operating at the level of the institution as a whole. The scope of the present audit did not encompass collaborative arrangements leading to the University's awards which will be the subject of a future, separate audit.

Section 1: Introduction: De Montfort University

The University and its mission

3 Under the terms of the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) the former Leicester Polytechnic was designated De Montfort University. In 1994 the former Bedford College of Higher Education, Lincolnshire College of Art and Design and Lincolnshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture merged with the University and the enlarged institution was joined in 1995 by the former Charles Frears College of Nursing and Midwifery.

4 Since 2001 the University has undergone significant change, setting itself the goal of maintaining the scale of its operations while becoming more geographically and academically focused. It has therefore decided to withdraw from the direct provision of further education courses and programmes of study itself, to withdraw from its operations in Lincolnshire (which have now been taken over by the University of Lincoln), to close its operations in Milton Keynes, and to rationalise its operations on its campuses in Leicester and Bedford. By these operations, it has therefore consolidated its activities from the 10 campuses, across which it worked at the time of the 2001 audit, to four campuses at the present - two in Bedford and two in Leicester. The University is now based at Leicester and Bedford and is the nucleus for a network of partner colleges. It provides full and part-time provision and awards at all levels. The University maintains an active programme of UK and overseas collaborations which, as noted elsewhere in this report, will be the focus of a future audit.

5 At the time of the audit approximately 23,000 students were registered to study for the University's awards, of whom there were more than 700 full-time and 1,250 part-time taught postgraduate students. At the same time there were approximately 500 postgraduate research students registered for higher degrees, of whom approximately 260 were studying full-time. About 8 per cent of students registered to study for the University's awards

are located in its UK partner colleges. At the time of the audit, the University employed 3,300 staff and its academic provision was organised into six faculties, each led by a dean, with each faculty comprising a number of departments, schools and divisions.

6 The University's mission statement is as follows:

'De Montfort University is

- committed to excellence
- committed to professional, creative and vocational education
- committed to research aligned with our mission
- committed to the application of our knowledge.

We are building upon our traditional strengths to become

- the leading university for professional, creative and vocational education, underpinned by research excellence.

We are committed to develop support and enhance the quality of

- professional programmes where the University qualification is the entry requirement for the chosen profession. (For example nurses, teachers, pharmacists, speech therapists, solicitors etc)
- creative programmes which nurture, encourage and assess the creative talents of our students and which equip them for the creative industries. (For example, in performing arts, dance, music, media, animation, fashion design etc)
- vocational programmes designed to meet the needs of a particular career. (For example marketers, HR specialists, computer systems engineers, technologists, public sector administrators etc).

We seek to ensure that our work is

- underpinned by research excellence - we have excellent researchers and scholars working in selected research areas that fit with our identity and which are judged

excellent by external benchmarks. We share our knowledge and transfer its application to the wider community.

We have four key values that guide our planning and investment

- high quality - present in all our work; and we shall work at the cutting edge of our disciplines
- student focus
- our work will be relevant to stakeholders in the wider community we serve
- we actively promote widening participation to provide opportunity to all those with the ability to benefit from University education'.

Background information

7 The published information available for this audit included:

- the report of a quality audit of the University conducted in March 2001 by QAA which was published in October 2001 (the 2001 report)
- reports of reviews by QAA of provision at subject level, published since 2000
- information on the respective websites of the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), Higher Education Research Opportunities (HERO), HEFCE, and the University.

8 The University provided QAA with:

- an institutional self-evaluation document (SED) and appendices and five discipline self-evaluation documents (DSEDs) for the disciplines selected for the DATS, together with the relevant programme specifications
- its undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses 2004-05
- copies of the Quality Assurance Guides it provides for its staff
- its Handbook and Regulations for Undergraduate Awards 2004-05 and its Taught Postgraduate Programmes University Regulations, September 2004

- relevant internal review reports
- access to its intranet and virtual learning environment (VLE) sites
- information from its Strategic Planning and Management Information System (SPMIS).

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

10 In addition to the SEDs and internal papers and reports provided by the University, the De Montfort University Students' Union (SU) also provided the audit team with the students' written submission (SWS).

The audit process

11 Following preliminary meetings at the University in June 2004 with representatives of the University and students, QAA confirmed the number of DATs to be conducted during the audit visit. QAA received the University's institutional SED in October 2004. On the basis of the SED and other information provided, the audit team selected the DATs, and QAA subsequently confirmed to the University that the DATs would focus on architecture; computing; pharmacy; sociology; and performing arts. The University provided QAA with DSEDs in December 2004.

12 The audit team visited the University in January 2005 and met the Vice-Chancellor, senior members of the University and students' representatives. The briefing meetings enabled the team to explore matters discussed by the University in its SED and to discuss with students matters they had similarly raised in the SWS. At the end of the briefing visit the team proposed a programme of meetings for the audit visit and requested some additional

information. The programme for the audit visit was agreed by the University. No areas were specifically identified for thematic enquiries.

13 The audit visit took place in the week beginning 28 February 2005. The audit team comprised Dr N Casey; Mr P Collins; Professor I Marshall; Professor C Morris; Ms J Routledge; and Professor N Sammells, auditors; and Mrs I Pennie, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr D W Cairns, Assistant Director, Development and Enhancement Group.

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

14 The 2001 report noted the 'measured pace' of progress in the University since the Higher Education Quality Council audit in 1995, and commended the approach taken by the Vice-Chancellor in communicating the University's new vision to staff and students; the University's internal audit process for external examiners' reports; the thoroughgoing approach it had taken to addressing the findings of previous audits in respect of arrangements for research students; and its development of a University Teacher Fellowship Scheme as a means of recognising the status of teaching and of disseminating good practice.

15 The 2001 report advised the University to continue to develop its management information systems to support processes for the assessment of students' work and the monitoring of progression rates, until a level was reached commanding the confidence of users; to make arrangements for sustaining the learning environment of students based at Milton Keynes during the rundown of that campus; to clarify the responsibilities of the mentoring role to all staff and inform students of their entitlements to support from mentors, and to establish robust monitoring arrangements for its new mentoring system; to develop its intranet system to provide information for its staff and learning support for its students, and to ensure that it had appropriate means to check entries on its intranet for accuracy and clarity.

16 The SED provided a detailed summary of the actions which had been taken to address each of these recommendations. This stated that the capability of the University's management information system had been substantially enhanced and that the closure of the Milton Keynes campus had been successfully accomplished. The SED also indicated that the University had taken careful steps to protect the learning experience of students during the closure of the campus. It also noted that the term 'mentoring' had now been replaced by 'personal tutoring' across the institution, and that a University framework for this activity had been set up, although measures had taken time to put in place since it had been desirable to bring them in line with the University's arrangements for personal development planning (PDP) for its students (see below, paragraph 151). With respect to the recommendation offered in the 2002 report on managing the content of the University's intranet, the SED described the work currently being undertaken to introduce a proprietary VLE across the institution (see below, paragraph 137).

17 More generally, since the previous audit, the University has pursued the policy of 'doing fewer things in fewer places' which was identified in the 2001 report. Since then it has continued to reduce the number of its campuses and this process is set to continue with the consolidation of its Bedford-based provision at the Polhill campus from the 2005-06 session.

18 Perhaps the most significant of the changes it has undertaken since 2001 is the introduction of 'Curriculum 2004', a project which the University has carried out over the past two academic years which has enabled it to make the transition from its former, largely module based curriculum, to a curriculum centred on programmes of study. This was in its first year of operation at the time of the audit and the audit team was able to observe how the University was managing the process of transition. At the same time, the team was also mindful that some quality and academic standards processes were still being piloted in their new context (see below, paragraph 57).

19 Since 2000 QAA has conducted six subject reviews under the process which ended in 2001, and participated in two academic reviews at the subject level after 2001. At the time of the audit, the University was in the process of completing a further academic review at the subject level. Common themes in the published subject reviews included matters relating to assessment, particularly with respect to the links between assessment criteria and learning outcomes and the annual monitoring of provision, specifically the use across the University of programme and subject journals and the consistency with which other internal quality management processes have been employed across the institution.

20 The SED described the actions taken by the University to address the recommendations in the published subject review reports. The audit team's detailed comments with respect to the effectiveness of these measures, and particularly those relating to the consistent operation of quality management processes are discussed elsewhere in this report (see below, paragraphs 58, 60, and 63).

21 Since 2001 the University has hosted a number of accreditation and recognition events for provision associated with particular professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), a number of examples of which were cited in the SED, together with indications of the actions which had been taken in response to the relevant reports. The University's relations with individual PSRBs is discussed elsewhere in this report (see below, paragraph 94) but, in general, it seemed to the audit team that the University had recognised the need for a greater central involvement in the work of its faculties, departments, schools and divisions with PSRBs and was taking steps at the time of the audit to make this practicable.

22 The audit team reviewed the actions taken by the University to address the matters raised in the 2001 report and came to the view that the steps which it had taken had been appropriate. The University's general care in managing the introduction of new policies and procedures appeared to the team to be a

strength of its practice overall. This was to be observed in a number of different contexts such as the University's strategy for e-learning, but particularly with respect to its introduction of 'Curriculum 2004', the title given by the University to a significant adjustment to the way in which it delivers its portfolio. In this instance, the team noted that following debate at the Academic Board the University's senior managers had extended the timescale for the introduction of this substantial measure.

23 Overall, the audit team came to the view that while, in some respects, action by the University to improve the consistency with which some of its quality and academic standards processes operate had been slow, nonetheless there had been a period of major structural change since the publication of the 2001 report and this should not be ignored.

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

24 The University has 'an articulated policy on academic quality', which was reviewed during the 2003-04 session and approved by the Academic Board. The objective of this policy is 'to promote enhancement, promulgate good practice, assure the quality of learning opportunities and standards of DMU programmes and awards, and provide evidence of quality to stakeholders'. The policy is based on seven principles, which can be summarised as follows:

- standards compare with those of similar awards in UK higher education; responsibility for quality lies with all staff at all levels; the University trusts its staff to work to high standards; the University is accountable to stakeholders for quality and standards, and this accountability is vested in the Academic Board
- there is a culture of continuous improvement

- the University is responsive to the views of all stakeholders, and is committed to prompt resolution of issues
- its quality procedures are intended to be transparent, fair, based on common sense, and offering a degree of regulation commensurate with the task.

The institution's framework for managing quality and standards

25 Ultimately, responsibility for the academic standards of the University's awards, and for the quality of its educational provision, rests with the Academic Board. In practice, the Academic Board has devolved authority for these matters to academic committees in each faculty (FACs) which report to the Academic Board both directly and through the latter's Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) which exercises day-to-day responsibility for assuring quality and maintaining the academic standards of the University's awards. Given the devolved nature of the University's systems, AQSC discharges these responsibilities primarily through three Audit Groups, which operate as standing committees of AQSC and report respectively on academic standards, procedures and external examiner reports (see below, paragraph 36).

26 In addition to AQSC, the Academic Planning Committee of the Academic Board has responsibility for decisions concerning the development of new programmes before these proceed to validation. A further Academic Board standing committee, the University Learning and Teaching Committee (ULTC), provides the Board with advice on policies and matters to do with learning and teaching, while responsibility for monitoring matters to do with research degrees and the development of related policy and processes has been delegated by the Board to its Higher Degrees Committee. Lastly, the Modular Management Group, which was established before the last audit, is responsible for monitoring and supporting the working of the University's undergraduate modular scheme. A counterpart, the Postgraduate Modular Management Group, carries out the same role in relation to taught

postgraduate provision. Both groups are, again, standing committees of the Academic Board.

27 Within the University's management arrangements, the Vice-Chancellor is assisted by a Core Executive which he chairs, the membership of which includes the University's pro vice-chancellors and its directors of Human Resources and Finance. Within the Core Executive one of the pro vice-chancellors is responsible for overseeing academic quality. Each faculty is headed by an appointed dean who is assisted by a faculty executive committee. A Faculty Management Board, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, meets quarterly to review the implementation of faculty objectives and progress towards them and against financial targets. In each faculty, day-to-day responsibility for quality management resides with a 'head of quality', who is a member of the faculty executive. The membership of the Core Executive, together with the deans of the faculties, constitutes the University's Strategic Management Group which meets each month to consider matters of strategy. A central Department of Academic Quality (DAQ) (a new department, formed from the merger of the divisions of Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement) works with the faculties to support all aspects of quality assurance and enhancement activities, including external examining and some elements of staff development.

28 Deliberative arrangements for quality and academic standards at faculty level are patterned on those adopted by the centre, with FACs overseeing the exercise of the authority for quality and academic standards delegated to each faculty by the Academic Board. Minutes and other information flow in both directions between each FAC and AQSC and the Academic Board. For matters to do with research students and higher degrees FACs also report to the Academic Board's Higher Degrees Committee. Within each faculty research, teaching and learning, and academic planning committees have been established, which report to their respective FACs.

29 Within each faculty, subject authority boards (SABs) have been established to be responsible for the development, management, quality and academic standards of one or more discrete subjects and the modules associated with them. SABs were in place at the time of the previous audit and operate in two modes: in 'management mode' a SAB is considered to be responsible for the planning, design implementation and management of all aspects of the curriculum within its subject area, and for developing and implementing teaching, learning and assessment strategies in accordance with University policies and procedures, again for its subject area. In this mode it will also receive reports and oversee the management of the provision and report, in turn, to the faculty, and through the faculty to AQSC. In 'assessment mode' a SAB (usually working with a subject-based external examiner) is considered to be responsible for the arrangements and processes for module assessments and moderation and for reporting module assessments to the relevant faculty progression and award boards (PABs) (formerly faculty ratification panels (FRPs)). In one Faculty, Computing Sciences and Engineering, the volume of programmes and awards handled by the SAB has led to the adoption of a system of 'sub-SABs' referred to by the Faculty as 'Cognate Area Boards' (CABs) (see below, paragraph 188).

30 The University operates a two-tier assessment system for its modular awards of which SABs constitute the first tier and PABs comprise the second tier. PABs are responsible for 'reviewing, checking and recommending awards and degree classifications in all programmes leading to named awards within or allocated to their Faculty'. Their membership includes a 'senior external examiner' whose remit includes ensuring on the University's behalf that PABs comply with its procedures and regulations. Senior external examiners are also tasked to participate 'in the work of Faculty Progression and Award Boards in reviewing and confirming progression decisions and recommendations for the award of qualifications' and to confirm 'the standards achieved by students on programmes offered by the University'.

31 The University's quality assurance arrangements have been thoroughly documented in a series of QA Guides, which are available as booklets and electronically, each of which provides concise statements of the University's approaches to a particular aspect of quality assurance such as, for example, the validation and approval of new provision. The QA Guides were introduced from September 2002 to replace an earlier handbook covering all the University's quality processes (the Curriculum Approval, Review and Monitoring handbook) and are intended to provide accessible guidance to staff on quality assurance matters. The SED noted that external members of periodic review panels had subsequently commented favourably on the new QA Guides and the audit team found that they offered a comprehensive and user-friendly introduction to the University's quality assurance arrangements (see below, paragraph 81).

32 The SED described the University's external examining arrangements but otherwise contained little information on its quality management arrangements for assessment across the institution. In this connection the audit team noted that the reports of two subject reviews conducted since 2001 had indicated that there was scope for improvement. The University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy covers assessment matters where one of the stated principles is that 'all assessment tasks [should be] explicitly linked to learning outcomes with clear assessment criteria'. Information gathered in the course of the DATs enabled the team to confirm that strong links had now been established between stated learning outcomes, the nature of assessment tasks and the criteria used in marking.

33 The University has piloted a number of projects relating to the management of assessment. For example, the Faculty of Art and Design has produced six Practice Guides. This initiative has, however, yet to be extended to the development of University-wide guidance on assessment processes. Through the DATs the audit team found some information to suggest that the assessment of students' work could be

handled inconsistently in some areas, for example, with respect to the treatment of extenuating circumstances and with respect to the moderation of marks. (See below paragraphs 207 and 209).

34 The University's plans for the enhancement of its quality and academic standards arrangements recognise that insufficient use is currently being made of the analysis of quantitative data, notwithstanding the considerable improvements which have been achieved in the University's management information systems since the publication of the 2001 report. The University's use of progression and completion statistics is discussed elsewhere in this report (see below, paragraph 112).

35 The SED expressed the view that while the University was generally satisfied with the overall design of its quality management arrangements, there remained room for improvements in particular areas. For example, internal audits conducted by the University have convinced it that the work of the FACs in reviewing and summarising information from programmes and modules for the benefit of AQSC and the Academic Board could be made more effective, particularly in the area of 'analysing and evaluating quality information to maintain a "health check" on provision or to influence improvements' (see below, paragraph 57). In a devolved structure, based on the principle of 'subsidiarity', it is essential that bodies to which the central authority has devolved responsibilities should exercise those responsibilities. The SED acknowledged the University's concerns to ensure that 'Faculty Academic Committees accept their authority and responsibility', not least so that those whose work is overseen by FACs can be confident that their reports and briefings are read and receive responses (see below, paragraphs 54 and 222). The audit team endorses the University's view of the importance of this matter, and encourages it to continue with the steps it has begun to take to improve the effectiveness of the work of the FACs. Likewise, the University's internal audits have convinced it that its SABs need to be helped to conduct their work in a more active and evaluative fashion, so that there

can be general confidence that each will follow consistent practice, will discuss student progression and achievement and, that where SABs identify problems, they will discuss and record the action they have taken to address them (see below, paragraph 230). Again, the team encourages the University to continue to work to improve the effectiveness of SABs and other faculty-level bodies.

Internal audit processes

36 The audit team devoted some time to establishing the place of the University's internal audit procedures in its formal quality assurance arrangements. As noted earlier, AQSC has established three standing committees which are formally referred to as 'audit groups': the External Examiners Audit Group (EEAG); the Academic Standards Audit Group and the Quality Assurance Procedures Audit Group. The Audit Groups have produced a number of authoritative reports on the operation of the University's quality management arrangements, copies of which were made available to the team. The importance of these reports in enabling the University to manage and improve its quality management arrangements was clear to the team and the thoroughness with which they conduct their audit work is beyond doubt. The University is generally content with the reliability of its internal audit reports and the team sees no reason to disagree with this view. However, the number of the internal audit reports the University has commissioned from the Audit Groups, together with their constitution as standing committees of AQSC, could have the potential to blur the (necessary) distinctions between quality audit, quality assurance, and quality control for staff, with the risk that the importance of day-to-day quality control and quality assurance activities may be downgraded in their estimation. To forestall such an eventuality it might be worthwhile for AQSC to check with staff from time to time how they view each element of the University's quality management arrangements (including its internal audits) and their part in them, and to emphasise the importance of their journals and reports to the University.

Summary: the University's framework for managing quality and standards

37 Mindful of the number of the University's quality management and academic standards procedures, and having noted its intention to introduce additional processes (see below, paragraphs 57 and 63) the audit team sought to establish whether, taking all these activities into account, the level of quality assurance activity across the University was proportionate to its needs. In this context, the team also wished to establish whether the complexity of current arrangements might have caused confusion among staff about the functions of the various processes and bodies. Senior members of the University told the team that it kept the number and structure of committees under review, that the views of external examiners and the outcomes of accreditations by PSRBs suggested its processes were effective, and a recent audit of quality assurance processes had not identified complexity as a particular concern. This finding was at odds with evidence that some staff regarded the University's quality management arrangements as 'complex', and that others remained unclear about aspects of the processes, for example, who should write entries in the journal, and where the latter should be presented.

38 Overall, and taking note of the views expressed in the SED and the outcomes of its discussions with members of staff, the audit team came to the view that the University's framework for managing the quality of its provision and the academic standards of its awards was generally effective. The team did, however, identify several areas where further work might be beneficial. The University's quality management and academic standards arrangements, and the relations between the various elements, are complex and this complexity may need to be more actively managed (and, preferably, reduced) if the University is to limit the scope for some of the unhelpful inconsistencies at operational level which came to the team's attention (for example, in assessment practice) and, if it is, to ensure that the costs of its quality management arrangements do not inhibit its capacity for development.

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

39 Two sections in the SED described the University's overall approach to the enhancement of quality. The first, headed 'Enhancement' stated that the University's approach was based on the 'belief that learning and teaching flourishes best where ownership is located in faculties, as close to the point of delivery as possible. It continued that 'in practice, enhancement relies on examples of good practice being identified through the university quality assurance mechanisms, such as the programme journal and external examiners' reports, through items for discussion at Faculty Learning and Teaching committees or by faculties proposing an aspect of provision for dissemination'.

40 This section of the SED also noted that the University had recently restructured its quality assurance and enhancement arrangements (in the course of which it had closed its former Centre for Learning and Teaching), in order to bring quality assurance and quality improvement into one area, with the aim of 'strengthening the links between these functions in line with developing national practice'. The newly-established DAQ therefore now incorporates a Quality Improvement Team. The University has also recently formed an Academic Professional Development Unit (APDU) with the intention of ensuring that the staff development it undertakes is consistent with its strategic requirements. The SED noted that discussions in early 2004 had led ULTC to consider how to improve the identification, dissemination and embedding of good practice.

41 In the course of the audit the University made it possible for the audit team to browse its intranet and VLE and this enabled the team to gather evidence of the work formerly undertaken by the Centre for Learning and Teaching to support the implementation of the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. This had included the publication of an internal journal 'Learning and Teaching Matters' and the organisation of an annual quality

enhancement conference for staff. Since the closure of the Centre some of its responsibilities have been remitted to DAQ and APDU.

42 At the end of the SED a section entitled 'Enhancement Plan' set out a number of areas of existing and intended development, and made reference to the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2004-2007 in order 'to provide a full picture of current quality and improvement objectives'. Specific aims included in the Enhancement Plan were:

- embedding scrutiny of performance data at all levels of the reporting system
- improving monitoring of programme journal quality
- seeking more rigorous feedback from employers and
- enhancing student feedback mechanisms.

43 From its discussions with members of the University the audit team learned that the Enhancement Plan constituted a distillation of continuing matters requiring the University's attention, and that the individual items had been identified during the preparation of the SED. The University did not therefore intend to use the Enhancement Plan to monitor progress against the identified issues in any formal sense. This would be done through routine quality assurance and enhancement processes and therefore in line with the earlier statements in the SED.

44 Through its reviews of the University's papers and its discussions with members of staff, the audit team was able to confirm the existence of a wide range of opportunities for staff to discuss academic practice and to identify examples of enhancement activities. It is the University's stated expectation that its staff will engage in reflective practice and critical self-evaluation, share good practice systematically and respond to the ideas of others. From the examples of routine annual reporting and periodic review activities that it saw, particularly in the DATs, the team was able to confirm that its staff are largely meeting the University's expectations in this matter.

45 Reviewing the University's quality enhancement arrangements, it was clear to the audit team that the newly-established DAQ including its Quality Improvement Team, APDU, AQSC, and ULTC were individually undertaking quality enhancement activities. It was less clear, however, that the University was coordinating and sharing information between the individual programmes, other than through informal contacts and some cross-membership of committees, nor was it altogether clear to what extent the University's present and future approach to quality and academic standards management would be shaped by enhancement. The team noted the good work begun by the Centre for Learning and Teaching, including annual quality enhancement conferences, and is encouraged by the University's determination that this should not be allowed to lapse. The University has itself identified the need for a more systematic approach to enhancement and the team suggests that it would be wise to pursue this.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Programme approval

46 The initial planning of new provision takes place at faculty and central (University) level, and was described as 'a continuing process of iteration'. Within each faculty the academic planning of new provision is overseen by a head of studies, who reports to the Dean and the FAC, and by the faculty academic planning committee, with the latter undertaking most of the detailed consideration of the proposal. At this initial stage, a key concern is to establish likely demand for the proposed programme and hence its likely viability. This process is assisted by the University's Strategic Planning Department, which provides faculties with an annual analysis of current market trends both within the University and in the wider higher education and economic environment. The audit team considered that the provision of this information significantly assisted the faculties to plan the development of their portfolios and is a feature of good practice.

47 Once a proposal for a new programme has been approved by the relevant faculty academic planning committee it is referred to the Dean and to the FAC and, subsequently, to the University's Academic Planning Committee. Among the responsibilities of the latter is to ensure that there is no overlap between the proposal and any existing or recently proposed provision in other faculties. Although the audit team was told of instances where a proposal had been referred back to a faculty, it is more usual for the proposal to go forward for validation. The team noted with interest the University's firm requirement (with specified exceptions, such as when working with a PSRB, or a Workforce Development Consortium) that no proposal be subject to validation later than March when it is the intention to recruit and admit students in the following September. The team considers that this is a feature of good practice.

48 Responsibility for conducting validation processes is normally devolved to faculties, except in the case of collaborative provision. For staff seeking guidance, DAQ has issued a clear and detailed guide which sets out the characteristics of the different types of development, and indicates which proposals would require a central University validation, and which would normally be conducted at faculty level. Proposers of programmes are expected to provide a well-defined set of documentation to support the validation process which culminates in a validation event. This involves meetings between a panel, the membership of which is drawn from across the University (and includes some participants from the proposing faculty) with external representation, and members of the proposing team and faculty. Clear criteria are provided in the DAQ Guide for the selection of panel members, in particular the external participants.

49 Whether they are conducted at University or faculty level, the University's arrangements for the validation and approval of new provision require those framing the proposal, and those validating it, to make reference to the relevant elements of the Academic Infrastructure. For

example, for each programme proposal a course template is required, which in the University fulfils the purpose of a programme specification, and which requires reference to be made to the relevant subject benchmark statements. There is also clear direction in the DAQ Guide that validation panels should satisfy themselves that the proposal is consistent with the advice offered by the *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

50 In 2003 the University carried out an internal audit of validations conducted by faculties using their devolved powers, as a result of which it made a number of modifications to the DAQ Guide to improve clarity, and also strengthened procedures for following up conditions imposed at validation and checking on their fulfilment. The audit team was able to confirm the thoroughness of this internal audit from the papers of the Quality Assurance Procedures Audit Group, which also provided evidence that the findings of the audit had been followed through.

51 On the basis of the evidence available to it, the audit team considers that the University's procedures for the development, validation and approval of new provision (whether at University or faculty level) are effective in ensuring that new developments are consistent with the University's requirements and the advice of the Academic Infrastructure.

Annual monitoring

52 The monitoring and evaluation of the University's existing provision is undertaken through the evaluation of a 'journal' and through the evaluation of information on individual modules. In 2002 the University defined the journal as a document 'in which issues, actions and outcomes are recorded that relate to the evaluation and development of courses and subjects'. The journal also reports good practice as identified by the subject team as well as detailing how this can be disseminated across the SAB, Faculty and University'. Journals (and now, the pilot annual reports of SABs) are sent to FACs for their

consideration and to be used to compile summaries of salient points (including instances of good practice) for the information of AQSC and Academic Board.

53 The SED noted that the 2001 report had identified 'some confusion about the terminology for the journal depending upon whether it was being used at postgraduate or undergraduate level or in partner colleges'. To dispel this confusion the SED noted that the 'journal is now called the programme journal throughout [the University]'. The SED also stated that the programme journal was 'used by subject teams to track developmental issues and promote continuous improvement', adding that it was not 'a record of evaluation but a record of actions required to lead to improvement and of identified good practice'. The continuation of some confusion about the naming of the focus of the journal process, notwithstanding the changes described in the SED, was highlighted for the audit team by the material it consulted in the DATs, which indicated that some areas of the University had continued to use the term 'subject journal' while others had adopted the newer terminology.

54 The University's view of the centrality of the journal process in its quality management arrangements is demonstrated by the attention it has devoted to establishing how journals are used by staff in practice, and the overall effectiveness of the journal process (see below). Following this work, the University has come to the view that while the journal constitutes 'a transparent document and...is straightforward to monitor', and that where 'the journal is used as designed, it is effective', the challenge 'is to continue to address variable practice and ensure that good practice is disseminated'. In this connection, the SED acknowledged that it is 'important that Faculty Academic Committees accept their authority and responsibility for checking the validity of the journals and remedying deficiencies. Evidence from the [AQSC] evaluation [of the journal] reveals room for improvement in the monitoring processes [at] faculty level. In addition, subject leaders need to be assured that at faculty level journals are read and responded

to by senior staff' (see above, paragraph 35).

55 In the course of its inquiries the audit team reviewed a wide sample of recent programme and subject journals and consulted an internal paper produced in September 2004: 'Evaluation of Subject (Programme) Journals for the Academic Quality and Standards Committee'. This showed that in one faculty that only 60 per cent of journals had been received by the due date and that some programme leaders 'didn't know how to complete the journal'. The University is to be congratulated for the forthright manner in which this matter had been brought to the attention of AQSC. Where journals are completed the contents of those which the team saw led it to the view that while they recorded changes to provision they rarely reflected on root causes, or on possibilities for enhancement. Moreover, in looking backward rather than forward, some journals had begun to assume some of the elements of a quality control or quality assurance document, rather than fulfilling the University's intention that they should 'track developmental issues and promote continuous improvement'.

56 In 2004, debates in AQSC and discussions between the faculty heads of quality and the Chair of ULTC set out to establish 'whether Deans were receiving reliable and timely information about the quality of provision for which they were responsible'. These discussions had confirmed for the University that the journal as presently configured did 'not record evaluative commentaries nor give an annual reporting of strengths and weaknesses in a given subject area', a finding which is consistent with observations in the minutes of AQSC that the journal has until now been primarily viewed as a quality enhancement tool. This understanding may be changing, however, as the team was told by members of the University during the visit that the journal also fulfilled a quality assurance function.

57 Although the programme journal was the only element of routine monitoring which was fully described in the SED, the audit team learned that the University was also piloting the

introduction of an annual report from SABs to FACs, with the aim of providing the latter with means to confirm that quality assurance processes have been followed. In part, this initiative is intended to address the findings of a recent audit of the use of performance information by SABs, PABs by the Academic Standards Audit Group. This had established that while there had been improvements in the way in which SABs monitored student performance at module and programme level since a previous internal audit, there remained 'room for improvement' and that the audit exercise had 'also exposed a general failure to discuss or record action when problems were identified'.

58 The audit team saw examples of the new format of annual reports from SABs to FACs and discussed their development with members of the University. The latter has provided a standard form to ensure that key matters are addressed and discussed when the reports are compiled, chiefly student progression and achievement, and has arranged for its management information systems to provide SABs with consistent sets of progression and completion data. The intention is that these measures will enable FACs to be better informed about the provision they are expected to oversee and, in turn, enable them to provide AQSC and Academic Board with more reliable and informative reports, based on summaries of journals and the annual reports of SABs. The examples of completed SAB reports which the team was able to read were, however, very terse. For example, one report offered only five lines of comment on recruitment, with no supporting data. Members of staff told the team that what should go into the SAB report was 'still under discussion'.

59 On the basis of its conversations with members of the University, and its consideration of the University's papers, the audit team considers that once the form and content of the SAB reports is finally agreed it would be desirable for the University to consider how it might ensure that all areas across the institution produce SAB reports and programme journals, that this is done in a timely fashion, and that all members of staff share the same understanding

of the purpose of SAB reports and programme journals in the University's quality management arrangements. From the information it saw, the team understands that the University intends to make the relationship between the journal and the report the focus of the next round of journal evaluations: the team endorses this course of action.

60 Overall, the audit team welcomes the continuing attention the University is devoting to improving its regular monitoring processes for its educational provision (see below, paragraph 230). With the University, it considers that there is, however, some scope for enhancing these arrangements, as indicated above.

Periodic review

61 The University reviews its educational provision on a six-year cycle, with the cycle itself being reconsidered every three years. Reviews are undertaken at faculty level and are generally carried out of clusters of provision, with each cluster usually being a group of cognate programmes. Within the University's periodic review arrangements, the largest cluster of courses which can be considered as part of one review is all the programmes and provision which comes under the authority of a single SAB. As with other key elements of the University's quality management arrangements, DAQ has provided staff with a clearly written and authoritative guide to the conduct of the process and the University's expectations, which draws constructively on documents published by QAA.

62 The periodic review process commences with the preparation of a self-evaluation by programme and/or subject leaders for the consideration of a review panel. The latter must be chaired by a senior member of the University from another faculty, and its overall composition must be approved by a subcommittee of AQSC and include suitable external representation and a student member. Where a PSRB has an interest in the provision under review the membership of the panel will normally include one or more representatives of that body. The self-evaluation provides the basis for a 'preliminary meeting' between the

designated panel chair, the faculty head of quality, and members of the course teams, a month in advance of the review event, to agree the key matters to be discussed during the review and to shape the agenda for the forthcoming meetings. The audit team considered that this was a positive and helpful feature of the arrangements overall. The periodic review event itself usually lasts one day, but where the provision under consideration is large or complex a longer period may be allocated. Following discussions between subject staff, students and the members of the review panel, and visits to studios, laboratories and so on, the panel agrees its findings and a report of the event, together with an enhancement plan, addressing any recommendations, is sent to the relevant FAC and to AQSC. The relevant FAC is responsible, in the first instance, for monitoring actions taken to address any recommendations.

63 In 2003-04 the Quality Assurance Procedures Audit Group undertook an audit of periodic review procedures, the findings of which gave solid grounds for the University's confidence in its arrangements. Overall, the University considers that its periodic review process is working well and that it is 'embedded in the culture of the University'. It has, however, identified a need for greater central control over the production and circulation of reports, in order to ensure that they are produced promptly and has decided for the future that following each periodic review there should be an update on progress at the mid-point in the review cycle.

64 As part of its information and evidence to support the DATs the University provided a number of periodic review reports. While the contents of these reports varied in character and content, all met the minimum requirements as set out in the DAQ Guide. Discussions with members of staff in the DATs also enabled the audit team to confirm that the former shared a settled understanding of the nature and purpose of the periodic review process; likewise, its consideration of the University's papers enabled the team to confirm that AQSC monitored the

enhancement plans produced following periodic reviews. Overall, the University's periodic review process provides an effective means for ensuring that the curriculum remains current and relevant, together with a way of assuring the general academic health of the provision. As it takes forward its plans for the incremental improvement of its periodic review process, however, it will no doubt have occurred to the University that with the introduction of interim updates of reviews, as another element in its overall quality management arrangements, it may be necessary to satisfy itself (and its staff) that the costs (including opportunity costs) of this measure will be worthwhile, particularly in the context of its existing plans to introduce annual reports from SABs (see above, paragraph 60).

65 Notwithstanding the comments above, and some doubts arising from the growing complexity of its quality arrangements, the audit team considers that the University's overall approach to the approval and periodic review of programmes is sound, and operates to assure the quality of those programmes and safeguard the academic standards of the associated awards.

External participation in internal review processes

66 One of the guiding principles in the University's academic quality policy and framework is that in the area of 'standards' activities 'which support the maintenance of academic standards include external representation on validation and review panels' (see above, paragraph 62). Likewise, in keeping with its principle of 'responsiveness and resolution' the University states that it 'is committed to responding in a timely manner to the views of all stakeholders, including students, staff, external examiners, employers and professional and statutory bodies...'. Accordingly, the SED emphasised the value the University places on the participation of external panel members in periodic review and validations and noted that since 2003 'independent external panel members [have been] included on the Institutional Review panels for overseas collaborative provision'.

67 In practical terms, the membership of individual validation and periodic review panels must include external members, the suitability of whom is judged against published criteria and is approved by a subgroup of AQSC. The documentation provided to support validation and periodic review stresses the importance of ensuring the independence of external advisers and provides clear guidance related to the passage of time before previous external examiners or former members of staff could be involved in future periodic review or validation events.

68 Where a planned development has links to a PSRB representatives of the latter may be included in a validation or review panel and PSRB members may also be co-opted informally to advise review or validation panels. From the sample of validation and periodic review materials considered by the audit team it was clear that the University's requirements for the participation of external peers were invariably met in that there was always one experienced external academic present at validation and periodic events and more usually two had participated.

69 There is no requirement to include representatives of employers other than those who are members of PSRBs on Validation and Periodic Review Panels, but those supporting the development or review of vocationally-orientated provision are encouraged by the University to make contact with the relevant employer, industry or professional bodies during the drafting of the documentation. In this instance, the audit team found that the evidence for the routine participation of employers in the preparation for a validation or periodic review was more limited, but did see several examples of employer representatives being included as external advisers on periodic review events. This practice was not universal, however, even in areas with a strong vocational focus and it would now be desirable to encourage wider consideration of the merits of inviting the participation of employers in validations, periodic reviews and other aspects of its quality management arrangements.

70 Overall, the audit team found the University's guidance to its staff on the need for external participation in validation and approval and periodic review to be clear and consistent and that it had been designed to ensure that external members are independent of the University. Having reviewed the evidence made available to it, the team came to the view that the University was making strong and scrupulous use of independent external advice in validation and approval and internal periodic reviews.

External examiners and their reports

71 The SED pointed to the importance the University attaches to the work of its external examiners and expresses confidence that it makes good use of their inputs in major academic developments as well as routine operations. It also described various means by which it has sought to improve its procedures at subject, faculty and institutional level.

72 The University's overall approach to external examining is laid out in its 'Guide to External Examining', published by DAQ in 2002, and the regulations which apply to external examining are included in its Handbook & Regulations for Undergraduate Awards (published in 2004-05) and its counterpart for taught postgraduate programmes. External examiners for undergraduate programmes are appointed to SABs with responsibility for modules within a specified subject area, although the SED noted a pilot scheme designed to extend their remit to the whole programme. In addition, the University appoints senior external examiners to PABs in each faculty - formerly known as faculty ratification panels and still referred to under that name in the DAQ Guide - with a brief to review and confirm award and progression decisions, and to ensure that in their conduct the panels comply with University procedures and protocols. External examiners for taught postgraduate awards are appointed to specific postgraduate boards.

73 The appointment of external examiners is handled by the External Examiner Appointments Subcommittee of AQSC which considers nominations against stated University

criteria and conducts much of its work by means of email. Once appointed, external examiners are provided with a range of University documents including handbooks and regulations, a copy of the standard form which they will be required to complete, and information from the relevant programme or subject area. External examiners are also invited to participate in annual training days which were formerly organised at institution-level but will be organised at faculty level from 2004-05.

74 External examiners are encouraged by the DAQ Guide to comment in their reports on academic standards with reference to subject benchmark statements, the FHEQ and the requirements of PSRBs, although the standard form provided by the University does not explicitly mention any of these elements. It might now be worthwhile for the University to consider whether prompts, linked to these elements, might be included in its standard form.

75 Reports from external examiners are received centrally by DAQ on behalf of the Academic Registrar and copied to the relevant dean, and to the faculty manager, head of studies, head of quality, chair of the SAB/postgraduate board and the subject leader. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality) also reads all external examiners' reports. The University refers to this arrangement whereby reports from external examiners are considered simultaneously at University and faculty level as a 'two stream approach' (see below). The University informed the audit team that the senior external examiner in each faculty does not receive copies of the minutes of SAB for the areas which form part of their responsibilities. Senior external examiners do, however, receive all the reports from external examiners associated with the faculty. In the interests of better securing the ability of senior external examiners to perform their duties, the team urges the University to explore the possibility of providing them with copies of the minutes of SAB boards.

76 Through one of the DATs the audit team was able to follow how the University dealt with complaints from its external examiners. This matter (which is dealt with more fully in

paragraphs 225-228) had arisen from the convening of an extraordinary SAB to review progression decisions for first and second-year students in the School of Pharmacy and at which external examiners had not been present. The evidence made available to the team enabled it to establish that the complaint had been dealt with thoroughly and that the University had taken steps to satisfy itself that the academic standards of its award had not been jeopardised and that it had sought the endorsement of the senior external examiner for the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences that matters had been properly handled.

77 Within the faculties, external examiners' reports are discussed in the first instance at the relevant SAB/postgraduate board, which is expected to identify matters raised in the reports and provide responses to the faculty and the University. These responses are monitored initially at faculty level, by internal faculty groups (which operate under different titles from faculty to faculty) which are expected to read all the reports from external examiners for provision offered by the faculty, in order to identify cross-faculty themes, good practice, and matters requiring attention for report to FACs (see below).

78 At University level, reports from senior external examiners are considered by the Modular Management Group and a standing subcommittee of AQSC, the EEAG, the brief of which is to consider summaries of matters arising from the reports and areas of good practice, to audit the University's external examining arrangements, and to produce an annual report to AQSC. EEAG also monitors the work of the groups in the faculties which read the external examiners' reports and which report to FACs. In the course of 2003-04, EEAG conducted a review of the work of these faculty-level groups. It concluded that the faculties needed to respond in a more formal manner to external examiners, and recommended that the University should develop and introduce an operational statement for the faculty-level groups, aimed at promoting more timely responses to external

examiners and greater consistency of practice across the groups in the way they responded to reports from external examiners. This procedure was subsequently introduced in summer 2004.

79 In the course of the audit, it was possible to review a wide sample of external examiners' reports (including some from senior external examiners) and to observe how the University received, considered, analysed, responded to, and made use of their contents. Several of the external examiners' reports seen by the audit team related to provision, delivered in more than one location, leading to a single award. In a small number of instances there was evidence to suggest that more care might be needed to ensure that recommendations in the reports of the external examiners received attention (see below, paragraph 205). This particular matter will no doubt form part of the enquiries for the future collaborative provision audit, but the immediate concern of the team was that this did not appear to have been identified by the relevant faculty or by EEAG at University level.

80 More generally, the audit team found clear evidence of how the University sought to address matters raised by external examiners and disseminate information about good practice that the examiners had identified and, similarly, evidence of how it kept its procedures under review. The team also found evidence that the University's 'two-stream approach' to handling reports by external examiners, while ensuring comprehensive consideration of the reports, might be overly complex and could lead to confusion about who was initiating action. Further consideration of its written advice on the conduct and coordination of its 'two stream approach', to their handling of external examiners' reports might therefore be worthwhile in order to ensure clarity.

81 The University is confident that the approach it has taken to working with its external examiners is consistent with the advice offered by the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, Section 4: *External examining*, published by QAA, and the audit team was able to confirm the measures taken by

the University as recently as 2003-04 to satisfy itself on this matter. In one area, however, it appeared to the team that the guidance currently being offered to external examiners in the relevant DAQ Guide to External Examining was not in line with the spirit of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*. The version of the Guide published internally, and made available to the team, assigns to external examiners the power to adjudicate as necessary on individual cases including 'problem student cases...for example...in cases of extenuating circumstances where internal examiners are unable to agree'. The team heard that, in practice, external examiners rarely exercised the right to adjudicate, particularly with respect to extenuating circumstances, and it was subsequently informed by the University that this advice had been superseded and that the University had removed the right of external examiners to adjudicate in extenuating circumstances. On the basis that it had formed its initial view on information which it had been told was current, and which members of staff would have no reason to dispute, the team considers that it would now be wise for the University to ensure that its internal documents and web-based guidance on the roles and responsibilities of its external examiners are up to date and accurate and are consistent with the advice of the *Code of practice*. At the same time it would be advisable to ensure that its measures to maintain the currency and accuracy of its regulations and QA Guides enable it to be fully confident that staff, students and external examiners are not provided with versions of such documents which have been superseded.

82 Overall, the audit team came to the view that the University's procedures for securing and considering the views of its external examiners are generally thorough and work well at programme and institutional levels, and support broad confidence that it can safeguard the academic standards of its awards.

External reference points

83 The relevant section of the SED catalogued how each aspect of the Academic

Infrastructure has been addressed within the University and pointed to the extent to which the University was required to take account of the requirements of PSRBs, having in all 30 such bodies associated with its provision.

84 In administrative terms, DAQ is responsible for ensuring that as each Section of the *Code of practice* has been released, or updated, responsibility for considering the Section is allocated to the relevant University committee and that a named individual (the 'owner') is identified to ensure that the process is followed up and that the means of disseminating information about the Section and the University's stance are also identified. In many cases the channel for dissemination will be the faculty learning and teaching committees although, as already noted, attention to ensuring that only up-to-date information is circulated would now be wise (see above).

85 The Academic Board has considered each section of the *Code of practice* as it has been released. In each case, a comprehensive progress report table had been produced setting out how the University has checked the alignment of its own arrangements with the advice of the *Code* and providing the evidence in support of that view. The audit team was able to confirm that the University had taken a systematic approach to addressing each section of the *Code* and considering its advice. For example, the University's guidelines to its staff on judgements with respect to programme design have been adapted from the advice offered in *Section 7: Programme approval, monitoring and review*; likewise its guidance for provision incorporating work-based and distance learning shows that it has consulted the recently revised *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

86 Responsibility for ensuring that the University's portfolio of awards is aligned with the advice offered by the FHEQ again rests with the Academic Board, advised by AQSC, with the latter having required faculties to report on their monitoring of the levels of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes with respect to the advice of the FHEQ.

87 The DAQ Guide to Validations informs proposers that course documents should match the descriptors in the FHEQ but does not expand on their location or significance. Information on use of credit within the FHEQ is supplied on the University intranet but it was not clear to the audit team how far this was referred to by staff.

88 From its consideration of the University's programmes, particularly in the context of the DATs, it seemed to the audit team that they reflected the FHEQ descriptors and were broadly in accordance with the levels set out in the FHEQ although the team noted that the Handbook & Regulations for Undergraduate Awards made little mention of level descriptors, whereas its counterpart for taught postgraduate programmes did set out the level descriptors for master's-level study. The University might therefore find it helpful to consider developing the range and nature of its references to the FHEQ in its internal documentation.

89 Within the University, course templates have fulfilled much of the function of programme specifications for many years, with a primary function of supporting validation and review. Following the introduction of programme specifications the University continued with the use of the course templates, and this position was most recently reviewed by ULTC in May 2004 when it was decided to revise the course template to include reference to subject benchmark statements. The audit team was unable to establish whether the University intended to develop the course templates to facilitate their use by students and other stakeholders.

90 Until recently the course template has not required reference to relevant subject benchmarks. This deficiency was recognised by the University during the validation events associated with the migration of its portfolio to Curriculum 2004 (see above, paragraph 18) and the template has since been adapted. The SED Enhancement Plan (see above, paragraph 42) had mentioned the need to continue to raise awareness of the FHEQ and subject benchmarks for those designing and developing new provision, testifying to the

University's awareness that work needed to be done in this area. From the evidence available to the audit team, however, particularly from the DATs, it appeared to be the case that members of the University had generally engaged with the subject benchmark statements and professional reference points.

91 Overall, the audit team considered that the University's response to the *Code of practice* has been considered and systematic, helping to promote sound practice. The team could not find as much evidence of a thoroughgoing engagement with the development of the FHEQ and the aims of the programme specifications but came to the view that, taken together, the various elements of the Academic Infrastructure have been used effectively by the University to set the standards of awards at the appropriate level and to provide pertinent points of reference.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

92 Reports of subject reviews conducted by QAA are considered by the relevant faculty and at AQSC. The University's analysis of successive subject review reports has enabled it to identify positive features and weaknesses. As noted earlier, the University works with about 30 PSRBs and has developed protocols for supporting the accreditation and inspection of its provision by PSRBs which provide a consistent framework for the centre, the faculties and the departments to work closely together.

93 For each PSRB the University has designated a contact person within the relevant faculty with sufficient seniority and authority to manage contacts with the PSRB, with the assistance of DAQ which also provides support for approval and accreditation events and the development of any necessary documentation. This is considered in advance of any event by the FACs which are expected to provide feedback before the documentation is submitted to the PSRB. All reports from engagements with PSRBs are considered by AQSC together with any associated action plan to address matters requiring attention. Where substantive issues are raised in PSRB reports small working groups are

established to remedy the problems. All reports from PSRBs are seen by staff in DAQ who are responsible for advising the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality) of any need for action to be agreed with the Faculty.

94 In two of the DATs (pharmacy and architecture) the audit team was able to observe how the University's arrangements for liaison and Association with PSRBs worked in practice. In pharmacy, the team saw instances of contacts between the School of Pharmacy and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB) and noted the active encouragement of student membership of RPSGB. In other instances, however, the team noted that relations with two PSRBs had been more challenging. In psychology the University had temporarily lost and subsequently regained accreditation and in the case of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the University had achieved conditional validation and was working with the Architects Registration Board (ARB) to resolve outstanding matters (see below, paragraph 170).

95 In each case, the audit team was able to confirm that the University had investigated the circumstances thoroughly, digested the findings of the internal reports it had commissioned, including reports from AQSC task groups, and had implemented measures to ensure that professional recognition and accreditation can be maintained. The measures the University has introduced to ensure that AQSC and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality), advised by DAQ, are better informed about relations between subject areas and PSRBs, and better placed to intervene to support faculties, schools and departments have, in part, been influenced by these developments and should enable the University to be better informed about the requirements of PSRBs and relevant developments. The team encourages the University to continue the good work it has begun to enhance its capacity to oversee relations between its departments, schools and faculties and the PSRBs to which they are linked, in order to ensure that its professionally and vocationally linked provision continues to meet the requirements of the associated PSRBs.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

96 Across the University there are opportunities for students to participate in the University's deliberative arrangements from Board of Governors and Academic Board to programme and departmental level. In this connection, the audit team observed that membership of the group within the University which had prepared for the present audit and had been responsible for overseeing the development of the SED had included student representatives. In addition to the Academic Board, students attend as members of AQSC and ULTC, and student representatives form part of the membership of student appeals panels. In the SWS the SU stated its view that representation arrangements at institutional level were generally effective and described how the University encouraged the contributions of student representatives to AQSC and ULTC discussions.

97 At faculty level students have been members of FACs since 2003-04 and it is AQSC policy for these representatives to be elected from different schools or departments within each faculty. Once elected there is an expectation that student representatives should meet with the secretary of the FAC to get an introduction to the committee. The SU has welcomed this development, but it stated in the SWS that, as yet, it was too early to judge whether this measure would be successful in encouraging more effective representation of students' views at faculty level. From 2004-05 the University has resolved that the membership of each periodic review panel should include a De Montfort SU faculty representative, with the proviso that the student member should not be drawn from the department or school in which the review is located.

98 At the subject level, students are formally represented at SABs when meeting in 'management mode' (see above, paragraph 29). At the programme level, the Academic Board requires that prior to each SAB, a staff-student consultative committee (SSCC) shall have taken place. This is to ensure that 'student issues can be reported [to the SAB] in a timely fashion'. The

status of such SSCCs is enshrined in the DMU Students' Charter; however, their establishment and subsequent effectiveness would appear to be less sure. The audit team found that while there were active SSCCs for some programmes, others had either not been constituted or were not in operation and it would now be desirable for the University to clarify its requirements for the convening of staff-student consultative or liaison committees, and promulgate this to all staff and students (see below, paragraph 214). The SWS reported that 77 per cent of respondents were aware of the student representative system although only 56 per cent knew who their representative was and 55 per cent considered that the student representative system did not work. In one DAT the team found some evidence to suggest that members of SABs were questioning how relevant their meetings were to the needs of students. Comments in the SED showed that the University is aware of the students' concerns about its representation arrangements and indicated that it had begun to address them. For example, the Academic Board and AQSC have considered and adopted a paper supporting increased training and support for representatives.

99 The observations in the paragraph above should not, however, detract from the features of good practice which the audit team identified in the University's arrangements to support and extend student representation. For example, it has recently introduced an award to be made to student representatives for their contributions to SABs, based on certification of their attendance by the chair of the SAB, and a statement of the experience they have gained. In another case, the team noted that SABs set the order in which items are listed on their agendas so as to place matters immediately relevant to students near to the beginning of meetings. A third, and very effective instance of good practice, was observed by the team in the Faculty of Computing, Science and Engineering where it is the practice for the chairs of SABs and other committees to invite student representatives for coffee and a discussion of the agenda an hour before the start of each meeting. This simple but effective device was

reported by staff and students to have 'dramatically' improved patterns of attendance and participation by student representatives at meetings in the faculty.

100 At an institutional level the University has also supported an annual 'Student Rep Conference' which provides an opportunity for students' representatives to meet and question senior managers, including Pro Vice-Chancellors, the Director of Student Services and the Head of Library Services.

101 Overall, the audit team came to the view that the University provided generally effective arrangements for student representation at both institutional and local level with several features of good practice. As the University continues to strengthen its student representation arrangements, however, it might nonetheless be wise to establish the effectiveness of current representation arrangements for students studying by part-time and flexible and distance-learning modes, and to work with the SU to strengthen what are essentially sound arrangements.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

102 The University gathers feedback from its current students on their learning experience through student representatives (see above), questionnaire surveys, group discussions and one-to-one tutorial discussions. At the module level it is the University's policy to collect the views of students for all modules. To this end, the University has standardised its 'approach to module evaluation and has introduced a minimum expectation for faculties'. In adopting this approach, the University has drawn on the work of an AQSC audit subgroup which identified valuable local practices, which it then pulled together to produce a standard form for evaluation purposes. Each module is expected to collect student feedback at least yearly as part of its annual evaluation.

103 In 2003, an AQSC Student Feedback Working Group concluded that in addition to module feedback, faculties should also gather student feedback at programme level.

Acknowledging the diversity of the University's provision, however, the report of the Group did not recommend the adoption of a standard questionnaire for gathering programme-level feedback but suggested that the broad headings of the National Student Survey be followed and provided guidance for staff which drew on good practice identified in a publication of the Learning and Teaching Support Network. To support the DATs the University provided the audit team with large samples of 'raw' student feedback and the associated summaries and analyses. While the team found a variety of approaches and practices to gathering student feedback through questionnaires it had no reason to believe that any were not effective.

104 To support the production of the SWS the SU had surveyed its members experiences of using questionnaires to return feedback on their learning experiences. In this instance, 70 per cent of respondents reported that they had used questionnaires to return feedback, while 41 per cent stated that their module or programme gathered feedback through course representatives. The SWS also noted that that 'only 58% [of respondents] say their department or school ask for their opinion on modules most or all of the time, and over 71% said there could be significant improvements to this'. Again, 49 per cent of respondents considered that providing feedback made little or no difference to their learning experiences.

105 As noted earlier, one of the University's seven principles of academic quality is a commitment to 'responsiveness and resolution' and to respond 'in a timely manner to the views of all stakeholders including students, external examiners, employers and professional and statutory bodies'. From its discussions with staff and students throughout the audit, and from the University's papers which it saw, the audit team was able to confirm the vigour with which the University is working to improve the inclusiveness of its arrangements to gather feedback from its students on their learning experiences, and to report back to them on the outcomes from its consideration of their feedback. In this connection, the decision of

AQSC to extend the remit of its Student Feedback Working Group for a further two sessions, so that it can monitor progress and facilitate the sharing of good practice in gathering and acting on student feedback, is clearly prudent. The team encourages the University to continue to look for ways to redress the negative perceptions which some of its students hold of its feedback arrangements.

106 In addition to gathering feedback from students at the module and programme level the University's learning support services, including the Library Services and Information Services and Systems, routinely gather feedback from their users through questionnaires and also monitor the level at which their services are used in order to gauge the responses of students and staff to changes and improvements. These matters are considered further elsewhere in this report (see below, paragraph 142 et seq).

107 The University gathers feedback from its graduates regarding their job and further study destinations in line with the requirements of HESA and aims to use feedback from former graduates as part of its process of periodic review, although this does not always happen. The University is beginning the systematic development of relations with its alumni through its Development Office which has established a dedicated web page for this purpose and a programme of 'Alumni Relations'. It did not appear to be the case, however, that the University encouraged its present students to think of their relations with it as likely to extend throughout their careers, a move which might assist the development of an alumni association.

108 The University encourages its staff and students to make links with existing and potential future employers and it actively seeks feedback from employers, and especially those who employ its former students. As part of the steps it has taken to support the development of links with employers the University has suggested possible models that might be used at local level, such as through the appointment of one or more employers as programme advisers, through inviting employers to join SABs, or through the establishment of an

employers consultative committee or employers group forum. In view of the University's commitment to develop a strategy and policy for employability, linked to its Teaching and Learning Strategy, it might wish to consider how its engagement with the employers of its students can be made more visibly a part of its quality management arrangements.

109 In the course of the DATs the audit team was able to confirm the wide range of methods used at all levels to gather the views of employers and to seek feedback on their experiences of employing the University's former students. These included programmes of guest speakers from industry and the involvement of current employers and practitioners in programme developments. Measures to work with employers and practitioners are particularly well developed in those faculties which have developed programmes of study which make provision for practice and/or sandwich placements.

110 As an example of links with employers which have been established at the local level, the Faculty of Business and Law has set up a Work Based Learning Unit to engage with employers to encourage and support them in providing placements and to provide informal means for employers to 'network' across the University. One of the challenges for the University in its work to engage with local employers is the large number of small businesses across the region. At the time of the audit the University had embarked on a programme of inviting representatives of small businesses to visit it to discuss matters of common interest.

111 Notwithstanding the University's determined work to improve the flow of feedback information from its students, graduates and their employers, it readily acknowledges that 'there is scope to seek feedback more rigorously', and in the Enhancement Plan appended to the SED it was stated that it intends to clarify its expectations 'and promote the development of explicit policies and monitoring at faculty level'. The audit team is in no doubt that this is a serious commitment, and encourages the University in

its continuing work to secure feedback information from its stakeholders.

Progression and completion statistics

112 The 2001 report advised the University to develop its management information systems so that all users could have confidence in the data and information they provide. In the period since the continuation audit the University has invested substantially in the development of its systems, and in a suite of software tools, to enable it to extract meaningful reports from the core database it maintains of student information, and to serve the needs of a variety of audiences across the institution. In the course of the audit, the University demonstrated these tools to the audit team, which also discussed with faculties and departments how the tools and the reports they produce are used in quality and academic standards management.

113 From the sample of management information reports it viewed, and the demonstration of reporting tools it observed, it seemed to the audit team that the reports and the tools showed that the University now had the means to enable effective and suitable analyses of data to be conducted. The team also learned that a large amount of data was now provided routinely to departments and faculties, including assessment data for SABs, and data to inform the discussions of PABs.

114 There is some evidence that the University now expects SABs to use quantitative data to inform their monitoring and evaluation of the provision for which they are responsible, particularly in the area of student progression, retention and achievement. Here, the current DAQ Guide to monitoring, which covers SAB annual reports, explicitly advises the use of data drawn from SPMIS. Equivalent clear advice on the use of management information reports and statistical information has yet to be offered for those preparing for a periodic review.

115 Information gathered by the audit team in the course of the audit, including the DSEDs to support the DATs, confirms this mixed picture. In one DAT, for example, the team saw evidence of student award and progression data was

discussed at SAB meetings, and noted that module evaluation forms reported on data at the module level, although a recent SAB annual report for this area had not considered such data. Discussing this matter with members of staff, the team was told in this particular instance that they doubted the adequacy of the data provided by SPMIS, and that they preferred to generate their own data from local sources for the purpose of analysis (see below, paragraph 242).

116 A similar picture was presented by the other DAT areas; the DSEDs were variable in the level of quantitative information included, with one offering the most thorough analysis (see below, paragraph 187), and, at the other extreme, one presenting no quantitative data at all. In this latter case the audit team was told that, while data provided by the centre was now more reliable than in the past, they did not consider that it was helpfully presented and that they collected and maintained their own data on student performance independent of SPMIS.

117 The section in the SED on progression and completion statistics charted 'significant progress' in the use the University has made of statistical information at programme level. It cited as evidence the improvements in SPMIS discussed above, and secondly the findings of an audit conducted for AQSC of the extent to which SABs and PABs were using data to monitor student performance, which had identified a number of areas of good practice. At the same time, however, the SED also acknowledged the need for 'a more thorough and well-documented approach to performance analysis', and identified a number of areas for action.

118 Reviewing the range and power of the tools now available to staff across the University to support quality and academic standards management, the audit team came to the view that the University's arrangements in this area now constitute a feature of good practice. As yet, however, it has not achieved the cultural change among its staff which will be necessary if they are to take full advantage of this enhancement. For as long as staff at subject level continue to doubt the quality of the data provided centrally, and prefer to generate their

own information, the University will not be able to obtain full value from its investment in the development of SPMIS, and variability of practice in the analysis and presentation of student progression, completion and achievement will continue. The team therefore suggests that it would now be desirable for the University to consider what steps might be needed to ensure that staff across the institution make use of the facilities available through SPMIS. The University might also wish to consider the desirability of providing its staff with training to support the greater use of statistical information in securing academic standards and managing the quality of modules and programmes.

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

119 The SED identified staff as 'the University's most important resource' and identified the recruitment and retention of high-quality staff as 'an institutional priority'. Accordingly, the University's Human Resources Strategy is designed to support the recruitment and retention of staff who are committed to its vision and delivery of that vision. The SED coupled the University's recruitment and retention of 'high quality staff' with its commitment 'to quality higher education underpinned by research' adding that 'DMU sustains a flourishing research environment that enables the University to attract staff whose teaching practice is informed by their own scholarly enquiry'.

120 Members of staff participating in the work of interview and selection panels are required to have participated in formal training and there are regular refresher courses. The University's appointment processes for its teaching staff provide for the selection process to include a teaching presentation and/or lecture by interviewees. The SED stated that the University sought to attract applicants from a diverse range of backgrounds in line with its Diversity Strategy. It acknowledged that there was scope for the University to use human resources monitoring statistics more critically to evaluate the effectiveness of its human resources policies.

121 It is usually the case that new members of the teaching staff are appointed as probationers, typically for between one and two years, before confirmation of their appointments. Confirmation of appointments has been devolved to faculty level and is based on criteria developed for use institution-wide by the University.

122 Newly-appointed staff are provided with an extensive information pack, which is available on the intranet, and those with little prior experience in teaching in higher education are required to participate in a centrally provided induction programme which includes a three day 'Introduction to Learning and Teaching'. This induction programme, which is offered three times each session by the University's APDU, has been accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and there are opportunities to progress from this initial training to a programme of studies which leads to a master's award in Learning and Teaching. Staff are supported by the payment of fees for these and other continuing professional development programmes, and the University pays the initial fees of staff wishing to join the HEA. Newly appointed part-time staff, including graduate research students who have been appointed to teach undergraduates are required to undertake a specified training programme to prepare them for teaching and demonstration.

123 Staff in the first years of their careers who met the audit team spoke enthusiastically about the level of support which they had received including formal and informal mentoring and opportunities for staff development. The University has identified that in some of its departments, schools and faculties, practice in induction and mentoring is outstanding but recognises that this is an area where there is considerable variation in practice and this is an area where it plans to introduce greater central direction through its Human Resources Department (see below, paragraph 131).

124 Members of staff may be promoted on the grounds of teaching, learning and scholarship, or research and professional practice and the promotion and advancement of staff is normally undertaken at faculty level by faculty

promotions committees which make recommendations to the Vice-Chancellor. Procedures for the conduct of faculty promotion committees are published on the University's intranet. Promotions to professorial positions are decided by panels the membership of which comprises senior internal and external staff who are active researchers.

125 The University has a system of annual appraisal linked to a teaching observation scheme. Despite clear and well-documented procedures there appeared to be some shortcomings in this system: a recent survey established that slightly more than half of the staff had undergone appraisals and a report to ULTC in 2004 confirmed that practice for the observation of teaching varied between the faculties. An item in the SED Enhancement Plan, acknowledged the scope that existed 'to strengthen the arrangements and responsibilities for monitoring and evaluation of appraisal and to establish a stronger link between appraisal and staff development'.

126 Across the University, teaching excellence is rewarded through a 'Teacher Fellowship Scheme' which was commended in the 2001 report. It has subsequently been reviewed and a new approach developed in which, the University believes, clearer mechanisms have been introduced to ensure that good practice is disseminated and that the award of teacher fellowships is subject to equal opportunities and other monitoring. At the time of the audit there were 19 Teacher Fellows in post, five of whom had also been awarded National Teaching Fellowships. The SED noted that the University had recently introduced the 'Vice Chancellor's distinguished teaching awards, team awards and awards for teaching innovation' to commence in 2004-05. The team was interested to note that students can nominate staff for these latter awards.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

127 The University's view is that while its approaches to providing training and development for its staff are generally appropriate, it now needs to 're-balance local management and central support for training

and development and appraisal in order to provide a greater central lead'.

128 In part, this review of the balance of responsibilities between the centre of the University and the faculties appears to have stemmed from the outcomes of a 2003 survey of staff opinion, which had suggested that while staff found the support they received at local level satisfactory, and were likewise confident with communication at that level, this confidence did not extend to institution-level arrangement and communications. The reports of this survey cited, among other observations, 'the perception that consultation takes place on decisions that have already been made'. In addition to this internal feedback, the audit team was also made aware of a January 2005 press release from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) reporting on an investigation by the Executive into a complaint of work-related stress at the University's Bedford and Leicester campuses. The Executive had subsequently reported that the University had responded positively to this matter.

129 In the course of the visit the audit team discussed the findings of the 2003 staff opinion survey and the 2005 HSE report with members of the University. It was told that measures had been taken to address the difficulties identified through both exercises, and saw evidence of the staff development provision which had been agreed with the HSE to address these matters.

130 Across the University, other staff development measures to support a number of institution-wide strategies and policies are provided from several different departments depending on the needs of the staff (see below). Several programmes of staff development are provided specifically for teaching and support staff based at the University's Bedford campus, and while the University recognises the need to provide staff development opportunities for those who are based on each of the campuses, in practice, the greater part of the available staff development opportunities are provided in Leicester. The University may wish to consider the desirability of ensuring that staff based in Bedford have

access to staff development opportunities which are equivalent to those available for their peers who are based in Leicester.

131 In addition to staff development opportunities provided by the University at Leicester and Bedford, each faculty has staff development funds which can be deployed in support of its own staff development priorities. Similarly, some decisions about what staff development should be made available are taken by schools and departments. This distribution of responsibilities for staff support and development across central departments and faculties has resulted in inconsistencies and shortfall in the availability of staff development provision which the University has decided to tackle through providing 'a greater central lead'. At the time of the audit the Department of Human Resources had only recently assumed responsibility for the coordination of staff development provision and it was, as yet, too soon to judge whether this will satisfactorily address the challenges the University has identified in this area. No doubt it will continue to monitor developments closely.

132 Members of the teaching and support staff have access to a wide range of staff development provision to support their teaching and learning support activities. Support for staff development linked to the University's quality management and academic standards arrangements is provided under the auspices of Human Resources by DAQ, which offers development sessions for academic and support staff. Other programmes to support developments in teaching and learning (including e-learning) are available to academic, administrative and learning support staff.

133 The SED drew the audit team's attention to the University's provision of a programme of professional development for its senior and middle managers: 'The Leadership and Management Programme' although the details were readily available on the University's intranet. The team discussed this programme with deans, heads of departments and senior administrators who had first-hand experience of its benefits. They spoke highly of their experience, and from

the programme on the University's intranet it appeared to the team to provide a flexible and extensive framework of learning opportunities, with elements of bespoke programmes using external consultants, peer support groups and workshops. It also appeared to the team to offer the University a useful opportunity for succession planning. In the light of the content of the programme, its flexible organisation and the positive expressions of those who had benefited from it, the team came to the view that the programme represented a feature of good practice.

134 Members of the teaching staff who wish to supervise research students are required to follow a training programme in research supervision which leads to a certificated award. This programme is designed to meet the needs of new supervisors and to provide an opportunity to update those who have been supervising research students for some time. No member of staff, however experienced, can take on a research student before completing the course or attending a regular update. The audit team discussed the content of this programme with a group of staff supervising research students who strongly endorsed its usefulness. Again, having viewed the content of the programme and discussed its features with staff who had undertaken it, the team considers that it can be considered a feature of good practice.

135 Overall, the University has identified a challenging agenda for itself in staff development and human resources management more generally which, when successfully completed, will enable it to continue to underpin its capacity to provide its staff with the training and development opportunities they require to support its educational activities.

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

136 The University is in the early stages of a four-year strategy for the development of e-learning, which the SED acknowledged was still in its developmental stages. A project management group was initially established to

support the development of this initiative which subsequently evolved into an 'E-Learning Project Group', which reports to ULTC. The University considers that the successful implementation of its e-learning strategy is integral to the success and future development of its learning and teaching strategy overall, and the progress of the former is being actively monitored by ULTC with the assistance of faculty LTCs. As part of its evidence to support the SED the University provided the team with the implementation plan which it has developed for e-learning which is mirrored within each faculty which provides a useful checklist to guide staff in the development of e-learning programmes.

137 The University has purchased a proprietary VLE and is developing a managed learning environment (MLE). A central feature of the University's e-learning strategy is to provide suitable development programmes for staff to enable them to make use of these opportunities for providing learning and support materials to students. The management of sections of the VLE has been devolved to faculty 'Learning and Teaching Coordinators' and 'E-Learning Coordinators'. The University's monitoring of progress to date as it has rolled out its VLE suggests that resistance to the take-up of e-learning, where it exists, is located at programme level; hence, a large part of the University's staff development provision to underpin e-learning has been targeted on this area. At the time of the audit visit a third of all modules were reported to be supported by the VLE and about half of the University's students were again reported to participate in some form of e-learning.

138 The University's work to develop its MLE is student-focused and aims to provide users with individual access to a range of academic, support and social information tailored to their needs and their faculty and/or campus location. The support the system provides is made available to full and part-time students and can be adjusted for special needs. The audit team was told that about 12,000 students and 500 staff currently used the MLE. Students with whom the audit team discussed their access to

and use of the VLE and MLE reported problems in gaining access to their marks through these means in the previous session, but told the team that steps had subsequently been taken to address this matter and that there had been no recurrence in the current session.

139 For new provision which includes e-learning, or delivery by means of flexible and/or distributed methods, the University expects the validation panel to refer to the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, and it also expects at least one member of the panel to have expertise in this area. In addition to the normal requirements for a new programme, for provision intended to be delivered by distance learning, the proposing team is expected to provide full versions of the learning material for half of the first year of the programme.

140 From its consideration of the University's papers, and its discussions with members of staff, the audit team learned that faculties had recently been required to review any distance learning materials with reference to the *Code of practice, Section 2* and that the University was actively looking for instances of good practice in e-learning for institution-wide dissemination, in part through the involvement of Teaching Fellows and the provision of further staff development opportunities. The team was interested to learn that the University sought to involve students in developing e-learning in some faculty groups and that their feedback on their e-learning experiences was sought via SABs, SSCCs and at faculty LTCs. Members of staff told the University that migration to Curriculum 2004 had required one Faculty, Art and Design, to make a specific commitment to introduce e-learning despite the difficulties that this would present.

141 Overall, the audit team came to the view that the University was taking appropriate steps to manage the quality of learning and teaching provided through e-learning, the VLE and the MLE.

Learning support resources

142 The University's key physical learning support resources comprise its estates, Library Services and information and communication technologies (ICT) provision. The University's measures to develop its MLE and VLE are considered in paragraphs 136-137. Whether learning takes place face-to-face or virtually, the University is committed to maintaining, monitoring and enhancing its learning resource provision as a number of previous external reviews undertaken by QAA have recognised.

143 The SED stated that since the publication of the 2001 report the University had made considerable progress towards the consolidation of its academic provision on its campuses in Leicester and Bedford, including through the closure of sites in Milton Keynes and Lincoln. Improvements to the University's estate include the construction of a new library at Bedford and of a new Campus Centre building at the Leicester City campus.

144 The aim of the University's Library Service is to underpin the educational activities of the University 'through support for learning, teaching and research'. The University benchmarks its library provision against national standards and this information, together with student feedback, convinced it in 2001 that additional investment in text books and journals was required. Subsequently, the University has increased the annual budget of Library Services and made substantial investments in the construction, refurbishment and extension of library facilities in Bedford and Leicester. The continuing ability of Library Services to meet the needs of students is regularly monitored by means of student satisfaction surveys and through regular reports to UTLC.

145 The SED stated that the Library Service worked closely 'with the Faculties to ensure its resources are matched to academic activity'. Members of the Service participate as members of panels in validations and attend key faculty committees such as SABs, LTCs and FACs. The University's internal periodic reviews provide it with a steady stream of information against

which to gauge the adequacy of the library resources required to support learning and teaching. Where a periodic review identifies deficiencies in the current or likely future learning resources for a subject area or programme (including library resources), measures to redress this will form part of the action plan linked to the periodic review report. Progress with the implementation of action plans is monitored at subject level by the SABs, at faculty level by the relevant FAC and at University level by AQSC.

146 The SWS reported that students were generally satisfied with the library's provision of books, the availability of silent study space and access to PCs. Members of staff and students who discussed learning resources with the audit team generally echoed the positive statements of the SWS and SED. Students based at Bedford, however, noted that their access to library facilities there were less satisfactory than for their peers in Leicester, because of differences in the opening hours on the two campuses. The University may wish to consider the desirability of ensuring that students have access to equivalent learning resources across its campuses.

147 The University's Information Services and Systems is responsible for the institution's centrally provided ICT infrastructure and provides specialist facilities in consultation with the faculties. As with its library provision, the University uses national benchmarks to establish the adequacy of its expenditure on ICT, which it is satisfied is in line with the expenditure of comparable institutions.

148 The University's strategy for ICT is overseen by the Information Services and Systems Committee which is also responsible for ensuring that the strategy links to other University plans. The SED noted that the University had made substantial investments in its ICT provision in recent years and that this had been augmented by funding by HEFCE and through the Joint Information Systems Committee. As with the University's library provision, the SWS was largely complimentary about the level of ICT support available to students and the adequacy of ICT to support

subject areas and programmes is regularly tested through periodic review.

149 On the basis of the evidence presented in the SED and accompanying documentation together with its discussions with staff and students, the audit team came to the view that, in overall terms, the University's measures to monitor and manage the learning support resources which it makes available to staff and students are effective and enable it to provide suitable learning opportunities for its students to pursue their studies.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

150 The University regards academic staff as the primary source of support for students but provides additional support through faculty-based Student Advice Centres (SACs), the Department of Library Services, and the Student Learning Advisory Service (SLAS). SACs are well-established across the University and offer practical advice on academic matters, sometimes referring students on for specialist counselling. The Humanities Faculty has chosen to supplement this support through its own Faculty Academic Guidance Centre.

151 The responsibility of supporting students in PDP, which was introduced for first-year students in 2004-05, rests with personal tutors. Since September 2004 a PDP home page has been available on the University's MLE, which provides students with information on the use of personal development records, as well as links to support material.

152 SLAS is a small central team which works directly with students and through staff development, with its focus on key skills. It provides support for students with dyslexia and other learning needs and additional support in information technology and mathematics. An educational psychologist works through the Dyslexia Centre and with students in order to develop support mechanisms appropriate to their needs.

153 SLAS is responsible for conducting self-assessment exercises for new students which

measure their levels of confidence in the study skills they have on entering higher education. Some 50 per cent of students participate in this exercise, which has recently been extended to include a number of taught postgraduate and distance-learning students. In order to strengthen links between SLAS and the faculties members of the Service attend each of the faculty LTCs.

154 The SED noted that support and training for postgraduate research students is provided by a combination of generic courses, offered centrally, and faculty subject-specific courses and stated that the University adheres to the specific training requirements of particular funding bodies. Some faculties have developed handbooks for research students, and a review of research degrees undertaken in 2004 recommended that the University develops a policy on the production of handbooks for research students and that the Handbook produced by the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences should be used as a model. Research students who met the audit team spoke positively of the support they had received from the Research Office.

155 In general, students who met the audit team had yet to be convinced of the benefits of PDP although students in pharmacy who met the team in the course of the DAT, were positive about the links between PDP and continuing professional development. Nevertheless, they were generally happy about levels of academic support, valuing the work of the SACs in general, and the Humanities Faculty Academic Guidance Centre in particular.

Personal support and guidance

156 The 2001 report identified scope for improving the understanding and monitoring of the University's support arrangements for students which then revolved around a 'mentoring' system and in 2002 the University adopted the term 'personal tutor' in place of 'mentor' which is now reserved to describe student support in work environments such as teaching and nursing. The SED noted that each student following a taught programme was now assigned to a personal tutor, whose responsibilities for providing academic support

have been broadly defined by the University, leaving room for local variations to accommodate the needs of specific disciplines or professional programmes.

157 FACs are responsible for overseeing personal tutor arrangements within their respective faculties and, from 2004-05, for preparing an annual evaluation for ULTC of how personal tutoring (including PDP) is working for full and part-time undergraduate, taught postgraduate and distance-learning students in the faculty. The SED acknowledged that the University was proceeding 'with deliberation during the early stages of the implementation of PDP in order to ensure that staff and students share [its] commitment' to its promotion. Learning support staff told the audit team they believed the introduction of PDP had helped to formalise and 'sharpen' the personal tutor system.

Collaborative provision

158 The University's partnership provision including its participation in consortia will be the subject of a future audit.

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

Discipline audit trails

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

Architecture

160 All the provision considered within the DAT is located within the Leicester School of Architecture (the School), which is part of the University's Department of Product and Spatial Design which, in turn, is in the Faculty of Art and Design. Professionally based architecture courses

include: BA (Hons) in Architecture (three years full time) with exemption from the RIBA Part 1 examinations; BArch (Hons) in Architecture (two years full-time preceded by a year in practice), with RIBA Part 2 exemption; Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice (full and part-time) with exemption from RIBA Part 3 examinations. The Commonwealth Association of Architects also accredits the Part 2 programmes. The RIBA Part 3 Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice is run in collaboration with the University of Nottingham and the University of Sheffield. The BSc (Hons) Architectural Design Technology and Production is accredited by the British Institute of Architectural Technologists (now the Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists (CIAT)). The scope of the DAT also included an MA in Architectural Conservation which was referred to in the DSED provided by the School. No students have registered for this latter programme, however, and it is currently in abeyance.

161 At the time of the audit the BArch (Hons) in Architecture had replaced a former Graduate Diploma in Architecture (full-time) and a Diploma in Architecture (part-time). Several students who had deferred their studies were registered for the final year of the full-time programme, and the final year of the part-time programme was being offered in the course of the 2004-05 session. The BA (Hons) in Architectural Studies is offered as an exit award for those students who fail to meet RIBA assessment standards. Entry to this programme is only open to BA (Hons) in Architecture students who 'meet the generic degree standards of the University, but not the additional criteria required by the professional and statutory body'.

162 The DSED provided by the School comprised an overview of the architecture provision together with a discussion of the RIBA validation of Part 1, 2 and 3, the 'prescription' (see below) by the ARB and the reports of an internal periodic review of the University's architecture provision which had been conducted in summer 2004.

163 Course templates, which serve as programme specifications across the University,

were provided for each of the programmes and awards listed in paragraph 159, above. All appeared to have been developed and approved with due regard to advice offered by the FHEQ. The course templates seen by the audit team made no reference to the relevant *Subject benchmark statement* for architecture, architectural technology and landscape architecture, and the professional body benchmarks of the BIAT, RIBA and ARB. On this matter, evidence from other papers provided by the School suggested to the team that staff were aware of such guidance and referred to it, including the wider guidance offered throughout the Academic Infrastructure and the professional body benchmarks, and the University has now required that the course templates be updated to include these external reference points. It appeared to be the case to the team that the School's current course templates provided generally accurate and helpful advice on curriculum content, and teaching learning and assessment requirements and criteria.

164 Progression and completion data are regularly considered as part of the annual review process that is associated with programme journals and by SABs operating in management mode. Hitherto, the focus appears to have been on individual modules and groups of courses, although this is likely to change with 'Curriculum 2004' with its stronger and more deliberate focus on programmes of studies. A programme-based examination board is being piloted in the School with what is termed by the University, a 'unitary board'. This is one of two trials within the University for PABs that deal with 'ring-fenced' programmes, where all modules are offered only within a specified programme, with the intention, it seemed to the audit team, to enable unitary boards to assume the key functions of an SAB and a PAB.

165 Although the School stores enrolment and progression data across its undergraduate and postgraduate provision, this does not appear to be recorded in a wholly consistent manner from one programme to programme and the audit team noted that this had also been the case for the data sets provided to support the University's internal periodic review of

architecture in 2004. It seemed to the team, therefore, that there were opportunities within the School to improve the systematic and detailed reporting of assessment outcomes and trends, particularly with the increased availability of data from SPMIS.

166 Overall, the majority of undergraduate students who complete the first year of their studies in the School go on to secure an honours award. From the data available, however, it appeared that while student progression for the BA (Hons) in Architecture was comparable to that for like institutions, the number of students failing to proceed from level 1 to level 2 remained a challenge for the School. Some staff have expressed concerns that student attendance is being affected by the students' need to take on paid employment during term-time while in full-time study.

167 Attendance and progression difficulties from level 1 to level 2 for the BSc (Hons) Architectural Design Technology and Production have also been reported and the programme team is consequently devoting increased attention to the selection and support of full-time entrants. In this respect, the University's recent commitment to interview all intending students might also be helpful. Progression and completion date for the Part 2 BArch (Hons) in Architecture and its forerunner the Graduate Diploma in Architecture (full-time), for the Diploma in Architecture (part-time), and for the Part 3 Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice (part-time), all appeared to the audit team to be satisfactory or better.

168 The University's architecture provision was most recently reviewed internally in June 2004. The scope of this review largely coincided with that specified for the DAT. The panel which had conducted the University's review had been chaired by an Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor and other members included three external advisers and two members of the Faculty outside the School. Although the review process demonstrated the University's concern to secure external participation, it seemed to the audit team that it might have been more appropriate for the two 'internal' members of the panel to

have been drawn from outside the Faculty, not least to facilitate dissemination of information about good practice.

169 The report of the internal periodic review had commented favourably on the appropriateness of the course templates and learning outcomes; learning opportunities; resource provision; course management and quality assurance for the University's architecture provision, and had identified a number of areas of good practice, including the School's development of a successful 'studio culture' and information technology strategy. The review report also noted that the School had achieved 'the implementation and operation of updated course structures under Curriculum 2004 one year ahead of the [University's deadline], without detriment to students or the quality of the provision'; that it was providing good tutorial support to students and that 'excellent' feedback had been received from current and former students.

170 The review report also recounted the School's responses to difficulties it had experienced in meeting the requirements of the ARB and RIBA. These had followed a joint RIBA/ARB visit in February 2002 to review and renew the validation (RIBA) and prescription (ARB) of Parts 1, 2 and 3 of the University's architecture provision and the periodic review report recognised the work the School had since done to renew its staffing, including the appointment of a new Head within the newly-formed Department of Product and Spatial Design.

171 The outcome of the ARB and RIBA review had been the 'conditional validation' of Part 1 and Part 2, and the unconditional approval of the Part 3 provision. RIBA's concerns appeared to the audit team to have revolved around the titles of the architecture programmes, their curriculum content, and assessment practices. Specifically, RIBA had expressed concern that some students might be awarded an unclassified degree, the title of which would be indistinguishable from that of the classified honours award. RIBA had therefore made it a condition of its validation of the architecture provision that the School work with an adviser to address these matters and

develop an action plan.

172 In response to these concerns, the School developed a programme of studies leading to a BA (Hons) in Architectural Studies for those students who had satisfied the University's degree requirements but who had not met the requirements of the ARB and RIBA in terms of module performance. A pointer to the success of the School's work to satisfy the requirements of RIBA is the latter's restoration of validation following a visit in summer 2004, subject to standard formal requirements. At the time of the audit an application had been made to ARB for full prescription of Part 1 and Part 2 of the Architecture provision, the outcome of which was not due to be decided until later in 2005. Students successfully completing the BA (Hons) architecture and the BArch (Hons) Architecture can nonetheless apply on an individual basis to the ARB for registration, with the support of the School. Part 3 architecture provision remains fully prescribed by ARB.

173 The School monitors the academic well-being of its modules through annual module evaluations which enable it to capture assessment outcomes, comment on the subject matter and teaching together with feedback from students. This is done using a standard reporting format. The audit team sampled a range of module evaluations from the material provided to support the DAT. These showed that the evaluations provide much helpful information. In using student feedback information, however, the School relies on those leading individual modules to summarise the key themes from students' feedback. This has caused no obvious difficulties to date, but the team considered that it might be wise to arrange for staff with no personal interest in the findings of the feedback to carry out any associated collation and analysis.

174 As part of the DAT, the audit team reviewed reports from external examiners for all architecture and architectural design technology and production provisions received by the University in the two most recent sessions. Overall, the external examiners had confirmed that the academic standards of the relevant awards were in line with their

expectations, that marking and grading had been carried out fairly, and at the appropriate level, and that students were well supported. With respect to the RIBA Part 3 Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice, offered in collaboration with the University of Nottingham and the University of Sheffield, the external examiners suggested that it would 'be useful to review the feedback of the other Universities to ensure that standards are similar', a matter which the University has no doubt considered it wise to take up with its collaborators.

175 The audit team reviewed a sample of student work for all years of the undergraduate and postgraduate courses. It noted that the School's approach to the assessment of studio-based work for the architecture programmes should be marked by members of staff working in pairs, more commonly in threes and sometimes in fours. From the sample of marked and moderated work it saw it was clear to the team that essays and dissertations were double-marked and that staff provided helpful and constructive feedback to students. For the architecture provision this includes extensive formative feedback as project based work develops over the year. This was not the case, however, for the Architectural Design Technology and Production provision, where feedback was substantially summative. Students with whom the team discussed the provision of feedback on their assessed work indicated that in some cases it was not always returned promptly, a matter which the School might wish to consider, particularly with the adoption of year-long modules under Curriculum 2004. Students confirmed to the team that they had received clear advice from the School on its policies regarding plagiarism.

176 In addition to course templates, students in the School receive course handbooks. In all cases, while the handbooks differed in style, all were found to be helpful and clearly presented. Students who met the audit team stated that they found the handbooks a good source of guidance on all matters relating to their respective programmes and the University in general. They observed that they dipped into the handbooks as the need arose.

177 Students who met the audit team considered that the library stock and computer-aided design facilities available to them were very good, and that the School's accommodation for teaching and studio work was satisfactory, a view shared by staff. Students warmly praised the support they received through the specialist information centre which is available to them, although external examiners have queried the impact on staff-student communications of the physical separation between staff offices and the (student) studio areas. There was a general sense among the students who met the team that the learning environment available in the School had steadily improved in the last two sessions, and singled out for praise the beneficial effects of the appointment of two new members of staff.

178 All undergraduate students in the School are allocated to a personal tutor, but students told the audit team that the friendly and approachable nature of the staff enabled them to speak to most members of staff if they encountered difficulties. A work placement constitutes a significant feature of the architecture provision and occurs at the end of the BA (Hons) in Architecture RIBA Part 1. The placement is for a period of one year and forms part of RIBA Part 2 studies. Students with whom the team discussed the School's arrangements to support their placements were generally satisfied with its organisation. The School does not allocate taught postgraduate students to a specific personal tutor, the programme team having agreed to share this responsibility. At present the small size of the postgraduate student body ensures that this is an acceptable arrangement.

179 In the course of its discussions with students in the School, the audit team was told that the additional costs of tools and materials, which are considered necessary to undertake the practical elements of the architecture courses, were not made sufficiently clear in University promotional material. This matter has also been raised by design students through student representatives on the SAB. The University might therefore wish to consider

whether the addition of some clearer statement on the cost of tools and materials for students entering such provision might now be helpful.

180 Students who met the audit team confirmed generally that students were aware of their representation on formal committees. In addition to formal representation on SABs, some programmes also have established staff-student liaison committees. The BA (Hons) in Architecture operates an active series of four staff-student liaison meetings per annum which presents a healthy contrast to arrangements some years ago, when only one such meeting was held throughout the year. The team noted that in this instance it is the programme team's practice to hold a staff-student liaison committee meeting prior to a SAB, so that student related matters can be taken forward for further consideration where appropriate. Such good arrangements did not appear to the team to be operating uniformly across the School; for example, staff-student liaison or consultation committee arrangements do not appear to have been introduced for students following the BSc (Hons) Architectural Design Technology and Production. The absence of such arrangements have been the focus of critical comments from external examiners in the past, for example, when students were held to have not been properly informed of the withdrawal of ARB prescription.

181 Some students in the School who met the audit team commented that the small size of their programmes made the need for formal representation arrangements unnecessary. Nonetheless, the University may wish to consider how formal means of representation, whether by staff-student liaison or consultative committees, without being unduly burdensome, could be extended to all students in the interests of fairness and equality of access to representation.

182 Overall, the audit team came to the view that the quality of the learning opportunities is suitable for programmes of study leading to the awards listed in paragraph 160 above.

Computing

183 The scope of the DAT comprised programmes in computing leading to the

following awards: HNC/HND Computing; HNC/HND Business Information Technology; BSc/HND Computing; BSc/HND Business Information Technology; BSc Software Engineering; BSc Computer Science; BSc Computer Science (part-time); BSc Computing (joint); BSc (Hons) Internet Computing; BSc Business Information Systems; MSc Bioinformatics; MSc Computational Intelligence and Robotics; MSc Computing; MSc Distributed Systems Integration; MSc Information Systems Management; MSc Information Technology. Of the above, the BSc/HND Computing is a 180-credit programme which the University is currently running out.

184 All the provision included within the DAT is delivered by the School of Computing which is located within the University's Faculty of Computing Sciences and Engineering. There are 1,566 undergraduate, 92 taught and 86 research postgraduate students studying through full-time, sandwich and part-time modes with the School.

185 The DSED provided to support the DAT included a review of the taught and research postgraduate provision which had been specially prepared and an internal document which had served as the SED to support an internal periodic review of the undergraduate computing subject area. The report of the periodic review of computing and the improvement plan were made available during the audit visit.

186 Course templates were also provided for provision leading to the awards listed in paragraph 183 above. These set out the aims, outcomes and content of each programme and are the equivalent for the University of programme specifications. The course templates also provide information on course structure, regulations, teaching, learning and assessment strategies, learning outcomes and most include references to sources of support available to students. The DSED indicated the School's view that learning outcomes map closely to the advice offered in the *Subject benchmark statement* for computing, and that programmes are designed in line with the FHEQ. External panel members who had participated in the

recent internal periodic review of computing supported this view, which is consistent with the observations of the audit team.

187 Progression and completion data were presented within the DSED documentation. Originally this data had been collected and presented by the School. The audit team was interested to note, however, that growing confidence in the University's SPMIS was encouraging the greater use of the data and tools provided centrally. Non-completion rates for the School vary from programme to programme but match the pattern for computing provision nationally for like institutions.

188 As noted in paragraph 29, the volume of provision for which the Computing SAB has responsibility has led to the designation of a number of 'sub-SABs', referred to in the Faculty as CABs. Reports on student progression and completion are discussed at the CABs, which deal with groups of programmes leading to related award titles, and at meetings of the Computing SAB, operating in management mode. There was evidence from the minutes of these meetings that matters and actions related to progression are identified and monitored. The audit team agreed with the view of the Academic Standards Audit Group in its 2004 papers that the Faculty had established a comprehensive reporting structure for communication of issues from CAB level, up through the SAB to faculty-wide committees. The team would, however, encourage the School and Faculty to consider the potential to make more use of the trend and other data analysis tools now provided as part of SPMIS.

189 Each programme (course) leader maintains a programme journal which is presented to the SAB. The programme journal contributes to the FAC report which in turn is presented for consideration at AQSC. The journal identifies student, external examiner and staff matters and good practice related to the operation of the provision. In addition, the programme journal identifies actions and responsibilities required to address course and module matters.

190 The programme journals do not routinely address progression and completion at module

or course level but, as noted elsewhere in this report, the University has recently introduced a SAB annual report and the Computing SAB had taken part in the pilot exercise. A copy of the report was provided to support the DAT in which a section provided information on progression and completion. While recognising the developmental nature of this report, the audit team encourages the School to look at how it might provide more detailed analysis for individual programmes within the SAB annual report.

191 External involvement is a major feature of the University's periodic review process and the audit team noted that the panel which had conducted the recent internal review of computing had included two external academics together with academic staff from other faculties. The outcomes of the periodic review seem to the team to be a fair reflection of the evidence provided to support the review. The report of the review had identified that the School should consider the ways in which the views of employers and industry can be more formally integrated into the development of existing and prospective computing programmes. The team encourages the University to disseminate information on the items identified in the review report as demonstrating good practice and to follow up the matters for consideration.

192 Within the Faculty, reports from external examiners are widely disseminated and considered; formal responses are made by the Dean and the Head of School. Reports and responses are monitored by CABs and the SAB. The external examiners' reports the audit team saw confirmed that the CABs and the SAB were operated fairly and efficiently. Several reports did, however, criticise the restricted availability of module marks for meetings of the SAB, which they linked to the existence of several very heavily subscribed modules and the brief period allowed for marking between the conduct of examinations, and the meetings of the SAB. They noted that this required an undue number of matters to be dealt with by action of the Chair of the Board. While the external examiners had emphasised that they

believed that such matters had been dealt with fairly, the team advises the University to consider how to ensure that SABs follow consistent procedures when dealing with missing marks, and to consider how the conduct of its assessment processes might be arranged to lessen the need to progress to students through extraordinary measures, including 'chair's action'. From its discussions with members of staff in the course of the DAT and from the supporting papers made available by the School and Faculty, the team was able to confirm that recommendations for action from external examiners have led to timely action.

193 Samples of student work submitted for assessment were provided for the audit team. These indicated that the tasks set for students were well matched to the assessment strategies set out in the relevant module. From its consideration of marked and moderated student work, the team was able to confirm that examination scripts and coursework had been subject to moderation in line with University policy. Some parts of the sample of assessed student work provided, however, related to earlier sessions where it was not always evident that moderation had taken place. This matter had been raised by an external examiner in his report and the School had responded by adopting arrangements developed elsewhere in the Faculty to ensure that records of moderation were kept. In all cases, the examples of assessed work seen by the team matched the expectations set out in the course templates. The team was able to confirm that the standard of student achievement was consistent with the titles of the awards listed in paragraph 183 and likewise matched the levels of achievement indicated in the FHEQ.

194 Students who met the audit team stated that they were generally content with the nature and quality of feedback they received on their assessed work, but observed that it could vary from lecturer to lecturer. Similarly, the students indicated that the timeliness of the return of feedback on assessment might also vary. The periodic review of computing identified that there was a need for the school

to achieve a more consistent approach to the provision of feedback to students on their work. Following the periodic review the School has also recognised that there is a need to monitor and detect plagiarism more actively and has begun to use viva voce assessments more widely across modules.

195 Practice regarding student handbooks for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes varies: postgraduate students receive a programme-specific handbook while, at present, undergraduate students currently receive a faculty handbook for each level of their programme. In the latter case, each set of information contains details of programme aims, assessment processes, regulations, module descriptors, representation arrangements and the responsibilities of students. This present format is being changed so that each student will receive a handbook matched to their programme, in line with the University's move away from module-focused delivery. The undergraduate handbook was supplemented by a web-based facility operated by the course leader which provided clear, summarised and helpful information on course and module choice for second and third-year students. The students spoke appreciatively of this and of the other information the School provides for them.

196 The personal tutor system operated by the School is consistent with the University's expectations. The School has implemented the University's scheme of PDP supported by on-line software and recording tools. Members of the School told the audit team that they were aware of plans to harmonise the PDP support across the University. Students commented favourably on the level of personal support and guidance available from academic staff and considered that if they encountered difficulties the assistance available to them would not be limited to the support of their personal tutor.

197 The School provides specialised facilities for teaching and learning support for its students and staff and is also able to call on University provision. Students have access to substantial ICT provision within the School, in addition to computer resources available through the

Faculty and library. Students confirmed their ready access to these facilities and to specialist software when required. Students were less complimentary when describing the age of some of the book stock and access to particular on-line research sources available to them in the University's library. From the information provided it seemed to the audit team that the means available to the School to monitor the learning support arrangements for its students were, however, generally effective.

198 Students' representatives attend CABs and the Computing SAB (sitting in management mode) as well as the FAC. The School is of the view that it has managed to improve student representation significantly and that it now works well, with representatives regularly seeking the views of their constituencies prior to meetings and feeding back to them afterwards. The introduction of informal meetings with senior members of the School and Faculty over coffee, prior to formal meetings, and at the start of the session was reported to have improved the quality and quantity of the students' participation in meetings and the feedback they provide to other students. This seemed to the team to be a feature of good practice which is worth further notice. Students who met the team confirmed the effectiveness of the School's representation arrangements and took the view that the School paid attention to their views.

199 Overall, on the basis of the evidence made available to support the DAT, the audit team came to the view that the quality of learning opportunities provided by the School and the Faculty is suitable for courses leading to the awards listed in paragraph 183, above.

Performing arts

200 The scope of the DAT comprised programmes in performing arts offered by the University on its Leicester and Bedford campuses. These included BA (Hons) Performing Arts; HND Performing Arts; BA (Hons) Education Studies and Theatre; BA (Hons) English Studies and Theatre at Bedford, and at Leicester the BA (Hons) Theatre; BA (Hons) Performing Arts; and MA Theatre Today.

201 The performing arts provision offered at Bedford is located within the Faculty of Education and Contemporary Studies and that offered at Leicester is located within the Faculty of Humanities. The programmes based at Bedford are overseen by a Programme Board, which is a subcommittee of the SAB for the performing arts which reports to the Humanities FAC through the SAB and directly to the Education and Contemporary Studies FAC.

202 To support the DAT the University provided a specially prepared DSED together with the course templates for each of the programmes which were clear and comprehensive. In each case, the content of the course templates for the undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes was consistent with the advice of the FHEQ and the relevant subject benchmark statements.

203 The performing arts programmes on both campuses are subject to the University's internal procedures for securing the standards of awards and assuring the quality of provision. Members of staff told the audit team that information and data on student progression and completion supplied by the centre were now more reliable than formerly, but that it was not always presented in the most helpful way. Performing arts staff in the Faculty of Humanities at Leicester informed the team that they collected and maintained their own progression and completion data in order to monitor student performance.

204 Student feedback on individual modules is collected in a variety of ways, including by means of a common questionnaire: the results are discussed at the SAB. Staff told the audit team that they regarded the SAB minutes and the programme journals as the principal means for conveying information on good practice from one campus to another. They cited the use of a form developed at Bedford for providing feedback on dissertations which had been adopted at Leicester, but were unclear as to whether either the SAB or programme journal had played an explicit role in its identification and dissemination.

205 From the evidence available to the audit

team, it appeared to be the case that reports from external examiners had generally been followed up in a timely and appropriate fashion, with written responses from the SAB chair and the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities. The team did, however, find evidence that one external examiner had repeatedly requested more information in order to be able to fulfil their responsibilities with respect to provision in a partner college. As the University's collaborative provision is to be the subject of a future audit, the team did not pursue this particular matter in detail. However, it did follow through the chain of reports and correspondence relating to the provision in order to see how the University had responded to its external examiner. In this connection, the team noted that the external examiner's concerns had been addressed explicitly only once, in the annual correspondence between the Dean and the Chair of the SAB, replying to the examiner's final report at the end of their appointment. This correspondence noted that several of the concerns would be addressed by the appointment of a second external examiner in Theatre; nonetheless the team was surprised that it should have taken four years to respond to the matter, notwithstanding the plurality of arrangements the University has introduced to ensure that such responses are not overlooked.

206 It is the University's policy that between 5 and 10 per cent of the assessed work in each module be externally moderated. The practice normally followed in performing arts, however, is to send a selection of work from some - but not all - modules to the external examiners. It would now be desirable for the University to consider how it might provide its external examiners with evidence that marking and moderation has taken place for all modules.

207 At the time of the audit, external examiners in performing arts had hitherto been linked to provision on both the Leicester and Bedford campuses. Henceforth, however, external examiners' responsibilities will be specific to one or other of the faculties and campuses. The SAB intends to facilitate an appropriate external overview of performing arts

provision across all locations and staff are aware of the need to be vigilant about securing comparability across campuses. For example, there are plans to undertake a marking comparability exercise between Leicester and Bedford, and staff told the audit team that although no modules are currently shared across campuses, the introduction of some degree of cross-campus internal moderation would be beneficial. The team encourages the SAB to take an early opportunity to introduce such a calibration process and, at the same time, also encourages the University to work with the faculties to ensure that samples of marked work for all modules are provided for external examiners, in line with its expectations.

208 The audit team reviewed a range of assessed work, which had clearly been internally moderated, and was satisfied that the nature of the assessment and the standard of student achievement met the expectations of the programme specifications and subject benchmark statements, and was appropriate to the relevant awards and their location in the FHEQ.

209 Students in performing arts based on both the Leicester and Bedford campuses raised a number of concerns with the audit team about the timeliness with which they received feedback on written work. In some cases, work submitted in the previous academic year had yet to be returned. The team noted that this matter had been raised by the SAB, which had acknowledged the benefits of face-to-face feedback.

210 The SWS had raised the concerns of some students that individual requests for extension to deadlines for the submission of coursework were not handled across the University in a consistent manner. The audit team discussed such procedures with the performing arts students and, from the accounts it heard, came to the view that there might be some substance to these concerns. The University informed the team that the Faculty allowed individual teaching staff to exercise discretion to grant extensions of deadlines for up to two weeks. Some students considered that staff took such requests seriously, asking for certification for illness, for example. In other cases, however,

procedures appeared to be less soundly based. It would now be desirable for the University to satisfy itself that consistent and equivalent procedures are operated when students ask for extensions to deadlines for the submission of coursework.

211 Students are supplied with user-friendly handbooks which contain grade descriptors and advice on such matters as plagiarism and the availability of support services. Students who met the audit team regarded these as useful and comprehensive. They also commented positively to the team when asked about the availability and quality of learning resources. There were some concerns among students based at Bedford that the restricted opening hours of the Bedford library disadvantaged them in comparison to Leicester students, who had access to their library at all times.

212 The most pressing concern among Bedford students appeared to the audit team to be the poor levels of security at one of the Bedford sites; they also perceived some strain on the availability of rehearsal and performance space. Students from both campuses were positive about the benefits of access to the University's VLE, but considered that in comparison with other subjects, the area on the VLE devoted to the support of performing arts was relatively underdeveloped as a teaching resource, a point acknowledged by staff in their meeting with the team.

213 Students spoke warmly of the quality of the teaching in performing arts, and were particularly positive about the contribution made by professional practitioners. They were also positive about the support provided by the SACs, but less convinced of the benefits of PDP.

214 Performing arts operates a series of SSCCs through which students can contribute to the quality and management of their programmes, although the Theatre SSCC had not met at all during 2003-04 due to the difficulty of recruiting representatives. A contributory factor in this may have been a feeling among students, which had been reported to the SAB, that the SSCC 'did not seem able to produce answers to many of the problems reported, or

to be an effective conduit for representation and action elsewhere'. It appears to be the case that following this hiatus the Theatre SSCC was now meeting regularly. Minutes of the Dance SSCC suggested that students had opportunities to discuss relevant operational matters, such as access to performance facilities and the problems of ensuring that the latter were adequately cleaned. It would now be desirable for the University to clarify its requirements for the convening of SSCCs and/or staff-student liaison committees and promulgate them to its staff and students. Notwithstanding these comments, students at both Bedford and Leicester told the audit team that they believed that staff listened to their views and representations.

215 Overall, on the basis of the evidence made available to support the DAT, the audit team was satisfied that the standards of student achievement in the programmes covered by the DAT is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ and that the quality of the learning opportunities is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards in paragraph 200, above.

Pharmacy

216 The scope of the DAT in pharmacy covered the following provision leading to awards of MPharm with Honours; Postgraduate Certificate in Clinical Pharmacy; and Postgraduate Diploma in Clinical Pharmacy. The latter two programmes are referred to henceforth as the 'postgraduate distance learning pharmacy provision'. The MPharm is accredited by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB).

217 Pharmacy provision in the University is the responsibility of Leicester School of Pharmacy which is based within the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences. The Faculty was formed from the merger of the former Faculties of Health and Community Studies and the Faculty of Applied Sciences.

218 The documentation provided by the University to support the DAT comprised a DSED incorporating the report of the University's periodic review of the MPharm, conducted in

April 2004, an update describing subsequent developments, as well as a self-evaluation for the postgraduate distance-learning provision. The DSED provided some basic information to assist the audit team to situate the pharmacy provision within the School and the wider work of the Faculty. Correspondence and other relevant material was also provided to assist the audit team to understand the measures the University had taken to address a recent complaint to the Vice-Chancellor from the external examiners for pharmacy (see below).

219 The MPharm with Honours replaced a BSc Pharmacy in 1997. The course template for the MPharm is consistent with the format the University has adopted, and makes reference to the subject benchmark statements which relate to four-year undergraduate programmes with M-level outcomes. Although the outcomes fall within the requirements of the FHEQ, the latter is not specifically referred to within the programme specification. The panel which conducted the validation of the postgraduate distance-learning pharmacy provision in 2003, confirmed that the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) for that provision demonstrated that the programmes were appropriately located within the FHEQ.

220 As noted earlier, the MPharm programme is accredited by the RPSGB, the accreditation guidelines of which are compatible with the FHEQ. The most recent RPSGB accreditation visit for the MPharm was in 2002, and a re-accreditation is due to take place in 2006. RPSGB does not accredit the postgraduate distance-learning provision but the latter follows the RPSGB criteria for continuing professional development provision. Of the two external members of the validation panel for this latter provision, one had been based in industry and one in the National Health Service. From the evidence available to the audit team it appeared that the relationship between RPSGB and the School was being maintained according to the University's 'Quality Assurance Protocols for Supporting PSB [Productivity and Standards Board] Accreditation and Inspection activity' (see below).

221 Progression and completion statistics are collected routinely and reported at SABs and PABs and the DSED reported that they had been drawn on for the periodic review for the MPharm and for the validation of the postgraduate distance-learning provision. At that time, some problems were experienced in drawing down and using data for part-time taught postgraduate students from SPMIS. The audit team was told that these difficulties had since been remedied and that staff in the School were now in a position to use centrally provided data for quality and academic standards management. The team urges the University to ensure that this is now put into practice.

222 Annual evaluations of provision take place at the module level and by means of 'subject journals'. In the case of the MPharm, module evaluations and progression statistics are considered at the SAB, which provides an annual report to the FAC for onward transmission in summary to AQSC. Copies of recent annual evaluations, journals and reports from the SAB to the FAC were provided as part of the information made available to support the DAT. From its consideration of this information, the audit team noted that reports from the MPharm SAB to the FAC of the former Faculty of Applied Sciences had highlighted difficulties with poor student performance on some modules in the first year of the MPharm. These did not appear to have caused the FAC of the former faculty to intervene, however, and it seemed to the team that in such circumstances the University was fully justified (and to be encouraged) in its determination to enjoin the faculties to be more active in discharging the quality management and academic standards responsibilities it has devolved to them (see above, paragraph 35).

223 For the postgraduate distance-learning provision, module evaluations and progression and completion data are considered by the Postgraduate Board of the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences. Again, instances of such reports were provided to support the DAT. These enabled the audit team to identify clear evidence that the monitoring and evaluation systems

being employed by the School had been able to bring about improvements in delivery to the Postgraduate Certificate in Clinical Pharmacy.

224 Reports from external examiners are considered at SABs and responses are drawn up at this point, including, where needed, action plans. These are reported to the FAC and thence, through EEAG, to AQSC. The audit team was able to confirm with members of the School that this process, including the responses made by the School to the external examiners, is monitored by the Faculty Head of Quality.

225 In the course of the DAT the audit team reviewed a number of reports from external examiners which were generally positive. The team also noted, however, that in June 2004, a second, extraordinary, SAB had been convened to adjust the marks of first and second-year MPharm students in response to high failure and referral rates. This action had resulted in a formal complaint to the Vice-Chancellor from the external examiners for pharmacy and critical comments from two of the external examiners in their reports. The report of the senior external examiner which related to these occurrences had emphasised that two of the external examiners appeared satisfied with the outcomes of the SAB and that two had not - although one of the former appeared to the team be dated immediately after the first SAB and made no reference to the second, extraordinary, SAB.

226 In response to the complaint it received from the pharmacy external examiners, the University established a Pharmacy Task Group to investigate the matter, which had reported to AQSC in November 2004. The Task Group's report set out the evidence it had considered which had included the outcomes of discussions with the Dean of the Faculty, the Head of School, and members of the pharmacy staff group.

227 The audit team was provided with the information which had been made available to the Task Group. Throughout, it appeared to the audit team that the University's first concern had been to safeguard the interests of its students without jeopardising the academic standards of the programme and the award. The report of the Task Group acknowledged

that, in hindsight, it would have been wiser to have invited one or more external examiners to attend the extraordinary SAB and that, in future, external examiners should be involved in any process liable to lead to changes in module marks. It noted, however, that the Senior Examiner for the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences had been satisfied that the actions which had been taken in convening the extraordinary SAB had not been 'nefarious'.

228 The report of the Pharmacy Task Group also urged the School to review the programme regulations for the MPharm, working closely with the 'Royal Pharmaceutical Society to establish what is permissible in terms of their regulations' and urged the Faculty and the School to intensify a programme of improvements to the curriculum, to pedagogy and other practices. At the time of the audit the School was beginning to implement these measures which include strategies to support learning, teaching and assessment on the MPharm.

229 The audit team discussed these matters with pharmacy staff who told it that they now monitored the ethnic and gender characteristics of their intake more closely, and that they were intending to take greater care to establish the academic and study skills of students on entry. To this end they intended to introduce early diagnostic tests to enable them to identify which students could benefit from additional assistance with mathematics and in the acquisition of core skills. These interventions would be supported through the personal tutor system and the VLE. It was also planned to provide increased support to prepare students for the experience of formal examinations. Overall, it seemed to the team that the Task Group had identified many matters requiring attention, and that the School, supported by the Faculty, was beginning to implement a wide-ranging programme of action to address these. For the School to be successful in carrying through this programme of action, however, it will need sustained support from the Faculty and the University, not least to assess the progress it is making.

230 The report of the Task Group and its acceptance by the University indicated to the

audit team that the institution had been able to identify not only the immediate matters in pharmacy which require attention, but that it had provided additional confirmation for the University's senior managers of the need for actions at school level to be monitored and taken forward more actively by the faculties, and for actions by the latter to be more actively monitored by the University (see above, paragraph 35). The team encourages the University to take forward its plans to address these matters.

231 To support the DAT, the School provided the audit team with samples of marked and moderated student work which had been subject to the consideration of the external examiners. In all cases it seemed to the team that the tasks set were well matched to the learning outcomes as set out in the course templates and the handbooks provided for students. Marked examination scripts which were provided as part of the sample showed evidence of having been moderated. Marked work from the postgraduate distance-learning provision that had been moderated, also showed evidence that good feedback was being provided to students on their performance, which the latter found helpful. Students who discussed the School's management of its assessment arrangements with the team were generally complimentary; they observed, however, that the promptness and value of the feedback they received varied.

232 MPharm students receive a guide for each year of the programme which sets out learning outcomes, assessment regulations and the requirements for progression and success. Students found these useful as well as the information available on the VLE such as timetables and module handbooks. The University and the School provided the audit team with access to the support for modules provided via the VLE for MPharm students, which was therefore able to confirm the availability of teaching material and generic feedback on assessment to students. The latter told the team that support provided by the VLE was helpful and that they had been introduced to its use as part

of their induction to the programme.

233 Taught postgraduate students registered for the distance-learning programmes in pharmacy are provided with a detailed handbook and there are arrangements for attendance days at the start of each module and support from the Faculty's Postgraduate and Continuing Professional Development Office. The School is also piloting the use of the University's VLE to support the distance-learning provision which, to date, has included one VLE-based assessment.

234 The information provided to support the DAT showed that the University, advised by the Faculty, has kept the learning environment available for the support of the pharmacy provision under review. Specialised accommodation for pharmacy was upgraded to include a new Pharmacy Practice Suite in 2003 and the Pharmaceutical Technology Suite has also been refurbished. Notwithstanding these tangible improvements the buoyant demand for the MPharm has led to increases in the size of the cohort, necessitating some repeat teaching sessions in order to mitigate timetabling difficulties. From the papers of the SAB and the recent periodic review of the MPharm, and from its discussions with students, it appeared to the audit team that the Library was able to offer satisfactory support for pharmacy and that ICT provision was also satisfactory. The team came to the view that the School and the Faculty were taking appropriate steps to monitor and manage the learning environment for pharmacy.

235 MPharm students are advised to undertake a voluntary practice placement in their summer vacation which they are expected to arrange for themselves. Students who met the audit team saw this placement as an important part of their learning experience and preparation for employment but reported they had encountered difficulties in arranging satisfactory placements. Others expressed the desire to have more information or exposure to pharmacy practice in smaller commercial or community settings. Staff told the team that discussions were underway to facilitate the early re-accreditation of the MPharm programme in 2006, in part in response to changes in pharmacy practice. Questionnaires

completed by postgraduate distance-learning students showed that they had been invited to evaluate the learning support provided for them and that they were generally satisfied.

236 The School has established a SSCC for the MPharm which meets twice each session. Students can request the addition of agenda items by email and there are elected representatives for each year of the programme. The consultative committee is perceived by staff and students alike as an effective liaison mechanism.

237 The audit team discussed the work of the consultative committee with students in the course of the DAT. They were able to give examples of how this committee had brought about enhancements, for example, in improving access for students to computing facilities. They were also able to provide examples of matters which had been raised and which, while not having been resolved, had been explored so that students understood the difficulties preventing a solution. Student representatives also attend meetings of the SAB (in management mode) for which they receive the agendas and advance briefings. For postgraduate distance-learning students representation has worked less well, since their representative has, as yet, been unable to attend the Faculty Postgraduate Board or receive feedback on matters which have been raised by distance-learning students.

238 Overall, the quality of learning opportunities is suitable for programmes of study leading to the awards listed in paragraph 216 above.

Sociology

239 The scope of the DAT comprised the BA (Hons) Sociology offered at the University's Bedford Campus. This is a single honours programme located in the School of Business and Applied Social Science which is, in turn, part of the Faculty of Education and Contemporary Studies at Bedford where all the teaching takes place. The University provided information on other validated programmes which include sociology provision and the student panel which met the team included individuals following the single honours programme in Sociology and Criminology.

240 The DSED which was provided to support the DAT took the form of an SED, for the University's internal periodic review of sociology in 2004 (with some accompanying appendices), the resulting report and an improvement plan. Course templates for the sociology programme were provided with the DSED.

241 The course template for the BA (Hons) Sociology provides information on the content, aims, learning and teaching strategies and ILOs for the programme. At the time of the 2004 periodic review the University did not require that proposers address relevant subject benchmark statements, although the DSED and the course template show a clear awareness of the relevant benchmark and staff described, for the audit team, the ways in which the sociology programme has been developed to address the subject benchmark. Programme content was structured around three clear levels of study, although there was no direct reference to the FHEQ and the aims and outcomes of the programme were not, as yet, defined by level in the template. Sociology also produces module templates which include learning outcomes, syllabus, assessment and resources.

242 The audit team saw evidence that some student award and progression data had been considered at SAB meetings and basic module data is recorded and discussed on module evaluation forms. The DSED expressed some concerns about the sufficiency of the University's centrally produced progression and completion data and stated that locally-produced statistics had been used for this purpose. From the example it saw, it appeared to the team that the SAB annual report for Sociology and Criminology had not made use of relevant statistical data, although for the 2004 periodic review the sociology team had been supplied with data by SPMIS. The team was told by members of staff that the central provision of data was improving.

243 Annual monitoring, evaluation and enhancement matters are discussed in meetings of the sociology team, records of which are kept in the programme journal by the BA (Hons) Sociology Programme Leader. Minutes from the Sociology and Criminology SAB go to the FAC,

and members of the sociology team attend the Faculty LTC. Standardised module evaluation forms, incorporating responses to previous action points, consideration of student feedback, module team comments and an improvement plan, are completed at the end of each module and then considered by the SAB. The team found evidence in the minutes of the SAB of the ways in which matters raised by SSCCs, and arising from module evaluations and reports by external examiners are addressed and proposals for improvements are discussed. More recently, and in line with the University's arrangements to pilot SAB annual reports, the Chair of the Sociology and Criminology SAB had produced such a report although it was not altogether clear to the team how the report in its present, concise, format had added to the information available to the University from existing annual evaluation arrangements.

244 The University made available to the audit team the reports of the response of the sociology team to the move to Curriculum 2004 and the conduct of the University's 2004 periodic review of sociology. The audit team noted that the sociology team's responses to outcomes of the 'migration event' to Curriculum 2004 had been monitored by the SAB.

245 The SED prepared by the Sociology Section to support the periodic review, had made effective use of a range of sources of information including external examiner reports, student feedback and SAB minutes, using them to conduct a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis for sociology which had culminated in a development plan. The periodic review itself had been conducted by a panel, the membership of which had included two external peers. It had produced an evaluative report which had followed the University's guidelines and had identified good practice and offered recommendations for action.

246 The papers made available by the University to support the DAT enabled the audit team to track the follow-up to the review and how it had influenced the BA (Hons) Sociology programme. For example, a revised staffing

plan had been drawn up and a skills module had been redeveloped.

247 The audit team was provided with reports from external examiners for sociology and responses to the latter for the previous three sessions, noting that the formal documentation has been complemented by a more lively, informal, dialogue between the external examiners and the subject team. The team was able to confirm that reports and responses to the external examiners are sent to the Dean but are also considered in the programme journal, at the SAB and reviewed by the Faculty's EEAG. The team was satisfied that the combined work of these groups and individuals ensures that local and generic matters raised by external examiners are addressed in an appropriate and timely fashion. The sociology external examiner has also commented on institutional assessment matters. Students appreciated the opportunity to meet with the external examiner.

248 From the evidence available to it, it seemed to the audit team that the assessment practices followed by sociology staff were consistent with the University's regulations. The team sampled a range of assessed work from modules at each level of study. This enabled it to observe the use of a standardised feedback form and provided evidence of effective internal moderation. The team was satisfied that the standard and content of the work was appropriate to the title and level of the award as expressed in the course template. Students mentioned the comprehensive feedback on assessment and appreciated the punctuality with which coursework was returned to them.

249 Copies of the programme handbook issued to sociology students were provided for the information of the audit team. The handbook is organised and issued by level of study and contains comprehensive information on the programme aims and structure, programme management, staff and modules. Students who discussed the programme handbook and other information provided for them by sociology staff were generally satisfied that they contained most of the information they routinely needed, but observed that the

quality of the handbooks provided to support individual modules varied.

250 The audit team discussed the arrangements available within sociology for academic guidance and personal support. On this matter, the DSED had observed that sociology staff were committed and attentive to the needs of students, and that staff operated an open-door tutorial policy. Students with whom the team discussed these arrangements confirmed the view expressed in the DSED, and that all students had been allocated a personal tutor in line with expectations in the programme handbook.

251 The small size of the sociology teaching team and the consequent impact of this on the breadth of the curriculum has previously been raised by students, staff and the external examiner and was considered as one of the items in the 2004 periodic review. The audit team discussed this matter with members of staff in the course of the DAT. In line with the University's responses to this matter in the periodic review and elsewhere, the team was told that modules drawn from other areas had been, or would be, incorporated into the BA (Hons) Sociology programme, and that more teaching staff were being drawn into its support. The team also discussed this matter with students who were unsure of the relevance of a second level module drawn from Education Studies which had been added to the programme. Members of staff who discussed this matter with the team were confident of the overall relevance of the module to the sociology programme. This is a matter which the staff, the Faculty, and the University will no doubt wish to keep under review.

252 The DSED suggested that the learning resources available to support the sociology programme, and particularly library and computer facilities, were appropriate to its needs while noting some concerns about the speed with which books ordered from the Leicester campus arrived in Bedford. The DSED also claimed that the sociology team had now addressed concerns about the under-utilisation of ICT in teaching and learning which had featured in the SED prepared to support the

2004 periodic review. While curriculum documents available to the audit team suggested that ICT and other skills were well embedded in the sociology curriculum, students observed that sociology had only a limited presence on the University's VLE (which the team was able to confirm). Greater use of the VLE to support teaching and learning had been identified as an action point in the DSED and, in the course of the DAT, the team sought to learn how members of staff were being supported by the University in adopting new developments. It was told that although the programme of staff development opportunities available in Leicester is more extensive than that at Bedford, many of the staff development events offered at the former were also repeated at the latter.

253 There are opportunities for students studying sociology to contribute to the quality management of their provision by means of module evaluation forms, administered at the end of each session and students who met the audit team were able to cite examples of how their views had been considered. There is also a SSCC for sociology (which covers a number of other programmes in addition to the BA (Hons) Sociology). This committee meets regularly and, again, students were able to point to matters which they had raised and which had been addressed following consideration at the SAB. Representatives drawn from sociology students attend the SAB (meeting in management mode) and the FAC, although some questions had been raised about the usefulness (to them) of their attendance at SAB meetings.

254 Students expressed their enthusiasm for the curriculum, singling out the benefits they perceived they had derived from the 'Skills for Social Science and Work' module which draws on expertise in the library and in the Careers Service and is designed to provide a sound preparation for the dissertation at level 3. The wider curricular orientation to employability had been identified as a strength of the provision in the 2004 periodic review report and would appear to reflect the Faculty's strategy of developing courses with a strong vocational emphasis. For the periodic review of sociology, staff had collected the views of a sample of

graduates on the programme who had been asked to comment in the light of their subsequent careers. This had been an interesting and worthwhile project but it was not clear to the audit team how the views of former sociology students would otherwise be gathered.

255 Overall, on the basis of the evidence made available to support the DAT, the audit team was satisfied that the standards of student achievement in the programmes covered by the DAT is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ; and that the quality of the learning opportunities is suitable for the programme of study in sociology leading to the named awards in paragraph 239, above.

Thematic enquiries

256 No thematic inquiries were undertaken in the course of the audit.

Section 4: The audit investigations: published information

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

257 The University provided a large volume of the information it publishes for students as part of the evidence it brought together to support the audit. This included information provided before students join the University (undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses), and information provided at University and other levels for current students, such as handbooks, guidance on various University services, regulations and complaints procedures. Much of this information was accessible on-line as well as in hard copy.

258 The audit team discussed with students in each of the DATs their experience of the accuracy, clarity and accessibility of information available to them, prior to joining the University and during their period of study. Research students were also asked to comment on this aspect of their experience.

259 The SED gave few details on the way in which the University assured the quality of the information it publishes but staff were able to describe for the audit team how the central Press and Public Relations Department worked with the faculties to generate the contents of the prospectuses and other promotional material, and how the views of students were sought on such publications. For programme handbooks, a set of standard headings is provided, indicating the areas to be covered, although this permits considerable variations in practice. As part of the validation process panels are required to scrutinise and approve the relevant handbook(s): this allows the University to take an overview of the quality and accuracy of the information each contains.

260 The SWS presented a somewhat mixed picture of students' satisfaction with the material provided to them before joining the University, the overall view being that it was 'good, but could be better'. This view was confirmed for the audit team by the comments of students in DAT meetings, with Bedford-based students in particular expressing the opinion that the prospectus and the information provided about accommodation did not provide an accurate impression of students' experience.

261 While agreeing that a wealth of material was provided for students in the course of their inductions, students who met the audit team also observed that the provision of so much information in a short period, when newly arrived at the University, and so partly disoriented, contributed to a sense of 'information overload' and could lead them not to take up important information. Similar observations were also offered in the SWS. Students did, however, acknowledge that it was difficult for the University to get the balance right in this area, and added that while they may not have read in detail all the information provided, they believed that they would know, or would easily be able to find out, where to find information should they require it.

262 The SWS indicated that the information provided for students during their studies was broadly satisfactory. Students who discussed

this with the audit team were satisfied with the usefulness and relevance of module handbooks, though some variability was noted. This impression was confirmed by the DATs, both by the comments of students and by the quality of material reviewed by the team. Students indicated that they received clear information about the requirements of assessment and that assessment criteria were generally incorporated into module handbooks; they also appeared to understand the overall system of regulations under which their degrees would be awarded. The team was easily able to gain access to the regulations and the University's complaints procedures, through the 'Information for Current Students' section of the public website.

263 Increasingly, the University's students turn for information to its website and VLE. Again, through the DATs, students were able to confirm the usefulness of these sources, where they were kept up to date. For postgraduate students studying by distance learning, and who relied on the VLE for much of their current information, the latter seemed to the team to be exceptionally useful. Postgraduate research students also expressed themselves content with the information provided to them by the Research Office, for example, in relation to regulations for transfer from MPhil to PhD.

264 On the basis of the material it examined, the observations offered in the SWS and its discussions with students, the audit team considers that the provision of information to students across the University, its usefulness and accuracy, is generally acceptable, although the accuracy of information for students prior to registration for study at Bedford could be improved. In some cases, however, such as the information provided for distance-learning students in pharmacy, this is exemplary.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

265 The University has given careful attention to the requirements of HEFCE's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, having benefited from its participation in the pilot exercise with HERO.

A number of modifications have been, or will shortly be, made to internal quality processes in order to align them more effectively with HEFCE requirements. For example, standard reports for external examiners and guidance notes have been modified in order to elicit clear responses to the three questions posed on the Teaching Quality Information website.

266 The University has published, on the HERO website, all the information which was required by the deadline of January 31st 2005, including summaries of reports from external examiners, a summary of its Teaching and Learning Strategy, statements on the structure of external examiners and on employers' needs and trends, and a brief commentary on the HESA data for the institution. The University intends to monitor these summaries to ensure that no distortion is created by the imperatives of marketing and publication which indicates the responsible approach which, it seemed to the audit team the University is adopting. Summaries posted to date appear consistent with the tenor of the externals' more detailed reports.

267 Given this evidence of the University's awareness of, and compliance with the requirements of HEFCE 03/51 to date, there is no reason to doubt the statement in the SED that 'the University is on target to meet the requirements of the Cooke Report'.

Findings

Findings

268 An institutional audit of De Montfort University (the University) was undertaken during the week 28 February to 4 March 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility as a UK degree-awarding body. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals and Universities UK, five audit trails were selected for scrutiny at the level of an academic discipline. This section of the report 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

269 The University's quality management arrangements allow for the planning and approval of new provision to take place at faculty and at University level. There is a head of studies within each faculty who reports to the Dean, the faculty's academic committee (FAC) and its academic planning committee, who is responsible for overseeing proposed new developments and for checking their viability. The University's Strategic Planning Department supports this work by providing annual analyses of current market trends, within the University and further afield, so that the faculties can review and plan the development of their portfolios. The provision of this information to the faculties seemed to the audit team to be a feature of good practice.

270 Once the faculty academic planning committee has advised that permission be given for a new proposal to be developed, and this has been approved by the Dean and the FAC, the proposal is sent to the central Academic Planning Committee. This body is responsible for ensuring that any new proposal will not compete with existing provision, or

provision which is being planned elsewhere in the University, and its approval must be secured before further development can take place. With some specified exceptions, the University does not allow proposals put forward for validation later than March to recruit students in the following September: this seemed to the audit team to be a feature of good practice.

271 The University's Department of Academic Quality (DAQ) has provided comprehensive guidance for the procedures to be followed in validating and approving new proposals. This may take place at faculty or University level and the criteria to be followed in deciding whether a proposal is to be handled locally or centrally is, again, clear in that all collaborative provision is dealt with at the centre.

272 Provision is subject to validation through a process which culminates in formal meetings between the proposers and a panel of peers which must include members external to the University. DAQ provides clear guidance on the membership of validation panels which must be approved by a subcommittee of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC). Through the validation meetings, the University expects to be able to satisfy itself that new proposals are consistent with the advice of the Academic Infrastructure and, where relevant, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). In most instances seen by the audit team, this was the case.

273 The University closely monitors how the faculties use the powers it has devolved to them, to validate and approve new provision on its behalf. In 2003 it conducted a thorough internal audit of such validations, which enabled it to strengthen arrangements for checking that conditions imposed that validation are fulfilled, and to clarify its guidance to the faculties on these matters. In each faculty the FAC compiles an annual report for AQSC which draws on the programme journals which have been submitted. There can be confidence in these arrangements.

274 For a number of years the University's regular monitoring and evaluation of its provision at the programme and subject level has been based on the evaluation of 'journals' kept by

programme and subject leaders. At the time of the audit the University had shifted the focus of attention to evaluation and monitoring at programme level by means of programme journals. These are intended to serve as records of issues, actions and outcomes arising from the evaluation and development of provision and as means of recording good practice for further dissemination. Journals are sent to FACs which are required to compile summary reports from all the journals they receive for onward transmission to the AQSC of the Academic Board. The importance of the journal process in the University's quality management arrangements overall can be seen from the attention it has given to establishing how journals are used in practice and their overall effectiveness. Each FAC compiles an annual report to AQSC based on the programme journals it has reviewed and other sources of information.

275 A recent internal evaluation, conducted for AQSC of the journal process, has concluded that in some areas up to 40 per cent of journals were not received by the due date, and that some programme leaders were unsure how they should complete their journal. The audit team was able to confirm the soundness of this evaluation and observe that while many journals recorded changes to provision, few were reflective or offered views on how the provision might be enhanced. It would now be desirable for the University to consider how it might ensure that programme journals are submitted more promptly and in line with its requirements.

276 The University's work to establish how journals are being used in practice has coincided with a growing view at a senior level that deans might not be receiving 'reliable and timely information about the quality of provision for which they were responsible'. Partly in response, the University has begun to pilot annual reports from subject authority boards (SABs) to the respective faculties to provide information to the latter on how the SABs monitor student performance at module and programme level, supported by information from the University's Strategic Planning and Management Information System (SPMIS). The self-evaluation document (SED) provided no information on

this new development but the audit team was able to see samples of the annual reports from SABs produced to date. These were very terse and although the team acknowledges that this initiative is at an early stage, it encourages the University to clarify for its staff the purpose of the new annual reports and their relationship to the journal.

277 Provision is reviewed within the University on a six-year cycle with provision for the regular review of that cycle and the place and timing of provision within it. DAQ has provided comprehensive guidance for the conduct of the process which is based on a self-evaluation, completed by the programme and/or the subject leaders. This forms the chief source of evidence and information for the review panel, the membership of which must include external peers and must be approved centrally. There is provision in the University's review process for a preliminary meeting between the person designated to act as the panel chair, the faculty head of quality, and members of the course teams involved, a month in advance of the full panel meeting, to agree the scope of the review and outline the agendas for individual meetings. These arrangements seemed to the audit team to be a helpful feature of the process.

278 The University's periodic review procedures were the subject of an internal audit in 2003-04, which identified the need to ensure that periodic review reports were produced promptly but, nonetheless, gave the University grounds for confidence in the solidity of these arrangements. Following this internal audit the University decided to make provision for an update on progress to be received at the mid-point in the review cycle.

279 The University's overall approach to the approval and periodic review of its programmes is sound. It might now be appropriate, however, for it to confirm for itself and for its staff that the cost of this new combination of the journal process, SAB annual reports, periodic reviews and interim updates is not likely to become too burdensome or to deter innovation.

280 The University secures feedback from its students on the quality of their learning

experiences through questionnaire surveys, group discussions and through tutorial discussions. Feedback is also gathered, independently, by Library Services and Information Services and Systems on users' experiences of their services.

281 The University expects feedback information to be collected from students for all modules annually. Staff are expected to use a standard form to report this information, the development of which drew on the work of an AQSC audit subgroup which had looked into this area. In 2003 AQSC recommended that student feedback should be gathered at the programme level using the broad headings of the National Student Survey. The University subsequently provided a template for this purpose developed in the light of guidance published by the Learning and Teaching Support Network.

282 The survey conducted by the Students' Union to support the students' written submission (SWS) suggested that while most students had completed questionnaires at the module level, this experience was not uniform for all modules or subjects and that many students considered that their provision of feedback made little or no difference to their learning experiences. The evidence seen by the audit team of the efforts made by the University to gather, analyse and respond to the feedback it collects from its students would not generally support such a negative view. The University is continuing to work on the inclusiveness of its arrangements to gather feedback from its students, and to report back to them on what it has done in response, and the team encourages the University to look for ways to redress the negative perceptions some of its students hold of its feedback arrangements.

283 The University seeks information from its graduates on their employment and further study destinations and intends that feedback information from former graduates should contribute to periodic reviews. More systematic development of relations with alumni is being undertaken by the Development Office, although it seemed to the audit team that the University was not, as yet, seeking to encourage current students to see their relations with it as likely to

extend throughout their careers. The University supports subject areas in making contact with, and seeking feedback from, employers to learn about their experience of the University's former students. It also encourages subject areas to invite employers, representatives from industry and commerce, and members of PSRBs to become involved in the development of its portfolio of provision through advising on the curriculum and contributing to the validation of new programmes. The University has given careful thought to how it might improve the flow of feedback information from students, graduates and their employers and part of its Enhancement Plan, which was appended to the SED, stated a commitment to promote the development of policies and monitoring in this area at faculty level.

284 The University has embraced a four-year strategy for the development of e-learning which is still in its developmental stages: a project group has been established to oversee this development reporting to the University's Learning and Teaching Committee (ULTC). An early step has been the development of an implementation plan which gives staff a useful checklist and guide for the development of e-learning programmes. As with the introduction of Curriculum 2004, this seemed to the audit team to be an example of the University's careful approach to the introduction of new measures. The University expects new provision for delivery by e-learning, flexible and/or distributed methods to be undertaken in the light of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning* (including e-learning), published by QAA. From the material provided to support one of the DATs; part of the provision in which is delivered by means of e-learning and from other papers and its discussions with staff and students, the team was confident that the University was taking appropriate steps to manage the quality of learning and teaching it provides through e-learning modes of delivery. The University's collaborative provision will be the subject of a future QAA audit.

285 Overall, the University is confident that the design of its quality management arrangements is sound, but has identified for itself areas where there is room for improvement. These include the need for its FACs to become more effective and proactive in reviewing and analysing the provision for which it has given them responsibility and for SABs, likewise, to conduct their work in a more active and evaluative fashion. The audit team endorses the University's view of these matters.

286 The University maintains a complex set of quality management arrangements in which the relationship between some of the component parts is not always clear to all its staff, and where there is scope for overlapping arrangements (for example, for the scrutiny of reports from external examiners), to blur the locus of responsibility for taking action and for checking that it has been taken (see below). As noted above, the introduction of two new elements into the University's quality management arrangements (SAB annual reports and interim updates in periodic review) is likely to increase the burden of quality management across the University. In this context it will be important for the University to be able to satisfy itself, and its staff, that this additional complexity is worth the cost, including the opportunity costs, that the component parts will work to support one another, and this additional activity will not deter innovation and enhancement.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

287 The SED identified the University's use of external representation on validation and review panels, its external examiner arrangements, its programme monitoring, and its analysis of data on student achievement as key elements in its management and safeguarding of academic standards.

288 The University has established guidelines for the appointment and induction of external examiners which are set out in a DAQ 'Guide to External Examining'. Appointments are

monitored centrally by a subcommittee of AQSC and there are arrangements for institution-level training for newly appointed external examiners. The audit team discussed the duties and authority of external examiners with members of staff throughout the audit. With the assistance of the University it learned that the information it had been given (and which was available as authoritative guidance to staff and external examiners) had been superseded but had not been updated. The team advises the University to check that its internal documents and web-based guidance on the roles and responsibilities of its external examiners are up-to-date and accurate.

289 Subject-based external examiners are appointed by the University to SABs and a senior external examiner is appointed to the Progression and Award Boards (PABs) in each faculty, with a brief to review and confirm award and progression decisions, and to ensure that SABs and PABs comply with University procedures and protocols. The University informed the audit team that it does not routinely provide senior external examiners with the minutes of SABs. The team urges the University to reconsider this position, not least to enable the examiners to comment on how SABs have met the University's requirements. External examiners are encouraged in their reports to comment on academic standards with reference to subject benchmark statements, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and the requirements of PSRBs. Reports are received from external examiners centrally by DAQ on behalf of the Academic Registrar. The reports are copied to the dean of the relevant faculty, to the faculty manager, the head of studies, the faculty head of quality, the chair of the SAB/postgraduate board and the subject leader. A copy is also provided for the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality).

290 Reports from external examiners are initially considered by the relevant SAB or postgraduate board, which is expected to respond to any matters the external examiner has raised and to provide copies of the response to the faculty and the University. Reports and

responses are considered through a system of committees and scrutiny groups at faculty level, and by a standing subcommittee of AQSC, the External Examiners Audit Group (EEAG) at University level. This mixture of faculty-level and central monitoring of external examiners' reports and the responses to them, is described by the University as a 'two-stream' approach.

291 The work undertaken by the faculties to consider and analyse reports from external examiners was reviewed in 2003-04 by EEAG, which came to the view that the faculties needed to respond to external examiners in a more formal and timely manner and that there needed to be greater consistency in the practice they follow when working with external examiners. In one case seen by the audit team it seemed that the University's arrangements for monitoring responses to external examiners' reports had not assisted it to identify a failure to respond to comments from an external examiner over several years. In another case it seemed to the team that comments from another external examiner might have been necessary to alert the University to pressures on its assessment arrangements caused by the late delivery of marks. Overall, however, the team came to the view that the University's procedures for securing and considering the views of its external examiners were generally thorough and worked well at all levels. There can be broad confidence in these arrangements.

292 Following the recommendations in the 2001 report that the University would be advised to develop its management information systems, it has invested considerable time and resources in the development of its SPMIS. This System allows the University to draw reports from its core database of student information to meet the needs of staff across the institution. From the sample of management information reports the University provided, and from the demonstration of the SPMIS system it saw, it seemed to the audit team that the University was now in a position to provide the faculties SABs and PABs with assessment and progression data to support their work and that the range of tools and support, which can be provided to facilitate

quality management and support academic standards, constitutes a feature of good practice.

293 The audit team's consideration of the DSEDs suggested that across the University, not all subject areas had taken readily to working with the new sources of data and information SPMIS can provide. In several of the DATs the team found evidence that locally generated data was still preferred to that provided centrally by the University through SPMIS. The team suggests, therefore, that it would now be desirable for the University to consider what steps might be needed to ensure that its staff make use of the facilities available through SPMIS. It might also wish to consider the desirability of providing training to support staff in the greater use of statistical information in securing academic standards and managing the quality of modules and programmes. Overall, however, there can be broad confidence in the University's growing capacity to use progression and completion data to monitor quality and secure academic standards commands.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

294 The University's Library Service aims to underpin the educational work of the institution in learning, teaching and research. Its work to benchmark its provision and services against national standards led the University to make a substantial investment in library facilities in Bedford and Leicester and to increase the annual budget of Library Services.

295 The continuing ability of Library Services to meet the needs of users is gauged through feedback gathered from them, and by the contributions of members of the Service to key faculty committees. The adequacy of library provision is a standing item to be checked by panels in the course of periodic reviews. From the SWS and its discussions with students and staff based at both Bedford and Leicester, it was clear to the team that users at Leicester are generally satisfied with the support they receive from the Library Service although there is some evidence to suggest that students at Bedford might have less access to library facilities. This is

a matter the University will wish to consider in the interests of providing students at Bedford with access to equivalent learning opportunities.

296 ICT support across the University is provided by Information Services and Systems (ISAS), supplemented by some specialist facilities in the faculties ISAS provides in association with them. Like the Library Service, ISAS records and analyses the use made of its networked and local services by staff and students and participates in the work of faculty and University-level committees. Again, like the Library Service, staff and students who met the audit team appeared broadly satisfied with the level of ICT provision available to support their work.

297 The University sees its teaching staff as the primary source of academic guidance and support for its students, augmented by the specialist Student Advice Centres (SACs) it has established and its Student Learning Advisory Service (SLAS). Each student is assigned to a personal tutor in their subject area who is responsible for academic support and guidance and is the first line of contact for students who may need pastoral support. The University is beginning to introduce personal development planning (PDP) facilitated by the personal tutor system. The University has recently made provision for an annual evaluation to be undertaken of personal tutoring arrangements, including PDP, for all students.

298 SACs offer practical advice on academic matters and SLAS works directly with students to support those with dyslexia and other learning needs and to offer additional support in information technology and mathematics. A specialist Dyslexia Centre has been established with the support of an educational psychologist. There are arrangements for SACs and SLAS to gather first-hand information from faculty learning and teaching committees and other committees on students' needs and the effectiveness of the support they provide.

299 Postgraduate research students receive support through University and faculty-level training and courses and, following an internal review in 2004, it has been decided that all

faculties should provide handbooks for research students based on the handbook produced by the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences. Those research students who met the audit team were content with the support they received from their supervisors and from the (central) Research Office. Overall, it seemed to the team that the University's arrangements for academic guidance and support and personal support were satisfactory to students. The University requires those who wish to supervise research students to undergo prescribed training courses and it requires trained supervisors to take regular refresher courses. These arrangements seemed to the team to be a feature of good practice.

Outcomes of discipline audit trails

Architecture

300 The scope of the DAT comprised the BA (Hons) in Architecture (three years full-time) with exemption from the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Part 1 examinations; BArch (Hons) in Architecture (two years full-time preceded by a year in practice), with RIBA Part 2 exemption; Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice (full and part-time) with exemption from RIBA Part 3 examinations; RIBA Part 3 Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice (in collaboration with the University of Nottingham and the University of Sheffield); and BSc (Hons) Architectural Design Technology and Production. In addition to validation by the RIBA and prescription by the Architects Registration Board (ARB), elements of the provision offered through the School are accredited by the Construction Industry Board, the British Institute of Architectural Technologists (BIAT), and the Commonwealth Association of Architects.

301 Course templates (programme specifications) were provided for each of the above programmes and awards. These provided much helpful information but there is scope for clearer references to be made in them to the advice of the Academic Infrastructure and the benchmarks provided by professional bodies such as RIBA, ARB and BIAT. The School has recently regained validation by RIBA and is working to regain ARB prescription by the end of 2005.

302 In all cases, the standard of student achievement observed in the marked and moderated student work provided to support the DAT was appropriate to the titles of the relevant awards and their location within the FHEQ. From the marked work and from the comments of the external examiners in their reports, in general it appears that assessment processes have been satisfactorily managed by the Leicester School of Architecture and the Department of Product and Spatial Design, and by the Faculty of Art and Design. There is scope, however, for enrolment and progression data to be more consistently recorded by the School and there are opportunities for the more systematic and detailed reporting of assessment outcomes and the analysis of trends using centrally-provided data. The use of such data might also assist the School to identify how it might better support progression for students from level 1 to level 2. There is also scope for formative assessments to be returned more promptly to students.

303 In addition to feedback provided through questionnaires and meetings with tutors, students can also comment on their learning experiences to the School through staff-student liaison meetings. These do not, however, operate uniformly across the School and their absence in one particular area has been the subject of critical comments from an external examiner. As noted elsewhere, it would now be desirable for the University to clarify its requirements for the convening of staff-student consultative or liaison committees, and promulgate this to all staff and students.

304 The audit team came to the view that the quality of the learning opportunities in architecture is suitable for programmes leading to the awards listed in paragraph 300, above.

Computing

305 The scope of the DAT comprised programmes in computing leading to the following awards: HNC/HND Computing; HNC/HND Business Information Technology; BSc/HND Computing; BSc/HND Business Information Technology; BSc Software Engineering; BSc Computer Science; BSc

Computer Science (part-time); BSc Computing (joint); BSc (Hons) Internet Computing; BSc Business Information Systems; MSc Bioinformatics; MSc Computational Intelligence and Robotics; MSc Computing; MSc Distributed Systems Integration; MSc Information Systems Management; MSc Information Technology. Of the above, the BSc/HND Computing is a 180 credit programme which the University is currently running out.

306 Course templates were provided for provision leading to the awards listed above and, for each, the standard of student achievement observed was appropriate to the titles of the relevant awards and their location within the FHEQ. The volume of the provision in the School of Computing is such that its SAB has established sub-SABs or Cognate Area Boards (CABs) which reports to the SAB. In general, it seemed to the audit team that the assessment processes were operated in a manner consistent with the University's expectations although an external examiner has noted that the brief period between the conduct of examinations and the meetings of the CABs/SAB has required a large number of matters to be dealt with by action of the Chair of the SAB. It would now be advisable for the University to introduce arrangements to lessen recourse to such measures.

307 The School is aware from a recent internal periodic review report that the timeliness with which assessed work is returned to students needs to be improved but, from the marked and moderated student work it saw, and from the comments of the external examiners, it seemed to the audit team that the standard of student achievement is appropriate to the titles of the awards listed in paragraph 305, above, and their location within the FHEQ.

308 Within the School student representatives attend meetings of CABs and the SAB (meeting in management mode) and there are informal meetings between student representatives and senior members of the School and the Faculty prior to School and faculty-level meetings. Staff and students believe that this arrangement has contributed to the improved effectiveness of

students' contributions to such meetings and the team considers it to be a feature of good practice. Students who met the audit team were satisfied with the School's representation arrangements and considered that their views were listened to.

309 Overall, the audit team came to the view that the quality of the learning opportunities in computing is suitable for programmes and pathways leading to the awards listed in paragraph 305, above.

Performing arts

310 The scope of the DAT comprised programmes in performing arts offered by the University on its Leicester and Bedford campuses. These included BA (Hons) Performing Arts; HND Performing Arts; BA (Hons) Education Studies and Theatre; BA (Hons) English Studies and Theatre at Bedford, and at Leicester the BA (Hons) Theatre; BA (Hons) Performing Arts; and MA Theatre Today.

311 Course templates were provided for the undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. These provided a clear guide to the programmes and their contents were consistent with the advice of the relevant subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ. Samples of marked and moderated student work were provided to support the DAT. From these it was clear that while the University's policy is that between 5 per cent and 10 per cent of assessed work for each module should be externally moderated this is not the practice in performing arts, where selections of work from only some modules are provided for external moderation. It would now be desirable for the University to consider how to provide its external examiners with evidence that marking and moderation has taken place for all modules. At the same time, it might be desirable for the University to assist staff in performing arts to make greater and more consistent use of centrally provided progression and assessment data and for it to ensure that the consideration of extenuating circumstances for late submission of work is handled more consistently. It might also be wise for the University to consider how it might ensure that

students in performing arts receive feedback on their written work in a more timely fashion.

312 Provision leading to awards in performing arts is delivered separately in Bedford and Leicester, although the programmes report ultimately to the performing arts SAB and the external examiners have, until recently, been able to take an overview of the standards achieved in performing arts on both campuses. For the future it is intended that external examiners for the performing arts provision at Bedford will report to the Faculty of Education and Contemporary Studies, which is based there, and that external examiners for the performing arts provision at Leicester will report to the Faculty of Humanities. Performing arts staff have discussed undertaking marking comparability exercises between the campuses and the early introduction of such a measure is to be encouraged. From the marked and moderated student work it saw, however, it seemed to the team that the standard of student achievement in performing arts is appropriate to the titles of the awards listed in paragraph 310 and their location within the FHEQ.

313 Performing arts at both Bedford and Leicester operates a series of staff-student consultative committees (SSCCs) but difficulties in recruiting student representatives caused at least one SSCC not to meet during 2003-04. The SAB has received reports from students that reluctance to serve as a representative on SSCCs may stem in part from a perception that they are ineffectual. It would now be desirable for the University to clarify its requirements for the convening of SSCCs and/or staff-student liaison committees for promulgation to its staff and students.

314 Students in performing arts are satisfied with the teaching they receive, including tuition from professional practitioners, and spoke warmly of the support provided by the Faculty Advice Centre (Bedford) and the Faculty Academic Guidance Centre which the Faculty of Humanities has established in Leicester. While there are signs of some strain on the availability of rehearsal and performance space, in general the audit team was satisfied that the quality of the learning opportunities in performing arts is suitable for programmes and pathways leading to the provision listed in paragraph 310, above.

Pharmacy

315 The scope of the DAT comprised provision leading to the following awards: MPharm with Honours; Postgraduate Certificate in Clinical Pharmacy; and Postgraduate Diploma in Clinical Pharmacy. The latter two programmes are offered via distance learning. Pharmacy provision in the University is the responsibility of Leicester School of Pharmacy which is based within the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences. The MPharm is accredited by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain.

316 Course templates were provided for each of the above programmes; that for the MPharm was consistent with the former adopted by the University and referred to the subject benchmark statements which relate to four-year undergraduate programmes with M-level outcomes. Although the FHEQ was not referred to in the MPharm course template, the panel which validated the postgraduate distance-learning pharmacy provision in 2003 had confirmed that they were appropriately located within the FHEQ.

317 From the sample of marked and moderated student work provided to support the DAT, it appeared to the audit team that the tasks set were well matched to the intended learning outcomes (ILOs), as set out in the course templates, and that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

318 In order to establish whether the School was satisfactorily managing the assessment processes for which it is responsible, the audit team reviewed reports and correspondence from external examiners and the papers of a University Task Group. This had been convened to look into complaints by the external examiners with regard to the conduct of an extraordinary SAB in June 2004. The report of this Task Group seemed to the team to be based on a thorough consideration of the external examiners' complaint. It had found that academic standards had not been jeopardised. Following the completion of the report, measures were being introduced to provide additional support for students' learning and improve their familiarity with formal examination

requirements. It would now be advisable, however, for the University to consider how it might lessen the need to progress to students through extraordinary measures.

319 The learning environment for pharmacy was upgraded in 2003 with the addition of a Pharmacy Practice Suite and the refurbishment of the Pharmaceutical Technology Suite. Students and staff who met the audit team were satisfied that the library and ICT provision available to them was sufficient for their needs.

320 Modules are evaluated annually, in line with the University's requirements and student feedback is reported to the SAB where it is discussed. The report of the Task Group noted that difficulties with student progression had been identified by the SAB in previous sessions without evoking the necessary response from the relevant FAC. The University has identified for itself that FACs need to take a more active approach to such matters and is to be encouraged in its work to make this so.

321 Students attend meetings of the SAB (in management mode) and there is a SSCC for the MPharm which meets twice each year. The latter is seen by staff and students as generally effective. Student representation arrangements appear to have worked less well for postgraduate distance-learning students.

322 Overall, the audit team came to the view that the quality of the learning opportunities in pharmacy is suitable for programmes leading to the awards listed in paragraph 315, above.

Sociology

323 The focus of the DAT comprised the BA (Hons) Sociology offered at the University's Bedford Campus. The course template for the programme provided information on the curriculum, learning and teaching strategies and ILOs. It did not explicitly address the subject benchmark statement or the FHEQ and the outcomes have yet to be defined by level.

324 From the evidence available, the assessment practices followed by sociology staff appeared to be consistent with the University's regulations and the external examiners confirm that this is the

case. Students receive comprehensive feedback on work they have submitted for assessment and marked work is returned promptly. From the samples of assessed and moderated student work provided to support the DAT, and from the reports of the external examiners, the audit team is satisfied that the standard of student achievement is appropriate to the titles of the awards listed in paragraph 323 and their location within the FHEQ.

325 Staff are confident that satisfactory learning resources are available to support the programme, although it is delivered by a small, core team of staff and this constrains the breadth of the curriculum. The 2004 internal periodic review and the external examiner have each commented on this matter, and strategies are being developed to ameliorate the effects on the curriculum. Students remain to be convinced of the suitability of some of these strategies. Overall, however, the quality of learning opportunities in sociology is suitable for programmes leading to the awards listed in paragraph 323 above.

The use made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure

326 Through DAQ the University has arranged for each section of the *Code of practice* to be systematically analysed against the University's own arrangements and for the report of such analyses to be presented to the Academic Board. There is clear evidence that where its analyses have shown a need to amend its procedures or regulations this has been carried through. There can be confidence that the University has taken full account of the advice offered by the *Code* (and revisions of the *Code*) in continuing to develop its own arrangements. The audit team was unable to find such clear-cut evidence of a thoroughgoing engagement with the development of the FHEQ and with the aims of the programme specifications but, overall, it is satisfied that the various elements of the Academic Infrastructure have been used effectively by the University.

T

he 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

327 The audit team found the SED to be a helpful document. Its structure was well-suited to support the audit process and it was written in an open and straightforward manner. Where claims of strength were being made, these were expressed in a confident manner which avoided hyperbole. In the case of limitations, the University had taken the opportunity provided by the process of preparing the SED to draw a number of issues together which had already been identified through its regular quality management arrangements. A supplement to the SED titled 'Enhancement Plan' outlined the ways in which the University intended to take action. In some areas the SED was somewhat uncritical of the University's structures and procedures.

328 Overall, the SED provided evidence of the University's ability to undertake a frank evaluation of its strengths and limitations. Less helpful was the omission from the SED of a consideration of how the newer elements in its quality management arrangements are intended to work together and with more established elements. In this respect the University's evaluation of its own arrangements in the SED did not provide a complete picture of the complexity of its quality management arrangements.

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

329 The SED stated that the University's approach to the enhancement of quality relied on identification of examples of good practice through its quality management arrangements such as the programme journal and reports from external examiners. Additionally, a summary 'Enhancement Plan' was appended to the SED which outlined its intention to embed the scrutiny of performance data at all levels in its reporting arrangements; to improve the monitoring of programme journals; to seek

more rigorous feedback from employers; and to enhance student feedback arrangements.

330 The University has recently closed its Centre for Learning and Teaching and transferred the greater part of its activities to a Quality Improvement Team, located in DAQ, and the newly formed Academic Professional Development Unit (APDU). It seemed to the audit team that the Centre for Learning and Teaching had made a useful contribution to the enhancement of the University's educational activities, through publications and other devices such as an annual quality enhancement conference for staff. The team was encouraged by the University's commitment that such initiatives should not lapse.

331 Overall, while it was clear to the audit team that DAQ and APDU were individually undertaking quality enhancement activities, it was less clear how the University was coordinating these activities and sharing information about them more widely. The University has identified the need for it to pursue a more systematic approach to enhancement and the team encourages it to do this.

Reliability of information

332 The University has carefully considered the requirements of HEFCE for the publication of Teaching Quality Information as set out in *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance* (HEFCE 03/51), and has modified a number of its internal processes to allow it to align them with HEFCE's requirements. When it submitted the SED to QAA in 2004 it considered that it was on course to meet the formal requirements of HEFCE 03/51.

333 By the beginning of January 2005 the University had published all the required information to the HERO website and the audit team was able to confirm this. The University intends to monitor the information it publishes to the HERO site to ensure that no distortion is created by the imperatives of marketing and publication.

Features of good practice

334 In the course of the audit the following features of good practice were noted in the context of the University:

- i the quality of the data gathering, analysis and report generation tools available to staff across the institution to support quality and academic standards management (paragraphs 46 and 118)
- ii its requirement that, with specified exceptions, no proposed programme be validated later than March when it is the intention to recruit students in the following September (paragraph 47)
- iii the support given to student representatives in the faculties (paragraphs 99 and 198)
- iv its leadership and management training programme for its staff (paragraph 133) and its arrangements for training supervisors of research students (paragraph 134).

Recommendations for action

335 The audit team advises the University to consider:

- i measures to ensure that its internal documents and web-based guidance on the roles and responsibilities of its external examiners are up to date and accurate, and are consistent with the advice of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA (paragraph 81)
- ii how it might ensure consistency between subject authority boards (SABs) in the way in which they approach marks which are missing or received late, and how to lessen the need for students to be progressed through extraordinary measures (paragraphs 192 and 225).

336 It would also be desirable for the University to consider how it might ensure that:

- i all areas across the institution produce SAB annual reports and programme journals in a timely fashion, and that all members of staff share the same understanding of the purpose of SAB reports and programme journals in the University's quality management arrangements (paragraph 59)

- ii it considers how its engagement with the employers of its students can be made more visibly a part of its quality management arrangements (paragraph 69)
- iii its requirements for the convening of staff-student consultative committees and/or staff-student liaison committees are clearly set out and promulgated to staff and students (paragraph 98 and 214)
- iv staff across the institution make use of the facilities available through its strategic planning and management information systems and that they are provided with training to support the greater use of statistical information in securing academic standards and managing the quality of modules and programmes (paragraph 118)
- v it continues with its work to ensure that staff and students across its Bedford and Leicester campuses enjoy a fully comparable and consistent experience (paragraphs 130, 146 and 211)
- vi its external examiners have access to evidence that marking and moderation has taken place (paragraph 206)
- vii consistent and equivalent procedures are followed for handling requests from students for extensions to deadlines for the submission of coursework (paragraph 210).

Appendix

De Montfort University's response to the audit report

The overall outcome of broad confidence is welcomed, as is the confirmation that the University's response to all aspects of the Academic Infrastructure has been timely and appropriate. The University acknowledges the work done by the audit team and Assistant Director and broadly accepts the outcomes of the audit and the five discipline audit trails. It is pleasing to note that there are only two advisable actions which both refer to matters of detail and one of which has already partly been remedied. The need to achieve greater consistency in Assessment Board practice is something that the University will turn its attention to and will put right as a priority.

Regarding the other recommendations for action, we are able to report that in the main these are matters that the University is already addressing and in some cases the areas for improvement were identified in our own evaluation. The implementation of SAB reports has been supported by staff development and will be kept under review in the wider context of programme monitoring arrangements. The University Learning and Teaching Committee has already taken responsibility for improving how the University records moderation activity and it is refining the implementation of the University procedure for late submission of coursework. The Committee is also charged with ensuring the employability strategy, which was formulated in May 2004, is appropriately embedded in curriculum design. The University notes that the development of our management information systems are considered to be good practice and we recognise that the challenge now lies in supporting programme teams in their effective use of the MIS reports.

We also appreciate that the audit team have acknowledged the considerable work done to promote a consistent experience for staff and students across the Bedford and Leicester campuses. This work will continue.

Finally, we note with interest that the report raises the question that the University may be over-complex in its arrangements for quality management. The desirability of regulation which is proportionate to the needs of the institution is recognised within the University and it is helpful to have this external perspective which we will consider as part of our continuing process of review.

