University of East London

MARCH 2005

Preface

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

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

The purpose of institutional audit

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

● providing HE, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard, and

● exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

Judgements

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

● the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards

● the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

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

Nationally agreed standards

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

● The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ), which include descriptions of different HE qualifications

● The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education

● subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects

● guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of the what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. They outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the FHEQ.

The audit process

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

The main elements of institutional audit are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution nine months before the audit visit

- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the audit visit

- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the audit visit

- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the audit team five weeks before the audit visit

- the audit visit, which lasts five days

- the publication of a report on the audit team's judgements and findings 20 weeks after the audit visit.

The evidence for the audit

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

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, such as regulations, policy statements, codes of practice, recruitment publications and minutes of relevant meetings, as well as the self-evaluation document itself

- reviewing the written submission from students

- asking questions of relevant staff

- talking to students about their experiences

- exploring how the institution uses the Academic Infrastructure.

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

From 2004, institutions will be required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 02/15 *Information on quality and standards in higher education* published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The audit team reviews progress towards meeting this requirement.

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Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of East London (UEL or the University) from 7 to 11 March 2005 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of awards that the University makes.

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

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

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

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

Outcome of the audit

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

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

Features of good practice

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

- the openness of senior managers in their engagements with staff and students

- the identification of, and staff development provided for, personnel who have a key role to play in supporting the devolution of the quality assurance and enhancement agenda as quality leaders, and as leaders in learning and teaching

- the effectiveness of the implementation of staff development at the University

- the University's equitable approach to, and support for, its part-time staff and students

- the contribution made by learning technology advisers to the development of new technologies for teaching and learning

- the support provided for students in the context of the University's culture of equality and diversity

- the strategic approach and careful consideration given to the further development and integration of the skills curriculum

- the existing Skillzone provision.

Recommendations for action

The audit team also recommends that the University should consider further action in a number of areas to ensure that the academic quality and standards of the awards it offers are maintained.

The University is advised to:

- review the impact of the implementation of the new academic framework to ensure that the University's quality procedures have been followed where changes have been made to programmes

- enhance its capacity to oversee and monitor its engagement with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies in respect of its accredited programmes.

The team also recommends that it would be desirable for the University to:

- encourage in staff a greater awareness of the Academic Infrastructure

- seek ways to give a higher profile to its user-friendly and accessible student charter.

Art and Design (now Visual Arts), Biosciences, Civil Engineering and Surveying, Media and Communications

To arrive at these conclusions the audit team spoke to staff and students, and was given information about the University as a whole. The team also looked in detail at programmes in the discipline audit trails listed above to find out how well the University's systems and procedures were working at that level. The team came to the view that the standard of student achievement in the programmes was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, published by QAA. In each case, the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for a programme of study leading to the relevant awards.

National reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings the audit team also investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the audit suggest that the University is committed to making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure to inform its framework for the management of quality and standards at an institutional level. The audit team considered, however, that there is scope to further develop understanding of the Academic Infrastructure at a local level.

From 2005, the institutional audit process includes a check on the reliability of the information set published by institutions in the format recommended in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE's) document, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance* (HEFCE 03/51). The audit found that the University is preparing appropriately for the publication of its information set and had made good progress towards meeting the requirements of HEFCE 03/51.

Main report

Main report

1   An institutional audit of the University of East London (UEL or the University) was undertaken during the period 7 to 11 March 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility for its awards.

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

3   The audit checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of its academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study leading to those awards; and for publishing reliable information. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, the audit included consideration of 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 offered within the University. The collaborative arrangements that the University has established with a number of partners will be the subject of a separate, future audit.

Section 1: Introduction: University of East London

The institution and its mission

4   The University has been a major provider of higher education in East London for over 100 years, and traces its origins back to three local institutions: the West Ham College of Technology, founded in 1898 as the West Ham Municipal Institute; the Barking Regional College of Technology, formerly the South East Essex Technical College and School of Art; and the Waltham Forest Technical College and School of Art, formerly the South West Essex Technical College and School of Art. In 1970 these three institutions were brought together to form the North East London Polytechnic, later renamed the Polytechnic of East London. In 1992, Privy Council consent to the title, the University of East London was granted. The University currently occupies three main campuses in Barking, Stratford and Docklands, but is planning to vacate the Barking site whilst developing a Lifelong Learning Centre in the borough in collaboration with partner colleges, the borough education service and the public library service. Since 2004 the Docklands Campus has hosted the Rix Centre for Innovation and Learning Disability, which harnesses the power of interactive multimedia and the internet to benefit people with learning disabilities, their families and carers around the world.

5   The University, which has taught and research degree awarding powers, has a stated ambition, expressed in its self-evaluation document (SED), 'to promote and to celebrate the diversity of our community and to focus on the regeneration of our region, not least by striving to widen successful participation for our student body, the majority of whom can be defined as local students'.

6   Following a period of considerable growth since the continuation audit when student numbers were approximately 9,500 full-time equivalents (FTEs), the student population now stands at approximately 13,700 FTEs, of which over 10,800 are full-time and over 5,600 are part-time. There are more than 4,000 overseas

students, the majority of whom are taught in the Business School and in the School of Computing and Technology. Postgraduate students comprise approximately a quarter of the total enrolment.

7   The University has replaced its former faculty and departmental structure, and is now organised into eight Schools: Architecture and the Visual Arts; Business; Computing and Technology; Education; Social Science, Media and Cultural Studies; Health and Bioscience; Law; and Psychology. The heads of these schools, along with the directors of services are members of the Corporate Management Team, together with the Vice-Chancellor's Group which comprises the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) (Academic), PVC (Research, Outreach and Infrastructure), Director of Finance, and Secretary and Registrar, as well as the Vice-Chancellor.

8   A devolved school-based approach to quality assurance and enhancement, combined with institutional level 'audit', has been in operation since 2003. In 2003-04 the University adopted an implementation programme relating to an institution-wide modular credit-based academic framework for the majority of taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The SED described the introduction of a skills curriculum for the development of skills for learning at level 1, with employability, personal and professional development, research and project management skills, as appropriate, at levels 2 or 3. UEL currently offers six programmes entirely by distance learning, and the SED described the institution's aim to become one of the UK's leading multi-mode universities.

9   The University has undergone significant reorganisation since 2001-02. The SED described the role of the Corporate Management Team in managing this change as 'pivotal', and explained that the intentions behind the new structures 'were to facilitate better two-way communication; to encourage far greater ownership of policies by involving more staff in decision making; to provide a sharper focus for student number planning and academic development; and to ensure that our strategic priorities could be delivered through the shortest chain of command'.

10   The current strategic plan 'Innovation and Renewal' covers the period 2002-07 and sets out the University's plans to realise its vision:

> 'to be an inclusive regional university, focussed on students, committed to enterprise and to new models of learning which help students change their lives; to exploit our research in social, cultural and economic development; and to achieve national and international recognition for our achievements.'

11   The SED stated the University's values 'to be student centred, really useful, inclusive, challenging and open, honest and accountable'. The audit team was helped to understand UEL's vision and values through its reading of documentation provided by the University and a full programme of meetings with students and staff.

Collaborative provision

12   Of the total student body, some 2,200 students are following provision provided by the University in conjunction with 32 UK and overseas collaborative partners; a separate audit of the University's collaborative provision is scheduled for 2005-06.

Background information

13   The published information available for this audit included:

- information made available through the Higher Education and Research Opportunities (HERO) portal and the University's own website

- reports of QAA reviews of provision at subject level

- the report of QAA's continuation audit of the University (published in July 2000).

14   The University initially provided QAA with:

- an institutional SED, accompanying appendices and electronic copies of supporting information, which are not accessible from the University's website, on CD-ROM

- discipline self-evaluation documents (DSEDs) for the four areas selected for DATs.

15   During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was given on-site access to a range of internal documents on the University's intranet. It was also given on-site access to internal documents in hard copy, and to a range of documentation relevant to the selected DATs, including samples of student work.

The audit process

16   Following a preliminary meeting at the University in June 2004, QAA confirmed that four DATs would be conducted during the audit visit. QAA received the institutional SED and supporting documentation in November 2004. On the basis of the SED and other published information, the audit team confirmed that the DATs would focus on art and design (now visual arts); biosciences; civil engineering and surveying; and media and communications. QAA received the DSEDs, accompanied by programme specifications, in January 2005.

17   In each case, the DSED comprised self-evaluation documentation produced for internal academic review purposes. The academic review of Art and Design (Visual Arts) was held in January 2005. The DSEDs for Biosciences, Civil Engineering and Surveying, and Media and Communications, which had been subject to internal academic review in 2004, included supplementary and updated documentation relating to the reviews of these disciplines (January 2005). The audit team also received reports of the internal academic reviews undertaken.

18   A briefing visit took place from 2 to 4 February 2005 with the purpose of allowing the audit team to explore with the Vice-Chancellor, senior members of staff and student representatives, matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the SED, the students' written submission (SWS) and other documentation provided to the team in advance. At the close of the briefing visit, the main themes to be pursued in the audit visit were signalled to the University, and a

programme of meetings for the visit was agreed. The team decided that it did not wish to pursue any thematic enquiries during the audit visit.

19   At the preliminary meeting for the audit, discussions were also held with representatives of the Students' Union (UELSU) to confirm the contribution of the UELSU, and the University's students more generally, to the audit process. The student representatives were invited to submit a separate document expressing views on the student experience at the University, and identifying any matters students would wish to highlight with respect to the quality of programmes and the standard of awards. QAA received the SWS in November 2004. The submission was informed by responses to questionnaires for all registered course representatives, student focus groups, a course representatives' meeting with the PVC (Academic), and advice and information statistics on appeals and complaints. The audit team is grateful to the students for preparing the submission which has been made available to the University as a whole through the University's website.

20   The audit visit took place from 7 to 11 March 2005, and included further meetings with staff and students of the University, both at institutional level and in relation to the DATs. The audit team consisted of Professor G Elliott, Professor J Feather, Mrs P Lowrie, Dr J Minten and Dr N Mort. The audit secretary was Mr D Stannard. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr I Ainsworth, Assistant Director.

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

21   The University's previous quality audit took place between 29 November and 3 December 1999, with the subsequent audit report published in July 2000 (the 2000 report). In the intervening period, the University has experienced major change in its academic structure and quality assurance procedures, and a significant growth in student numbers, including a high proportion of overseas and minority ethnic students. The current Vice-Chancellor was appointed in 2001, and a

number of other senior staff appointments have been made subsequently. The institution recognises that 'running through our SED is the wide range of initiatives, across the board, which have been developed over the last three years, some very recently'.

22   The 2000 report recognised the demanding challenges faced by the University in pursuing its access policy, and the extent to which it subjects its work in this area to objective and constructive scrutiny. It commended the University for the leadership provided by its Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, the proactive engagement of the Quality Assurance Department and faculty quality officers and the institutional arrangements for the evaluation of central service departments. The report also commended the University's reflective and thoughtful approach towards mapping its provision against the South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer level descriptors, recognising the contribution this had made to assuring the standards of the University's awards. The standard and objective scrutiny of data gathered to prioritise resource allocation, the contribution of the Quality in Learning and Teaching initiative to the evaluation and enhancement of the quality of learning and the effectiveness of student support, and the University's development and dissemination of good practice through cross-faculty representation and exchange were similarly highlighted.

23   In the 2000 report the University was asked to give further consideration to the linkages between monitoring, prioritising and planning for institutional development, the terms of reference of quality committees, procedures for revising systems or procedures, compliance with policy decisions across the institution and connecting staff development to institutional objectives. Other matters drawn to the University's attention were communication with panel members, quality assurance arrangements for research degrees, the composition of panels for institutional approval and programme validation, institutional approval processes,

memoranda for institution- and programme-level collaborative arrangements, the format of external examiner reports, and monitoring and evaluating both the effectiveness of information provided to students and the systems in place for briefing student representatives.

24   The actions taken by the University in responding to the 2000 report were detailed and clearly described in an appendix to the SED, although there was little evaluation of the effectiveness of these actions. Several of the matters relating to quality assurance procedures which emerged from the 2000 report of the continuation audit, and to which the University responded, were followed up in the present audit.

25   QAA reviewed the subject areas of Economics in 2000 and Education in 2001 and in both cases the provision was approved. During 2003, subject reviews were undertaken in Accountancy; Earth and Environmental Sciences and Environmental Studies; Engineering; and Law. With the exception of Accountancy, the reviews resulted in positive outcomes. The review of accountancy resulted in a judgement of no confidence in academic standards while the quality of the learning opportunities was failing. As a consequence, the provision was subject to a re-review within 12 months. This took place in December 2004, resulting in a confidence judgement in academic standards while the quality of the learning opportunities was approved with teaching and learning and learning resources both being considered to be commendable.

26   The audit team found that the Quality and Standards Committee (formerly Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee) received and discussed school reports and action plans emanating from all QAA subject reviews, and that these were endorsed by the Academic Board. There have been no developmental engagements at the University. In the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise, the University submitted 15 units of assessment and achieved one 5 rating (Communication, Cultural and Media Studies) and two 4 ratings (Art and Design and Sociology).

27   The SED referred to a 'culture of openness, transparency of information and decision-making and accessibility…' established following the appointment of the new Vice-Chancellor in 2001 and including 'regular personal engagement with staff in schools and services on particular topics'. In the course of the audit, the audit team was able to confirm that the openness of senior managers in their engagements with staff and students was a feature of good practice (see paragraphs 39 and 83 below).

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

28   The SED outlined the processes by which the University assures itself of the quality and standards of its provision. It described the move away from a centralised quality assurance agenda to a more devolved system combined with institutional level 'audit'. By these means the University hoped to increase ownership throughout the academic community and foster a culture of trust, within clearly defined parameters, rather than compliance. The SED characterised this change as a shift of focus in its quality systems from control to assurance and enhancement.

29   The University's procedures for programme approval, monitoring (the annual review and enhancement process (REP)) and periodic academic review are detailed in the UEL Quality Manual. Power to approve new programmes and modify existing ones is delegated to school standing quality committees. Schools appoint external academic peers as programme approval advisers, and use is made of senior academics from other schools as 'internal externals' and to disseminate good practice. Schools have designed the detail of their own approval processes in line with criteria outlined in the Quality Manual. A programme specification is required for each programme, including reference to the appropriate subject benchmark statement(s). The Validation and Review Sub-Committee confirms validation, and a report is forwarded to the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) and Academic Board.

30   The University replaced the annual quality improvement process with the REP from the 2003-04 academic year and each school has designed its own REP procedures within the parameters of the Quality Manual guidelines. The SED provided an evaluation of the first year of implementation of the REP and detailed changes planned in consequence.

31   The process of internal periodic academic review evaluates the student experience and operation of the academic organisational units, normally at field (subject area) level, and involves the production of a SED. Following production of the review report, the relevant school is required to produce an action plan, and both this and the written report are forwarded to the QSC, for consideration on a rolling basis, and to the Academic Board.

32   The SED claimed that students make an extensive contribution to institutional procedures and decision-making, including quality assurance and enhancement, involving, inter alia, regular UELSU liaison meetings, student representation on all major committees, and academic working groups. The audit team was able to confirm this to be the case in the light of its discussions with students, who appreciated the opportunity to engage in this way. The participation and contribution of employers to review was described in the SED as 'an area for improvement' and whilst it was not clear to the team how improvements would be made where acknowledged weaknesses existed, it noted that the appointment of a Head of Employability (see paragraph 40 below) was intended to support the University's work in this area.

The institution's framework for managing quality and standards

33   Ultimate responsibility for maintaining quality and standards rests with the Academic Board, which carries out this function through

the QSC which itself has three sub-committees to advise it on particular aspects of business: learning and teaching (LTSC), external examiners (EESC) and validation and review (VRSC). The University's approach to managing quality and standards is described in detail in the Quality Manual, which is available both in hard copy and on its website. A new academic framework has been introduced from September 2004. Points for consideration by the University, identified in the continuation audit report (2000), have been fully addressed in the broader context of the University's thorough revision of its academic quality procedures.

34   The audit team learned that the Vice-Chancellor had held a number of 'QA Future Workshops' with staff from across the institution soon after taking office in November 2001. These have continued since that time to enable the external and internal quality agendas to be disseminated. There is significant devolution of authority to the University's eight schools, which are required to develop their own procedures in the context of the framework. School Quality Standing Committees (SQSCs) report to School Boards which, in turn, report to the Academic Board. The SQSCs also interact with the VRSC. Where significant new procedures are being developed, schools are required to seek approval from the Academic Board. This happened, for example, in the development of the annual review and enhancement process; the team saw evidence that this was an iterative process between the Academic Board (and QSC) and the schools.

35   The *Code of practice for quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*), published by QAA, is fully embedded in the Quality Manual. Although there are no explicit references to the *Code*, it was used in developing the systems described in the Quality Manual. The audit team saw evidence that the relevant committees explicitly engaged with the *Code* in developing new or revised procedures, and that when additional or revised sections of the *Code* are published, the University maps them against its own current procedures. Among the examples were the sections of the

Code relating to external examining and arrangements for research students.

36   It is clear from the documentation at institutional and school levels, and from meetings with staff at all levels, including in the DATs, that the devolution to schools has given a significant sense of empowerment to academic staff. They told the audit team that they felt able to develop systems and processes which they deemed appropriate to their own subject domains, while operating within the University's academic framework. They also noted that, at a central level, members of the Strategic Planning and Quality Enhancement (SPQE) team were supportive and helpful. The University's policy, described by a senior officer as being 'trust with rigorous checking', is already well-embedded at every level.

37   Each school has a 'leader' for the areas of combined honours; learning and teaching; quality assurance; and research. Leaders are accountable to the relevant head of school for the effective implementation of relevant procedures at school level. The audit team particularly noted the key role of those members of academic staff who may be selected as quality leaders and leaders in learning and teaching, as a result of interest expressed during their annual reviews with their respective heads of school.

38   Quality leaders chair their SQSCs and typically serve as quality facilitators in other schools. The audit team was told that this system is intended to foster comparability between schools and to be a mechanism for disseminating good practice across the University. Evidence from the DATs, as well as at institutional level, suggests that this intention is realised. Quality leaders are supported to take an active role in championing quality in their own schools. They are also used as 'internal externals' in various processes (such as programme approval and REPs) in other schools. Leaders in learning and teaching are responsible for promoting developments relating to learning, teaching and assessment within their schools. The team noted that this aspect of their work was built into the leaders' workload within the

University's academic workload allocation model. It considered that the careful definition of their roles and the support provided for, and time allowed for school quality leaders and leaders in learning and teaching to undertake their respective roles, is a feature of good practice facilitating and promoting enhancement on a university-wide basis.

39   The audit team heard of the ways in which senior managers interacted with staff who clearly welcomed the approach adopted. The team considered the openness of senior managers in their engagements with staff to be a feature of good practice. Overall, the team considered that the University has developed and implemented an appropriate framework for the management of quality and standards. However, and acknowledging that the new academic framework has only recently been introduced, the team wished to sound a note of caution in the light of its experience in one of the DATs (see paragraphs 75 and 183 below). This suggested that it would be advisable for the University to review the impact of the implementation of the new academic framework to ensure that its quality procedures have been followed where changes have been made to programmes.

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

40   The University claimed in the SED that its approach to quality assurance and enhancement and securing the standard of its awards is informed and influenced by a number of key external reference points including the *Code of practice*; *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ); subject benchmark statements; the requirements, where appropriate, of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), employers and external examiner reports; and external market conditions. Of these external reference points, the University's internal review processes have on occasion, reported consultation with employers as an area in need of improvement. As a consequence, the University has appointed a Head of Employability

to improve its strategic impetus here. Through its meetings with staff and students, the audit team found that employer engagement and influence on the University curriculum appeared to be increasing. The team formed the view that considerable progress had been made in developing a university-wide skills curriculum, and believed that the focus on 'employability' at levels 2 and 3 would provide a significant enhancement in this area.

41   A major objective of the University is to improve on its current performance in student retention and achievement, and the SED indicated that this is a major theme in annual planning. The introduction of a modular scheme, new re-assessment regulations, staff development in learning and teaching, and new student support arrangements are planned to bring about significant improvement, together with more effective dissemination of existing good practice identified in REP reports. These reports provide schools with the progression, achievement and completion data upon which their plans for improvement and enhancement in this area are based. The SED stated that evidence from the REP process in 2003-04 suggests that 'great progress' has been achieved but that further improvements can be made. The audit team considered that the roles of the school quality and standing committees and the quality leaders in developing action plans in this area were pivotal in securing future improvements.

42   The University recognised the importance of students' contributions to providing feedback on programmes and the SED described a student representation project which aims to embed student representation fully in 2004-05. The project is led by the SPQE Office and involves joint working with UELSU. In the DATs, the audit team found evidence of very effective student representation practices on programme committees, but recognised that the University was finding it more difficult to secure effective representation at school-level quality and standing committees and school boards.

43   The SED claimed many examples of good practice in the use and communication of assessment criteria across the eight schools, as

well as some practice where further enhancement is required. The Academic Board approved a new assessment and engagement policy in December 2003 for full implementation by September 2004. The policy is designed to build on, and extend, current good practice. Issues covered include the purpose and definitions of assessment; assessment design; marking and moderation requirements; external examining requirements; and advanced standing entry. At the time of the audit, the first round of field assessment boards had been held, and the audit team learned from staff that these had provided beneficial opportunities for discussion of assessment practices. The team was able to confirm, through the DATs conducted, that school assessment practices were clear and consistent with the University's assessment and engagement policy.

44   The University recognises that many new developments are at a very early stage of implementation with necessarily limited evidence, therefore, of their effectiveness. The audit team agreed with the University's view, expressed in the SED, that work remains to be done, particularly 'in relation to routinising new procedures and systems' and improving its focus on 'loop closure'. However, there is evidence that regular review by SQSCs of REP action plans, including named individuals with responsibility and due by dates, will contribute significantly in this regard.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Programme approval

45   The programme approval process is described in the University's Quality Manual. A new programme proposal is discussed informally by the proposer and the appropriate head of school before formal submission to the School Board, or the SQSC on its behalf. The relevant head of school then makes a proposal to the Corporate Management Team (CMT). Outline approval is given provided that the programme is aligned with the University's vision and strategy. Detailed development is undertaken with the support of the proposing

school's associated quality assurance officer. There is a requirement to contact internal service providers (for example, Chief Management Accountant, Planning Manager, information technology (IT) services, Learning Resources, Estates) to discuss the facilities and services which will be needed, and the financial viability of the programme.

46   The Chair of the SQSC appoints external subject advisers before the meeting at which the Committee will give detailed consideration to the proposal. At least two such advisers are required. The SQSC will expect to see a full range of documentation for the proposed programme, including the programme specification, following a university-wide template; the details of the contents of the programme and its articulation with the University and the School's strategic plans; a full rationale for the programme; its professional context; a detailed account of the structure of the programme, module content, arrangements for student placement and student support; a statement of the articulation with the FHEQ, the *Code of practice* and relevant subject benchmark statement(s), and professional accreditation requirements; staff curricula vitae; and a statement of resource requirements. The SQSC is required to consider the proposal in detail at a meeting and to make a formal and detailed record of its discussion. Following SQSC approval the VRSC, on behalf of the Academic Board, reviews whether or not the required procedures have been followed. When this assurance has been received, the programme can be delivered. The SED described these procedures, but did not evaluate their effectiveness.

47   The audit team read and heard evidence, both at institutional level and through the DATs, that the procedures were being followed. It noted that there is an appropriate level of external involvement, and of 'internal externality'. The team also noted the involvement of the CMT in the process and the support which schools and, in particular, the SQSCs receive from institutional-level quality and standards support systems. The University maintains a good institutional-level overview of the development

process through the involvement of the Quality Assurance Manager centrally and the Quality Assurance Officer associated with the particular school, and through the involvement of the CMT at the beginning of the process and the VRSC at the end. Sections of the *Code of practice* are taken as points of reference throughout the process, as is evident from the minutes of meetings at school level.

Annual monitoring

48   The annual monitoring of programmes takes place through the REP, which is described in the Quality Manual. Responsibility for the REP lies with each SQSC. Schools are required to establish their own procedures for this purpose, which have to be approved by the QSC of the Academic Board before implementation. Each programme team is required to produce its own REP report as a contribution to the process at school level, and to consider a wide range of evidence including external examiners' reports; module level reflective reviews; student feedback at modular and programme level; and data on the student population, progression and achievement. The programme REP also addresses progress made in relation to the previous year's agreed action plan.

49   The programme REP report is discussed at a programme or field committee meeting before submission to the SQSC, which then develops a school overview report identifying major issues; student-related statistical data are analysed; issues raised by external examiners and the responses to them are discussed; and institutional-level issues and examples of good practice are highlighted. The relevant school is required to produce an action plan against which progress will then be judged. School boards approve overview reports before they are signed off by the heads of school. The QSC is required to agree action plans and to monitor their implementation. The VRSC has ownership of the REP, and conducts an audit of the process in each school on a triennial cycle, through a quality facilitator.

50   The SED indicated that the first complete application of the REP in 2003-04 revealed a number of weaknesses in the production of both

REP reports and action plans. There were inconsistencies and some REP reports were considered to be too discursive. The quality facilitator role has presented problems, but the QSC concluded that there was sufficient 'internal externality' (through the member of the SQSC who is from another school) for the process to be robust. The Academic Board is of the view that the REP has made schools more reflective on their academic processes and that it is beginning to have a positive effect on the student experience.

51   The audit team confirmed the variable quality of the REP reports from 2003-04, particularly in the depth and reflective analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data. However, the team also found evidence that the QSC was effectively monitoring and leading the process, in line with the University's stated approach to quality enhancement. Schools are clearly engaging with the process, and using it positively to enhance the quality of the student learning experience. The team noted, and welcomed, the extent of central support for school activities and, in particular, the key role of quality leaders and leaders in learning and teaching. The team also noted that there is centrally-provided staff development for academic staff in schools who are involved in the REP. Consistency has not yet been fully achieved, but the team considered that processes are in place which will ensure that the system, which it regards as fundamentally robust, will continue to improve.

Periodic review

52   Periodic academic review in the University's new academic framework will take place at not more than six-yearly intervals and is described in the Quality Manual. Heads of school work with the Senior Quality Assurance Officer, located in the SPQE Office, to prepare for review, with SQSCs taking a coordinating role. Schools are required to produce an SED analysing the overall aims of the provision; learning outcomes; curricula and assessment; quality of learning opportunities; and quality maintenance and enhancement. Reviews are conducted by panels comprising a minimum of six people, normally chaired by a member of the Quality and Standards Committee, and

including three external subject specialists and a member of UEL staff who has not previously been involved in such a process. School heads nominate external specialists to serve on review panels. Specialists are required to meet strict criteria of expertise and experience, including experience as QAA auditors or reviewers, and they should have no previous association with the provision under review.

53   The review process is managed by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement staff who are part of the SPQE Office and the review event takes place over two days resulting in a written report highlighting strengths, and identifying recommendations for action at both school and institutional level. The report, which is produced by the SPQE Office, and the action plan produced by the relevant school, are considered and endorsed by the QSC and subsequently by the Academic Board. The QSC monitors the implementation of the action plan at each subsequent meeting, until all actions have been completed. If a review panel has serious concerns about the provision being reviewed, it may hold a second review; it has the power to recommend to the Academic Board that recruitment should be suspended while it is assured about the quality of particular programmes.

54   The SED noted that some school self-evaluation documents have been over-descriptive and insufficiently evaluative, and there is a need to redress this imbalance through staff development. The SED also noted that the focus is on the overall student experience, and that it is particularly important to give weight to the views of employers and to the statistical data which evidences student progression and achievement. The SED presented the view that academic review is an integral part of the quality enhancement process in the University, and that the system is robust.

55   The audit team is aware that the University has radically revised its academic framework, and that few academic reviews have been conducted under the new system. The evidence available to the team, however, supported the broad view that the system is robust, and that it is being improved as, and

when, any operational weaknesses are revealed. In particular, the team noted the QSC's close monitoring of the implementation of action plans, with progress chasing at every QSC meeting until all actions have been signed off.

56   The University recognises the need to ensure that all staff are fully engaged with the process and the team saw evidence in the DATs, and in other documentation, that this is indeed the case. Although external academic involvement in the process is sound, the team saw less evidence of employer involvement, for which a claim is made in the SED. The team also noted that, in some cases, the consideration of progression and achievement data was weak on analysis, although the QSC is aware of this, and is addressing the issue. The team noted the institutional-level support for new and complex processes which is apparent through staff development. It considered that the practice of using one inexperienced member of UEL staff on a periodic academic review panel was a useful mechanism for developing staff expertise and disseminating good practice across the institution. The team formed the view that the support provided, and the use of quality leaders and leaders in learning and teaching as agents of development and change, constitutes a feature of good practice.

External participation in internal review processes

57   The University requires the involvement of two external academic advisers in the programme approval process. They are appointed on the advice of the Chair of School Quality and Standards Committee if they meet strict criteria of expertise, experience and impartiality. The Chair of SQSC is expected to achieve a balance of these requirements between the two nominees. External advisers may (but are not required to) attend all meetings, but they are required to comment in writing, and their comments are discussed by SQSC as part of the approval process.

58   Three external subject specialists are normally required to serve on academic review panels. The same criteria are applied as for

external academic advisers for programme approval, with the additional requirement of prior experience as a QAA reviewer or auditor. Review panel chairs manage the process of selection. In addition, there are 'internal external' members of the groups developing a new programme, and of the academic review panel. In the latter case, one UEL member should be someone with no previous experience of the process. The Quality Manual describes the procedures for the appointment of external advisers.

59   The SED stated that the involvement of external advisers in the programme approval process is 'critical in ensuring appropriate external calibration'. The University considers that its programme approval and review processes are robust and that externality is fully integrated into all of its quality assurance and enhancement processes. However, the SED recognised the need to monitor and adapt, as appropriate, the comparatively recent innovations made to the University's internal quality assurance and enhancement processes.

60   The audit team found the systems described in the Quality Manual to be fundamentally sound, and it saw and heard evidence of their implementation in practice. The team agreed with the University's analysis that the external involvement in the periodic academic review process is particularly strong. The appointment of three external reviewers gives ample scope to consider the wide range of programmes typically provided in each school. The additional requirement that, ideally, they should have experience of QAA processes, ensures an alignment with sector-wide norms and expectations.

External examiners and their reports

61   The SED described how the introduction of the new academic framework in September 2004 provided the University with an opportunity to make a significant change to the way external examiners were used in the institution. From this date, two distinct kinds of examiner were employed: *field* external examiners, with responsibility for assuring standards at module level; and *award* external examiners, who act as

guarantors of due process and equity in award decisions. The use of field and award examiners is also intended to increase the engagement and active participation of external examiners in the entire assessment process.

62   The University's procedures for external examiners are clearly set out in the Quality Manual, including the rights and responsibilities of examiners, the selection and appointment criteria and the reporting process. All external examiners receive a copy of the External Examiners' Manual which gives detailed information about their roles and responsibilities. Newly-appointed examiners are invited to attend an induction day, held twice a year, during which the UEL academic framework and the roles of external examiners are described. The appointment of external examiners begins at school level where nominations are approved and then forwarded for detailed consideration by the EESC of QSC.

63   Under the new arrangements for external examining, reports submitted by examiners are in one of two formats to acknowledge the differing roles of field and award examiners. The SPQE Office scrutinises all reports received by the University and notes of actions needing attention are sent in parallel to the School and PVC (Academic). Schools respond directly to the external examiners and copies of their responses are also sent to the SPQE Office and PVC (Academic) to ensure 'loop closure'. Further backup is provided by school annual REP reports which include external examiners' reports and school responses to them. The monitoring of cases where external examiners' reports are not submitted on time, together with recommended school action, is provided at institutional level by the EESC.

64   In seeking to establish the University's engagement with the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*, the audit team noted that minuted meetings of the EESC contained clear action plans on the University's response to recent changes in this section of the *Code* which had been requested at senior institutional level by the Academic Board and QSC. The team also viewed a sample of

external examiners' reports submitted prior to the adoption of the new field and award examiner system and found that examiners were generally positive about the programmes on which they were required to comment.

65   In the course of discussions with staff during the audit, it was clear to the audit team that the introduction of the new academic framework, the structural changes to the roles of external examiners, newly-designed pro forma reports and the revised mechanism for dealing with external examiners' reports all contributed to a more robust and integrated system. The team was convinced that these changes would address the desirable recommendation contained in the previous quality audit report (2000) which related to variability in examiner reports received by the institution at that time. Overall, and notwithstanding the fact that the processes were new and not fully tested, the team concluded that the University's external examining arrangements are sound and that measures are in place to use the advice of external examiners to enhance programme provision.

External reference points

66   The SED stated that 'the Quality Manual formalises our engagement with the *Code*'. The current version of the Quality Manual is a recent publication (September 2004), reflecting the new academic framework, and appeared to the audit team to be a well-structured document which would be of great use as a reference to quality matters for all staff. The team noted that not all sections of the *Code of practice* were explicitly referenced in the Quality Manual and thus sought to establish how the University embraced the *Code* in its complete form.

67   From meetings with staff, and from reading documentation provided prior to and during the audit, it was clear to the audit team that at institutional level there was a clear engagement with all sections of the *Code of practice*. The team noted that the University's policy was to embed the *Code* within its policies and procedures at institutional level. Thus, there was an expectation that, by following University

procedures, schools would be following the *Code* even though they may not be consciously aware of the details. The team's experience in one of the DATs highlighted the need for shared understanding at local and university-wide levels of operation (see paragraph 75 below).

68   The SED stated that 'all programmes conform to the qualification descriptors of the FHEQ' and, in meetings with staff during the audit, it became clear to the audit team that programme specifications had been developed with due regard to the FHEQ. The team formed the view that staff were aware of the contents of the FHEQ and had taken due regard of it when constructing programmes.

69   The audit team also noted that, as part of the academic review process, panels were required to report on the use of external reference points such as subject benchmark statements in the section of the report on 'activities to ensure and enhance standards and quality'. From the evidence presented in the DATs and elsewhere, the team considered that the University's provision was consistent with relevant subject benchmark statements.

70   According to the SED, the University sees programme specifications (for undergraduate programmes) primarily 'as a single source of detailed information for Prospectus, programme leaflet and web site descriptions of programmes'. The audit team noted that the style of all programme specifications presented were consistent with this aim given that they were clearly written with prospective students as an audience.

71   Experience of the DAT in Biosciences and in Civil Engineering and Surveying suggested to the audit team that an appreciation of the detail of the different elements of the Academic Infrastructure would be helpful at the point of programme delivery. Consequently, the team formed the view that it would be desirable for the University to encourage in staff a greater awareness of the Academic Infrastructure (see paragraphs 75, 164 and 183 below).

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

72   Since the continuation audit visit in 1999, there have been subject reviews of Accountancy (2003), Earth, Environmental Science and Environmental Studies (2003), Education (2001), Engineering (2003) and Law (2003). With the exception of Accountancy, the reviewers expressed broad confidence in academic standards and approved all aspects of provision, in many cases finding it to be commendable. As indicated (in paragraph 25 above), Accountancy provision was re-reviewed in December 2004 following a judgement of no confidence in the academic standards of the programmes under review, and a concern that the quality of student progression was failing. Following the re-review, confidence in academic standards has now been achieved and approval given in respect of learning opportunities, with teaching and learning and learning resources both being found to be commendable.

73   Academic Board and its QSC receive external reports but the responsibility for responding is devolved to schools and they are required to produce action plans. These plans are approved by the QSC and their implementation is monitored at every subsequent meeting until all actions have been signed off. The operation of the system described to the audit team was confirmed through the team's consideration of minutes of QSC and Academic Board meetings. In the particular and problematic case of Accountancy, an action plan was developed at school level, and was agreed after iteration with the QSC and the Academic Board. The QSC monitored its implementation and oversaw the preparations for the re-review which took place in 2004. The team considered that the positive re-review outcome served to demonstrate that the University's systems are both responsive and effective.

74   The audit team was told that schools are responsible for liaison with PSRBs. The majority of schools at UEL have programmes which are accredited by PSRBs and students who met the team saw professional accreditation as an important factor in choosing where to study. The University indicated that it considered carefully the demands of PSRB requirements in the light of its agenda for widening participation, access and diversity.

75   During the course of the audit, members of the team noted that, in some cases, accreditation of certain programmes had been given prior to the adoption of the new academic framework in September 2004. Although many of the existing degree programmes satisfied the new framework, this was not true for all programmes. For example, as observed in one of the DATs, a Civil Engineering programme needed major changes to move from eight to six taught modules, including a new university-wide skills module. The audit team was unable to find any evidence that the accrediting body (The Joint Board of Moderators (JBM)) had been consulted when these changes were implemented. Moreover, the University has clear requirements for programme re-approval following structural changes relating to interaction with PSRBs if they are involved in accrediting the programme. It appeared to the team that the absence of an institutional overview at committee level of accreditation by PSRBs will have contributed to this oversight. It also suggested to the team that an appreciation of the detail of the Academic Infrastructure at the point of programme delivery would be helpful.

76   From the evidence seen by the audit team, it did not appear that external accrediting bodies had been fully engaged in the implementation of the new academic framework. The team considered that liaison with PSRBs was problematic and noted that there is no institutional overview of PSRB engagement with the University at committee level, this overview currently being the responsibility of the PVC (Academic). The team formed the view that the University needs to engage more fully with this issue and considered that it would be advisable for the University to enhance its capacity to oversee and monitor its engagement with PSRBs in respect of its accredited programmes.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

77   The SED stated that students are represented in University procedures and decision-making either through individual contributions or through the UELSU. There is a formal liaison group between members of the Vice-Chancellor's Group and UELSU as well as a more informal, quarterly series of meetings. Student representatives sit on all major committees of the University, including Academic Board and there are two representatives on the Board of Governors.

78   Students are represented at school level on school boards and quality committees and individual programme cohorts nominate representatives who sit on programme committees and school boards. UELSU offers training for these students. Significant changes to existing programmes require consultation with students, who are also involved in the academic review process and, where appropriate, in quality improvement in learning and teaching project activity.

79   The issue of student representation was raised in the previous quality audit report (2000) which noted that there were difficulties in securing representation, regular attendance and effective contribution by students on major committees. Furthermore, the effectiveness of student representatives, their preparedness and the monitoring of such issues by the University led to a recommendation that the University should monitor and improve the information provided to representatives and to monitor this to ensure consistency.

80   The SED suggested a close relationship between University managers and UELSU. It cited examples of the outcomes of a range of liaison meetings including equality and diversity, campus safety, student accommodation, bursaries and the UEL student charter. UELSU officers have been key members of recent Academic Board working groups relating to the academic framework, quality assurance and enhancement, and combined honours. The SED indicated that student

representatives at all levels make a significant contribution to the design and delivery of programmes. The SWS and UELSU representatives confirmed the considerable improvement in relationships between the University and UELSU and listed the wide range of fora at which the UELSU are represented.

81   The SED recognised that, although the structure and mechanisms for student representation are in place, their operation varies. The SWS similarly highlighted variability in the effectiveness of student representation as an issue, identifying only two schools having what was described as a 'workable representative system'. The SWS also indicated that student representatives questioned the extent to which they are able to raise and get action on issues. The University has initiated a student representation project, led by the SPQE Office, with a view to embedding student representation fully in 2004-05. The audit team noted that an additional 130 student representatives were recruited for 2004-05, and the majority have been trained

82   The audit team formed the view that UEL is responsive to student concerns. At programme level, it noted the joint involvement of the SPQE Office and the UELSU in the implementation of the new student representation project, resulting in significant progress by the time of the audit. Meetings with a range of students also confirmed the effectiveness of the representative system although the DATs suggested that inconsistencies still remained in the effectiveness of student input at school level.

83   The audit team heard that students appreciated the openness of senior managers in engaging with them and the team considered this to be a feature of good practice. The team formed the view that the University had effective systems for students to contribute to the management of the quality of provision. The University had significantly enhanced these arrangements recently, was monitoring them effectively and had implemented steps to address weaknesses where they still existed.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

84   The University gathers feedback through student representation at a number of levels. Additionally, individual academic programmes are required to gather feedback from students and to report on this and subsequent actions in the REP. This varies by school although a standardised set of questions for module evaluation questionnaires was implemented in 2003. The VRSC monitors the process at school level to ensure that adequate feedback is being obtained and appropriate responses made.

85   In 2003-04 the institution-wide student satisfaction survey was re-introduced in the form of a pilot survey conducted by an external organisation. The results were considered by the CMT, Academic Board and school and service teams in order to plan appropriate responses and to inform the annual planning cycle. The University plans to hold the surveys annually with the 2004 survey being timed to enable the results to inform the REP. The SED did not outline any formal mechanisms for obtaining feedback from graduates or employers but indicated that the latter are consulted 'wherever possible' in the academic review process.

86   The 2000 quality audit report identified good practice in the use of feedback in the annual monitoring and quality improvement processes. However, it noted that there were exceptions to this across the University in terms of the information sought, the way the material was collated and the degree to which the 'loop' was closed by feeding back information to students. The SED acknowledged that the lack of consistency in the University's approach to feedback at programme and module level makes meaningful comparisons across years and programmes difficult, and it has responded by initiating the student representation project (see paragraph 81 above).

87   The University considers the student satisfaction survey to be a strength. It has re-instated the survey with external guidance and plans for it to be an annual process. The SED cited several examples of the responsiveness to the survey, including the provision of new human and physical resources in areas of dissatisfaction and the results of the survey informing strategic planning in student services.

88   The SED acknowledged, however, that there are problems with 'closing the loop' with regard to programme and module level feedback. It also stated that the University has established, through monitoring the REP, that consultation with employers is an area in need of improvement. Evidence from the DATs suggested that there had been some improvements in providing programme and module feedback to students but that inconsistencies between schools, in the way in which feedback is collected and action is taken, remained. Meetings with students and the UELSU also suggested that there was still variation across the University and that notification of the response to feedback could be ad hoc rather than systematic. However, all of the students who met the audit team during the audit were very positive regarding the approachability of staff and considered that this went a long way to enhancing the informal feedback provided. In addition, the SWS specifically mentioned the value of WebCT as a feedback tool.

89   Feedback at institutional level appears to be effectively collected through the student satisfaction survey and the SED highlighted a range of actions following the 2003 survey. The audit team noted that the 2004 student satisfaction survey had been carried out and the results disseminated by the time of the audit. Students and UELSU representatives suggested that they felt empowered by University actions on the issues that had been raised in the recent past.

90   The audit team found that, although the systems for gathering feedback from stakeholders had improved, the ability to 'close the loop' requires further development. The team found little evidence of systematic feedback from graduates and employers but noted that the recently appointed Head of Employability has been tasked to make improvements in this area. Overall, the team concluded that there is effective feedback from students, but that further consideration should

be given to the means by which feedback from graduates and employers is sought.

Progression and completion statistics

91   Data on student progression and achievement are derived from the corporate management information system (MIS) and are provided at fortnightly intervals to heads of school for monitoring purposes. The data are used in the REP, and incorporated in the REP report. They are used within schools at module, field and programme level to identify issues and anomalies, and are reported to assessment boards. The main focus is on retention which is one of the University's five generic 'themes' identified in its learning and teaching strategy. The Vice-Chancellor regularly reports to the Board of Governors on retention and progression. Analysis includes data on ethnicity, gender and other features which articulate with the University's approach to diversity in admissions.

92   The SED indicated that statistical data are considered annually as part of the REP. It emphasised the central importance of retention while recognising that, in the past, data provided have been 'less than optimal'. The new MIS is intended to overcome this deficiency.

93   The audit team considered that the University has an MIS which is capable of producing relevant and adequate data, although there is evidence of some teething troubles in individual cases. Statistical data is to be found in the REP reports, but there is limited evidence there of reflective analysis of the statistics. The team formed the view that the monitoring and analysis of statistical data is still under development at school level. The QSC's responses to the first round of REP reports, however, offered assurance that this issue is being addressed.

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

94   The wide ranging human resources (HR) strategy 2001-04 was developed as part of the HEFCE ' Rewarding and Developing Staff - Round

1' initiative and was implemented by Personnel Services working with the CMT. The 2001-04 HR strategy identified seven priority areas for attention, namely recruitment and retention; staff development and training; equality and diversity; regular reviews of staffing needs; performance review; rewarding performance and managing performance. The University considered that strong progress had been made against all priorities and the review of achievement underpinned the identification and development of aims and targets for the HR Strategy (Round 2) for 2004-06 which broadly cover the same areas. In the review of the progress made for the period 2001-04, Personnel Services are identified as a key change agent to support performance enhancement and the modernisation of UEL's culture.

95   Teaching appointments are made at school level in line with the University's staff recruitment and selection policy guidelines which are regularly reviewed. These were most recently revised in October 2004. The guidelines are designed to empower managers involved in the recruitment and selection process and to reinforce the implementation of UEL's equality and diversity policy. Schools and services are responsible for identifying the need for new or replacement posts within budget constraints. All requests to fill substantive posts (as identified in the staffing policy guidelines) are considered by the CMT staffing group.

96   The University's Equality and Diversity Unit organises mandatory training in equality and diversity for all UEL staff and individuals involved in staff selection panels must have attended a staff recruitment and selection skills course, which is run on a monthly basis by Personnel Services. UEL monitors the staff profile closely and the SED stated that the University's practices in the implementation of equal opportunities bears comparison with the best in the higher education sector.

97   Since 2001, due to staff turnover and some early retirements, staffing vacancies have been released and allowed new appointments to be made. The audit team was told that 44 percent of staff had been recruited in the last five years.

98   The University recently reviewed the staff appraisal scheme and has put in place a system for staff development and review (SDR) which includes mandatory training for both reviewers and reviewees. The annual SDR interview provides an opportunity to review personal development plans for staff and is informed by the peer observation which takes place each semester. The outcomes of the SDR process contribute to the staff development component of each school/service annual plan to more closely link the contribution of staff development to the achievement of the University's objectives identified in the corporate plan.

99   The University's promotion procedures are detailed in its employment policies. Academic staff have the opportunity to apply for promotion to principal lecturer. The number of promotions available is identified as a resource dependent annual quota. Promotion to principal lecturer is on merit, based on performance in the three areas of teaching, research (and scholarship) and administration. Applications are considered initially by a short-listing panel and then a review panel which includes a senior external academic. There is also an annual call from existing members of staff who wish to be considered for appointment as a professor or reader of the University. The Professorship and Readership Committee considers applications and involves two external professors in its final deliberations.

100 Since the submission of the SED, the Academic Board has approved the introduction of a teaching fellowship scheme. The award will provide a mechanism by which excellence, specifically in teaching and supporting learning, can be recognised and rewarded. At the time of the audit, the first appointments of these fellowships had yet to take place but it was anticipated that the scheme would be launched in March 2005 with fellowships being formally awarded at the June 2005 Learning and Teaching Conference.

101 Meetings with staff at institutional and field level indicated that the arrangements for recruitment, selection, appointment and promotion were perceived as sound and effective. Staff confirmed their involvement in peer observation and the SDR process, which has now been implemented in most schools. Some areas have yet to complete the SDR schedule and the need for a consistent operation of the SDR scheme was identified in the SED. Staff welcomed the revised promotion procedures and considered them to be thorough and transparent; a view shared by the audit team. The team considered that the assurance of the quality of teaching staff (through the appointment, appraisal and reward system) was secure and that appropriate procedures were in place.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

102 The University identifies the effective performance and development of staff as crucial to realising the vision and aspirations of UEL's strategic plan 'Innovation and Renewal'. Staff development and support is provided by a wide variety of means and covers activities designed to address the needs of all staff at different stages of their careers and in differing roles.

103 All new staff are required to attend the UEL corporate staff induction programme organised by Personnel Services. Academic staff are assigned a mentor for support and induction to their respective school and new academic staff at all levels serve a probationary period of one year. Staff with less than two years' teaching experience must take the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning (PGCTL) run by the School of Education. The PGCTL is accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and staff who have successfully completed the programme automatically qualify for HEA membership. The audit team was told that the University encourages staff to seek membership of the HEA.

104 Staff development is organised and delivered by a range of agencies in the University. The Staff Development Unit within Personnel Services, Learning Development Services (LDS) and the SPQE Office all offer staff development to support the achievement of

corporate objectives as well as provision to meet individual staff development needs. In addition, the audit team found evidence through the REP process, of the significant support for staff development for all staff, including part-time staff, provided by the schools from their devolved budgets. The team also noted that the Graduate School is to provide a staff development programme to enable staff to develop and improve their skills as research supervisors.

105 The SDR scheme provides an opportunity for individual staff needs to be identified. Best practice indicated that the outcomes of the SDR process were submitted to school learning and teaching committees which provide effective fora for linking staff development to the enhancement of teaching and learning. The UEL research policy encourages schools to determine, in discussion with staff, their objectives for research and scholarly activity and to agree appropriate staff development. The academic management and business plans for schools identify HR strategy and staff development intentions and respond to, and inform, the University planning cycle.

106 The Staff Development Unit publishes an annual staff development handbook of activities. The current development opportunities provided are derived from UEL priorities, from needs identified in school and service plans and from a training needs analysis carried out in July 2004. The information in the handbook is supplemented by email notification of additional activities.

107 LDS provide staff development focused around distance, flexible and e-learning. A postgraduate diploma module, The Application of Learning Technologies, is a flexible on-line programme open to lecturers and support staff involved in e-learning. Through the work of school learning technology advisers (LTAs), LDS provides support and development at school level in the use of new technologies for teaching and learning. LDS has also organised a series of expert speaker seminars held at different campuses on current and relevant topics in teaching and learning.

108 The SPQE Office has provided staff development to enhance the quality assurance process. Training has been provided for quality leaders and programme leaders in the preparation of REP reports, and training to support those involved in committee servicing has also been provided for secretaries of school boards, quality committees and programme committees. In addition, members of school quality committees and assessment board chairs have also received training. The audit team noted that a substantial programme of staff development and training had been implemented prior to the introduction of the new academic framework.

109 The audit team met research students who were involved in some teaching but it was not clear if a specific policy regarding training was consistently applied across all schools. The team was told that postgraduate students are not generally encouraged to become involved in teaching but they may assist lecturers in a supporting role. However, the team noted that the School of Psychology actively involves research students in the teaching and learning process through its graduate teaching assistantship scheme. The School provides mentoring and support and requires postgraduate students involved in the scheme to undertake the PGCTL concurrently with their research studies. The team met students in schools other than the School of Psychology who were involved in supporting the learning and teaching of undergraduate students. The University will wish to monitor the involvement of research students in this activity and ensure that appropriate guidance is given on the nature of this 'support' role.

110 The University is seeking the Investors in People (IIP) quality standard which assesses how effectively the institution manages, develops and communicates with staff. The first stage of the IIP assessment has been completed and the University will receive a second visit in June 2005. The team noted that the University had responded to the IIP assessment by putting in place a programme in leadership and management aimed at middle managers. The audit team saw evidence that the CMT actively engages in staff development, noting the

involvement of the CMT in piloting the mandatory training on equality and diversity and a Governors'/CMT residential conference that had been held recently.

111 The audit team heard from a wide range of staff who were extremely positive about the way in which the University's staff development provision was contributing to their personal and professional development and to the enhancement agenda in UEL. The team considered that there is some noteworthy practice highlighted in school REP reports and identified through the academic review process that could be more widely disseminated across the institution.

112 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University's approach to the assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development was a feature of good practice and, in particular, would wish to highlight the support given to part-time staff to participate in staff development.

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

113 The audit team heard that the University's objective is to have 50 per cent of its students studying off-campus. At the time of the audit, it had achieved 25 per cent. The team was told that there is no intention to develop programmes which are available only by distance learning but the University sees distance learning as an integral part of collaborative provision. As indicated above (see paragraph 12), the University's collaborative provision will be subject to audit in 2005-06. The team noted the role of school LTAs which included working with lecturing and support staff to develop online support for distance learners using learning technologies. It found the contribution made by LTAs to the development of new technologies for teaching and learning to be a feature of good practice.

Learning support resources

114 Information services are provided by the University's Learning Support Services (LSS) and

are located in three learning resource centres (LRCs) on each of the three main campuses and at Duncan House, Stratford. The SED stated an intention to extend opening hours at the Stratford LRC, which will mean that all the LRCs will open 24-hours, Monday to Thursday and seven days a week by the 2004-05 session. The SED highlighted access to learning resources and its 'Skillzone' as perceived strengths of the University.

115 Resources are allocated to schools on the basis of student FTEs and schools are supported by LSS subject specialists who liaise between academic and LRC staff. They also sit on school and programme committees where student feedback is given. The SED indicated that issues are taken to the LSS Management Group for action.

116 User feedback is gathered by a range of methods including the LSS's annual student satisfaction survey. The SED suggested that the survey showed 'a good level of satisfaction with the services we provide and, where satisfaction levels were not so good, we acted promptly'. LSS benchmark service performance against similar organisations and national data and total spend on book stock per FTE is above the benchmark for new universities.

117 The University regards information and communication technology (ICT) as 'playing a key part in enhancing the overall learning experience of our students'. It provides all students with network accounts with the usual range of functionality which was rated as satisfactory or above in the 2004 student satisfaction survey. There is also an on-going programme of upgrading computer facilities and plans for large state-of-the-art facilities at the Docklands and Stratford sites in 2006.

118 The SED described how IT help desks are located at each campus, have 0900 to 2100 hours opening on weekdays in term-time, and are supplemented by web pages and printed materials. A major recent development is the UEL Direct web portal project which provides 'a personalised, single point of access to the online resources that support students and staff in all aspects of their learning, teaching, research and

other activities'. The University perceives UEL Direct as significantly enhancing the student experience and the SED suggested that initial feedback from students was very positive.

119 Students highlighted the extended help-desk opening hours and Skillzone as strengths in the SWS but also noted the lack of parity in services and resources between sites and in the number of computers available. They also identified the need for the time availability of some services, such as IT support, to be extended. In addition, the SWS suggested that a greater number of core texts were needed and that, for some schools, there was not enough communication between school and LRC staff.

120 The SED identified the strengths and weaknesses of the learning support provided and it was clear to the audit team that the weaknesses, including those identified in the SWS, were being addressed by the time of the audit. Students who met the audit team in the course of the DATs indicated that the issue of cross-campus parity had been addressed. Overall, students were positive about the resources provided. However, there was some variability between the DATs suggesting that there is still room for improvement, particularly where programme provision is relatively new.

121 Postgraduate research students who met the audit team were very positive about the resources provided for them, as were postgraduate taught students, particularly in respect of the 24-hour opening of LRCs. Part-time students who met the team were also positive about their access to resources and considered that the ability to cater for the diversity of student needs was a particular strength of UEL. Students particularly praised the use of WebCT, off-site ICT access including UEL Direct, and Skillzone.

122 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University was aware of the strengths and weaknesses of its provision of learning support resources and was taking steps to enhance those areas of perceived need. Significant improvements had recently been put in place, often as a response to student feedback, and

the team was assured that the University was planning for this to continue in the future. The team formed the view that the consideration given to the learning support needs of part-time students is a feature of good practice.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

123 The SED stated that since the previous quality audit report (2000) which had identified variability in students' experience of personal tutors in the past, the University had 'adopted a more strategic approach to improving the experience of all our students'. Reciprocal expectations of the University and its students are contained in the UEL Student Charter. Students are supported and guided academically by a range of mechanisms beginning with the induction process termed 'First Week at UEL' when students are introduced to their personal tutors. The latter provide regular academic review and academic support and refer students to the University's support services, as appropriate. The SED indicated that the First Week process is monitored by each head of school, supported by the Head of Student Services and that the CMT receives an annual overview report. Consultants were employed in 2003-04 in each school to identify and disseminate good practice.

124 The SED stated that responsibility for the support of research students is coordinated by their home school and the Graduate School. The Graduate School runs an induction programme and, for the first time in 2004-05, has produced a postgraduate handbook. All research students are allocated two experienced supervisors and, if engaged in teaching, an experienced colleague as a mentor. A suitable programme of training is established in skills and methodologies.

125 The SED acknowledged the variability of its personal tutoring arrangements in the past. The University has responded by undertaking a survey and establishing a working group that presented a draft personal development tutor policy, which the Academic Board subsequently approved for implementation. The SED suggested that while First Week had led to 'significant improvements to the ways in which we introduce students to UEL', students starting

in February (Semester B) do not enjoy an equivalent experience. The audit team was told, however, that there is an intention to make this provision in the future. In addition, the SED recognised that 'there is still some way to go before the Graduate School achieves a fully proactive role in relation to ensuring consistency of the research student experience across all Schools'.

126 The SWS suggested that the First Week induction was more coordinated now than previously and noted that personal tutor system arrangements varied from one school to another. The First Week induction process was praised by all of the students who met the audit team and students who started in Semester B also indicated that they were satisfied with their induction to the University. The team noted that the First Week process takes note of the diversity of the student body and, as such, is a feature of good practice. Discussions with students confirmed that the academic support mechanisms are effective for this diverse student body including part-time, mature and international students.

127 The audit team heard that the new personal development tutor system was still at an early stage in its implementation. However, evidence from the DATs suggested that there were aspects of good practice in the integration of the personal support mechanisms and the skills curriculum, also being established in the University. In addition, students who met the team reported a high level of satisfaction with the informal and ad hoc interactions with academic staff to support their learning, with part-time students particularly valuing the support provided by staff.

128 Postgraduate research students who met the audit team were positive about the academic guidance and support provided, and they described the induction as easing the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate study. They were given a useful handbook and considered that the Graduate School was a very good 'one-stop-shop' for support. The students were all positive about the supervision they received, seeing the allocation of more than one supervisor as a benefit and appreciating the time that staff were prepared to give.

Although the minimum frequency of supervisory meetings was once a month, the students described the informal contact with staff as being on-going and helpful. Training for research skills is provided for postgraduate students in the form of two core modules from the Master of Research Programme, this becoming mandatory from 2005-06.

129 The audit team noted that, in general, students were very satisfied with their experience of, and the support they receive from, the University. Overall, the team considered that the academic support provided for students is effective and that the First Week induction process is a feature of good practice. The University recognises the need to develop the personal tutor system further and this appears to be leading to enhancement, particularly with its integration into the skills curriculum. Although the systems relating to postgraduate research students are less well developed, the team formed the view that the establishment of the Graduate School represents a positive step in terms of the availability of support for these students and the ability of the University to monitor the consistency of the student experience.

Personal support and guidance

130 The SED indicated that personal support and guidance is primarily provided by Student Services who deliver support in relation to careers/employability, childcare, counselling, dyslexia and disability, sports and leisure, finance and health. Each campus has a student information centre and the SED outlined plans to develop a 'one-stop-shop' approach to provide more integrated provision.

131 Students are introduced to the range of services at induction and are also made aware of the range of services available to them by the use of a directory of services in The Essential Guide to UEL, which is given to all students and is also available on the web. A recent innovation, in partnership with the UELSU, has been the use of student ambassadors to meet new students with a view to helping them to orientate themselves and making them aware of

the opportunities and support available to them as students of the University.

132 Particular groups of students receive specific support. Examples cited of this are mature students receiving pre-entry advice though the Information, Advice and Guidance Service, and younger students receiving advice through the appointment of a Connexions adviser. Where part-time provision is significant, the SED indicated that specific arrangements are made in schools to meet their needs. UEL is proud of its diverse community and established the Equality and Diversity Unit in 2002. The SED drew attention to the 'exemplar status' received from HEFCE for the University's race equality policy, with each school and service responsible for developing an action plan based on an institutional template. The University's Dyslexia and Disability Unit provides support for all students with special needs and has obtained 'Two Ticks' accreditation. The International Office adds to the usual range of services for international students by offering a permanent 'drop-in' service.

133 The Careers Service operates on all three sites and has resources available on-line. The SED identified employability as one of UEL's key priorities and a new Head of Employability post was created at the beginning of 2004-05. Acknowledging that further work was required to enable the University to meet its benchmark for graduate employment, the SED suggested that the University had undertaken a range of measures in response, representing a substantial investment. A fully developed strategy was to be spearheaded by a senior group led by the PVC (Academic).

134 Some innovative projects have already been introduced, for example, a Passport into Work programme designed to provide a work preparation programme and placements to unemployed recent graduates, and an Employability Works fair which ran for the first time in 2004. UEL also operates a Job Shop through the Careers Service and The Work Bank which sources work opportunities for students. The SED made reference to employer links established and its host status for the National

Mentoring Consortium which provides mentors in the workplace for minority ethnic students.

135 The SED acknowledged that, at the time of writing, aspects of the personal support and guidance could be strengthened, but indicated that the University's student services offer a 'better than adequate level of support'. It also identified several areas of strength, including the investment in a variety of roles and positions to support learning and teaching; the new skills curriculum and Skillzone; the accessibility of the LRC and IT provision; and the ability of the University to support its diverse student body. The SED also stated that international students comment favourably on the support provided by the International Office.

136 The SED analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the personal guidance and support provided was confirmed by the evidence seen by the audit team. The SWS broadly agreed with the SED in the assessment of weaknesses and strengths, specifically identifying the Dyslexia and Disability Unit, Skillzone and the accessibility of the LRCs as strengths. Students who met the team were very positive about the extent to which the University provides support for all of its students and recognised the improvements that had recently been implemented. Part-time students particularly were appreciative of the way in which the University supported their needs, suggesting that their experience was comparable to that of full-time students. Student support is taken very seriously by UEL and the audit team found good practice in the range of support mechanisms provided by the University for its diverse student population.

137 The audit team heard that help-desks, providing a further means of support, are located in each school, and that these have been well received by students. Students who met the team particularly appreciated the Skillzone provision, and this, combined with the way in which the University is integrating the skills curriculum into its programmes, was considered by the team to constitute a feature of good practice. All students in the University study a skills module in their first-year programme and

are provided with The Study Skills Handbook published specifically for UEL. The team noted that recent appointments at a senior level had strengthened Student Services and that a student focus conference had been held in February 2005. Students who spoke to the team in the DATs were universally positive about the personal support and guidance they received, particularly in relation to support for placements and support for students with disabilities. Satisfaction with the support provided by the University extended to taught postgraduate and research students, who described the support as being very good, particularly in respect of the considerable international student body. They also recognised the good practice of the University in supporting and embracing diversity.

138 The audit team considered that the UEL Student Charter is clearly written and is effective in clarifying students' roles and responsibilities and the expectations they should have of the University. Students suggested that there was a growing awareness of the Charter but that it was still in the process of embedding into the student consciousness. The team formed the view that, in order to enable the Student Charter to be used to best effect, it would be desirable for the University to seek ways to give it a higher profile, given its usefulness and its user-friendly and accessible format.

Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline audit trails

Discipline audit trails

139 For each of the selected DATs, two members of the audit team met staff and students to discuss the provision, studied a sample of assessed work, saw examples of learning resource materials, and studied internal review and other documentation. The team's findings are as follows.

Art and Design (now Visual Arts)

140 The DAT covered all Visual Arts programmes in the School of Architecture and the Visual Arts, encompassing nine

undergraduate programmes, one postgraduate diploma, two taught master's programmes and a professional doctorate in Fine Art as follows:

- BA (Hons) Graphic Design
- BA (Hons) Graphic Fine Art
- BA (Hons) Fashion Design (three-year pathway)
- BA (Hons) Fashion Design with Marketing (three-year and four-year pathways)
- BA (Hons) Printed Textile Design and Surface Decoration
- BA (Hons) Fine Art
- BA (Hons) Art History
- BA (Hons) Film History
- BA (Hons) Visual Theories
- MA Fine Art
- Postgraduate Diploma (PgDip) in Fine Art
- Professional Doctorate in Fine Art.

141 The undergraduate programmes in the discipline area have 780 full-time and 88 part-time students and the postgraduate programmes have 37 full-time and 67 part-time students. The DSED was produced as part of the University's academic review process. The audit team was provided with a confirmed copy of the report of the academic review conducted in January 2005. Programme specifications for all programmes were included.

142 The audit team considered that the DSED was overly descriptive and noted that it made no reference to the programme specifications or to the FHEQ. School staff who met the team appeared uncertain of the implications of the FHEQ for academic standards. However, it was clear to the team that the appropriate subject benchmark statements and the Code of practice were referenced in programme design, which suggested that it was the vocabulary of the Academic Infrastructure which had not yet permeated to all staff. Both the internal academic review report, which commented in detail on the DSED, and the team's own findings, allayed any broader concerns about

lack of self-reflection or criticality on the part of Visual Arts programme and field teams.

143 Programme specifications are intended for potential students and the written style is consistent with this intention. The audit team was told that all staff had been involved in the generation of the programme specifications, and that this process had been useful in the recent review and validation of the School's undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

144 The unconfirmed internal academic review report noted that, in the DSED, there was no commentary on student pass rates in Visual Arts, and made it a condition that the School should include in REPs for 2004-05 deeper analysis of statistical data, and ensure that the academic implications are acted upon accordingly. Staff confirmed that the data now provided by the University on student progression and completion was helpful and a useful tool for field leaders who would normally investigate any issues. Module pass rates were scrutinised at both programme and field level, and external examiners had been helpful in identifying potential influences on poor progression such as excessive module assessment requirements. The audit team was told by staff that the review and enhancement process had encouraged them to adopt a more reflective and analytical approach to student progression and completion.

145 The audit team noted the finding of the confirmed internal academic review report that the School had an operational REP, with evidence of attention to quality within the process, through a system of peer review and a requirement for documentation to be resubmitted where standards had not been met. The team welcomed efforts made to involve a wider group of programme and field committees in the production of the REP report, as a way of involving more staff in the School in quality assurance procedures. The team would encourage the School to continue its efforts in this direction in order to embed the quality and standards agenda securely throughout the School.

146 Recent external examiners' reports indicate a high level of satisfaction with student

achievement on the programmes under review. They confirmed that, in the examiners' view, the academic standards of the School's awards are comparable with those of other UK higher education institutions. Where they had raised issues, these were summarised by the SPQE Office and appropriate responses had been made, in line with university-wide procedures documented in the Quality Manual. The staff provided examples of action loops being closed following external examiners' comments. The SQSC plays a key role in ensuring that issues raised by external examiners are addressed. Any action not completed, together with actions that are longer term in nature, reappear in REP action plans until they are completed.

147 The audit team reviewed a range of undergraduate and postgraduate work, including practical and written assessments and student learning journals. Assessment practices across the School were consistent with the University's policies and staff were familiar with the UEL assessment and engagement policy.

148 The audit team considered that student assessments were marked using clear and appropriate assessment criteria. Students commented that they found their assessments fair and that they understood their marks. They also confirmed that they were given detailed and helpful feedback on assessed work during studio practice, and that there were weekly tutorials when they received individual guidance on the standard of their work. Some tutors used email feedback in addition to formal feedback via the assessment sheets. The team found that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

149 Student handbooks are produced for each programme and are distributed to all full and part-time students. These are clearly written and contain much illustrative material about individual programmes and the School. The assessment regulations are summarised and there is an explanation of the assessment criteria by which all modules are assessed and a description of the grade descriptors in use. Students who met the audit team were positive

about the quality and amount of information that they received about their programmes.

150 The audit team was interested to learn about the extensive use programme teams made of the numerous galleries and exhibitions within easy travelling distance of the University, and the input into the teaching programme by practising artists on the staff and visiting practitioners. The School hosted a fine art forum, attracting celebrated artists and focusing on the teaching of fine art practice, in November 2004. Students were very positive about the benefits of the contact with professional practice that they had experienced during their studies at UEL.

151 Students expressed general satisfaction about the quality of accommodation and facilities for their programmes. They were generally positive about the recent move to the Docklands Campus, although they highlighted some bedding-in issues, particularly in relation to the delayed completion of some facilities to support the newly-validated programmes and the increase in shared use of studio spaces. However, they confirmed that any concerns were listened to and logistical issues were generally resolved quickly. In order to deal with any future accommodation and resource issues, the audit team was told that a housekeeping committee with student representation had been formed. Students were very complimentary about the LRC and the support they received from technical and other support staff. The team considered that there is a need for the University to remain vigilant, to ensure that sufficient resources are in place to support new academic provision.

152 Students' views are formally sought out in committees and via student satisfaction surveys. Student involvement in programme committees was good, and students felt that they were able to raise any matters of concern during its meetings. Students confirmed that they felt able to talk any issues over informally with any member of staff. However, they infrequently attended SQSC or School Board meetings. The audit team formed the view that students felt that the business of these committees was less close to their own needs.

The team would encourage the staff of the School to work more closely with the UELSU to encourage wider involvement by students in the full range of the representational committees of the School, and a greater awareness of their importance.

153 The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities made available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the awards covered by the DAT.

Biosciences

154 The scope of the DAT covered 15 BSc (Hons) programmes and three MSc programmes in Biosciences offered by the School of Health and Bioscience, as follows:

- BSc (Hons) in Animal Biology and Conservation
- BSc (Hons) Biochemistry
- BSc (Hons) Forensic Science
- BSc (Hons) Human Biology (currently being discontinued)
- BSc (Hons) Infectious Diseases (currently being discontinued)
- BSc (Hons) Medical Biotechnology (currently being discontinued)
- BSc (Hons) Pharmacology
- BSc (Hons) Wildlife Conservation
- BSc (Hons) Applied Biology
- BSc (Hons) Biomedical Science
- BSc (Hons) Herbal Medicine
- BSc (Hons) Immunology (currently being discontinued)
- BSc (Hons) Medical Biochemistry (currently being discontinued)
- BSc (Hons) Microbiology (currently being discontinued)
- BSc (Hons) Toxicology
- MSc Biomedical Immunology
- MSc Molecular Medical Microbiology
- MSc Toxicology.

All of the BSc programmes were also available as extended, four-year degrees.

155 The DSED was derived from internal documents and consisted of an SED prepared for an internal audit in April 2004, a separate document produced in January 2005 describing the actions and responses to the original recommendations, and an appendix containing programme specifications for all of the programmes, originally produced in June 2003. The report of the internal audit was provided for the audit team following the briefing visit in February 2005.

156 All programme specifications referred to the relevant subject benchmark statement and, where appropriate, reference was made to more than one subject benchmark statement. For example, the specification for BSc (Hons) Biomedical Sciences refers to both the biosciences and biomedical sciences benchmark statements. Staff in Biosciences reported that the programme specifications were written by a group using a University template and that the benchmark statements had informed their production.

157 The programme specifications do not explicitly refer to the FHEQ and *Code of practice* and staff did not make specific reference in the meeting to input into the production of the programme specifications. However, the programme specifications were aligned with the FHEQ and the *Code* precepts and staff explained that they 'trusted' the University centrally to address external reference points and disseminate the information to schools. The programme specifications were written in a clear style, are user-friendly and were clearly designed to be used by students, before and during their programmes. However, the students consulted by the audit team indicated that they did not use the programme specifications to inform themselves about the programmes, being more reliant on handbooks and the intranet.

158 The DSED provided comprehensive overall progression and completion data for the Biosciences programmes and confirmed the use of data in informing the academic review process. Additionally, programme-level data,

including yearly trends were supplied in the supplementary documentation along with data on entry profiles. Consideration of documentary evidence confirmed that the data were used appropriately in the REP process with subsequent action plans identified and monitored.

159 The audit team reviewed a range of documentary evidence and concluded that the internal monitoring processes considered in the DAT conformed to the systems described by the University's Quality Manual. The team noted that the role of the School Quality Leader was key to the effective operation of the monitoring and review processes.

160 At the end of each semester, module leaders produce module reviews commenting on student performance and feedback. This process produces action plans that help to inform the REP. The programme annual review and enhancement report is written by the programme leader and is considered by a field or programme committee. A member of the SQSC monitors the completeness of the REP according to set criteria and the audit team noted the effectiveness of this system in the documentation provided. An action plan, based on issues arising from a variety of sources, is produced and there was clear evidence of the REP process leading to effective review of the programmes and subsequent enhancement. The programme reports are considered by the SQSC which monitors the action plans and the DSED suggested that the School overview report for 2003 was a model of good practice within the University.

161 The Biosciences programmes were subject to an internal academic review in April 2004, with a report being published by the SPQE Office identifying good practice, areas of improvement and setting conditions (none were applicable in this instance) and recommendations. An experienced external consultant chaired the review and an appropriate panel had been drawn from across the University, including a quality leader from another school and two external subject specialists. The review report was considered by the QSC which also later received a separate response to the action plan that

addressed the areas of improvement and recommendations from the original report. The audit team concluded that the monitoring and review processes operated in the Biosciences DAT were appropriate and effective and conformed to the University's requirements as expressed in the Quality Manual.

162 The audit team confirmed that external examiners' reports are appropriately considered as part of the REP process with a response included to issues raised. External examiners are provided with a written response to their comments. Recent reports show that the programme teams are responsive to the comments and that external examiners are generally satisfied with the responses made.

163 The DSED stated that a range of assessment methods is employed in each module to ensure that both subject specific and transferable skills are developed and that the learning outcomes are tested. It suggested that this range of assessments in Biosciences is an element of good practice. The DSED also highlighted problems in the way students had engaged with the previous assessment regulations. Both the students and staff who met the audit team reported that the new academic framework had considerably improved the clarity of the regulations and the change had been positive in, for example, aiding retention. Problems had also been identified through the academic review process with the timescale for return of work, sending of assessments to external examiners and double-marking procedures. Discussions with staff and students confirmed that these issues had been addressed by the time of the audit. Students are informed of the coursework requirements and deadlines at the beginning of the semester and bunching is avoided. The programme specifications outline the way degree classifications are calculated, although students relied on handbooks for this information.

164 The audit team saw a range of assessed work across a variety of levels and programmes and the work matched expectations based on the programme specifications. The team considered that, on the basis of this evidence,

the standard of student achievement in each of the programmes was appropriate to the title of the awards and their location in the FHEQ. Learning outcomes of those level 3 modules seen by the team, however, did not articulate well with Honours level descriptors and there was a lack of consistency in the use of appropriate terminology in the setting of assessments. The team considered that a closer appreciation of the FHEQ would help the assessment process.

165 Students receive a student handbook during the induction week, supported by specific sessions to make them aware of the contents. Module handbooks, which include the learning outcomes for the module, are provided at the start of each module and are on-line via WebCT. The handbooks seen by the audit team were comprehensive and accurate and the students confirmed that they were useful.

166 Overall, students who met the audit team expressed satisfaction with the quality of their learning opportunities, specifically the Library, WebCT, IT facilities, laboratories, teaching rooms and the support via student services. One issue raised by students concerned the ability of the School to provide resources for new programmes in a timely manner.

167 The DSED reported that the students are allocated a personal tutor and that they remain with this person throughout their studies, this being supplemented by year tutors. Meetings between tutors and level 1 tutees are compulsory as part of a specific skills module. Students confirmed that there was appropriate support and that the personal tutor systems had been revised and embedded in the skills curriculum. The open-door policy operated by staff which was backed up by appointments was appreciated by students.

168 Students confirmed that they had appropriate opportunities to provide feedback, through regular staff-student liaison committees and they particularly highlighted the ample opportunities for informal input. All modules were appraised by feedback questionnaires and students recognised that progress on issues raised were being addressed, although the

'closing of loops' back to students was still under development.

169 Overall, the audit team found the quality of the learning opportunities to be suitable for the programmes of study leading to the awards covered by the DAT.

Civil Engineering and Surveying

170 This DAT covered all taught Civil Engineering and Surveying programmes located in the School of Computing and Technology, which was created in August 2002 following a University-wide restructuring exercise. The programmes ranged from Higher National Diploma/Certificate (HND/C) to master's level as follows:

- HND/C Civil Engineering
- BSc/BSc (Hons) Civil Engineering
- BEng/BEng (Hons) Civil Engineering
- BEng/BEng (Hons) Civil Engineering (Extended)
- BSc (Hons) Surveying and Mapping Sciences
- BSc (Hons) Geographical Information Science
- BSc (Hons) Civil Engineering Surveying
- BSc (Hons) Surveying (Extended)
- PgDip/MSc in Civil Engineering.

171 The DSED was based on an SED written for a periodic academic review of the subject areas conducted in May 2004 and updated with a document produced in January 2005 specifically for the audit.

172 Programme specifications were available and followed a centrally-produced template. The audit team was told that programme leaders initially drafted specifications with oversight from the relevant field leader and following advice from SPQE staff, as required. QSC acted in a monitoring role to ensure compliance with institutional criteria. An examination of the programme specifications provided evidence that appropriate reference was made to the relevant subject benchmark in

all cases. The Certificate, Intermediate and H qualification descriptors of the FHEQ were explicitly referenced in the programme specifications in the form of levels 1, 2 and 3 and broad alignment with the framework was noted. Discussion with staff showed awareness of all sections of the *Code of practice* was patchy but, the team did note that staff had found the briefing sessions on the *Code* held by the Vice-Chancellor to be very informative. Staff were also confident that the *Code* was embedded in policies developed at institutional level and that the proactive role played by the School Quality Leader meant that they did not feel disengaged from the national quality agenda.

173 The audit team was told that the responsibility of acquiring statistical data from the centrally-maintained database resided with the School Registrar who then provided a suitable digest for assessment boards. The narrative section of the DSED dealing with progression and completion data acknowledged that the failure rate at the end of level 1 was too high and arguments relating to a possible conflict between the diverse nature of the student intake and the strict requirements of external accreditation bodies were advanced as likely causes for this situation. The team noted that the new academic framework was designed to include a 'skills' module in each year of a programme and this was likely to have a positive effect on retention figures in the future. Progression and completion data are considered as part of the School annual REP and in periodic academic review, and the team noted that the review panel had commented on the lack of user-friendly data they had been presented with at the time of the review. The team noted the School action plan drawn up in response to the review and progress towards an improved data set was confirmed in discussions with staff.

174 The review and enhancement process is a central feature of the annual monitoring of provision although it has only been in place for a short time. The SQSC also plays a key role in ensuring that programme monitoring is effective at the point of delivery and that action plans are drawn up where shortcomings are

identified. Field leaders play an active part in coordinating input from module leaders and the audit team gained the impression that full ownership of the monitoring and review process throughout the School has been achieved from the evidence produced in this DAT.

175 The very recent change to field and award external examiners meant that no reports were yet available under the new format. It was clear from previous reports, however, that external examiners were generally complimentary about the standards of the undergraduate programmes. The audit team noted that some reports expressed concern about the quality of the individual projects at MSc level. This had been addressed by staff as part of the restructuring process to align the MSc with the University's new academic framework. The credit tariff for the MSc project has been raised from 30 to 60 and more rigorous requirements have been placed on students. The team was confident that this would address the concerns of the external examiners but it was too early to see evidence to this effect.

176 The assessment of students in Civil Engineering and Surveying aligns with the principles of assessment articulated centrally by the University, although these have also been the subject of recent change with the introduction of the assessment and engagement policy. As inherently practical disciplines, Civil Engineering and Surveying make use of a variety of assessment methods ranging from unseen timed examinations through laboratory/field work exercises and including group and individual project activity. The audit team noted that surveying field staff had taken particular care in devising mechanisms to allocate individual marks to students undertaking group project work. More generally, the team found that both fields had in place a progressive scheme of assessment linked to the acquisition of key skills and fundamental knowledge of Civil Engineering and Surveying practice.

177 The audit team saw a variety of assessed student work indicating that the expectations of the relevant programme specification were being met. External examiners' comments were

generally supportive and the specific issue relating to MSc projects (see paragraph 175 above) has been addressed. On the basis of all the evidence provided, the team was satisfied that the standard of student achievement in the Civil Engineering and Surveying programmes is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

178 The undergraduate and postgraduate students who the audit team met confirmed that the information available to them before commencing the programmes had been full and accurate. All students are issued with a Student Handbook during First Week induction and this is seen as a very useful reference document containing module descriptions, assessment methods and other relevant information. Students also found the availability of this information via WebCT to be particularly helpful.

179 The audit team was told that all students are assigned a personal tutor and that arrangements for scheduling meetings between students and their tutor had sometimes been an ad hoc process. The introduction of the compulsory 'skills' module in all years has provided an opportunity for staff to organise these tutorial sessions on a rather more formal basis. However, in speaking to the students, it was clear that the open door policy adopted by virtually all staff meant that students were comfortable with informal personal tutorial arrangements and that they did not feel there was a problem. The team heard that personal development planning was to be a feature of the skills module and that this was likely to reinforce the case for formal meetings with personal tutors although the informal arrangements were likely to continue in parallel. Students were universal in their praise for the learning resources provided by both Civil Engineering and Surveying.

180 Students have the opportunity to provide feedback at module level by way of a questionnaire. The questionnaire format has changed recently to follow a combination of university-wide qualitative questions together with a school-based quantitative performance indicator system. Student feedback is discussed with students at programme meetings and

feedback to students on actions taken is provided via WebCT. The students who met the audit team indicated that the student feedback systems adopted were very effective.

181   Staff/student interaction within the School takes place largely at programme meetings. The academic review report of May 2004 stated that the panel had been 'unable to comment on the student involvement in the REP or other areas of 'quality' within the school'. As part of the action plan, the Head of School was to discuss with the Quality Leader and programme leaders how to address this matter. One outcome was to confirm student representation on the various school committees. However, the audit team felt that this formal mechanism for greater student involvement should be seen in the light of the prevailing staff/student interaction evident in the school. For example, students confirmed they had seen changes made to the taught provision as a result of issues raised by student representatives. One issue that was raised, and is still a matter of debate, is the timeliness of returning assessed coursework to students. The conflict of the requirement for speedy return and the new constraint of double-marking of coursework has meant that students have had to wait longer for work to be returned. Students understood the difficulties and were minded to accept the longer turnaround times. The accessibility and openness of staff and their subsequent responsiveness has created an environment where students feel that issues can be raised at any time rather than waiting for more formal meetings to appear on the calendar.

182   Given the additional requirements of staff resulting from the many significant changes that have taken place across the institution in recent years, the Civil Engineering and Surveying staff have remained committed to delivering programmes of good quality. Moreover, they continue to put the interests of students at the core of their operational procedures. There were clear examples of good practice such as the schools liaison visits undertaken by staff in the surveying field. However, the team did identify one issue which

the School and the University should address to avoid potential problems developing with the relevant PSRBs who accredit their programmes.

183   The audit team noted that the BEng and BSc Civil Engineering programmes had received accreditation from the JBM (Institution of Civil Engineers) in 2003. In 2004, the new academic framework was adopted and there were clearly difficulties in mapping the existing civil engineering programmes on to the common framework. Compliance was eventually achieved and included the introduction of a 20 credit skills module in each year. The team considered that the nature of the changes were structural and that the programme re-approval process should have been invoked. This would have flagged the requirement to consult with accrediting bodies and the JBM would have been approached to confirm continued accreditation. This was not done and the programme re-approval process did not take place. Consequently, the team came to the view that the University should consider how it maintains central oversight of the requirements of PSRBs with regard to the accreditation of its programmes. In addition, the team considered that it would be desirable to encourage a greater awareness of the detail of the Academic Infrastructure at the point of programme delivery to avoid a recurrence of such a situation.

184   Overall, the audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the awards covered by the DAT.

Media and Communication Studies

185   The DAT covered programmes in Media and Communication Studies offered in the School of Social Sciences, Media and Cultural Studies:

- Foundation Programme (Level 0) Media & Creative Industries

- BA (Hons) Communication Studies

- BA (Hons) Film and Video: theory and practice

- BA (Hons) Journalism

- BA (Hons) Media and Advertising
- BA (Hons) Media Studies
- MA Multimedia
- MA Media Studies.

Two further programmes were being phased out at the time of the audit. These were:

- BA Cinematics (no longer recruiting; replaced by BA Film and Video: theory and practice)
- BA (Hons) Journalism and Print Media (no longer recruiting; replaced by BA Journalism)

186 The School is the product of a recent merger between two former schools (Social Sciences; Cultural and Innovation Studies). At the time of the audit the School was in its first full academic year of operation.

187 The DSED consisted of an SED developed for internal academic review of May 2004, and a supplement with some additional data (January 2005). A copy of the academic review report of May 2004 was subsequently provided. An action plan was developed from the review, and a copy was made available to the audit team. Programme specifications were provided, including revised specifications required by the May 2004 internal review panel.

188 The audit team was told that the revised programme specifications were developed through use of the subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ. Staff reported that the subject benchmark statements were more than adequate for all the programmes under review. The team found that there is clear evidence of articulation with both the subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ.

189 Progression and completion data were provided in the SED, and were used in the REP report. The audit team heard that data were provided regularly to programme leaders, and that these were subject to scrutiny and analysis as part of the internal REP process. Field boards reflect on the data, and use them to identify specific issues such as modules where students appear to be encountering unusual levels of

difficulty. This is then discussed with module leaders. The School acknowledged that the most recent (and first) REP report did not fully reflect the extent of the analysis and use of the data, but the team accepted that REP is a new process and that it will improve in future cycles.

190 The minutes of the SQSC show that there is detailed scrutiny of new programme proposals, the identification of new external examiners and the follow-up to internal academic review and the REP. The Field is the basic unit at which the REP begins to be iterated using reports from module leaders. Field-level input goes through the School Learning and Teaching Sub-Committee (SLTC) to SQSC, so that the final report is the product of an iterative process. The audit team noted the extent to which ownership of the process was disseminated through the School.

191 The audit team broadly agreed with the recommendations of the REP. It saw evidence that the action plan had been approved and was being implemented. The team considered that improvements achieved since the internal academic review event in May 2004 provided evidence of the overall improvement in the University's management of quality and standards at school, as well as institutional, level.

192 The audit team found that programme-level responses to external examiners' reports are thorough and detailed. The University's core requirements for the involvement of external examiners are being exceeded. The team learned that there is detailed informal discussion of assessment policy with the external examiners at modular level, and it was given several examples of changes which have been made as a result. Notwithstanding this informal discussion, staff were careful to keep an appropriate distance between themselves and the external examiners to ensure that the latter could take a truly independent and objective view of the work of the School.

193 The School's assessment and engagement policy was under development at the time of the audit to ensure its conformity with University policy. In its draft form, the policy shows that the School is moving towards a uniform approach

to ensure equity of student experience. Written feedback to students was comprehensive, and conformed to the standards and formats set by the School. Students confirmed that feedback was helpful and commented on the extensive informal feedback which supplements the formal written feedback.

194 The assessed work seen by the audit team was generally appropriate to the titles of the awards and in terms of their location within the FHEQ.

195 The School's student handbook was found to be comprehensive and detailed, although the audit team noted a few minor inaccuracies. Students said that they found it invaluable. The Handbook noted that the Module Guide is the ultimate authoritative document for each module. Students indicated that they were aware of this and made heavy use of these documents. The examples seen by the audit team were comprehensive. Students told the team that their various programmes and modules met their expectations, and that they had a clear understanding of the requirements placed upon them at every level from programme down to individual pieces of assessed work.

196 Students indicated that they found that resources were occasionally inadequate for their assessed work tasks. There was some evidence that the planning processes for new programmes and modules did not always allow enough lead-time for equipment to be acquired or for facilities to be completed. Students recognised, however, that these issues were temporary. Staff confirmed that some issues had arisen, but described how these had been addressed. In every case, it was clear that the School had responded quickly and appropriately to shortfalls, so far as it could, and that students acknowledge this. Students repeatedly emphasised that the staff were accessible and helpful, and that this mitigated minor difficulties which they might encounter.

197 Examples of module-level student written feedback were provided, together with module leaders' reflective comments on it. The latter showed that student comments were being taken seriously. The key issues raised related to

resources. The quality of teaching was generally, although not universally, commended. The response rate was low on some modules. There is no formal feedback at programme or field level, but the module-level feedback and the staff reflections on it are used within the REP.

198 Programme committees are the principal forum for formal interaction between staff and students. Students told the audit team, and the minutes of programme committee meetings confirmed, that this forum was extensively used. The team heard from students that staff were responsive and open; staff indicated that they valued student input. Although there have been problems in recruiting student members for SLTC and SQSC, the staff of the School are fully supportive of the University's efforts to address this matter through the UELSU.

199 The audit team formed the view that the School is taking full advantage of the University's devolved quality management system to develop procedures which are appropriate to its own ethos and subject domain. The team was told by staff that this was part of the process of blending the two former schools into a single coherent unit. The papers and minutes of the programme committees, SQSC and SLTC confirm that this work is being undertaken effectively. School-level procedures and documentation are being developed in line with the institution's new academic framework.

200 Overall, the audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities in media and communication studies is appropriate to the awards offered by the University in this discipline.

Section 4: The audit investigations: published information

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

201 The audit team reviewed a wide range of University, school and programme publications produced for applicants and existing students

and it was able to access the UEL website and the WebCT learning environment. Pre-entry and promotional materials, including the Guide to Undergraduate Programmes, the postgraduate prospectus, and programme leaflets are designed and produced by the University marketing group. The team heard that programme teams check the accuracy of the material, which is signed off by each head of school.

202 Student handbooks are provided for all programmes and are required to contain core information as detailed in the University's Quality Manual. Schools provide additional information for students, for example, school handbooks, module specifications and copies of the University's regulations. A research handbook for postgraduate students had been developed and published on the website. Students considered that the research handbook in its present form was complicated but understood that it was to be reviewed.

203 Reference is made to key websites in all printed documentation and handbooks are also available in electronic form. Students are encouraged to access information electronically so that they are aware of changes in provision, for example, in contact details for personnel.

204 All students are informed about the University complaints procedure via student handbooks which are required to include details of UEL's complaints, academic appeals and extenuating circumstances processes. The Student Charter gives guidance on informal channels for resolving complaints and also identifies the formal complaints procedure as detailed in the University's manual of general regulations. In the SWS the students commented on the variability of practice in resolving complaints across the University. The audit team heard that the University undertakes an annual analysis of the number and types of complaints.

205 The University has developed programme specifications using a University template to ensure student focus and consistency. It is intended that the programme specifications will be used as the basis for the production of all promotional materials. The audit team noted

that programme specifications were available on the UEL website at the time of the audit visit.

206 The audit team saw evidence of user-friendly published information for students at institutional and school level. All students had received a guide prior to the introduction of the new academic framework in October 2004 detailing the move to a modular programme system. The Student Charter, the development of which was led by Student Services, and given to every student, provided a comprehensive elucidation of the University's expectation of students mirrored against institutional commitment to the student experience.

207 Extensive use is made of the UEL website. Corporate Marketing and the International Office are responsible for the production of promotional material online via the internet. The UEL web team manages the updating, editing and expansion of the UEL website and provide support for schools and services who are encouraged to update their information on a regular basis.

208 WebCT is being used increasingly as a means of providing online resources for both campus based and distance-learning students. The WebCT environment facilitates student-student and student-lecturer discussion. Students spoke very highly of the benefits of WebCT in disseminating information and commented on the advantages of being able to enrol online and to receive assessment results via UEL Direct.

209 In meetings with both postgraduate and undergraduate students, the audit team was informed that pre-entry information and advice had been prompt and helpful. Student handbooks were considered useful and accurate and programmes had fulfilled student expectations.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

210 The University has developed an in-house MIS to support the applications and admissions cycle, the review and enhancement process and to facilitate the interrogation and interpretation of data. Training of staff at school level in the MIS has led to increased confidence in

production of information for both internal consideration and publication.

211   The SED presented in tabular form the progress that had been made in addressing the requirements for the collection and publication of the information sets outlined in HEFCE's document, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance* (HEFCE 03/15). The audit team noted that the SPQE Office provides a commentary on the University's performance against external benchmarks. The UEL website provides a link to the relevant HERO, Teaching Quality Information and HEFCE websites for ease of transmission of information. A summary of links with employers was to be included in the University's learning and teaching strategy and the outcome of the university-wide student survey was available via the UEL Direct web portal.

212   The audit team was informed that, since the submission of the SED, summaries of all 2003-04 external examiner reports for programmes completed before 31 August 2004 had been loaded on to the HERO website. On the basis of meetings with staff and students and documentation made available to it, the team found the University's current published information to be accurate and reliable.

Findings

Findings

213 An institutional audit of the University of East London (UEL or the University) was undertaken during the period 7 to 11 March 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility for its awards. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals and Universities UK, four discipline audit trails (DATs) were selected for scrutiny. This section of the report of the audit summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and recommendations to the University for enhancing current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

214 The University's procedures are defined by the recently adopted academic framework. Quality assurance issues are a joint responsibility of the institution and its schools, with the schools taking ownership of the specific mechanisms for the implementation of the broad principles embodied in the framework and described in the UEL Quality Manual. School procedures are subject to approval at institutional level, and their application is audited and monitored through annual and periodic review processes.

215 The approval of new programmes involves both the highest level of University management, who ensure that the proposal is in line with the University's vision and strategy, and schools responsible for the provision where the detailed work is undertaken. Systems are in place to ensure that resource considerations are taken into account and there is a strong element of externality in the process through the involvement of at least two appropriately qualified and wholly objective advisers, one of whom may be a professional practitioner in appropriate cases. Annual and periodic review

also involves a high level of externality. Outcomes are reported at institutional level. Action plans derived from reviews are developed in the school concerned, and then approved and monitored at institutional level.

216 Student feedback is obtained through individual feedback at module level, and through student representation on committees at both school and institutional levels. At module level, staff response to feedback is both appropriate and timely. Student representation on committees is most effective at programme level. There is evidence, however, of a lack of participation by students in other committees at school level (including school boards). The Students' Union is addressing this problem through training of its members, and is working in partnership with the University to try to ensure that students are fully represented at all levels. Relations between staff and students are generally excellent; students are confident that they can approach staff for guidance and feedback at all reasonable times, and staff make themselves available to students with minimal formality.

217 Relationships with employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) are managed at school level, although in the wider context of the University's employability agenda. These relationships vary across, and even within, schools but there is evidence that there is substantial informal contact. Formal relationships, especially with PSRBs which accredit programmes, are somewhat less secure, and may need to be brought under an institutional overview in line with the University's overall policy of monitoring devolved activities.

218 The University considers that its new academic quality management procedures are fit for purpose. At the same time, there is a willingness to recognise the need for on-going review and modification to ensure that the overall strategic aims of the new academic framework can be fully met. This willingness is in line with the University's overall approach to the new framework. Both at senior management level, and in the schools, there is a commitment to transparent and collaborative

working, with shared ownership of key systems and procedures. The new academic framework has been largely implemented, and the University continues to show evidence of its willingness to reflect on its effectiveness to ensure that it is robust and will serve the institution well in the future.

219 The audit team considered that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

220 External examiners' reports form one of the mechanisms that the University sees as important to securing its standards. The adoption of the new academic framework has meant that a new process of twin external examiners (field and award) has recently been introduced. Responsibility for dealing with issues raised in reports has been devolved to schools but the University has been careful to build in a thorough monitoring procedure, through the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC), the Academic Board and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic) personally, to ensure that any actions arising are dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner. Both forms of examiner reports request examiners to confirm whether the standards set for the awards are appropriate for qualifications at a particular level. Furthermore, examiners are explicitly invited to make these comments whilst referring to external reference points such as subject benchmark statements, the *framework for higher education qualifications and PSRB requirements.*

221 Each school has been encouraged to design the detail of its own processes for programme approval in line with rigorous criteria set down in the Quality Manual. Each school process was formally approved by the QSC on behalf of Academic Board. Formal validation of all programmes remains the responsibility of the Academic Board, delegated to QSC and exercised by the Validation and

Review Sub-Committee. The role of external advisers (appointed by schools according to institutional criteria) in the programme approval process is seen as critical in ensuring appropriate external calibration of programme standards. In addition, the University has put in place additional mechanisms to safeguard standards in programme approval in the form of 'internal externals'. These are senior academic staff from another school who are part of the approval process and who are able to act as a conduit to the dissemination of good practice across schools.

222 The majority of schools at UEL deliver programmes accredited by PSRBs, and such accreditation helps to secure the appropriateness and standard of the University's awards. The outcomes of accreditation by PSRBs appeared to be retained at school level and the audit team saw no evidence of an institutional overview of the deliberations of PSRB accreditation panels. The team considered this to be a weakness which the University should strive to resolve as part of its quality assurance and enhancement agenda.

223 Progression, achievement and completion statistics for all programmes are considered each year as part of the annual review and enhancement process (REP) and also during the periodic academic review. Such data is considered and tracked throughout the University's quality assurance and enhancement processes involving the Strategic Planning and Quality Enhancement (SPQE) Office, Validation and Review Sub-Committee, QSC and, ultimately, the Academic Board. The University conceded that the level of statistical information previously provided to assessment boards had been less than optimal. The introduction of new management information software has enabled users at school-level to interrogate the database structure for key performance indicators such as progression and completion. The audit team noted the provision of training for staff in each school on the use of this new system.

224 On the basis of the evidence available to it, the audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for securing

standards were effective. The findings of the audit confirm that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

225 The University recognises and celebrates the fact that it has a very diverse student population, investing in a wide range of facilities and providing appropriate mechanisms to support this diversity. Significant improvements have recently been made, often as a response to student feedback, and the audit team was assured that the University was planning for this to continue in the future. The University has also ensured that there is parity of provision across each of its sites and for differing types of students.

226 Information services are provided by the University's Learning Support Services (LSS) on each of the three main campuses and at Duncan House, Stratford and these open 24-hours, Monday to Thursday and seven days a week. Access to learning resources, UEL Direct and the University's Skillzone were perceived as strengths of the University. Resources are allocated to schools on a full-time equivalent student basis and schools are supported by LSS subject specialists who act as a liaison between academic and learning resource centre staff. The resources allocated to information services are benchmarked against similar organisations and national data.

227 The University has adopted a strategic approach to the provision of academic support mechanisms and has initiated a number of improvements. These include the First Week at UEL induction process, a personal development tutor system, and a skills curriculum that is compulsory in all programmes.

228 Postgraduate research students who met the audit team were positive about the academic guidance and support that they received. During an effective induction period they were provided with a handbook and the Graduate School was

described as a very good one-stop-shop for support. Although the systems relating to research students require further development, the team considered that the establishment of the Graduate School was a positive step in terms of the availability of support for students and the ability of the University to monitor the consistency of the student experience.

229 Personal support and guidance is primarily provided by Student Services, delivering support in relation to careers/employability, childcare, counselling, dyslexia and disability, sports and leisure, finance and health. Each campus has a student information centre and a one-stop-shop facility has recently been developed to provide a more integrated approach. Students were very positive about the level of support provided by the University and they recognised the good practice of the University in supporting, and embracing, diversity.

230 The UEL Student Charter is clearly written and is effective in clarifying students' rights and responsibilities and the expectations they should have of the University. However, it was not evident to the audit team that the Student Charter had been effectively embedded in the light of students' comments about the use, or lack of use, made of this document. The team found the Student Charter to be user-friendly and accessible and considered that it would be desirable for the University to seek ways to give it a higher profile.

231 The audit team met students who were very positive about the quality of the staff at UEL and this was confirmed by the student written submission (SWS). The wide-ranging human resources strategy adopted by the University identified seven priority areas for attention, namely recruitment and retention; staff development and training; equality and diversity; regular reviews of staffing needs; performance review; rewarding performance and managing performance. The University considered that strong progress had been made against all priorities. Staff development and support is provided by a wide variety of means and covers activities designed to address

the needs of all staff at different stages of their careers and in differing roles.

232 Meetings with staff at institutional and field level indicated that the arrangements for recruitment, selection, appointment and promotion were perceived as sound and effective. Staff confirmed their involvement in peer observation and the staff development and review process, which has now been fully implemented in most schools. The promotion procedures have recently been revised and the audit team found them to be thorough and transparent.

233 Staff development is organised and delivered by a range of agencies in the University. The Staff Development Unit within Personnel Services, the Learning Development Services and the SPQE Office all offer staff development to support the achievement of corporate objectives as well as provision to meet individual staff development needs. In addition, the audit team found evidence of the significant support for staff development for all staff, including part-time staff, provided by the schools from their devolved budgets.

234 The audit team considered that the assurance of the quality of teaching was secure and that appropriate procedures for appointment, appraisal and reward were in place. Overall, the team concluded that the University approach to the assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development demonstrated good practice and, in particular, wished to highlight the support given to part-time staff to fully participate in staff development.

Outcomes of discipline audit trails

Art and Design (now Visual Arts)

235 Students were generally positive about their learning experience and the support available to them on the visual arts programmes offered in the School of Architecture and the Visual Arts. They considered that they had received good quality information about their programmes, and particularly appreciated the contact with professional practice they experienced during

their studies, for example through gallery and exhibition visits and practitioner input into the teaching programme. The students understood their marks, found their assessments fair and commented that the range and detail of formal and informal feedback from tutors was helpful in gauging the level of their work. From its scrutiny of students' assessed work, external examiners' comments, and discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the programmes was appropriate to the title of the awards and their location in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

236 The meeting with students confirmed that they were currently satisfied with the accommodation and facilities for their programmes. Students viewed favourably the move to the Docklands Campus, although some unfortunate delays to the completion of facilities had disrupted some teaching. However, students told the audit team that most logistical issues were resolved quickly and that a housekeeping committee, with student representation, had been formed. The Univeristy is encouraged to ensure that sufficient resources are in place to support new academic provision.

237 The programme specifications for the programmes in Visual Arts set appropriate educational aims and outcomes. Although the staff who met the audit team appeared uncertain of the implications of the FHEQ for academic standards, the documentation reviewed, including validation documents and the internal academic review report, confirmed that the programmes had taken proper account of the Academic Infrastructure. The team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for the programmes of study within the field of Visual Arts.

Biosciences

238 The audit team met students and staff and reviewed a range of documentation and student work. From this evidence the team concluded that the standard of student achievement in each of the programmes was

appropriate to the title of the awards and their location in the FHEQ. All programme specifications referred to the relevant subject benchmark statement and, although they do not explicitly refer to the FHEQ and *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*), published by QAA, the University centrally addresses external reference points and disseminates the information to schools. The team formed the view that a closer appreciation of the FHEQ at the local level would be beneficial.

239 The REP and periodic academic review processes considered in the DAT conformed to the systems described by the University's Quality Manual, including the use and analysis of relevant data. The audit team noted that the School Quality Leader and the School Quality Standing Committee were key features in ensuring the effective operation of the monitoring and review processes.

240 The audit team found that students were satisfied with the quality of their learning opportunities and with the personal and academic support provided. In particular, the students recognised the way in which the School and University embraced diversity in the student population. Students spoke very positively about the helpfulness and availability of staff and their responsiveness to both formal and informal student feedback.

Civil Engineering and Surveying

241 From its study of students' assessed work, and from discussion with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standards of student achievement in Civil Engineering and Surveying programmes were appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. The programme specifications which are written with potential students in mind, set out appropriate learning outcomes linked to teaching, learning and assessment.

242 The student evaluation of the provision was positive and students were very satisfied with both the extent and nature of the support they received from staff. Students considered

that the learning resources provided to support their studies are good. Accreditation by professional bodies was an important factor in student perception of the programmes and the audit team considered that greater synergy between the School and the University centrally with regard to professional accreditation would be of benefit.

243 Overall, the audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to the students was suitable for a programme of study leading to undergraduate and postgraduate awards in Civil Engineering and Surveying.

Media and Communication Studies

244 The audit team concluded that the standard of student achievement is appropriate to the titles and levels of the awards, and that the programmes are consistent with the FHEQ and with the relevant subject benchmark statements. Programme specifications were found to be informative and comprehensive. Facilities were considered to be adequate and allowed students to have a satisfactory learning experience. There was evidence of a good relationship between staff and students at both formal and informal levels. Students were fully engaged with the School and with their programmes, while staff respect students' views and work hard to provide a good learning experience.

245 The audit team considered that student assessment was both equitable and transparent and noted that students and external examiners were satisfied with assessment processes and outcomes. The School of Social Sciences, Media and Cultural Studies, within which the programmes are located, was found to be taking full advantage of the University's devolved systems of quality management and had established effective internal procedures to meet the requirements of the systems.

The institution's use of the Academic Infrastructure

246 The University makes a clear statement in the self-evaluation document (SED) about its engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and, through its processes of programme

approval, REP and academic review, makes reference to the Academic Infrastructure as appropriate. The Quality Manual states that academic standards in subject content, teaching and learning resources must match expectations of the Code of practice, subject benchmark statements, the FHEQ and PSRBs. The audit team saw examples to confirm that these expectations are being addressed. The University is also revising its approach to assessment as it acknowledges that this has been of variable quality across the institution. The team found the new assessment and engagement policy to be a good example of the use the institution was making of appropriate sections of the Code in formulating new policy.

247 The adoption of the new regulatory framework for academic awards has provided the University with an opportunity to establish a position where all programmes conform to the qualification descriptors in the FHEQ. The evaluation of a programme with regard to subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ is the responsibility of subject specialist staff within schools, assisted by external advisors. Subject benchmark statements are used in the preparation of programme specifications and external examiners are asked to confirm that the standards of the awards they are reporting on are appropriate for the relevant subject benchmark. Programme specifications seen by the audit team indicate that use has been made of the FHEQ level descriptors, albeit with a change in notation (from Certificate, Intermediate and Honours to 1, 2 and 3), and that learning outcomes of programmes broadly match the appropriate level of the FHEQ.

248 Overall, the audit team formed the view that the University is committed to making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure to inform its framework for the management of quality and standards at institutional level. The team considered, however, that there is scope to further develop understanding of the Academic Infrastructure at a local level by increasing awareness among all staff of the importance of the national quality agenda.

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

249 The SED provided a clear and valuable overview of the University's academic structures and processes, and carefully outlined the significant changes and development being undertaken. The vision and values of the University were clearly communicated, and provided an invaluable context for the audit team. Whilst many of the University's procedures had been recently implemented, or were in the process of being implemented, the team considered that the SED was helpfully self-critical, particularly in relation to issues of consistency of practice in quality assurance and enhancement between the eight schools of the University.

250 There were several instances, however, where further investigation and follow-up were needed in order to determine precisely how the University intended to address shortcomings that had been identified through internal review or external audit. However, the audit team was impressed by the frankness with which the SED outlined the 'challenging agenda' faced by the University, and the clarity with which this was expressed. The SWS signalled a general level of satisfaction with learning and teaching at the University. The chief concerns raised in the SWS related to the level of student representation and feedback. These were recognised by the University, and addressed directly and self-critically in its SED. Overall, the SED supported confidence in the University's capacity for reflection and self-evaluation.

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

251 Many new developments are at a very early stage of implementation, with necessarily limited evidence, therefore, of their effectiveness. The audit team agreed with the University's view that work remains to be done, particularly in relation to 'routinising' new procedures and improving its

focus on 'loop closure'. Its future plans for the enhancement of quality and standards include a fuller analysis of all available data by schools as part of the review and enhancement process and appropriately monitored action plans, to improve its current performance in student retention and achievement; improved consultation with employers through the appointment of an individual to the new post of Head of Employability and improved employer involvement in programme design; improvements in the level of student representation on programme committees, and consistency of approach to eliciting and acting on student feedback and reporting back to students; minimised delays in its complaints procedures; and the implementation of the assessment and engagement policy to improve the use and communication of assessment criteria in some schools.

252 During the audit, the University updated the audit team on activities since the SED was produced, including the recent appointment of a Head of Student Experience in addition to the Head of Employability. An additional 130 student representatives were recruited for 2004-05 and the majority have been trained. Programme and quality leaders have received training in compiling REP reports, and further training has been undertaken by servicing officers of school committees. The team considered that the institution's future plans for the enhancement of quality and standards, as outlined in the SED, were appropriate. Based on the DATs and its meetings with staff and students, the team formed the view that the described shift in focus from control to assurance and enhancement had brought significant benefits to the institution in terms of greater ownership of the quality agenda at school level. The general approach was described as one of 'trust allied with rigorous checking' and the team considered that the careful implementation of the REP had played a key role in securing the assurance of quality and standards at the University.

Reliability of information

253 Students who met the audit team were very positive about the quality and amount of information they received about their programmes both at the pre-entry stage and during their programmes of study. Student handbooks were valued highly and the module guides provided detailed authoritative documentation for each module. Handbooks seen by the team were comprehensive and accurate and demonstrated a wide variety of approaches to the presentation of information in a student user-friendly manner.

254 Programme specifications had been developed using a University template and were informed by relevant subject benchmark statements. The statistical data provided by the centrally maintained database was available to staff for scrutiny and analysis and was seen as increasingly valuable for monitoring purposes.

255 The University uses its website as the principal publishing vehicle and, in providing links to the Higher Education and Research Opportunities, HEFCE and Teaching Qulaity Information sites, facilitates access to relevant information. The audit team noted the University's intention to provide additional facts and figures about the student population to present a more comprehensive overview of the University. The team came to the view that the University is preparing appropriately for the publication of its information set and had made good progress towards meeting the requirements of HEFCE's document, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance* (HEFCE 03/51).

Features of good practice

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

i   the openness of senior managers in their engagements with staff and students (paragraphs 27, 39, 83)

ii   the identification of, and staff development provided for, personnel who

have a key role to play in supporting the devolution of the quality assurance and enhancement agenda as quality leaders, and as leaders in learning and teaching (paragraphs 38, 56)

iii   the strategic approach and careful consideration given to the further development and integration of the skills curriculum (paragraphs 40, 135 to 137)

iv   the effectiveness of the implementation of staff development at the University (paragraphs 56, 111 to 112)

v   the University's equitable approach to, and support for, its part-time staff and students (paragraphs 104, 112, 126 to 127, 136)

vi   the contribution made by learning technology advisers to the development of new technologies for teaching and learning (paragraphs 107, 113)

vii   the support provided for students in the context of the University's culture of equality and diversity (paragraphs 126, 129, 136)

viii   the existing Skillzone provision (paragraph 137).

Recommendations for action

257 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

i   to review the impact of the implementation of the new academic framework to ensure that the University's quality procedures have been followed where changes have been made to programmes (paragraphs 39, 75, 183)

ii   to enhance its capacity to oversee and monitor its engagement with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies in respect of its accredited programmes (paragraphs 75 to 76, 183).

258 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

i   to encourage in staff a greater awareness of the Academic Infrastructure (paragraphs 75, 164, 183)

ii   to seek ways to give a higher profile to its user-friendly and accessible student charter (paragraph 138).

Appendix

The University of East London's response to the audit report

We are very pleased with the outcome of our recent institutional audit and would like to take this opportunity to place on record our appreciation of the conduct of the audit by the audit team, on behalf of QAA. Their visit was characterised throughout by courteousness, curiosity and careful reflection. Preparing for the audit and the process itself have brought many benefits and enhanced our own focus on reflection and enhancement. That the auditors found so many features of good practice is a source of particular pride.

In relation to the two advisory recommendations:

Quality and Standards Committee has decided to carry out a full internal audit of programme approvals at school level, as our annual thematic audit for 2005-06;

our engagement with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies will be enhanced via regular consideration of relevant reports and action plans by Quality and Standards Committee, the senior quality committee, on behalf of Academic Board; this will be in addition to consideration, as at the time of our institutional audit, by the School, the Pro Vice Chancellor Academic and the Vice Chancellor.

We intend to continue our extensive efforts to raise explicit awareness of the QAA's Academic Infrastructure amongst all colleagues and are pleased to note the auditors' positive view of our Student Charter; we will engage with colleagues and with UELSU, our Student Union, to enhance its profile as a key document for us.