Oxford Brookes University

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Preface

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

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

The purpose of institutional audit

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

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

Judgements

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

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

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

Nationally agreed standards

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

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

The audit process

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

The main elements of institutional audit are:

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

The evidence for the audit

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

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

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

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

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Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Oxford Brookes University (the University) from 25 to 29 April 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 awards.

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

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

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

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

Outcome of the audit

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

- broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's current management of the academic quality of its programmes, and

- broad confidence can be placed in the institutional level capacity to manage effectively the security of its awards.

Features of good practice

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

- the quality of support for postgraduate research students

- the on-line Personal Information Portal developed by the University for its students

- the level of accessibility of staff within schools and their support for students, underpinned by the information provided to staff by Student Services

- the series of themed audits undertaken by the Academic Policy and Quality Unit.

Recommendations for action

It would be advisable for the University to:

- strengthen the quality assurance processes at institutional level in order to secure a sufficiently effective oversight by Academic Board and its committees of their operation in the schools

- continue to address the identified deficiencies in the quality of learning experienced by some students in the first year of semesterisation

- develop and publish a plan for the semesterised academic year which ensures optimal coordination and operation

- review its assessment procedures with particular attention to consistency, timing and load on students.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- work more closely with the officers of the Students' Union in order to improve the utility of student involvement at the institutional level

- continue to develop a more strategic approach to the use and analysis of statistical data within review and decision-making processes

- make more effective use of the annual review process and develop further its formal systems for the dissemination of good practice across the institution.

Summary outcomes of the discipline audit trails

Business and management: BA (Hons) Business and Management; BA (Hons) International Business Management; BA (Hons)

Business Logistics; BA (Hons) Business Innovation and Enterprise; MSc Business and Enterprise

English studies: BA Single Honours, English Studies; BA Combined Honours; English Studies; Postgraduate Certificate/Postgraduate Diploma/MA, Modern and Contemporary Poetry

Construction management and urban design: BSc (Hons) Building; BSc (Hons) Construction Management; MA Urban Design

Mechanical engineering: BEng (Hons) Mechanical Engineering; BEng (Hons) Automotive Engineering

Philosophy and religious studies: BA Combined Honours in Philosophy; BA Combined Honours in Religious Studies

The audit team also looked at these five specific areas of provision by undertaking discipline audit trails to find out how well the University's systems and procedures were working at the discipline level. The University provided the team with documents, including student assessed work and, here too, the team met with staff and students. The findings of the team in the five discipline areas supported the overall confidence statements given above. The team considered that the standard of student achievement in each of the five discipline areas was appropriate to the title of the award and its location within *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, published by QAA, and that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for a programme of study leading to that award.

National reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings the audit team also investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the audit suggest that the University has embedded these developments into its management of quality and standards in a timely manner.

From the end of 2004 QAA's audit teams will comment on the reliability of the information about academic quality and standards that institutions will be required to publish, which is listed in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance.* The institutional audit process has included a check on the reliability of the information sets published by institutions in the format recommended in HEFCE 03/51. The University is alert to the publication requirements and the audit found that it had made substantial progress towards fulfilling its responsibilities in this regard.

Main report

Main report

1   An institutional audit of Oxford Brookes University (the University) was undertaken during the week 25 to 29 April 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility for its awards.

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

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

Section 1: Introduction: Oxford Brookes University

The institution and its mission

4   The University has its origins in the Oxford School of Art which was founded in 1865.

Subsequent development of technical and other subject areas led eventually to its designation in 1956 as a College of Technology, at which time it consolidated on the Headington Campus site. The College became Oxford Polytechnic in 1970 and, in 1975, the institution amalgamated with Lady Spencer-Churchill teacher training college, acquiring a second major campus at Wheatley. Oxford Brookes University was incorporated in 1992 taking its name from John Brookes, the Vice-Principal from 1928 and Principal from 1934 until 1956. There was further expansion through a merger with Westminster College in 2000 and the establishment of a third major campus at the College's site at Harcourt Hill. In September 2004 a fourth major site at Marston Road became operational and enabled the consolidation of the School of Health and Social Care at the new facility. The University has both taught and research degree-awarding powers.

5   Total student numbers were reported as 17,940 at the time of the July 2004 submission of data to Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), of whom 68 per cent were full-time and sandwich and 32 per cent were part-time. Undergraduates constituted 74 per cent of the student population and 70 per cent of all students were aged 21 or over at that time. International students and non-UK EU students accounted respectively for 13.4 and 5 per cent of the student population.

6   In 2000 senior management of the University initiated a number of changes to the organisation of the institution. The academic structure for the University is now based upon eight large schools instead of the previous 13 smaller ones: the Business School; the School of Arts and Humanities; the School of Biological and Molecular Sciences; the School of Health and Social Care; the School of Social Sciences and Law; the School of Technology; the School of the Built Environment; and the Westminster Institute of Education. In terms of student numbers the largest schools are the Business School, the Westminster Institute of Education and the School of Health and Social Care. The University has a broad portfolio of provision

that is weighted towards professional subject areas, for example nursing, business, law, architecture, engineering, computing and education. The reduction in the number of schools created larger organisational units with a higher level of devolution, the University's intention being to allow them to be better able to manage their responsibilities such as financial control and quality assurance. Also completed in 1999-2000, a restructuring of support areas led to the formation of six directorates with key functions relating to the student experience, these being delivered in particular by the Directorate of Learning Resources and the Directorate of Academic and Student Affairs.

7   Schools and directorates are cost centres with responsibility for devolved budgets. Budgetary control and direction is achieved through an annual strategic planning round involving the Senior Management Team (SMT) and senior staff within the schools and directorates. The planning process also covers the allocation of student numbers to schools and identification of new programme provision. School management structures vary from school to school but include support for the dean of school from a number of senior staff, including assistant deans and school administrators. The latter generally manage the day-to-day operational activities of the school with the assistant deans usually undertaking specific roles and responsibilities, for example, undergraduate or postgraduate programme provision; research; resource allocation. Decisions regarding academic provision within the subject areas are generally devolved to schools. Schools can take decisions to develop or close individual programmes but decisions to close subject areas are taken by senior management and are based on consultation with appropriate management, staff and student groups.

8   In 2002-03 there was a review of management and governance which resulted in a reduction in the number of committees reporting to Academic Board. The formal input of schools and directorates into strategic decision-making in the University takes place primarily through the Executive Board (EB) which determines the University's strategic and operational plans. This body, constituted in January 2004, comprises all deans and directors together with the members of the SMT. Decisions regarding financial management of the University are taken by the Vice-Chancellor and the Board of Governors and in these areas EB acts in an advisory capacity.

9   At the time of the QAA audit in 2001, the University was carrying out a wide-ranging strategic review. Led by the SMT, the major aim was 'to achieve efficiencies through a deeper understanding of the organisation and its environment, and to re-cast the University in a way which gives the institution the best possible chance to thrive, academically and financially, during the next ten years'. The decision to move to a semester structure for the academic year had been taken, but many other components of the review had not been completed at the time of the 2001 audit. The key review areas, which were considered initially by four strategic working groups, included:

● revisiting the University's Mission and Strategic Plan

● reviewing the University's undergraduate and postgraduate course portfolio

● changing the structure of the academic year

● revising the Undergraduate Modular Programme (UMP)

● reviewing the quality and customer care processes

● redesigning the University's management information systems

● revising the financial and strategic planning model.

10   Following university-wide consultation in 2003 a revised 'Mission for Oxford Brookes University' was developed:

'Oxford Brookes University will contribute to the intellectual, social and economic development of the communities it serves through teaching, research and enterprise of the highest standards'.

Implementation of the mission is provided through three strategic goals which were set out in the 2003 Academic Plan. This plan is a statement of the University's intention to be: a premier learning and teaching institution; a research community that values equally research and knowledge transfer; and a regional partner contributing to social and economic development. In order to deliver the mission and strategic goals a number of key objectives were identified (and updated in 2004):

- develop a distinctive and sustainable academic portfolio of the highest quality

- develop research excellence in all academic schools

- increase the range and volume of knowledge transfer from the University's research activities and expertise

- secure a leading role in the social, economic and cultural development of the region

- increase the diversity of the student body to represent a wider range of backgrounds, cultures and countries

- develop the quality and increase the diversity of staff

- be financially self-sustaining

- increase the quality and efficient use of university facilities.

In order to deliver the mission and strategic goals the University has developed a range of targeted operating strategies. Of these, the strategic statements which have a direct relationship to the academic context include the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS); the Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategy; the Strategy for Regional Development; the Strategic Statement on Quality and Customer Care; the Information Processes and Systems Strategy; the e-Learning Strategy; the Communications Strategy; and the International Strategy.

11   The University has introduced a new strategic planning process to align the objectives of schools and directorates with the University's objectives as outlined above. Progress in achieving these objectives is monitored through performance indicators, with reporting to EB. To support this process, EB has identified around 40 indicators. These include data which have been provided for many years (such as student applications, intakes and targets) together with newly developed indicators which reflect emerging central and regional government objectives (for example, percentage of graduates finding employment within the region). Regular reporting on these indicators began in December 2004. The introduction of a further 20 indicators was deferred by EB in early February 2004 because no data to support them were available at that time. A number of these related to student satisfaction and, following the University's first large-scale, cross-institutional survey in 2004, these data are now available (see paragraph 80 below).

12   A major element of the strategic review involved a detailed re-examination of the University's course portfolio and research activities. After developing a number of criteria for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of programmes and subject areas a major review of the course portfolio was undertaken. Initially the programmes within the UMP were reviewed and this resulted in decisions to phase out certain subject areas where ongoing difficulties around student recruitment affected the longer-term viability of programmes (for example, geology, cartography and civil engineering), and a commitment to develop other areas. Subsequently programmes outside the UMP, and particularly those in the postgraduate portfolio, were similarly evaluated in terms of their recruitment, viability, and potential future development. The University has recently developed a number of Foundation Degrees. They share a common structure and a Guide to the Development of Foundation Degrees has been produced to aid development teams. All the Foundation Degrees contain work-based learning as a component.

Collaborative provision

13   The self-evaluation document (SED) highlighted a recent wide-ranging review of the University's processes for the management and

quality assurance of its collaborative partnerships. In view, however, of the size and complexity of the University's collaborative provision, it will be the subject of a separate, future, audit. Therefore it does not form part of the current institutional audit or of this report.

Background information

14   The published information available for this audit included:

- the report of the QAA continuation audit of the University in October and November 2001 which was published in March 2002

- quality assessment reports and subject review reports produced since 1995

- the reports of QAA developmental engagements covering the provision in architecture, music (both summer 2003), and history (summer 2004)

- the information available on University's website.

15   The University initially provided QAA with:

- an institutional SED, with links to extensive documentation on a CD-ROM and on the University's website. This documentation included details of the University's organisational and committee structures, the academic regulations and other regulatory documentation; a range of policy and strategy statements; and the main quality assurance procedures of the University

- five discipline self-evaluation documents (DSEDs) for the areas selected for DATs, together with the relevant programme specifications

- access to the University's intranet.

16   During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was able to examine a range of the University's internal documents, both in hard copy and through the intranet facility. During the audit visit the University provided the team with a range of additional documentation relating to the selected DATs, including a full range of examples of students' assessed work.

The University provided a number of subsequently identified and requested documents during the visit and the team also had full access to the University's intranet and to the Personal Information Portal (PIP). The team appreciated the unrestricted access that it was given to these sources of information.

The audit process

17   Following a preliminary meeting at the University in September 2004 between the QAA Assistant Director and representatives of the University and students, it was confirmed that five DATs would be conducted during the audit visit. On the basis of the SED and other published information, the audit team confirmed that the DATs would focus on taught programmes in business and management; English studies; construction management and urban design; mechanical and automotive engineering; and philosophy and religious studies. The University provided QAA with DSEDs in March 2005.

18   A briefing visit was conducted at the University on 14 to 16 March 2005. The purpose of this visit was to explore with the Vice-Chancellor, senior members of staff of the University and student representatives matters of institutional-level management of quality and standards raised by the University's SED, the students' written submission (SWS), and the published documentation. At the close of the briefing visit, a programme of meetings for the audit visit was agreed with the University.

19   At the preliminary meeting for the audit, the students of the University were invited, through their Students' Union (SU), to submit a written submission expressing views on the student experience at the University, and identifying any matters of concern or commendation with respect to the quality of programmes and the academic standards of awards. They were also invited to give their views on the level of representation afforded to them, and the extent to which their views were noted and acted upon. In generating their written submission, the SU established a working party to oversee the production of the SWS, which included an external consultant

from another University. This group organised focus group meetings with students to design the questionnaire, field tested it and issued it on-line to all Oxford Brookes students. The questionnaire was also made available by canvassers at the SU building and at the University's sites. In total, nearly 1,700 responses were received, representing 10.2 per cent of the student population. The SWS contained statistical analysis and textual comment on five main areas: the quality and reliability of the information published by the University; academic performance (including assessment); the experience of students as learners; student participation in quality and standards; and the experience of different categories of student. Following the analysis of this survey, the SU submitted the document to the Academic Board (AB) meeting in November 2004. The meeting of AB concluded that the SWS was an unbalanced document and the SU officers were requested to submit a short covering paper putting the conclusions into context. The SWS was subsequently submitted to QAA in January 2004. The audit team is grateful to the SU for preparing this document which it found to be a thorough and carefully considered report. The SWS provided the team with helpful information relevant to the experience and views of the student body, and the team considered that it constituted an excellent model among similar student contributions to the process of institutional audit (see also paragraph 78 below).

20   The audit visit took place from 25 to 29 April 2005. Eight meetings were held during the visit with groups of staff and students from the University. Meetings were also held with staff and students in the five subject areas selected for the DATs. The audit team comprised Professor J Beeby, Professor R Craik, Mr M Hill, Ms A J Kettle, Mr B Robinson, Dr P Smith, auditors, and Mrs R Goggin, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr P J A Findlay, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

21   The University was last audited in October and November 2001, with the audit report published in March 2002. The AB of the University received the report of the continuation audit at a meeting in May 2002. In June 2002, the AB received the University's response which was presented in a summary table indicating the proposed action plan in response to the report's recommendations. It was agreed that the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) would have operational responsibility for monitoring the various strands of the response. Clear lines of responsibility, timescales and responsibilities were indicated. The most recent update of the action plan, dated November 2004, indicated that of the 18 actions required all had either been implemented or given careful consideration by the University. The only remaining area where work was ongoing was the action to provide opportunity for greater social interaction across the postgraduate community. The audit team reviewed the action plan and came to the view that the University had acted appropriately to address many of the issues raised in the 2001 audit.

22   The 2001 audit highlighted the good practice of centralised student support and the guidance given to staff in performing their student support functions. It also praised the involvement of student representatives on committees and the responsive process for the induction of new undergraduates.

23   The audit report contained recommendations related to ensuring that the quality and standards loops between central committees and schools are always closed. The SED stated that the annual review and reporting process is now the vehicle by which this requirement was now addressed by the University. In view of comments raised in subject review reports at that time, the 2001 audit also identified the need for there to be greater consistency in assessment procedures and practices across schools. In the SED, the University drew the attention to the redesign of

all programmes at the time of the introduction of the new semester-based academic year which had provided the opportunity to demonstrate this consistency and to make academic progression explicit. Consistency is also supported by the University LTAs which requires that the learning outcomes of all programmes are linked to assessment.

24   The report of the 2001 audit also referred to the need to ensure that focused staff development supported the outcome of the strategic review. As part of the 2002-04 Human Resources Strategy the University introduced a new unified personal review scheme for all staff. The first round of this scheme now been completed and its monitoring by the University suggests that it has been well implemented (see paragraph 89 below).

25   The report also identified a number of areas that the University was advised to consider. These included ensuring that the complex change agenda on which it had embarked was managed effectively. Many of the developments planned in 2001 had since been followed through by the University, although work continued on revising the University's financial and strategic planning model. The audit team noted, however, that since the publication of the 2001 report the pace of change in the University had, in many respects, increased and the University now faced new challenges. At the time of the 2001 audit the University was carrying out a wide-ranging strategic review. Since then, the University has introduced a new strategic planning process, moved to a semester structure, reviewed the UMP and postgraduate programmes portfolio, reviewed the quality and customer care processes, redesigned the management information systems and made changes to its committee structures.

26   The most challenging change for the University, in the view of the audit team, has been the move to a semester structure, and the SED acknowledged the demands on the institution which had arisen from this development, and the concurrent concerns of

students and staff. In May 2001 the AB approved the move to a semester structure and implementation was scheduled for September 2004. Preparation for the change was led by the Semesters Project Office (SPO) which was established in September 2002 with the Pro Vice-Chancellor as Project Director. A project Manager was seconded from the Academic and Policy Quality Unit (APQU). The SPO also established five working groups to handle specific aspects of the implementation (the Learning & Teaching Working Group, the Student Support Working Group, the Access, Recruitment & Publicity Working Group and the Systems & Resources Working Group). The principal potential benefits arising from the restructuring of the academic year were seen as to provide substantially more time during the summer for staff to conduct research and engage in knowledge transfer activities; and to provide the opportunity for the University to promote 'summer University' activities. In addition the move from three terms to two semesters reduced the number of formal summative assessment points from three to two and, therefore, reduced the burden of formal assessment. The University's UMP and postgraduate programmes were revised and re-approved during this process and wide-ranging amendments were made to quality management systems. At the AB meeting in May 2001 SU officers and student representatives, in accord with the results of an SU referendum, expressed opposition to the move to semesters. While continuing to oppose the move to semesters, the SU has cooperated with the SPO to make the transition as smooth as possible. Meetings with students have been held regularly and student concerns have helped to shape the structure of the new academic year and assessment. The SED set out clearly the issues relating to the introduction of semesters which had been identified by the University's own systems and by its external consultants; the audit team found that these continued to have a considerable impact on the student experience in the University (see paragraphs 44 to 49).

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

27   The SED set out in detail the aims which the University seeks to accomplish through its framework for managing quality and standards in order to fulfill the commitment in its mission to provide teaching of the highest standards. The policy is to ensure that 'there is an appropriate degree of ownership of quality assurance mechanisms at each level of operation'. The University further seeks 'to establish, maintain and enhance quality through a series of rigorous procedures'. The senior university committees concerned with quality and standards have delegated to the schools powers to operate their own procedures. It is intended that schools can 'operate their quality management processes with a degree of flexibility' but that in this they are constrained by the general operational principles set by the University in the Quality and Standards Handbook (QSH). For example, the QSH sets out the requirements for annual and periodic review, for the approval of new and revised programmes and the expectations for professional and statutory body (PSB) visits and accreditation.

28   In order that the central committees can maintain oversight of school quality management activity, members of the APQU are assigned to schools as Quality Assurance Officers (QAOs). Their role includes both advice to school staff and the monitoring of school activities. The audit team confirmed the close relationship between the QAOs and the schools and their detailed involvement with the entire range of school processes. In addition to their monitoring, communication and advice roles, the QAOs are able to identify good practice and to disseminate it. QAOs also work closely with the Head of Quality Assurance (HQA) on the development of quality assurance processes and academic policy.

29   Schools are required to develop their own procedures for the management of quality and standards. These are subsequently put before the QSC (see below paragraph 33) for approval and review. This is intended to ensure that they take proper account of university and external quality assurance principles. The SED explained that use by the schools of their own procedures for programme development and approval enables academic staff responsible for programmes to assume ownership of the relevant quality issues at an early stage.

The institution's framework for managing quality and standards

30   Following a review in 2003, in which consideration of 'the policies and management of quality within the University' formed an element, a new committee structure has been adopted. Only a single layer of committees now reports to the AB. Those committees concerned with quality and standards are QSC, Learning and Teaching (LTC), Research and Knowledge Transfer (RKTC) and the eight school boards. In a separate development, the APQU was restructured and a new HQA appointed.

31   The AB is the senior academic committee of the University and has overall responsibility for the academic standards and quality of all programmes. It oversees admissions, assessment and awards and is required to satisfy itself by receipt of minutes and review processes that any powers delegated to other bodies are correctly applied. Both the Board itself and its committees must include student members. The current membership of the Board includes elected staff representatives and eight student members. The University has adopted the convention that committee minutes are circulated to AB members electronically and not usually discussed, so that the Board can focus its meetings on specific discussion issues.

32   Matters of strategy and planning are dealt with by the EB which has deans, directors and the SMT as members and acts in an advisory capacity to the Vice-Chancellor. The

establishment of the EB, also following the 2003 review, was not, at the time, without opposition and, indeed, AB voted against its formation. The review consultation paper stated that 'the Academic Board and committees will be consulted on decisions about academic activities'. The audit team noted the fine line which a group such as the EB must draw between its overall executive role, and the formal responsibility for academic matters which must rest with the AB. The team would encourage the University to pay careful attention to ensuring that the terms of reference of the AB are fully observed.

33   The SED identified the QSC as 'the body in which quality assurance policy and procedure is brought together and determined'. It has representation from each school and from the university executive structure and some directorates. Its remit includes the assurance, maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards and the quality of student support activities. It is expected to develop policies and procedures and to monitor their implementation. It also has oversight of the monitoring and review of academic programmes. The school representatives on QSC are designated quality assurance contacts and are members of the Quality Forum (QF) (see below paragraph 38). According to the SED 'they have been identified as the key conduits for communication between the school and the committee'.

34   The LTC is responsible for policy and implementation in respect of learning, teaching and assessment. Its remit specifically covers e-learning and student support, guidance and retention. The membership is largely composed of senior teaching and student support staff. The SED recognised past difficulties in the communication of LTC decisions to teaching staff and noted that 'the committee is investigating how to improve the channels of communication'.

35   The remit of the RKTC includes 'research students and the quality, standards and operation of research programmes and degrees'. There is also a Research Degrees Committee (RDC) with delegated powers to award research

degrees. It reports to RKTC and also directly to AB in relation to research degree registrations and the assessment and conferment of research degrees. The RDC works closely with the Graduate Office and through discipline subcommittees. The audit team learned during its visit that approval has now been given for the establishment of a Graduate School.

36   School boards play a major part in the management of academic quality and standards. Although they are required to manage quality and standards processes as set out in the QSH, they have freedom to determine their own committee structure, subject to minimum terms of reference for the board, and have flexibility on detailed procedures. The audit team noted that the resulting variability in the management of quality and standards within schools placed additional responsibility on the higher-level committees to ensure that institutional policies are correctly and effectively followed.

37   Each school is required to publish and to operate its own policy and procedures for the assessment of students' work. These cover matters such as double marking and moderation of summative assessed work. The University has in place guidance on the procedures for examination committees and makes them available to external examiners through the external examiner resource web pages. The assessment load for each module is considered as part of the approval process and forms part of the programme specifications. In addition, programme committees are required to have regard for assessment scheduling and volume.

38   Three times each year the HQA, the QAOs, the Director of Academic and Student Affairs and the quality assurance contacts from each school meet as the QF. The meetings are informal, although notes are kept, and allow discussion of a wide range of issues concerned with quality, including consideration of areas where new or revised policy may be required. The SED noted that the QF also provides an opportunity for the sharing of good practice across schools. The audit team noted the

spread of topics discussed in recent years, such as external examining, assessment, external reviews and personal development planning, and concluded that the QF was a significant contributor to quality assurance within the institution and a valuable initiative.

39   Considering the overall framework for quality assurance, the audit team found that the chain of delegation of quality assurance matters from the AB to QSC to schools, (with the APQU sometimes as an intermediary, preparing summary reports), was a long one. The team considered that this, together with the degree of flexibility and variability allowed to schools, the number of committees reporting to AB, and the Board's approach to the consideration of committee minutes, had resulted in a system in which the Board's oversight of quality assurance processes taking place at the school, programme or module level was relatively weak. While recognising the role played by QSC in this regard, the team nevertheless advised that the communication of quality matters to the AB and their consideration by that body needs to be strengthened if it is to carry out effectively the responsibilities which rest with it.

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

40   According to the SED, the University 'is committed to enhancing not just the quality of all its academic programmes, but the whole student experience'. A paper from the APQU in June 2004 set out a Strategy for Quality Enhancement of Academic Programmes. One of the more important features of this strategy is the intention to improve the sharing of good practice, whether derived from internal or external reviews or from considerations at the programme level. The University has developed what is described in the SED as a coherent approach to enhancement, involving a new central post, improved learning, teaching and assessment practice, staff development, enhanced student support, improved facilities and better dissemination of good practice.

41   A significant new focus for developing the quality of academic programmes has been provided by the appointment of a Head of Learning and Teaching who works with the LTC on the development and implementation of the University's LTAs. The LTC maintains a continuing overview of progress in meeting the various objectives of the strategy, in addition to considering other proposals for developments in learning and teaching. Developments in learning and teaching practice are also sought as a means for enhancing the quality experienced by students. Poor attendance at earlier learning and teaching forums has led to a new approach exemplified by a recent conference on 'Delivering Inclusivity and Diversity'. A new peer reviewed e-Journal of Learning and Teaching has been established and joins a formerly paper-based publication, Teaching News, which has been an e-journal since 2003. These are expected to provide wide-dissemination of pedagogic developments. The SED particularly stressed the emphasis placed on staff development (see paragraphs 96 to 103) as a contributing process for quality enhancement.

42   Close attention is also paid to student support (see paragraphs 119 to 124), beginning at the pre-enrolment stage and proceeding through the provision, during the course, of handbooks and personal and academic guidance to careers guidance. The implementation of personal development planning (PDP) for undergraduates is a further extension of this activity. In addition, a Quality and Customer Care policy has been developed as part of the Strategic Review. This is intended to enhance, among other things, the service provided to students. The objectives include extension of annual and periodic review processes into support directorates, improved understanding of student satisfaction and progress on communications and information processes.

43   The SED stated that the reapproval process associated with the move to semesters had offered opportunities for enhancement. It had involved a redesign of the academic programmes which allowed the definition of a closer

relationship between the learning, teaching and assessment strategies and the learning outcomes of the programmes. Students were intended to have 'a better understanding of the academic standards and levels of achievement expected' from clearer assessment criteria relevant to each learning outcome. Definitive programme specifications support this process. Although the audit team recognised that the procedures for the redesign and approval of programmes had been carefully managed, it was too early for the team to judge the extent to which the overall aims had been achieved.

44   Much staff effort at all levels of the University during the three years preceding the audit had been occupied with the implementation of the decision to move from an academic year consisting of three terms to one of two semesters (see paragraph 26 above). The new teaching and assessment year lasts for 28 weeks (22 of them devoted to teaching), ending just after the middle of May (a shorter period than previously). The transition took effect from the start of the current academic year, 2004-05, at which time all three years of study were changed. The audit team noted that this was an extremely challenging change for staff and students alike, especially since there have been associated course and timetable changes (see below). The process of change was managed by the Semesters Project Board (SPB) which began meeting in November 2002 and was supported by the Themed Working Groups. The SPB has reported to the AB on a regular basis. The team was aware that its visit coincided with the University's first opportunity for an overall review of the change and consideration of any difficulties. Following an SPB meeting in February, a detailed report on the implementation of semesters was received and discussed by the AB. Although generally positive, the report drew attention to a number of problems which have arisen and which were also noted by the team during discussions with staff and students.

45   Among the potential problems identified early by the SPB is the structure of the academic year. Despite being appreciated at the beginning of the process and carefully

considered, the attempt to squeeze the entire first semester into the period before Christmas has led to difficulties with examinations and some disruption to the final week of teaching. The calendar for the academic year 2005-06 is already fixed so that it is difficult to resolve this problem fully in the short term. A further issue is the management of assessments, concerning which students complained of bunching of coursework and examinations. In some cases, assessment loads may have increased with semesterisation, despite the University's wish and intention to reduce them.

46   The thorough review and reapproval process undertaken as part of the semesterisation project was also intended to reduce the overall number of modules taught. This has been done, but it has combined with the changes in the timetable structure to cause difficulties for some students, particularly those studying part-time, in following their intended programme. Transitional arrangements have been put in place to minimise the disruption to courses, but affected students have to discuss their options individually with academic staff. The audit team nevertheless found that these difficulties persisted, and the team met, mid way through the second semester, some students who did not know how or whether they would be able to complete their intended course. A further consequence for some students of the move to semesters was brought to the attention of the team and had also been identified by the SPB. It concerned difficulties over the timetabling of contact hours, referred to in the University as 'slotting'. Affected students, both full and part-time, have experienced changes such as bunching of contact hours or alterations to evening sessions which they have found difficult to manage. A related issue which students brought to the attention of the team is the timing of the reading weeks which, they felt, had in this year been less coordinated and hence less useful than previously.

47   In the student meetings during several of the DATs the audit team identified concerns from students about the implementation of the semester structure. These related to the perceived heavier workload, particularly in the

first semester, the resultant effect on timetabling during the week, the impact on part-time students and the assessment load. Staff at various levels of the University recognised the challenge that semesterisation had presented. The SPB has reported regularly on the implementation of the process and at the March 2005 meeting of the AB an interim report was considered. This catalogued the difficulties being experienced by students under four main headings: learning and teaching, assessment, systems and resources (which includes the semester calendar) and student support. The SPB report recommended that these issues should primarily be handled through annual review reports, noting that most of the changes need to be implemented at programme and module level. The Board decided that the SPB should continue in existence to monitor the implementation of semesters in conjunction with the LTC and the QSC. A full review of semesterisation was to be carried out at the end of the first full academic year of operation. While the team acknowledged that many of the actions would need to be addressed at a local level, it considered that the University would also benefit from putting in place a plan and a timetable against which progress could be monitored by the committees.

48   The SU had also recently undertaken a survey on semesterisation which indicated that a majority of the student body felt that semesterisation had not been a positive move. The officers stated that some students had suffered from a lack of choice of modules as a result of semesterisation and that there had been a lack of consistent advice on the management of the modules that could be taken. In the worst cases this had resulted in unbalanced workloads on students in the two semesters.

49   The audit team found that the University is concerned about the enhancement of its programmes and has put in place a range of appropriate processes to support this. However, despite the considerable efforts at all levels, the major programme of change on which it has been working since 2001 has not been without problems and it was clear to the team that a

number of students, including some of the significant cohort of part-time students, had been adversely affected. The team concluded that many members of the student body had experienced one or more of the problems identified above during the first year of semesterisation and it was likely that the quality of their learning experience had been reduced in consequence. It is not only important for the University to eliminate or reduce these problems for future years, but also to pay continuing attention to those who have experienced difficulties with the progress of their studies during the current year, so as to ensure that the quality of their overall course of study is not diminished. The team recognised that the University had recently made progress with identifying and considering the problems occasioned by the move to semesters. It nevertheless advises the University to maintain its efforts to deal with the problems as a matter of urgency and particularly to seek to minimise any dislocations to the studies of current students.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

50   The University's requirements and processes for the approval of new and revised programmes are set out in great detail in the QSH and are described as 'robust' in the SED. Consideration of new programme proposals is essentially a two-stage process, resource and policy matters being dealt with first either through the school's planning agreement and the University's programme development calendar or through the EB. In the Business School, the audit team noted particularly well-developed procedures for establishing the business case for a new programme proposal. Once it has been agreed that a proposal satisfies the planning requirements, it proceeds to development through a programme development team (PDT). This team has the task of establishing the details of the programme and preparing the necessary documentation, including programme specifications and the proposed student handbook. Other considerations, such as likely take-up and the profile of graduates, must also be addressed. The proposal must then be placed

before a University approval panel chaired by a dean and usually having external members. This panel considers whether the proposal satisfies a large number of criteria set out in the QSH and, if satisfied, makes a recommendation to the QSC. Any conditions set by the approval panel must be met by the PDT before the link QAO forwards the required certification form to the QSC.

51   Major revisions to existing programmes must follow essentially the same procedure. The criteria for treating a revision as major are set out in the QSH and include, as noted in the SED 'proposals which affect learning outcomes, the addition of new awards, new modes of delivery, significant changes to assessment strategy and changes to title'. Minor revisions are subject to approval by the dean and by the link QAO and usually require consultation with external examiners. The University's Academic Regulations require that formal consultation with students already on the course must take place before any changes can be implemented. Reapproval panels which operated to approve revised programmes as part of the semesterisation project followed the same process. External panel members were used if there was a significant change in the programme, but for the most part this was not judged to be necessary and advice was sought only from external examiners.

52   The SED described annual programme review (APR) as 'a core element in the University's processes'. The review is conducted by the programme team and considers external examiner reports, progression data and student evaluation among the evidence. The QSH describes in detail the purposes, conduct and intentions of the review process. The report of the review, using a standard template, must include an action plan for the following year and programme teams are 'asked to identify examples of good practice or innovation for wider consideration'. The programme reports are considered at a school annual review meeting which is expected both to reflect critically on 'issues arising from the previous academic year' and to set 'key priorities for the forthcoming year'.

53   The annual review reports from schools are then forwarded to the APQU and are not shared directly or through University committee papers with other schools. The SED explained that in the APQU issues arising from the school annual review reports are 'collated and addressed to areas, such as directorates, where action is requested'. This has sometimes proved to be a slow process as matters have progressed through the committee structure. Following a recent review, an enhanced process has been introduced 'with a clearer focus on identifying major issues and obtaining direct responses by interaction between the schools and directorates concerned'. The audit team considered that, given the significant effort required to produce the reports and the relevance of their content, it would also be beneficial for them to be seen by staff in other schools. Although the APQU prepares a summary report for the QSC on the outcomes of the school reviews, the process is not, in the judgement of the team, being used to its greatest advantage in terms of securing consistency of the student experience across the institution. Similarly, although discussion at the annual school review meeting provides the opportunity for consideration of common issues and sharing good practice within schools, that can only happen between schools through the medium of the APQU. This intervention inevitably reduces the effectiveness of the process below that which would be achieved if the annual review reports were also discussed at meetings involving school academic staff.

54   The University uses a periodic review process on a six-year cycle. In a change from an earlier pattern which used schools as the basis for review, the process 'is now focused at the level of the subject or discipline', normally collecting together all programmes within a particular JACS code. The SED argued that 'this change has allowed the University to focus more effectively on academic issues'. As set out in the QSH, each school is responsible for reviewing the programmes within its portfolio. The QSH makes explicit reference to the relevant section of the *Code of practice for the assurance of*

academic quality and standards in higher education (*Code of practice*), published by QAA, and lists the questions that the review should address. The panel will normally be chaired by the dean of school or a nominated representative and a standard membership is prescribed. The panel receives a range of documentation including APR reports and external examiners' reports. It meets formally for a one-day event during which it meets with staff and students. At the end of the meeting the programme teams receive an oral report on the panel's findings. The written report is considered by the school board and forwarded to the APQU together with the subsequent action plan. Finally, the report and the response are considered and monitored by QSC. Both QSC and LTC receive annual collations of issues and good practice identified in the periodic review. The audit team considered that, if carried out as specified in the QSH, this constituted an effective process of periodic review.

55   The University operates a second review process referred to as themed audits. The topics for these audits are approved by QSC and the reviews are undertaken by APQU, looking at 'the mechanisms for assuring quality across particular aspects of the University's work'. Among the processes that have been audited are postgraduate research programmes, academic appeals and complaints and delegated validation procedures. The audit reports are received by the QSC and appropriate school-level committees for action on the recommendations. The audit team read some of the reports and found them to reflect a careful evaluation of the relevant processes coupled with useful recommendations for improvements. The example of the audit of postgraduate research programmes (see paragraph 116 below) further showed this to be an effective mechanism for the enhancement of quality processes. The team commends the themed audit process as good practice.

External participation in internal review processes

56   The SED stated that the University assures itself that new programmes are of the appropriate academic standard for the award being proposed by using an approval process that requires the involvement of external advisers with appropriate subject knowledge and expertise. Approval panels are specifically required to ensure that external advice has been sought and responded to during the development and the SED gave a number of examples of the influence of PSBs and employers on the development of new or revised programmes. The level of external involvement as set out in the QSH is that 'external advisers must be included in PDT discussions wherever possible'. The QSH does not specify that there must be external members of either the PDT or the approval panel, except when the approval process is linked to PSB approval, in which case a nominee may be included in the approval panel. However, the audit team was told by staff that there usually is an external member on approval panels unless the new programme is very similar to an existing programme. This suggests that the very detailed statement on the use of external advisers appended to the QSH could be usefully updated to reflect current practice.

57   It is university policy that each periodic review panel should contain an external member who can be either a PSB representative or a subject specialist. The specialist could represent an employer's view or provide an academic input. It is expected that the external panel member 'will take a full and active part in the review process, including attending the event itself'. Review reports seen by the audit team confirmed that effective use is made of external panel members in the review process.

58   The University's arrangements for external participation in programme approval and periodic review were judged to be appropriate and working well in practice. The audit team found that the University has sound policies which are implemented in schools to ensure

appropriate and productive external participation in its quality assurance processes.

External examiners and their reports

59   The SED confirmed that it is a University requirement that external examiners are appointed to each award-bearing programme. Their role is to monitor the programme's assessment processes and consider the overall academic standards. Schools are responsible for nominating external examiners and nominations are finally approved by the QSC on behalf of Academic Board. The University normally appoints external examiners for four academic years. On appointment APQU provides initial induction to new external examiners through its web pages. Most external examiners have expressed satisfaction with this arrangement and the information provided, but some have asked for written guidance, and this is being developed. The schools provide individual briefing for the examiners about the subject area and the programmes to be covered. This information includes school or departmental moderation policies and programme handbooks. Examiners are asked to comment in their annual report on the adequacy of the briefing information received.

60   External examiners are required to attend subject examination boards and to submit an annual report, for which the template had recently been extensively revised. Reports are received by APQU and circulated to schools. The dean of school is required to ensure the external examiner receives a formal response and schools have adopted various procedures to ensure that external examiners are informed about the outcomes of their reports. Examiners are also asked to comment on whether they believe that previous recommendations have been addressed to their satisfaction and this is monitored by the QAOs. The external examiner reports are synoptically summarised in an annual report by the QAOs and this overview is considered at University level by QSC on behalf of Academic Board. The SED pointed out that the recent move to semesterisation had utilised the external examiner system to ensure maintenance of

quality and standards and the relationship with external examiners in some cases went beyond the scrutiny of standards to involve active guidance in the enhancement of provision.

61   DATs found evidence of external examiners engaging well with the examination and quality enhancement processes. External examiners within the DATs provided full and detailed reports and it was noted that the template for these had been adjusted in order to accommodate the requirements for published teaching quality information (TQI). Staff in the DATs confirmed that external examiners were notified of actions taken in response to their reports, primarily through receiving the annual review reports, although the audit team noted that considerable variability in the process of reporting actions existed across the institution.

62   It was stated in the SED that the University's policies and procedures meet the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examiners.* Overall, the audit team was able to confirm this and was satisfied that the University had established an effective external examiner system which reflected recent sector-level developments. Although practice across the schools is variable in some respects, the team was convinced that the relationship with external examiners provided satisfactory assurance of standards.

External reference points

63   The SED stated that the University has engaged actively from the outset with all the elements of the Academic Infrastructure, published by QAA.

The Code of practice

64   The University has taken an active approach to the use of the various elements of the *Code of practice*. The University has reviewed its practice in light of the precepts of each section of the *Code* and identified areas where practice already meets the expectations expressed in the *Code* and those where additional work is required. Relevant sections of the *Code* are used as a

starting point for the themed audits (see paragraph 55 above). In general the University was confident that the *Code* was effectively mapped and integrated into the QSH, and audit team was able to confirm this.

The FHEQ

65   The SED stated that the University welcomed the development of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and that it expects the qualification descriptors to be used as a part of the approval and review process for academic programmes. In relation to the FHEQ all of its awards have been reviewed and are considered to be in line with the relevant level-descriptors. It was noted that a particular feature of the University's undergraduate awards was the distinction between level 1 modules, defined as stage 1, and level 2 and 3 modules which were defined as stage 2; however, clear distinction has been made between the levels in order to comply with the FHEQ.

Subject benchmark statements

66   In its SED the University emphasised that subject benchmark statements have been integrated into the consideration of the appropriateness of the learning outcomes and curriculum of both new and existing programmes; during the redesign of all programmes for the introduction of semesters, teams were required to demonstrate how they had taken account of the relevant benchmark statement as well as the relevant qualification descriptor.

67   Evidence from the DATs showed that subject benchmarks had often been a positive and useful reference point for curriculum design. Evidence from the DATs also demonstrated a strong awareness of subject benchmarks but noted that a number of vocational areas placed more emphasis on professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) expectations. PSRBs are an important external reference point for many courses, exercising their own influence on curriculum design.

Programme specifications

68   All programmes offered by the University have a programme specification, the development of which is a part of the approval process. Programme specifications were extensively reviewed as a part of the redesign of programmes. The University is now moving towards publishing programme specifications on its website. The University's LTAs recognises the value of programme specifications and used the redesign process as a mechanism to link more closely the learning, teaching and assessment strategies and the learning outcomes of programmes in a constructive alignment. Evidence from the DATs confirmed that programme specifications were in place for all programmes and were being used effectively for curriculum management and for student information. Specifications seen by the audit team showed appropriate references to the elements of the Academic Infrastructure, with good use of subject benchmarks. They also included reference to the University's strategies for learning, teaching and research. The University is using programme specifications effectively.

69   Overall, the audit team concluded that the University had a positive and effective approach to the recognition in all of its programmes of the external reference points provided by the Academic Infrastructure, and these have been appropriately adopted and embedded as a part of its internal procedures.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

70   The University underwent two subject reviews following the 2001 audit, since when there have been a number of changes in the participating programmes and schools in response to the recommendations made. More recently, three developmental engagements have taken place. The reports were considered in the departments, the schools and by QSC, which also received an overview paper of issues arising from them.

71   The University's portfolio of programmes includes many professional areas, leading to numerous visits and meetings concerning PSRB approval or accreditation. Staff in departments work closely with their professional colleagues and schools seek to combine accreditation visits with university review processes when possible. The visits are managed by the schools but with university support available. The audit team noted the close and responsive interactions between the University and the PSRBs. On the evidence available to it, the team judged that the University was making appropriate use of external reports to inform its management of quality and standards.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

72   The SED stated that students have a number of formal and informal routes for representation within the institution. The University's Student Charter sets out the rights and responsibilities of student representatives. At the operational level, all programmes have elected student representatives and their role is defined in the relevant programme handbooks. Student representatives are members of programme committees and in some schools they sit on the appropriate school and departmental committees. The SU has a student representative coordinator to liaise with the representatives and produces a useful booklet on becoming a student representative. The SU runs training programmes for student representatives in their role on programme committees.

73   Notwithstanding concerns expressed in the SWS relating to student representation and feedback (see below paragraph 78), the audit team found that students met during the audit confirmed the general effectiveness of the student representation system at programme level and identified positive changes that had been achieved following their comments in feedback. The students' representatives at programme level contribute to the annual review meetings for each programme. They are also invited to become members of the panels carrying out periodic review although take up so far has been

low. For example, in the context of the periodic review in the School of the Built Environment, staff had asked the SU for assistance in the nomination of student representatives.

74   In the SWS, the SU commented that the understanding among students of the role of student representatives was low and stated that there was room for improvement. It was pointed out that the training and support provided by the SU can only be made available to those representatives that they know about and that the communication of this information from programmes could be improved. The audit team heard from the Director of Academic and Student Affairs that the University was investigating the possibility of working with the SU to identify ways to increase student involvement and provide specific training for them in the periodic review process. Officers of the SU stated that they would welcome greater consistency in the student representation system at school level. Through the DATs the team recognised the variation that existed in the system of student representation at school level.

75   At institutional level, elected members of the SU are represented on the AB, on its subcommittees and on the Board of Governors. The SED commented that apart from the AB and the RDC, the attendance by students had been limited and that the University intended to work with the SU to improve this. The SED stated that the Vice-Chancellor and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Registrar have regularly scheduled meetings with the SU officers which the audit team learnt were six-weekly in the case of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Registrar. The SU officers expressed the view that, even with these meetings, they did not feel that issues which they raised were being given sufficient attention by the senior management of the University. Following the publication of the SWS and its subsequent consideration by the AB, the SU officers felt, according to their discussion with the team, that they had no longer been able to represent the student body in an appropriately receptive context; the officers were conscious of the need for both sides to work to improve this situation.

76   The SED stated that evidence from annual and periodic reviews suggests that most students feel that their views are taken into account, and the evidence gathered by the audit team in its meetings with students in the DATs tended to support this view. However, this contrasted with the concerns expressed to the team by the SU officers, and with the findings of the SWS survey. The team formed the view that student representation was generally effective at the level of the programme committees. Students are represented and able to make their views heard on matters of immediate concern to them. The University is conscious of the need to encourage the involvement of student representatives and is working in a number of ways to do this. At the institutional level students' views are articulated through the SU representatives who sit on all the University Boards and committees, with the exception of the EB. The officers of the SU work hard to gather and report the views of the student body, but at the time of the audit they did not believe that there was a receptive response to their contributions. The team encourages the University and the SU to work to reinforce this important relationship at the institutional level.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

77   The SED claimed that the University places great importance on collecting and acting upon feedback from students and that the mechanisms are effective. At the module level, feedback is collected using evaluation forms or questionnaires. At programme and school level the inputs of students' representatives are the main mechanism. The questionnaires used at the module level contribute to the production of the annual evaluation reports of modules although the methods used are variable. The views of students are also raised and discussed at programme committee meetings. Students met by the audit team confirmed that they provided regular feedback on their modules using the module evaluation questionnaires (MEQs). They also pointed to the informal channels of communication with programme

and module leaders that usually led to the speedy resolution of any issues.

78   The SWS produced by the SU summarised the results of a carefully conducted survey of the student body, with a response rate of just over 10 per cent (see also paragraph 19 above). The conclusions reached in the survey were: (most importantly) that a substantial majority of the respondents (73 per cent) were happy or very happy with their experience at the University; that there was some concern regarding the accuracy of information, in particular pre-arrival information; that some students were concerned about aspects of group-work; that there was a substantial amount of dissatisfaction about the availability of resources; that student representation was not perceived as always working effectively; that many students felt that their feedback was not listened to, or had not seen the result of it; and that students from non-traditional backgrounds or postgraduate students were least satisfied with their experience at the University. In the course of the audit, the audit team was shown an action plan produced by the University which was intended to address the issues of concern that had been identified in the SWS.

79   The SED recognised that at times feedback has not been as effective as it might be, confirming the view expressed in the SWS. The survey undertaken prior to the writing of the SWS revealed that approximately one third of students felt that developments in their courses were not communicated to them and only just over one third felt that their comments made in feedback were taken seriously. The SWS had commented that the situation could be improved if the good practice in some schools of the University was to be spread more widely across the University. The audit team noted that in the University's response to the SWS there were no specific actions identified in relation to the issue of students feeling that their comments were not taken seriously, although the HQA and the QF had been assigned responsibility for addressing this.

80   During 2004 the University undertook an institution-wide student satisfaction survey which achieved a 35 per cent response rate. This revealed that there was satisfaction with the learning and teaching experience and the organisation of courses and expressed a number of particular areas as very satisfactory including the timing of classes, the encouragement from staff, the flexibility of the modular system and the availability and quality of lecture notes and handbooks. The only issue that was rated as unsatisfactory within the perception of learning and teaching was the cost of course materials and this had been referred to the Value for Money Group. Concerns were also raised about the availability of multiple copies for books at the library sites, and as a result the University has made an additional grant of £60,000 to the library to be spent on multiple copies of books. The results of this survey have been translated into an action plan which indicates the issues, the actions and the responsibility for action. The University plans to repeat the student satisfaction survey on a regular basis.

81   With respect to feedback from graduates the SED acknowledged that the University had been less successful. The pattern of collection of feedback is variable, with active alumni associations in, for instance, the subject areas of architecture and hospitality, leisure and tourism. In the Department of Accounting the survey of graduates in 2002 revealed that they wanted greater contact with employers and this has led to a number of visits from representatives of the professional bodies. The Business School has launched Bacchus, a dedicated website for all its alumni and current students. Exit surveys are undertaken in the Business School to gather the views of students on their programmes but this is not universal practice. Overall the gathering of the views of graduates was judged in the SED to be ad-hoc, and the evidence available to the audit team suggested that this was an accurate assessment.

82   The views of employers contribute to the development of curricula in some schools, most notably, those with PSRB links. For example the

School of Technology and the Departments of Planning and Real Estate and Construction have programme advisory boards. The School of Mechanical Engineering has reintroduced an industrial advisory board to meet once each semester to advise on course content. The University actively seeks the views of employers at validation and periodic reviews and the audit team noted that the periodic review of Built Environment programmes had included appropriate representation of externals. Other feedback on programmes is obtained through the liaison between the staff of the University and placement employers. These inform the currency of the curriculum and the preparation of students for employment.

83   Overall, the audit team formed the view that there were appropriate mechanisms in place to gather the views of students at the module and programme level. The team welcomes the decision by the University to continue to undertake the student satisfaction survey on a regular basis and notes the demonstrated commitment to acting on the outcomes of the survey, guided by action plans. In this context, the team noted with interest the different outcomes, with regard to some aspects of the student experience, of the surveys conducted by the University and the SU. The University may wish to reflect, through such a comparison, on the best approach to identifying students' concerns. With respect to employers' and graduates' views the University has itself recognised, and the team supports the view, that much could be learnt from the initiatives in different schools to ensure effective gathering of feedback.

Progression and completion statistics

84   The SED outlined ways in which the University uses progression and completion statistics. These are one benchmark of student performance and they are given thorough consideration in examination committees. Standard module report forms are used in many schools; these include a statistical analysis of results and they explicitly compare results year on year. While a range of data was

provided for the annual review report it was noted that the only University requirement was an analysis of degree awards, with identification of any trends which may be developing in relation to classes of awards, mark averages etc. It was also noted that in the annual review process programme teams generally did not provide any commentary on the statistical information and data provided. The team considered that this was an area which would be enhanced by a more detailed analysis of all the statistical information provided.

85   The use of progression and completion statistics for quality assurance purposes at an institutional level is one where work is ongoing. The University has used a course and student management system for many years to record both the details of the course structure and of all the programmes within the UMP and student performance and progression within the modules and programmes. The system is now being replaced by a new student records management system (eCSIS). This is expected to enable a more sophisticated analyses of statistical information, including that relating to first destination statistics and information relating to widening participation initiatives.

86   Periodic review panels are provided with statistical evidence on student progression, achievement and employment for the period under review, although not all panels consider this information in detail. Evidence from the DATs indicated that no detailed analysis of data was included in the periodic review reports. With regard to the University's performance, the audit team found that the data provided from the individual DAT areas indicated good progression and completion rates, and HESA data made available to the team indicated a satisfactory performance against specific indicators and showed that the University is generally performing at its benchmark level with regard to progression and completion. At the institutional level, the team also saw an example of a report to the Board of Governors which provided various statistics related to finance, postgraduate research and external funding, however, no data or analysis for overall University performance in

progression and completion were provided beyond the normal HESA return.

87   The audit team found that there was extensive use of data at the local level in the context of annual review and in the assessment process. Student data had also been used in analytical studies by various committees developing policy, for example, withdrawal rates were considered by the LTC. However, the team found little evidence that data analysis was being used systematically to inform strategic policy-making within the academic committee structure. The University recognised the importance of the provision and analysis of student data and was moving towards enhanced methods of capture, analysis, and the more comprehensive review of statistical information. However, the data collected centrally does not appear to be used effectively to inform or manage programmes at school and course level. Overall, the data gathering systems appeared to be effective and had the potential to provide detailed data at institutional level. The University will wish to consider, however, whether its current procedures enable it to make the best use of the available data.

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

88   The SED stated that the University has adopted a comprehensive recruitment and selection policy to ensure that the most appropriate candidate is selected, and that its policy on equality of employment opportunity is followed. All posts have documented job descriptions and person specifications that are determined by the school or directorate, to reflect the nature and content of the role. Schools are responsible for the recruitment of hourly-paid staff who are then issued with formal contracts of employment by the University. The Directorate of Human Resources has taken over the responsibility for advertising such posts, while schools will continue to carry out the selection. It is intended that this will enable more effective monitoring of the recruitment and selection process. For all posts,

members of appointment panels must have attended the University's recruitment and selection training course; the content of this course was reviewed and updated during the 2003-04 academic year. The reasons for selection decisions are recorded to ensure that the process is transparent. References are taken up and qualifications are verified.

89 As part of the 2002-04 Human Resources Strategy, a new Personal and Professional Development and Review process (PPDR) for all staff was introduced from June/July 2003. The new process covers the assessment of performance and achievement of objectives over the previous year, career progression and development needs, and objectives for the following year. The PPDR scheme applies to all staff, including fractional posts. For academic staff, appraisal is usually by the line manager, who will have been trained as a part of the process. The audit team was able to confirm that the system was well embedded and staff who met the team spoke of appraisal positively as allowing for the identification of development needs.

90 The schools and directorates provide most of the elements of the induction process in accordance with the guidelines provided by the Directorate of Human Resources. These provide a set of organisational and job-related information which is designed to supplement the documentary information and welcome pack that is provided by the Directorate of Human Resources with the contract of employment. At approximately six-week intervals, the Directorate runs an introduction day for newly-appointed staff, in which senior managers introduce participants to the day-to-day operations of the University, and a 'marketplace' is offered through which service providers can provide more information about the University's facilities. A member of the University's SMT attends to make a short presentation about the University's Mission and to answer questions. The content and format of this introduction day was reviewed and restructured in 2003. Separate sessions on display screen equipment and manual handling are offered to all staff for whom they would be

appropriate. Some of the schools and directorates have their own handbooks and/or manuals and may also organise school induction days to supplement the University-wide material.

91 With effect from the autumn semester 2004, new academic staff will participate in a formal three-year programme of support that will incorporate mentoring on their research activities, research training, undertaking the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education (PGCTHE), and access to a £3,000 bursary to support work on a research funding application.

92 The criteria for promotion to senior and principal lecturer are set out in the employment handbook. At both levels, effectiveness and innovation as a teacher, researcher and scholar, administrator, and in consultancy and external activity, can be advanced in support of a promotion. All candidates are expected to demonstrate teaching effectiveness and excellence. The criteria and procedures for promotion to professorial status were revised in 2002, and include as one of the three threshold criteria, the 'record and reputation of the candidate as a teacher, including their contribution to the development of the subject and to course development'.

93 A key element of the University's LTAs is to 'encourage and reward teaching excellence and to establish teaching and course delivery based on evidence of effective practice'. The promotion procedures for principal lecturer and professor grades already incorporate a set of criteria reflecting contribution to learning and teaching, and from 2004-05 candidates for promotion will be expected to submit a portfolio of evidence of their contribution in support of their application. In 2000, as part of this strategy, two initiatives were launched to enhance learning and teaching and disseminate good practice. One initiative led to the creation of designated principal lecturer posts in all schools, specialising in teaching and learning; the other established 12 academic fellowships for one-year projects in learning and teaching submitted under a university-wide competitive bidding procedure. In both cases, a compulsory

criterion for appointment was a demonstrable record of excellence in learning and teaching.

94 In addition, and as part of the Human Resource Strategy, six two-year teaching fellowships have been awarded annually since 2003 to reward teaching excellence and to support pedagogic development in areas that contribute to the University's strategic objectives. These fellowships have been supplemented from 2004 by two-year associate teaching fellowships for less experienced staff to support their further development in areas of learning and teaching, as appropriate to their schools. Additionally, two two-year learning support fellowships will be offered for staff in posts which directly support the development of learning and teaching excellence.

95 On the basis of the published information and from its discussions with staff, the audit team considered that the arrangements for appointing and appraising staff were effective and clear. The team was satisfied that the University had effective systems in place to encourage staff in the pursuit of excellence in research and that the more recent developments and initiatives had also established learning and teaching as an area of significant career development.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

96 The University's PPDR process includes the requirement that schools and directorates maintain staff development plans. These are based on the development needs of all members of staff which are identified annually as part of the PPDR process, and are also related to key university and school objectives. Hourly-paid staff are not expected to undergo PPDR, although they do have access to all staff development activities provided by the University.

97 A central feature of the new framework for staff development is the three-year rolling staff development plan which is produced by each school and directorate. It is revised annually and links corporate and school/directorate

objectives to development priorities. The plans form the basis for determining allocations from the central staff development fund and are also linked to school/directorate human resource strategies. Each plan incorporates staff development supporting the delivery of research, learning and teaching, and organisational objectives, together with continuing professional development and the technical and management/administrative requirements of the school's operation. Plans are geared to the achievement of the key results areas for the school or directorate concerned over the next planning period, and comprises both specialist provision for its own specific needs and components of the corporate employee development portfolio delivered by the Oxford Centre for Staff Learning and Development (OCSLD), within the Directorate of Human Resources.

98 For all new teaching staff, half-time and above, with less than five years teaching experience and more than a one-year contract, it is compulsory to complete the PGCTHE. This is a one-year credit-bearing master's level course, accredited by the Staff Education and Development Association, in collaboration with Oxford Brookes, and by the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE). Schools receive part-time hours compensation to cover the attendance of new staff on the course. Staff from OCSLD evaluate the course annually and consult deans and other academic colleagues on the form and content of the course. Additionally, OCSLD provides a 10-session Associate Teachers' Course for staff and postgraduate research students who undertake more than 50 hours of teaching per annum. Accreditation is optional and each year a proportion of the participants seek credit by completing the assessment. Those who undertake less than 50 hours of teaching per year are also entitled to attend individual sessions of interest to them. Both of these courses were accredited by ILTHE, and are open to other staff for whom it is not compulsory. For more experienced staff, a Postgraduate Diploma in Learning and

Teaching in Higher Education is available, and this can lead to an MA in Education. All participants on the PGCTHE are required to have a mentor appointed in their school. There is also a new university mentoring scheme which offers the opportunity for all staff, at all levels, to be mentored.

99   In addition, OCSLD offers an annual programme of staff development workshops, including topics on aspects of learning and teaching. In the area of e-learning, the University has an e-Learning Strategy and this articulates with the Human Resources Strategy to support staff development in this area. Training, support and advice is provided jointly by the Media Workshop and OCSLD who also provide a programme of staff development sessions on e-learning. The Media Workshop also hosts the Learning Technologists' Forum that provides additional support and maintains the Brookes Virtual website, which includes a checklist of quality measures for tutors and schools to check before going live.

100 Each school and directorate has a designated OCSLD link consultant who works closely with the dean/director and staff to define the plan and to determine how training needs are identified and met. They will arrange for OCSLD to provide in-house development advice, consultancy and workshops on current learning and teaching issues identified by the school.

101 Another element of the Human Resources Strategy is the Senior Staff Development Programme. The Programme provides workshops and seminars for senior staff with managerial responsibilities across the University and also identifies and addresses their individual developmental needs. For staff aspiring to become senior managers OCSLD runs a Core Management and Leadership Programme which is externally assessed and leads to an NVQ award.

102 All schools are required to have peer-observation schemes in operation. The exact mechanisms of the schemes vary between schools, but they are all expected to be consistent with the principles described in the Strategy for Quality Enhancement of Academic

Programmes. LTC is planning to evaluate the effectiveness of these schemes during 2004-05. The audit team particularly noted the innovative aspects of the peer observation scheme (PELT) operated by the Westminster Institute for Education (WIE) (see below paragraph 185).

103 The audit team in its meetings with staff in the DATs and in the institutional meetings, and through its reading of the appropriate documents, was able to confirm that the Staff Development Policy was being realised in the schools and directorates in line with University policies. The team came to the conclusion that the University gave high priority to staff support and development as a driving factor in the pursuit of excellence in teaching. Both new and established staff expressed support and enthusiasm for the variety of training opportunities available to them. Particular praise was directed at the coordinating role of the OCSLD.

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

104 The University has developed a wide range of collaborative partnerships ranging from large overseas partnerships to small specialist colleges. The responsibility for managing these partnerships at a strategic level is the responsibility for the Learning Partnerships Advisory Group reporting to the SMT through its chair, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic). The quality assurance arrangements for the provision at these partner institutions is to be the subject of a separate QAA collaborative provision audit in the future and so lies outside the scope of this report.

105 The University has been developing extensive e-learning capacity and at the time of the audit had nearly 10,000 students making use of e-learning in their studies. This development is supported by a comprehensive e-learning strategy. The majority of this capacity for flexible and distance learning (FDL) is for the support of students for whom e-learning is one part of their learning within the on-campus learning experience, rather than being for a

separate group of students who learn at a distance. Therefore, the assurance of learning through distance and distributed methods and the courses that adopt those methods is fully integrated within the University's more general quality assurance processes.

106 For new programmes which are largely or completely delivered by FDL, the University has put in place agreed mechanisms for the approval of new teaching and learning materials, before they are put into operation. Staff with experience of FDL must be included in the approval panel. The OCSLD provides systematic support for staff, through its series of e-learning workshops, in order to address the new requirements for the engagement with e-learning, as the University extends its use. The audit team considered that the University was developing appropriate procedures to manage and support these significant new developments in the mode of learning.

Learning support resources

107 The SED explained the division of responsibilities between the Directorate of Learning Resources providing central learning support resources, and the schools providing specialist facilities such as laboratories, dedicated resource rooms and technical staff. Provision operates in a range of modes and, in cooperation with Student Services, is being enhanced to help students who require extra learning support. As the result of criticism in internal and external reviews, the University has recognised the need for 'an enhanced programme of refurbishment' of its central teaching spaces.

108 The library operates on three sites and, according to the SED, tries to meet students' needs by responding to, for example: the student satisfaction survey; feedback to subject librarians at school boards and committees; electronic questionnaires; a survey of users and learning resource issues raised in the course of internal and external reviews. In liaison with academic staff the subject librarians monitor patterns of demand and the audit team learnt that substantial extra resources were made available in anticipation of the demand for

multiple copies of textbooks following the redesign of programmes for semesterisation. Subject librarians are also responsible for the delivery of user education and the number of students attending library support sessions is monitored. There has been a recent expansion in the amount of information and the number of electronic resources available to students on the library's web pages. The team learnt that, in response to points raised in the SWS regarding some aspects of the library service, staff would work to improve provision of key resources through e-learning, digitisation, e-books and e-journals and academic staff would be asked to reconsider the format of reading lists in order to encourage students to read beyond core texts. It was pointed out in the SED that students preparing dissertations and postgraduate research students have access to the Bodleian Library and other libraries within the University of Oxford. In association with the Student Disability Service the library responds to special needs by a combination of general and individual provision.

109 It was noted in the report of the 2001 audit that subject reviews had commented that computer services were a particular strength, 'with IT [information technology] provision of high quality for students'. The audit team learnt of a plan to increase investment in IT, mainly in software packages in liaison with the schools. According to the SED, Computer Services uses a variety of methods to obtain feedback on existing and potential services and to identify students' needs, including an anonymous, on-line questionnaire. Academic computing officers and training officers in each school provide support for teaching and the Media Workshop offers pedagogical and technical support in the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE). Although the SWS reported considerable enthusiasm among students for the VLE, it also noted some dissatisfaction with Computing Services, in particular among postgraduate students. The team heard that, in response to these criticisms, Computer Services is to increase the number of central colour printers and plotters and to consider, in conjunction with the Centre for e-Learning, new forms of access to IT

services, including wireless connectivity, group study facilities and booths for disabled students. Additional work stations for postgraduate research students will be provided in a new research building scheduled to open in 2006 and Computing Services will investigate complaints by postgraduate students about the lack of subject-based IT facilities.

110 While students met by the audit team in the course of the DATs confirmed that they were well provided with learning support resources, the team also welcomed the constructive response of the University to the criticisms expressed in the SWS. The team endorsed the conclusion of the previous audit report that the Learning Resources Directorate 'provided a well-integrated service with a clear strategic aim of identifying and responding to students' needs'.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

111 The SED explained that the University places great importance on the academic and personal support mechanisms for students and recognises the challenges of providing support for a more diverse student population and of persuading academic staff of the importance of student personal and academic support. The University was commended in the report of the 2001 audit for its centralised approach to student support and its provision of guidance for staff in assisting them to perform their student support functions.

112 In the course of the DATs the audit team learned that induction arrangements which had been commended in the previous audit report continue to be thorough and now centre increasingly on the engagement by students with their pages on the PIP. Students are provided with all relevant information from enrolment to graduation and through their PIP pages are encouraged to use their PIP pages 'as the central mechanism for managing their learning'. The PIP enables students to view, amend and manage their personal and programme related information and to see their timetable, examination and assessment schedules. It provides a virtual link with personal

tutors and automatic messages are generated if students attempt to enrol on modules that are not part of their programme. Links are also provided to library resources and support services. Staff and students met by the team spoke enthusiastically about their use of PIP and the way in which it is being developed.

113 The SED explained that the academic support of students is the responsibility of a range of staff, including senior tutors in stage 1 of the UMP, programme leaders or field chairs in stage 2, personal tutors and members of the administrative staff. All staff have access to Supporting Students: a Staff Handbook which was commended in the continuation audit report. The Handbook, maintained by Student Services, sets out roles and responsibilities for supporting students and provides an invaluable resource to staff involved in addressing the problems brought to them by students by drawing together the strands of university provision in an accessible form. The on-line version, available from the beginning of the 2004-05 session, contains links to other sources of information and guidance embedded in the text. The Handbook emphasises the importance of giving students accurate and up-to-date information about semesterisation and asks staff to provide feedback to Student Services on 'the pleasures and perils' of using the electronic version. It was the view of the audit team that the Handbook constitutes a valuable resource to academic staff in guiding and support students.

114 The SED explained that all students are allocated to a personal tutor who is a member of the teaching staff on undergraduate programmes or the programme leader for postgraduate programme. The previous audit report had found variability between schools and tutors in the effectiveness of the personal tutor system; the SWS also reported variability in the personal tutoring system, which students considered should function as 'the backbone of the support network within Brookes'. Following the previous audit report the University had reviewed the work of personal tutors and, after extensive consultation, a revised role for personal tutors has been approved which is

linked to the introduction of personal development planning in 2005-06. It is intended that personal tutors will provide essential support for PDP by encouraging reflection by students on the opportunities for personal development which are available within their programme of study and engagement with careers advice and guidance. An on-line Personal Development Record and Planner, accessible from the PIP, will support the new role of the personal tutor. From what it heard in meetings and read in the documentation supplied to it, the audit team was able to confirm the belief of the University that the new policy linking personal tutoring and PDP will enhance academic and personal support for students.

115 According to the SED, Student Services make available a range of written and web-based academic advice, covering such issues as credit transfer, plagiarism and examination technique, but it is admitted that the take-up of generic study skills sessions - aimed primarily at mature students - has been patchy. An Academic Skills Centre began operating in 2005 as a first point of contact for students seeking support for developing their academic skills; it will build on existing good practice in learner support and will develop close links with schools in order to identify groups of students encountering difficulties.

116 The University was advised in the previous audit report to continue to reflect carefully on the implications of expanding postgraduate provision. A themed audit of Postgraduate Research Programmes conducted in 2002 made recommendations to the University, the RDC and schools for the improvement of support for postgraduate research students; in the course of the audit visit the audit team learnt that most of the recommendations had been implemented. The creation of a Graduate School, a development confirmed during the audit, will provide a focus for further improvements. The responsibilities of postgraduate research students, supervisors and schools are set out in a Code of Practice which is being revised to be fully compliant with the

Code of practice, published by QAA. The Graduate Office provides university-wide induction for new research students, supported by high quality induction packs; students met by the team spoke warmly of the support provided by the Graduate Office. A team consisting of a director of studies and at least one other supervisor provide supervision and support for research students; school postgraduate research tutors are a further source of advice and support. Members of staff are not normally appointed as directors of studies before they have been involved in supervising two research students to completion and have attended a supervisor training programme. Students met by the team praised their supervisory teams highly. The RDC has the responsibility for ensuring that schools monitor the progress of students on an annual basis. A Research Students' Committee on which each school is represented meets regularly and reports to the RDC; a Postgraduate Society has recently been established by the SU to organise social events for research students. Although the SWS reported some dissatisfaction among postgraduates with learning resources, students met by the team were appreciative of the quality of library and IT services available to them; international students were appreciative of the availability of free English language support.

117 Research students are required to undertake skills training appropriate to their individual needs and central provision is combined with subject-specific training provided by schools. A Brookes planner and diary enables students and their supervisors to plan and record a programme of study to equip them with research skills and also enhance their employment prospects after graduation. The Research Training Coordinator runs a series of research student training seminars covering topics such as thesis writing, funding sources and applications, career planning and job search skills. Attendance at training seminars is monitored by the Graduate Office.

118 Research students who undertake teaching or demonstrating duties must be provided with appropriate instruction by their schools and

OCSLD provides training for those who teach for more than 50 hours a year. Students who met the audit team appreciated the training offered and felt that the opportunity to be involved in undergraduate teaching enhanced the value of their period of research studies. The team considered that the quality and integrated nature of the supervision and support offered to postgraduate research students constitutes an aspect of good practice.

Personal support and guidance

119 The SED explained that close links exist between academic and personal support systems. The central student support services cover areas such as counselling, health and dentistry, dyslexia support and study skills. A Financial Aid Office administers a new bursaries scheme to support widening participation and a Financial Aid Committee provides a useful forum 'for addressing the increasingly complex and sensitive issues of student funding'. Students can access central support services directly or through their personal tutors; the staff handbook, Supporting Students, explains how to make referrals and contains useful links to central services.

120 The SU offers a range of advice and support facilities for students and most of the University's central support service departments are located close to the SU Advice Centre, 'to help access and to promote the close links between the two services to best meet student needs'. It is admitted in the SED that there is scope for 'the reconfiguration of centrally provided information, advice and guidance for students'. In spite of physical restraints there is said to be a senior management commitment to develop a 'one stop shop' approach to the delivery of student support services but, in the meantime, there has been an expansion of the range of electronic information and advice available.

121 An external audit of the University's provision of services for disabled students was commissioned in 2003 and indicated that, although the Student Disability Service was well regarded by students (a view confirmed in the SWS), more work was required at the level of structures and procedures to ensure that the needs of disabled students are identified and responded to. According to the SED, the Student Disability Service is working with a network of newly appointed Equal Opportunity and Diversity Coordinators in the schools and with OCSLD to increase awareness and understanding of the needs of disabled students and how to respond to them. Proposals for new programmes are scrutinised in terms of availability of, and access to, any specialist facilities and groups are working under the direction of LTC to produce web and print materials for teaching and assessing an increasingly diverse student population and to plan and deliver appropriate staff development.

122 An International Student Advisory Service, whose work was commended in the previous audit report, has had to respond to the needs of a rapidly increasing number of international students. The focus of its work is said to have shifted from pastoral care to providing 'accurate, reliable and timely information' to enquirers. The SED explained that it is intended to monitor the reactions of international students to this move from face-to-face work to a greater use of telephone help-lines and web-based services, and also to monitor their perception of how effectively they are supported.

123 The SED explained that, in order to maintain the good employment record of its graduates, the University continues to give a high priority to employability in course design and delivery and in other supporting activities. An Employability Advisory Group reporting to LTC has been set up to oversee the implementation of a recently approved Careers Education Information and Guidance policy. Greater prominence is to be given to supporting students in the management of their study path through the curriculum and the link between personal tutors, and PDP is part of this approach. The Personal Development Record to support PDP will have a number of links to material on the web pages of the Careers Centre to support writing curricula vitae and preparing for interviews, and a careers management skills module will be available in 2005-06. A range of careers related activities in schools complements

central services, and several programmes in the UMP have independent study and placement modules which offer opportunities related to future careers.

124 From its meeting with staff and students and from the documentation made available to it, the audit team was able to confirm that the University takes its responsibility for student support seriously and provides well integrated academic and personal support systems which are kept under review in order to enhance their effectiveness.

Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline audit trails

Discipline audit trails

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

Business and management

126 The DAT covered two sets of programmes: four undergraduate, and one master's programme. The four undergraduate programmes (BA (Hons) Business and Management, BA (Hons) International Business Management, BA (Hons) Business Logistics and BA (Hons) Business Innovation and Enterprise) form an integral part of the University-wide UMP, and are subject to its regulations. The MSc Business and Enterprise conforms to the University Postgraduate Framework and is subject to the regulations for taught postgraduate programmes. All these programmes are located in the Business School.

127 The undergraduate programmes contain a common first year and students choose their subsequent 'pathway' during the second

semester of study. There is an opportunity for student placement during year three of study in the undergraduate programmes. The master's level programmes have a common core of modules which students met by the audit team felt gave them a valuable grounding to progress.

128 The DSED contained programme specifications for all of the programmes which covered the learning outcomes expected from the programmes. The master's programme specification included a mapping of the learning outcomes as they are achieved in each of the modules of the MSc programme. The specifications included reference to the relevant subject benchmark statements including the generalist career entry type for the maste's programme. In the meeting with staff of the Business School it was confirmed that staff have familiarity with the Academic Infrastructure. The programme aims and the learning outcomes at both undergraduate and master's levels are in line with the FHEQ.

129 The Business School uses a full statement on the procedures for preparing annual reviews which conforms to the guidelines in the University's QSH. Using evidence from staff, students and external examiners' reports, these reports are structured to report on the standards of programmes and the quality of learning opportunities and subsequently to collate these issues into an action plan. They also report on progress with the issues that were raised in previous years.

130 The annual review reports written for undergraduate and postgraduate courses provide data on applications, entry profiles, and cohort statistics for the last 10 years. This data is provided by the School Office. Summaries of module results are included in an appendix together with details of graduate destinations. In the master's programme the data for the annual review is collated by the programme leader using local statistics. The audit team was told that the trends in these statistics are raised in the relevant sections of the annual review reports and that responses would be expected if, for instance, high failure rates were reported in any module.

131 The School has also undertaken evaluation of the first-year experience in a survey which had responses from 160 students. This provided qualitative information on the best and worst features of studying at Oxford Brookes. A graduating students' exit questionnaire has also been used in the School for three years and provided comments including commendation of the intellectual level of the courses, the value of the PIP system and the development of skills that students had achieved.

132 In line with university policy the School uses the module evaluation reports (MERs) to feed back on the activity within individual modules. These are based on various sources of information including questionnaires to students, external examiners' reports, data provided from the central administrative sources and a critical commentary by each module leader. The MERs are discussed at the Business School quality review meetings and they contribute significantly to the preparation of the annual review reports.

133 Under powers delegated to it by QSC, the School has developed processes to complement the University processes for designing and validating new programmes. An important focus in these programme approval procedures is establishing the business case for a new programme proposal. The audit team noted this additional feature as a valuable element which might be more widely adopted in the University procedures.

134 A periodic review was undertaken in June 2004 for the taught postgraduate programmes in the Business School. This set out a number of conditions, including recognition of the links with the benchmarks for master's degrees in business and management, improvements to career guidance and clarification of responsibilities for collecting exit survey data between the School and the University. The undergraduate programme periodic review was held in March 2005. The conditions from this were to provide matrices of learning outcomes and key skills against modules and to provide an assessment schedule to be placed in the

programme handbooks. The School has produced an assessment configuration document which indicates the timing, type and weighting of assessments across all compulsory modules. The audit team considered that the periodic review process had been effective and useful in supporting and enhancing the work of the School.

135 In the meeting with staff from the Business School the audit team heard that the processes for responding to external examiners were being reviewed in the light of concerns about inconsistency. At present external examiners receive a copy of the annual review report but do not necessarily receive a specific response to any issue that they have raised. It is intended that in future external examiners will receive a letter from the Assistant Dean informing them of any actions that have been taken and the timescale for the implementation of these actions.

136 In the Business School students can elect to do a placement year and the students who were met by the audit team were enthusiastic about the advice that they receive when they choose their placement and the management of the process. The School has a dedicated placement office with two full-time staff. Prior to going on placement students take a module on skills profiling and placement search. The team were told that currently, depending which programme they are on, students who choose to take this module, and who are not subsequently successful in finding a placement, may not be allowed to count this module towards their award. The School is aware of this anomaly and is seeking a solution.

137 The audit team reviewed a range of assessed work. The variety of assessment tasks and the appropriateness of the work was noted. The Business School has written guidelines for the internal moderation of assessments which illustrate the concern for good working practices. These include six different approaches which relate to the procedures for situations when there are experienced assessors included or not. There was evidence in most of

the written work that these guidelines were being followed. The School requires that all coursework assignments and examination papers, once set, are checked by another appropriate member of staff. Marking criteria are used effectively to enable students to understand how they are performing and in the work reviewed there was evidence of valuable feedback to students about their work. Students were aware of the diagnostic purpose of some of their modules and valued the feedback on performance that this provided. The standard of achievement in the programmes reviewed in this DAT was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

138 An issue which has been raised by one of the external examiners on the undergraduate programme is the variation in the penalties for lateness that are applied to assessed work. The School uses the guidance provided by the Directorate of Academic and Student Affairs in the 'Student Guide 2004-5' adopting one of three alternative models for penalising late work. The choice is determined by the module leader and is related to the type of work being assessed. These decisions are agreed at the School Board. The use of different policies on late delivery of coursework was acknowledged by students who understood the reasoning behind it and were not aware that it presented any problems.

139 Prior to enrolment, students met by the audit team had received good quality information and the master's-level students had received a DVD with relevant programme details and pre-enrolment reading information. Students receive comprehensive programme documentation at induction. They appreciate the complete coverage that this provides and described it as accurate and full. They also have access to the same information through the shared network drive used by the Business School. This provides a valuable and well-used alternative to the printed material.

140 The audit team saw examples of the student handbooks for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and found these to be clear and helpful. They provide full details of the structure of the programmes and the

assessment procedures. They also included details of the subject benchmark statements. Students met by the team expressed satisfaction at the level of information that they receive, describing it as full and useful.

141 Students have access to the PIP and expressed great enthusiasm for the access and convenience that this provides for investigation of module choices, assessment results and other information. The students were complimentary about the resources that they used, including the excellent electronic access to journal articles. They are readily provided with advice from subject librarians. The poor availability of multiple copies of text books was the only area which concerned the students that the audit team met. Computing facilities were considered to be adequate and the postgraduate students have access to dedicated computing space.

142 The audit team was informed that semesterisation had presented problems for some students. The students felt that there had been extra pressure on the time available for their studies during semester one caused by the late change in the timing of the examinations. Second and third-year students regretted the loss of the reading week which had been a useful opportunity to revise for their examinations. In the meeting with staff the view was expressed that the Business School was keen to find a solution to the additional pressure on students in the first semester and would implement its own solution if a common approach across the University was not found.

143 Students are invited to express their opinions on all modules using the MEQs. The students met during the DAT were confident that their views were taken into account in the running of the modules although they did not always see immediate changes. The collations of the views expressed in the MERs are made available to students' representatives through the annual School Quality Review meetings or through the annual review reports. (see paragraphs 52-53 above). In the master's programme the questionnaires have been delivered electronically using WebCT. The Business School has an undergraduate student

representative forum, although at the time of the audit visit the last minuted meetings were for May 2004. Student representatives are appointed from programmes and sit on programme and School committees. The representatives receive training and guidance from the SU although in the meeting with the audit team the representatives expressed the wish that there could be an improvement in the mechanisms for obtaining feedback comments from the students that they represent.

144 Students felt well supported by the staff who were accessible and approachable. The learning resources were well used and effective and despite initial problems with semesterisation the students felt confident in their ability to achieve and progress in their programmes. The students also expressed the view that they felt well prepared for their future careers. The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities offered in the business and management area was suitable for the programmes of study leading to the awards.

English studies

145 The DAT was based on the following programmes: BA Single Honours, English Studies; BA Combined Honours, English Studies; Postgraduate Certificate/Postgraduate Diploma/MA Modern and Contemporary Poetry.

146 The DAT was supported by a dedicated DSED prepared for the audit, together with programme specifications. The DSED stated that all three programmes had been designed with the requirements of the *Subject benchmark statement* for English and the FHEQ taken into account. The DSED also stated that the programmes were designed with reference to University strategic priorities. The audit team identified appropriate references to these elements of the Academic Infrastructure in the programme specifications and in the various modular handbooks. The DSED made reference to the School of Arts and Humanities' Quality Manual and the School's Academic Quality and Standards Committee which ensures that School and Department practice are in line with University policy. Through discussion with staff

and by reviewing the available documentation, the team was able to establish that these references were appropriate and were underpinned by firm knowledge and understanding of the content and purpose of these reference points.

147 The DSED did not include progression and completion data for the three programmes. Achievement in terms of degree classification of graduating students was given in the DSED but not analysed. Some commentary on entry qualifications was provided. The DSED did confirm that the appropriate data is available centrally. The audit team explored with staff how these statistical data were used. Overall, however, the team had some difficulty in establishing a transparent connection between statistical data and the monitoring of quality and standards. The DSED made the point that the Department recognises that the student failure and withdrawal rates at the end of the first year of the undergraduate programme are higher than they would wish. The DSED explained that this problem was considered in the redesign of the programmes and in the subsequent Periodic Review and that the decision was taken to revise the Stage 1 provision in order to respond more effectively to the particular needs of the students. In discussion with staff and with scrutiny of the new modules, the team was able to confirm that the new stage 1 provision had been designed in careful consultation with external examiners and with the English Studies Subject Centre and that the new curriculum does have appropriate content, learning outcomes and assessment for the programmes. The Department has plans to evaluate the effectiveness of the provision at the end of the first year of its implementation.

148 The School and Department have well established quality procedures for programme evaluation and review. These include annual and periodic review of programmes and student evaluations on module delivery. APR and periodic review reports are considered by the school QSC. Evidence from student feedback on modules is incorporated in these reviews. The

APR is the forum for the programme to reflect on standards and the quality of the provision. The outcome from the APR is an action plan for enhancement of the provision and the remedying of any identified issues. The audit team, through discussion with staff and students, was confident that this system was effective.

149 The audit team was able to study programme external examiners' reports for the last three academic years. Numerous positive comments were noted, both about the academic standards achieved by the students and about the quality of the teaching and learning environment through which staff help students to reach their potential. Where matters for consideration had been raised by external examiners, the team found evidence of positive response in accordance with the expectations of the relevant University policy. The team noted that there had been a problem with the timing of the examinations process in the preceding semester which had resulted in insufficient time for the external examiner for the Master's Programme in Modern and Contemporary Poetry properly to scrutinise student work. The team saw and heard evidence to show that the Department was fully aware of the problem and was taking measures to remedy it.

150 The DSED stated that assessment procedures comply with the benchmark statement that students should experience a variety of forms of assessment. The audit team was able to confirm that this was the case and that the assessment procedures were appropriate to achieving the learning outcomes specified.

151 Students give feedback on the assessment, content and delivery of modules through the module evaluations. These are followed up in the programme annual report and may become part of the action plan if changes to the system are deemed as necessary. The Department has recently introduced a standard pro forma coversheet for staff to provide feedback to students on assessed work. This was in response to the view expressed by students in the periodic review that written feedback on assignments was inconsistent across tutors.

152 The audit team reviewed a substantial volume of assessed student work from a range of modules within the three programmes. The team noted that the standard of achievement was underpinned by a range of appropriate assessment and assessment related processes. These included clarification of learning outcomes and assessment requirements in module handbooks, appropriate double marking and monitoring arrangements and appropriate interaction with external examiners in designing suitable questions. The team reached the conclusion that the nature of the assessment and standard of student achievement in the programmes were appropriate to the title of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

153 All undergraduate students receive a copy of the English Studies Student Handbook at the beginning of their course and a module handbook is provided for each module with standardised contents. MA students receive the Student Handbook: Humanities Taught Postgraduate Programme in advance of their enrolment. Postgraduate modules also have their own handbooks. The DSED stated that communication with students is done largely through email and the PIP. Students were very positive about the Student Handbook, module handbooks and the PIPs provision and confirmed that communication systems were effective in the Department. The one area that was mentioned for improvement was that no initial reading lists were sent out to students prior to the commencement of their degrees.

154 The DSED stated that student evaluation is a very important element of quality assurance and enhancement but it presented little evidence of how the system of student representation works within the programmes. Student representatives are invited to attend Department meetings to represent student views but attendance varies. There is no mention in the DSED of how the Department's system of student representation mirrors University systems but the audit team was able to confirm through discussion with staff and students and through appropriate documentation that the system is in line with University policy and is working effectively.

155 The DSED acknowledged some problems with the physical resources in the programmes. Students have expressed concerns in the APR regarding the availability of secondary texts and in the resources of the Headington Library which serves the programmes. The Department is continually reviewing the situation and has implemented a temporary loan system for core texts. In addition, level 3 undergraduates and postgraduates do have access to other local resources such as the Bodleian Library.

156 The audit team noted the commitment and engagement of the subject staff, and by the atmosphere of mutual respect within which staff and students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, collaborate. The team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the respective awards.

Construction management and urban design

157 The School of the Built Environment covers five discipline areas: architecture; civil engineering; planning; real estate and construction. The DAT covered the two undergraduate programmes BSc (Hons) Building and BSc (Hons) Construction Management both of which are located within the Department of Real Estate and Construction and are also contained within the UMP. The DAT also included the MA in Urban Design programme which is located in a joint centre between Architecture and Planning. The documentation provided for the DAT was specifically developed for the audit, and prepared by senior staff supported by course teams and with comments from students.

158 Programme specifications describe the course and provide information on the course aims, learning and assessment strategies and show how the programmes link to the University's strategies of linking research into teaching, providing an international context and encouraging reflective learning. The specifications also provide reference to the appropriate benchmark statements which are then expanded in the key areas of knowledge and understanding, professional skills, and

transferable skills. In the postgraduate course these are mapped across modules. Further detailed information is provided on individual modules in the comprehensive course handbooks. Students considered the inclusion of the industrial placement a particular strength of the Construction Management course which greatly increased their employability.

159 Progression and completion data are provided by the University's Systems Office and made available at the time of a programme and school review. In the DSED some information was provided on completion rates for the MA Urban Design course but there was no evaluative commentary. Following an examination of the school review documents the audit team considered that the review process would be enhanced by a more detailed analysis of the statistical information provided.

160 The process for monitoring and reviewing courses is through a series of programme annual reviews which in turn inform an annual review of the School. In addition there is a periodic review of programmes at department level. The evidence available to the audit team showed that the periodic review had involved external representatives, and had generally been an effective process. The review had included discussion of the issue of group work (see below). While the Department had responded to the matters raised by students in the course of the review, it was not clear to the team that the concerns raised by students had been fully resolved.

161 External examiners provide an important external view both of the course and of the academic standards achieved by students. External examiner reports are received in the School by the Assistant Dean who provides an initial response acknowledging receipt of the report and the issues that need to be addressed. A full response is considered at the programme annual review. External examiners are asked to confirm each year that previous issues have been addressed. Recent external examiners have expressed satisfaction with the programmes.

162 For the undergraduate programmes a wide range of assessment methods is employed including essays, reports, portfolios, reflective diaries, on-line quizzes as well as more traditional unseen examinations. Assessment criteria are provided to students at a general level through the module handbooks, with additional information provided when assignments are issued and supplemented by discussion by tutors. Students were generally satisfied that they knew what was expected but noted that feedback on assessed work could take much longer than the two weeks normally expected. Students expressed some concern over the assessment of group work which staff explained would contribute a substantial amount of about one third of the undergraduate programme and a little less on the postgraduate programme. Typically, group work might account for 40 per cent of a module but students considered that individual work carried out thereafter could be affected by a poor group performance. The student perception was that individual contributions to group work were not always recognised and this might impact on their final grades. Staff met by the team confirmed that there were few examples of a student failing assessed group work, as good students compensated for the poor achievement of others. The School is aware of the concerns of students and attempts have been made to address these concerns. During the audit the team saw a number of different approaches to assessing group work including examples of good practice in other DATs. The team recognises that the assessment of the individual contribution to group work has the potential to adversely affect the robustness, transparency and fairness of the assessment of individual student work and the school is therefore encouraged to continue to review its practices with regard to assessment of group work. Having considered the range of assessed work provided, the team found that the standards of student achievement were appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location with the national FHEQ.

163 The student handbook is a comprehensive document that provides a wealth of useful information to students. In addition to detailed descriptions of each module there is information on course structures, summaries of regulations, advice on study skills, information on student support, learning resources etc. The printed materials are supported by PIP which was considered to be both reliable and useful. Students were satisfied with the resources available to them within the School and University.

164 Until recently the collection of student feedback had been recommended by the University but had not always been undertaken to avoid evaluation overload. The current position is that feedback is to be collected for every module. The feedback was generally supportive with concerns normally about routine matters over which there is little control such as timetabling issues. Apart from the issue concerning group work, noted above, the students did not have serious concerns.

165 Programme and school student representatives attend and contribute to the annual review meetings. However, the School recognised 'that this process is not perfect and discussions are underway as to how to improve student participation'. Students also attend field committee meetings, and were satisfied that they have ample opportunity to voice their views and concerns.

166 The audit team found that the quality of the learning opportunities available to students was suitable for courses of study leading to the named awards.

Mechanical engineering

167 The DAT was based on the subject area of mechanical engineering located in the School of Technology. The DAT covered two undergraduate programmes the BEng (Hons) Automotive Engineering and the BEng (Hons) Mechanical Engineering. It was supported by a comprehensive DSED prepared for the purposes of the audit and supplemented by a range of appendices.

168 The DSED included programme specifications that reflected an appropriate engagement with the FHEQ although they did not refer explicitly to it. They did, however, make appropriate reference to professional body accreditations. Again, although no explicit reference was made to the relevant subject benchmark statements for this subject at undergraduate level, an appropriate engagement was reflected in the design and structure of the programmes. The subject team were aware that a review of the programmes will be necessary following the introduction of the UKSPEC by the Engineering Council and were already engaging in the process following a recent accreditation visit by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers.

169 Progression and completion data are analysed as part of the accreditation exercise. Although, however, data were included in the annual reporting cycle, it was unclear whether any critical analysis had been undertaken as this was not presented. Data on progression and completion was presented and discussed at Examination Boards and discussed by the course team. Quality assurance at a local level takes place in accordance with the School of Technology's published procedures, which are based on the institutional framework, and the audit team found that these were operating effectively.

170 The external examiner has an appropriate level of involvement in both the assessment and review of programmes. External examiner reports confirm the overall standards of the award and the reports are considered as part of the annual review process, with a formal response from the course team to any issues raised.

171 Students are involved in quality management systems through representation on field committees and this is supplemented by close relationships between the staff and student body. The audit team was informed by students that the staff team were highly accessible and that the students appreciated this close contact. Student opinion on the quality of teaching is also sought through module questionnaires and staff are required to present to the subject examination committee an account of the module evaluation. The students indicated a high level of satisfaction with their teaching, support and learning resources and confirmed the positive experience that staff teams offered to students. Actions on matters raised through liaison committees or student questionnaires are dealt with in an appropriate manner and appropriate feedback to students is provided.

172 Semesterisation appeared to have caused a number of problems which had affected the quality of the teaching and learning experience of students in the first year of operation. The teaching pattern had been affected by the perceived reduction in delivery time from three terms to two semesters and the assessments had become bunched causing extreme problems around hand-in dates. Also, it appeared that in a number of cases the student timetabled contact has been compressed within the teaching week resulting in attendance over an extended day spanning the three scheduled slotting periods. Students felt that staff were aware of the problems and had acted in an appropriate manner to resolve those issues which were under their immediate control.

173 The audit team reviewed a range of assessed student work and was satisfied that the nature of the assessment and the standard of student achievement met the expectations of programme specifications, and was appropriate to the relevant awards and their location within the FHEQ. However, the feedback on the student work provided varied widely in its quality and usefulness. Students did confirm this variability and they also felt that feedback could be more timely.

174 Students are provided with student and course handbooks. The course handbook is comprehensive, and students informed the audit team that they receive an appropriate level of information in order to facilitate their studies. The module descriptors contain details of the learning outcomes and assessment methods. However, it was unclear how these are directly related to the curriculum and the programme team may wish to review this area as part of any revision to the handbook.

175 In terms of learning resources the audit team was informed that there were no issues with either the provision or the quality of materials available to the students. The team also heard about the use that was being made of the PIP. Staff and students both acknowledged the usefulness of the portal but also felt that since their programme was highly prescriptive in nature they did not utilise its full functionality. However, the ability to access results was felt to be very useful. Students also praised the use of e-learning through WebCT as an aid to their learning.

176 The programmes also offer to students the option of taking an industrial placement during their third year of studies. The placements were supported by a comprehensive programme of seminars and a dedicated tutor. Students praised the support that they had received both before and during their placements and the audit team considered that this was an example of good practice.

177 Externality is a key feature of the programmes within this area. The programmes offered are highly vocational and benefit from accreditation from an appropriate professional institution. They also benefit from close contact with industry through an industrial advisory panel. However, the meetings of this board had recently lapsed and the team were keen to revitalise these links. Clearly both industrial and professional inputs contribute to the maintenance of quality and standards within the programmes and this is reflected in the high levels of employability that the subject area attains.

178 The audit team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities provided for students was suitable for programmes of studies leading to the named awards.

Philosophy and religious studies

179 The Philosophy and Religious Studies combined honours programmes are offered within the UMP and delivered by the academic group of Philosophy, Theology and Religion within the WIE, a school formed after the merger of Westminster College with the University in 2000. As this subject area has yet

to undergo periodic review, a DSED was prepared for the DAT following extensive consultation with staff and students. The religious studies programme was validated in 2000, was approved in a QAA subject review in 2001, and was redesigned in preparation for semesterisation in 2002; the philosophy programme was validated in 2001 and redesigned in 2003. According to staff seen by the audit team the transition to semesters had been unproblematic and students, who welcomed the increased flexibility involved in the change, confirmed this view.

180 The programme specifications attached to the DSED make full reference to the relevant benchmark statements and link learning outcomes to the FHEQ. They are aligned with the University's strategic priorities of linking research and teaching, internationalising the curriculum and encouraging reflective independent learning.

181 Data on progression, completion and first destinations of graduates were included in the DSED but it was explained to the audit team that detailed analysis for strategic purposes takes place at school level. Programmes are reviewed annually: programme committees consider MEQs and reports from external examiners and draw up an action plan for the following session. In the current session local programme directorate audits have been introduced by the Institute to supplement programme review, to identify good practice and encourage reflection on strategy in order to agree a developmental focus for the following session.

182 The audit team heard from staff that they enjoyed and valued highly close contact with their external examiners. External examiners report orally to Subject Examination Committees and Module Examination Boards and their written reports are considered in the course of annual programme reviews and directorate audits. They are sent copies of annual reviews which contain a summary of their comments and the response of the programme team. Recent advice from external examiners has resulted in the introduction of a plagiarism disclaimer on submitted work and the videoing of assessed presentations. Reports

seen by the audit team confirmed the constructive and complimentary nature of comments from external examiners.

183 Both programmes have produced a LTAS aligned with the LTAS of the Institute. A range of assessment strategies is employed to achieve the learning outcomes laid out in the programme specifications. Students met by the audit team confirmed that they were familiar with learning outcomes and assessment criteria from programme handbooks and module guides. They appreciated the prompt, detailed and helpful feedback provided on assessments. The team reviewed a range of student work from stages 1 and 2 of the programmes and found that the Institute's procedures for the assessment of students' work had been followed and that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

184 Students are provided with programme handbooks containing programme specifications, module descriptions, assessment criteria and both programme-specific and relevant University policies. Guides for each module include the details of the level and status of the module, its learning outcomes, an assessment schedule, guidance on referencing and recommended reading. Students met by the audit team found the handbooks and module guides useful but valued their PIP pages even more highly as a source of information. Staff confirmed that PIP has become an essential tool in communicating with students.

185 It was explained in the DSED that the teaching accommodation available for philosophy and religious studies was appropriate and well equipped. Both programmes benefit from the advice and support of a subject librarian and specialist audiovisual and IT staff. Students met by the audit team were enthusiastic about the availability of books and computers and the help that they were given in using electronic learning resources. The learning resource they appreciated most highly, however, was their access to research active members of staff who were also innovative and responsive teachers. Staff met by the team confirmed that WIE has a

comprehensive plan for staff development and requirements are identified in the course of annual Personal Development Reviews. An Institute scheme for the PELT had been introduced at the start of the session and staff confirmed the claim in the DSED that PELT is 'broader and richer' than traditional schemes for the peer observation of teaching. Staff work together in pairs to enhance teaching techniques, such as the assessment of oral presentations or the conduct of seminar discussions. The team considered this initiative to constitute an example of enhancement which the University might wish to consider adopting more widely in support of its learning and teaching strategy.

186 All students are assigned a personal tutor to provide academic and personal support and guidance. Among the students met by the audit team those who were mature and part-time said that they had received specialised help and advice from their personal tutors. Staff told the team of the preparations made in the Institute for the introduction of PDPs and the intended links with personal tutors. In addition to their personal tutors students are offered academic guidance by the senior tutor in stage 1 and by field chairs in stage 2. Students found the academic staff very accessible and experienced no difficulty in finding help when they needed it.

187 Staff seek feedback from students by means of MEQs; those seen by the audit team were well-designed and gave the opportunity for evaluative comment. In addition the Institute has introduced a version of the student course experience questionnaire which generates feedback on programmes as a whole. Feedback is also sought from student representatives on programme committees and other Institute committees, although students met by the team found the representative system rather cumbersome and they preferred to raise matters directly and informally with staff. The team was provided with a recent example of the active involvement of students in quality management. An Institute-wide compulsory module, Human Development and Learning, introduced as part of the redesign of programmes for semesterisation has been modified considerably

as the result of student feedback which indicated that it had placed too great an emphasis on study skills and did not provide enough opportunity for discussion of academic issues.

188 The audit team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities provided for students was suitable for combined honours programmes in philosophy and religious studies.

Section 4: The audit investigations: published information

The students' experience of published information

189 The information available to the audit team included the SWS, student handbooks, prospectuses and an extensive set of on-line information including PIP. The team met with students during the briefing visit and with groups of students during each of the DATs. The team also discussed some of the issues with staff both in the institutional meetings and in the DATs.

190 The student experience as described in the SWS is the result of a comprehensive and wide-ranging survey followed by detailed analysis and review (see paragraph 19 above). The majority of students considered that the pre-arrival information about the University was useful (96 per cent) accurate (83 per cent) and clearly written (96 per cent). However, information about the course was considered less accurate and 30 per cent of students felt that the information provided about their course was not accurate. The SWS acknowledged that this may be a result of inaccurate recollection as students were being asked to comment at least nine months after receiving the information and may be as much a reflection of expectation as accuracy.

191 Students met by the audit team considered that in general the information provided centrally by the University was accurate but that this was not always the case with schools, often because of the need to keep it up to date and accurate. The University states clearly in its advice to

students that current information is located on the PIP pages, but it appeared that this message did not always get through to all students. During the period immediately prior to the audit the University underwent substantial changes (see paragraphs 25 and 26 above), including a decrease in the elective choice of modules for some students. The students noted that some of the changes to course structures had affected their choice of programme. This was usually attributed by students to semesterisation though more properly it was the decision to reduce the number of modules which happened at the same time as restructuring.

192 Although the University made substantial efforts to ensure that students were properly informed about the changes by a variety of methods there were some students who were not clear about aspects of their course. This appeared to be a greater problem for part-time students, who spend less time in the University and rely more on printed materials. Students generally have a good working relationship with staff and this had clearly helped students to resolve uncertainties, but this does require the students to know that there is information that they are missing or that the information that they have is out of date.

193 The PIP pages were generally considered by students to work well and give access to a wide range of information, allowing students to register for modules, find out marks for assessed work, etc. When the on-line system identified problems with module choices it automatically notified tutors so that prompt action could be taken. Students generally considered PIP to be an excellent system.

194 The University is aware of the current issues concerning the currency of information and has taken action both at University level and at school level to address them.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

195 The University has put in place the necessary procedures to ensure that information relating to TQI is placed in the Higher Education

and Research Opportunities in the UK (HERO) website. External examiners are required to complete a revised report from which summaries are prepared and the majority of these reports are now in place. Programme specifications for undergraduate programmes were revised as part of the semesterisation process. These are currently being collected in the University web pages before being linked to the HERO website. Similar arrangements are being made for postgraduate programmes, where about 50 per cent of the external examiner reports have been published, and the remainder were expected to be dealt with before the required deadline. Periodic reviews of both subject areas and collaborative partnerships are being provided to HERO on an ongoing basis as they are prepared. Progress towards meeting the TQI requirements is being monitored through the QSC.

196 Additional information provided to students includes prospectuses and course handbooks. These are available both in printed form and on-line. A difficulty that the University recognises is that printed information can become out of date particularly in a rapidly changing environment - as during semesterisation. The University has taken steps to keep printed information as up-to-date as possible and maintains updated information on the websites. All courses were required to have new course handbooks for 2004-05 to ensure that they were accurate at that time with further revisions being maintained on the on-line versions available to students through their PIP pages. The Directorate of Corporate Affairs oversees the centrally generated information and monitors school activity for key documents such as course information. Schools then take responsibility for ensuring that information (both printed and on-line) is accurate and complete.

197 Overall, the audit team found that the University had made positive progress towards meeting the requirements for published information, and was confident that the University would be in a position to satisfy the requirements laid out in HEFCE 03/51, *information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance.*

Findings

Findings

198 An institutional audit of the Oxford Brookes University (the University) was undertaken during the week 25 to 29 April 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 discipline audit trails (DATs) were conducted. This section of the report of the audit summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged during the audit, and making recommendations to the University for action to enhance current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

199 Since the time of the continuation audit carried out by QAA in 2001 the University has reviewed and streamlined its committee structure. The Executive Board (EB) deals with matters of strategy and planning and the Academic Board (AB) is responsible for the quality and standards of the academic programmes of the University. The AB works through a number of committees, of which the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) and the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) have primary responsibility for the taught programmes.

200 The overall structure of the management of quality and standards is for the delegation of the primary responsibility to the schools, working within overarching principles set out by QSC and LTC and subject to monitoring and review by QSC. The schools have their own committee structures and, for example, their own rules of assessment. A central body, the Academic Policy and Quality Unit (APQU), supports the QSC. It is led by the Head of Quality Assurance (HQA) and some of its staff members act as Quality Assurance Officers (QAOs) in the schools, so acting as links between schools and between the eight schools and the central committees.

201 The AB delegates a significant degree of responsibility for the quality processes to school boards which, subject to the constraints set out in the Quality and Standards Handbook (QSH), can choose to operate processes in a manner appropriate to the requirements of the discipline. Schools report formally to QSC, but in the case of annual programme reviews QSC is only presented with a summary by the APQU. Also, school board reports and those of QSC and AB's other subcommittees are circulated electronically with the intention that AB discussion can be focussed on specified agenda items. The combination of these arrangements distances AB from quality assurance processes at the point of application. The audit team judged this to be a weakness in AB's management of the quality of the University's programmes and advise that reporting processes to AB be reviewed. The team would also encourage the University, in its ongoing review of the operation of its committee structures, to include particular attention to ways in which the AB is able to address and fulfil its terms of reference.

202 The principles guiding the management of quality and standards are set out in a QSH. This is available on-line and contains detailed descriptions of the procedures for the approval of new or revised programmes, periodic and annual review, external examining, credit accumulation and transfer and expectations for professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) review and accreditation. The necessary pro formas for all these activities are included as appendices to the handbook.

203 The approval process for new programmes has two stages, the first of which is the consideration of the resource issues and the determination that the proposed course of study fits the University's strategy. Following this, a detailed academic case is prepared by a Programme Development Team which is required to take external advice during its considerations. The school then establishes an Approval Panel

which includes academic staff from outside the school, a representative from APQU, and usually a member external to the University. The outcome of the process is considered by the school board, by the panel and by APQU. If agreed, the outcomes are then recommended to QSC after any conditions have been met. Major changes to existing programmes must follow essentially the same procedure.

204 The University uses a periodic review process focused on subjects or disciplines and carried out on a six-year cycle. The reviews are managed by the school but the panel which conducts the review must include academic staff from other schools, a representative from APQU, often including the HQA, and a member external to the University. The panel report and the school response are considered by the QSC, providing assurance at the institutional level.

205 Annual programme review is also managed within the school. Each programme team compiles an annual report taking account of student feedback and external examiners' comments and identifying any examples of good practice. These reports are drawn together as part of the school annual review, conducted at a specific review event. The school annual review reports are collated by the APQU and issues arising addressed to the relevant area of the university. While effective at school level, this process does not make best use of the reports which merit wider distribution and discussion.

206 The audit team noted also that the absence of a mechanism for discussion of these reports with academic staff from other schools weakens the effectiveness of the spread of good practice between schools. It is desirable that specific action be taken to use this additional opportunity for the spread of good practice between schools.

207 The APQU also conducts a series of 'themed audits' on behalf of QSC, concerned with mechanisms for assuring quality across the particular aspects of the University's work. The reports are received both by the QSC and by appropriate school committees to enable them

to be acted upon. The audit team judged these audits and their reports to be an example of good practice.

208 Students have representation on all the University's major boards and committees other than the EB. Direct feedback on modules forms part of annual programme review and is enhanced by student representation on programme teams and the school boards. Schools work closely with relevant PSRBs which may be involved with periodic reviews and, where possible, programme reapproval is combined with accreditation.

209 The University has carefully reviewed and revised during recent years its processes for the management of the quality of its programmes. The self-eevaluation document (SED) presents these changes as nearly complete but notes some areas where consideration is ongoing, for example, on information systems and the financial and strategic planning model.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

210 The role of external examiners is 'providing the principal…regular external view of quality and standards of the academic programmes offered by the University'. Examiners are expected to monitor assessment processes within the institution and consider overall academic standards. Schools are responsible for nominating external examiners and nominations are approved by the school board prior to submission to the APQU. QAOs make recommendations to the QSC on the suitability of nominations, which approves these on behalf of AB. On appointment, APQU provides initial induction to new external examiners through its WebPages. External examiners are required to attend Subject Examination Boards and to submit an annual report, the template of which has been extensively revised. Reports are received by APQU and disseminated to schools. The Dean is required to ensure the external examiner receives a formal response and schools have adopted various procedures to ensure external examiners are informed on the outcomes of their reports.

211 External examiner reports are synoptically summarised in an annual report by the QAOs and this overview is considered at University level by QSC on behalf of Academic Board. The audit team reviewed a number of examples which demonstrated the responsive nature of annual reports to external examiners' reports, and linked clearly to the institution's enhancement agenda.

212 The audit team noted that statistical data was appended to annual review reports, however, there appeared to be no requirement to analyse and comment on this and no critical appraisal was provided. Although statistical data was considered at programme level and specific themes appeared to have been analysed at both the QSC and LTC, the University does not appear to have adopted an overall strategy for the analysis of data at an institutional level. It also stated that, although periodic review panels are provided with statistical evidence, not all panels consider this information in detail.

213 The relationship with external examiners provides not only assurance of standards but also a frequently used resource for enhancement through curriculum development. The audit team considered that the policy of encouraging systematic and detailed external examiner reports followed by synoptic internal summaries recording evidence of consequent actions functions well.

214 Overall, the audit team found that the University had effective mechanisms in place to assure the standards of the awards offered. The team would encourage the University to adopt rigorous procedures to ensure the analysis of data at all levels as an important element in the maintenance and enhancement of standards.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

215 The responsibility for the provision of learning support resources is divided with the Directorate of Learning Resources providing central services and the schools providing specialist, subject-specific support. Library and information technology provision is operated across three sites, is monitored regularly and is responsive to the needs of an increasing diverse student body. There are plans to make further investment in the provision of electronic learning resources and to extend the use of the virtual learning environment. In response to criticism in internal and external reviews, the University is refurbishing and upgrading central teaching accommodation.

216 The University recognises the challenge of providing academic guidance, support and supervision for a diverse student population and of persuading academic staff of the importance of personal and academic support for students. Increasingly pages on the Personal Information Portal (PIP) are becoming the central mechanism for managing student learning from enrolment to graduation. Students are provided with a variety of information and links to support services on their PIP pages which serve also as a 'virtual office door' for their tutors. Academic staff are expected to be accessible to students and are supported in their academic and pastoral roles by an on-line handbook, Supporting Students, which draws together the strands of provision in an accessible form to enable staff to provide students with accurate information and informed guidance.

217 Postgraduate research students, in particular, are well provided with guidance and support by the Graduate Office centrally and by supervisory teams within their schools. This support is about to be enhanced by the establishment of a Graduate School and the provision of work stations in a new research building. Research students who take on teaching responsibilities are provided with an appropriate combination of central training and instruction in their schools.

218 Close links exist between academic and personal support systems. Student Services and the Students' Union (SU) provide a range of services centrally. The Student Disability Service is working with schools to increase awareness and understanding of the needs of disabled students and the International Student Advisory Service is responding to the needs of rapidly

increasing numbers of international students. In view of the importance attached by students to their employability after graduation increasing prominence is being given to supporting students in the management of their careers. Personal tutors are to play a key role in supporting personal development planning and there will also be close links to the Careers Service. The general accessibility and helpfulness of staff in academic and administrative matters was strongly appreciated by students.

219 Two key objectives of the University are to develop and increase the diversity of staff and to develop research excellence in all the schools. A comprehensive recruitment and selection procedure has been adopted to ensure appropriate appointments, and new academic staff participate in a three-year programme of support, incorporating mentoring on their research activities, research training and the undertaking of the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education (PGCTHE). All candidates for promotion are expected to demonstrate effectiveness and excellence as a teacher. Excellence in teaching has also been rewarded and good practice disseminated by the creation of designated principal lecturer posts specialising in teaching and learning and academic fellowships for one-year projects in learning and teaching. In addition a scheme of teaching fellowships, associate teaching fellowships and learning support fellowships has been introduced to support pedagogic development in areas that contribute to the strategic objectives of the University.

220 Schools are required to maintain staff development plans under a University policy for Personal and Professional Development and staff development needs are identified as part of the process of annual personal development and review. As well as an annual programme of staff development workshops, the Oxford Centre for Staff Learning and Development provides the PGCTHE for new staff, a Senior Staff Development Programme for senior staff with managerial responsibilities and a Core Management and Leadership Programme for staff aspiring to become senior managers.

The outcomes of the discipline audit trails

Business and management

221 The DAT covered four undergraduate programmes (BA (Hons) Business and Management, BA (Hons) International Business Management, BA (Hons) Business Logistics and BA (Hons) Business Innovation and Enterprise and the MSc Business and Enterprise.

222 From discussions with staff and students, the study of assessed student work and the documentation reviewed, the audit team formed the view that the standard of achievement in the business and management area is appropriate to the titles of the awards. The programme aims and the learning outcomes at both undergraduate and master's levels are in line with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). Appropriate reference has been made to the expectations of the benchmark statements in this area.

223 Students felt well supported by the staff, who were accessible and approachable. The learning resources were well used and effective and despite initial problems with semesterisation the students felt confident in their ability to achieve and progress in their programmes. They felt well prepared for their future careers. The audit team concluded that the quality of the learning opportunities offered in the business and management area was appropriate to the programmes of study.

English studies

224 The DAT covered two undergraduate programmes, the BA Single Honours, English Studies and the BA Combined Honours, English Studies, together with a master's level programme, the Postgraduate Certificate/Postgraduate Diploma/MA, Modern and Contemporary Poetry. From discussions with staff and students, the study of assessed student work and the documentation reviewed, the audit team formed the view that the standard of achievement in the English subject area was appropriate to the titles of the awards.

The programme aims and the learning outcomes at both undergraduate and master's levels are in line with the FHEQ. Appropriate reference has been made to the expectations of the benchmark statements in this area.

225 Sound procedures for the assurance of quality and standards were confirmed, with an appropriate management of student assessment. Students appreciated the positive support of staff and the quality of information and advice made available in student handbooks. Some concern was expressed regarding the availability of secondary text.

226 The audit team concluded that the quality of the learning opportunities offered in the English studies subject area was appropriate to the programmes of study.

Construction management and urban design

227 The DAT covered two undergraduate programmes: BSc (Hons) Building and BSc (Hons) Construction Management, together with a master's programme, the MA in Urban Design. From its discussions with staff and students, the study of assessed student work and the documentation reviewed, the audit team formed the view that the standard of achievement in the subject area was appropriate to the titles of the awards.

228 A wide range of assessment methods is used including a significant amount of group work. While students recognised the importance of group work in the construction industry they expressed some concern that individual contributions were not always recognised. Students expressed particular appreciation of the comprehensive student handbook and the industrial placement opportunity which prepared them for a professional career. Quality assurance of the programmes was generally judged to be operating appropriately although the audit team considered that the process would be enhanced by a more detailed analysis of statistical data.

229 The audit team concluded that the quality of the learning opportunities offered in the Built Environment subject area was appropriate to the programmes of study.

Mechanical engineering

230 From its study of students' assessed work, and from its discussions with staff and students, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the mechanical engineering discipline area was appropriate to the title of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. The programme specifications set out appropriate educational aims and learning outcomes and link them to teaching, learning and assessment. The programme specifications reflect expectations in the subject benchmark statements.

231 Student evaluation of the programmes is highly supportive and very positive, particularly in relation to placements, student support and guidance. Learning resources were felt to be wholly appropriate and accessible.

232 The audit team concluded that the quality of teaching and the learning opportunities offered in the Mechanical Engineering subject area was appropriate to the programmes of study.

Philosophy and religious studies

233 The DAT covered the following programmes: BA Combined Honours in Philosophy; BA Combined Honours in Religious Studies.

234 From discussions with students and staff and its study of assessed work, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location in the FHEQ. Student evaluation of the programmes was positive and there was evidence that staff were accessible to students and responsive to feedback from them. A variety of assessment strategies is effectively deployed to enable students to achieve the learning outcomes in the programme specifications.

235 The audit team concluded that the quality of the learning opportunities available to students in the religious studies and philosophy area was appropriate to the programmes of study.

The institution's use of the Academic Infrastructure

236 It was evident that institutional policy was informed and guided by the Academic Infrastructure. Within the quality assurance systems were procedures for embedding elements of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education,* published by QAA within the institutional procedures which ensured compliance at the programme level. The audit team saw sufficient evidence that subject staff were aware of and made reference to the *Code*.

237 The SED stated that the University has a clearly defined framework of academic qualifications based on academic level and academic credit and that it welcomed the development of the FHEQ and expects the qualification descriptors to be used as part of the approval and review process. The audit team confirmed that awards were inline with the level descriptors. It was noted that the University had defined its undergraduate awards of consisting of two parts containing the three level descriptors. This approach was clear to all students and staff.

238 Through its work the audit team found that subject areas had fully embraced subject benchmark statements. Programme specifications are fully embedded and have assisted in curriculum redesign and development. It also noted that the flexibility offered in terms of programme specifications had led to some diversity in approach and standards of documentation. The University is now moving towards publishing programme specifications on their website. The team also noted that existing review procedures did not make explicit reference to subject benchmark statements.

239 Overall, evidence suggested that the University had engaged meaningfully with the Academic Infrastructure.

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

240 The SED provided a useful description of the University, the main processes in relation to quality and standards, a statement of the recent changes that have taken place in the University and a description of the supporting services. The University also provided a set of supporting references which formed the basis of the audit team's work. The team pursued additional information on the areas described in the SED, collecting details on the variation in practice in the schools within the University from the DATs and the discipline self-evaluation documents. Overall the SED offered the team an initial statement of the view of academic standards and quality as seen from the centre of the University but was sometimes lacking in evaluation of these processes, or details of their operation in the schools.

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

241 The University has introduced a number of changes to enhance the quality of its programmes and the whole student experience. New developments in learning and teaching practice include conferences and a peer reviewed e-journal. It has also introduced a Quality and Customer Care policy within which is included the enhancement of the service provided to students.

242 A major change which took effect from September 2004 was the re-division of the teaching year from terms to semesters accompanied by a shortening of the academic year so that it finishes just after the middle of May. A senior group was established to manage the process and began its work in 2002. Despite careful planning and attention to detail, some of the problems have been difficult to deal with and a number of problems have arisen for students. These continue to be dealt with as they arise.

243 The plan for the revised academic year included the intention to complete semester one before Christmas. This has led to difficulties with the assessment period and some disruption to the final week of teaching. The audit team recognises that issues such as these have the potential to affect adversely the quality of the student experience, and the University is therefore advised to continue its programme of optimising the academic year to enable such problems to be eliminated.

244 The several problems which have arisen during the first year of semesterisation have affected a number of students in various ways. It is important that the overall learning experience of current and future students is diminished as little as possible and the University is advised to continue to address the deficiencies which have been identified.

245 Students have experienced problems with the timing and load of both formative and summative assessment. The audit team advises the University that continuing attention should be paid to ensuring that assessment loads on students are suitably spaced in time and are not allowed to rise above an acceptable level. The timetabling of student contact hours has also proved to be difficult for some full-time and some part-time students. It is desirable that this also be the subject of continuing attention within programme teams.

The reliability of information

246 The students' view is that generally the information provided is reliable accurate and fair. However, at the time of the audit the University was undergoing substantial and rapid change and as a result information quickly became out of date.

247 Students have continuous and immediate access to key individual information relevant to their studies through the on-line PIP developed by the University. The PIP enables students to manage their personal and programme-related information and to see their timetable, examination and assessment schedules. It provides a virtual link with personal tutors and

to the library and support services. Staff and students were enthusiastic about the benefits of PIP and it was generally considered by staff and students to be an excellent system.

248 The University was aware of the current issues regarding reliability of information and had made substantial efforts to ensure that students were properly informed by a variety of methods, and had ensured that the information on the pages was current. Nevertheless some students did experience difficulties which were compounded by staff not always having the most up-to-date information to give to students.

249 The University has put in place the necessary procedures to ensure that public information is placed in the Higher Education and Research Opportunities in the UK website. Preparations are well advanced to support the publication of programme specifications, summaries from external examiners' reports, and the University's internal periodic reviews of subject areas. The University's compliance with the requirements of HEFCE's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance,* is monitored through the QSC. Other information is verified either by the Directorate of Corporate Affairs or in schools.

Features of good practice

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

i   the quality of support for postgraduate research students (paragraphs 116 to 118)

ii   the on-line PIP developed by the University for its students (paragraphs 112, 141, 193)

iii the level of accessibility of staff within schools and their support for students, underpinned by the information provided to staff by Student Services (paragraphs 113 to 115, 144, 156, 171, 186)

iv   the series of themed audits undertaken by the APQU (paragraph 55).

Recommendations for action

251 It would be advisable for the University to:

i strengthen the quality assurance processes at institutional level in order to secure a sufficiently effective oversight by AB and its committees of their operation in the schools (paragraphs 39, 201)

ii continue to address the identified deficiencies in the quality of learning experienced by some students in the first year of semesterisation (paragraphs 44 to 49)

iii develop and publish a plan for the semesterised academic year which ensures optimal coordination and operation (paragraphs 45-46, 142, 172)

iv review its assessment procedures with particular attention to consistency, timing and load on students (paragraphs 45, 47, 172).

252 It would be desirable for the University to:

i make more effective use of the annual review process and develop further its formal systems for the dissemination of good practice across the institution (paragraphs 53, 205-206)

ii work more closely with the officers of the SU in order to improve the utility of student involvement at the institutional level (paragraphs 75-76)

ii continue to develop a more strategic approach to the use and analysis of statistical data within review and decision-making processes (paragraphs 87, 147, 159, 169).

Appendix

Oxford Brookes University's response to the audit report

The University welcomes the Agency's finding that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's current and future management of the quality of its programmes and of its capacity to manage effectively the academic standards of its awards.

We particularly welcome the recognition of the quality of support to postgraduate research students and the efforts made by all the staff involved to provide such an excellent experience.

The University is also pleased to see that the work that has gone into providing such an effective and well-used Personal Information Portal system has been duly recognised.

We are also pleased to see that the time and effort given by staff to support students, both within schools and through Student Services, which has always been recognised as first class by the QAA during Subject Review and the Developmental Engagements continues to be appreciated.

Finally the University welcomes the credit given by the audit team to the work of the APQU in relation to the themed audits that have been carried out and are planned for the future.

The University will be taking a variety of actions to address the recommendations provided in the report.

The terms of reference of the Academic Board and its main committees are already being reviewed to ensure there is greater clarity of their individual responsibilities, while continuing with the principle that the Quality and Standards Committee is the key University committee with responsibility for the quality and academic standards of its programmes of study.

The University accepts that there are further steps that it can take to improve the dissemination of good practice more widely and will be producing proposals to address this matter.

The University confirms that it has carried out the review of the first year of semesterisation and has an action plan to address the various issues that have been highlighted throughout the year. It is strongly committed to ensuring that the quality of the student experience is maintained and enhanced and will be making any changes it sees as necessary to the implementation of the new semesterised academic year. It will continue to monitor closely the views of students and staff to identify further enhancements.

The University values highly the role the Students' Union plays in representing the students' views and will be working closely with it to enhance student involvement in University processes at all levels. The University has been working with the officers of the Students Union on changes to the constitution which are designed to improve participation and accountability within the Union.