

Agenda Item 13

Enclosure 11

Paper ETC44/02

Education and Training Committee

**UP-DATE ON THE DoH/ QAA PROTOTYPE REVIEWS AND
PROGRESS ON SUBJECT BENCHMARKING AND " HIGHER
QUALITY No. 10 "**

From the Secretary

for information



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Continuous improvement

Since last November, when I wrote my first introduction to an edition of *higher quality*, a lot has happened within and beyond the Agency.

In England, my hope that Universities UK, the Standing Conference of Principals (SCoP), the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Agency would be able to reach agreement on a new quality assurance process for England has been realised. In April we were able to publish a new draft *Handbook*, describing how we expect the new institutional audit procedure to work. This document represents our commitment to the principle that it is only the institutions offering programmes of higher education that can know for certain that they are providing a high quality of education for their students, and that academic standards, both required and achieved, are appropriate for the awards being made. This means that responsibility for the assurance of quality and standards must lie with the institutions themselves.

The new approach also affirms our belief that higher education should be an actively self-regulating, academically autonomous, community. The broader cost to society of having a state-regulated system of universities and colleges would be very heavy indeed.

Of course, academic autonomy must not be used as an excuse for sloppy or negligent practice; it is much too important and precious to be jeopardised in that way. We have learnt over the years that reliable quality is not an accident; it is always the result of intelligent effort. I hope that what we have proposed in England will commend itself widely, and that universities and colleges will find it a helpful and useful component of their own quality assurance strategies. We now await the outcome of the consultation on the new *Handbook*.

In the meantime we have written to all institutions in England indicating when we would like to visit them for their first institutional audit. This was accompanied by our proposals for the discipline-level activities that we will be undertaking during the three-year transitional period (2002-05). The need to have some discipline-level activity (and the criteria for its implementation) was decided by HEFCE during the discussions that took place last autumn. The final decision to create a distinction between those institutions that would be eligible for academic review of subjects and those that were to have 'developmental engagements' represented the squaring of a circle.

I know that this decision has not been universally popular and that some institutions believe that they have been unfairly discriminated against. There are several points to bear in mind. Academic reviews of subjects are not intended to be punitive or non-developmental. We will be using for them the method described in the *Handbook for academic review*, produced in 2000, which allows a variable intensity of approach, dependent upon what the existing record of reviews tells us. We will also be looking to see how we might make the reviews as 'developmental' as we can, so that those institutions that have them will see the reviews as offering valuable opportunities for the enhancement of their activities.

Agency offices

Head office

Southgate House, Southgate Street
Gloucester GL1 1UB
Telephone +44 (0) 1452 557000
Fax +44 (0) 1452 557070
Email comms@qaa.ac.uk

Scottish office

183 St Vincent Street
Glasgow G2 5QD
Telephone +44 (0) 141 572 3420
Fax +44 (0) 141 572 3421

Agency web site

higher quality is published at
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In Scotland we are beginning to think through the implications of the new, enhancement-focused, quality assurance process which will be introduced in 2003-04. Although there will probably be some basic similarities with the English model, there will also be significant differences between the two approaches. A very careful and separate development programme will be required to ensure that the intended objectives agreed by the Scottish universities and colleges and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) are achieved. In Wales and Northern Ireland, discussions are taking place on the quality assurance approach that we will be asked to develop and take forward. There are articles about these developments elsewhere in this edition.

On a personal note, the last six months have been noteworthy for two contrasting reasons. The sudden and untimely death of Peter Milton in February dealt us all a heavy blow, one that we are only now beginning to recover from. The very large numbers of tributes that poured in after his death made it clear that he was dearly liked and respected by an astonishingly wide range of friends and colleagues. His contribution to higher education is only being fully appreciated now that he is no longer with us.

There have been several memorable obituaries of Peter and these have rightly been generous in their praise of him and his qualities. Elsewhere in this edition of *higher quality*, Arthur Brown, a long time colleague, offers his own appreciation of Peter. For my part, I would like to say that in the few years in which I was able to get to know him, I found in Peter a human being far more complex and humane than the image of bluntness and toughness that he liked to project might have suggested. I imagine we have all had colleagues that we particularly remember - those who have taught us something special, or who have left a lasting impression on us, or have been good friends, or simply those who have made us laugh. Peter did all those things, and will be remembered for them.

On a happier note, my own appointment as Chief Executive in March brought with it congratulations and commiserations in roughly equal numbers. I look forward to denying my Jeremiah friends the opportunity to say 'I told you so!'

Peter Williams

Peter Williams



Programme review

During this academic year, the Programme Review Directorate has been involved in carrying out a range of processes of review at subject level, including:

- the completion of the full cycle of subject review in England and Northern Ireland;
- the continuation of the academic review of subjects in Scotland;
- the introduction of the academic review of subjects in further education colleges in England; and
- the start of engagements at subject level in Wales.

In addition, Programme Review staff have contributed to planning the new process of institutional audit for higher education institutions (HEIs) in England, and to planning the subject and discipline-level activities that are due to start in HEIs in England during the next academic year.

We have also been commissioned to develop a bespoke method of review of foundation degrees, to be conducted in academic year 2002-03. It is proposed that this review will form an integral part of the evaluation of foundation degrees. Programme Review staff will take the lead on the development of this method of review.

The first 70 academic reviews of subjects in further education colleges in England will be complete by the end of June 2002. This programme of reviews includes one review of an HEFCE-funded consortium that elected for a combined review of the partner colleges which offer the relevant subjects.

The implementation of the academic review of subjects has been relatively smooth. Most of the colleges reviewed this year have had some experience of the Agency's reviews and have adapted well to the academic review method. We welcome the constructive comments that colleges, review coordinators and subject specialist reviewers have provided through the completion of evaluative questionnaires. The analysis of responses to the questionnaires is helping us to improve some areas of our practice. In autumn 2002, we will invite representatives of a sample of colleges to a focus group to help provide further detailed comment on the implementation of academic review.

In the academic year 2003-04 there will be a further round of some 83 reviews. Colleges eligible for review during this period have been notified individually of the period(s) of their review(s). We are offering another series of workshops for subject leaders to assist them in their preparation for review. In July, there will also be a further series of briefings for new subject review facilitators.

In due course, we will be writing to further education colleges for information about their directly-funded provision in the next round of subjects for academic review (2003-06). These are listed in Annex K of the *Handbook for academic review*.

During spring 2002, the Agency took part in two formal meetings with OFSTED and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI). The purpose of these meetings was to focus on areas of common interest; in particular to start to explore the ways in which the three agencies can work co-operatively in the implementation of the Common Inspection Framework and the academic review of subjects in colleges. In addition, the group has started to consider the potential impact of the proposed inspection of further education in HEIs.

Although the Agency has a wide range of contacts with further education colleges, and with organisations such as the Association of Colleges and the Learning and Skills Development Agency, it has been agreed that the review of higher education in further education colleges would benefit from the advice of a formal liaison group. Invitations have been sent out to potential members of this group in anticipation of the first meeting towards the end of summer 2002. For further information about the Agency's review of higher education in further education colleges, please contact Penny McCracken on 01452 557172 or email p.mccracken@qaa.ac.uk

HEIs in England have assisted the planning of academic reviews of subjects and developmental engagements by providing the information requested by Peter Williams in his recent letter to institutions dated 15 May 2002. Once we have recorded this information, we will be able to respond to queries, start more detailed dialogue with each institution, and draw up schedules of subject reviews and developmental engagements. For further information please email g.hayes@qaa.ac.uk or telephone 01452 557017.

Gillian Hayes

Dr Peter Milton - a tribute



Peter Milton's sudden and untimely death earlier this year while working as Director of Programme Review came as a shock to all who worked with him. He brought a no-nonsense approach to subject reviews and the development of new processes that promised a lighter touch. Yet he never underestimated the complexity of the review process or the demanding nature of the tasks associated with running an extensive review programme across a diverse higher education sector.

Peter was respected for plain speaking and his authoritative approach to subject review methods

and reporting the outcomes. He justifiably took pride in an infinite capacity to master detail at the same time as seeing the broad picture. Well known as a speaker at conferences, his contributions behind the scenes were, perhaps, less evident. He was passionate in his belief in the review process as a means of driving up academic standards and quality and placing the responsibility firmly within the institutions. Equally, we all owe him a debt for his determination while directing the review programme to keep it simple and to seek a lighter touch. He had considerable influence in the development of related initiatives such as the network of learning and teaching centres and their links with the Agency.

Determined to optimise the benefits of the process and to make them known more widely, he was engaged at the time of his death in writing a Magnum Opus, as he called it, which analysed the outcomes of almost 10 years of public reporting on the quality of higher education. It is fitting that the Agency is determined to complete this study and to publish it later this year dedicated to his memory.

Writing in tribute to an accomplished professional is rarely sufficient to the person. In Peter, there was always the human side. His strength of character and energy reflected in all he did, in all his many interests in life and in his love of music, rugby, the culinary arts and, of course, West Country cider. His wonderful sense of humour, his sense of proportion and good companionship were a joy to those with whom he worked. He is missed and remembered with great affection and respect.

Arthur Brown

Liaison officers

Since it was created, the Agency has tried to keep in touch with the Higher Education community in a number of ways. There have been many consultations over the last few years, and reviews and audits have involved many contacts at both institutional and departmental level.

Recent developments have resulted in a new approach to quality assurance that is based largely on the external audit of each institution's internal processes, but with both aspects supported by the standards infrastructure. These advances offer a new opportunity to think carefully about how links between the Agency and institutions may best be developed to support the new review processes.

What can the Agency offer to institutions to support their internal quality assurance processes, and what can institutions offer to the Agency to improve its effectiveness, and that of the standards infrastructure?

We are now proposing to establish liaison officers to provide, for those institutions that wish it, an individual, named contact at the Agency. One aim of the liaison function will be to help institutions to understand and gain confidence in the use of the standards infrastructure. It will also offer the opportunity for us in the Agency to get to know institutions better, and to appreciate the diversity of contexts and approaches within which they work.

Each liaison officer will be expected to gain an understanding of the mission, values and ethos of each of the institutions s/he works with, and an understanding of how these impact on the institution's approach to its internal quality assurance procedures. Specific information gained through the liaison function will not feed directly into individual reviews; generic aspects, however, will feed into the cycle of work of the Agency's Development and Enhancement Group, which will manage the liaison process. There will be evaluation of the generic and contextual information, and consideration of how any further work with the sector might be carried out to develop or clarify issues.

The liaison role will be completely separate from the management of institutional audit; the liaison officer for a particular university will not manage that institution's audit.

In July, the Development and Enhancement Group will meet with invited representatives from the sector to discuss in detail the brief for the liaison function. It is important that the Agency develops something that is a close match to what institutions think would be helpful, and it is equally important that the sector understands the purpose, scope and limitations of the liaison function. If you have comments please email f.crozier@qaa.ac.uk

After the meeting, briefing papers for both institutions and Agency staff will be produced with a view to implementing the liaison function for subscribing institutions during the academic year 2002-03.

Fiona Crozier

Discussion meetings on external examining and programme specifications

The Agency, Universities UK and SCoP have jointly organised two series of discussion meetings concerned with quality and standards in higher education, and the way they are to be reported publicly.

The meetings began in May and have been held in Birmingham, York, Manchester and London. There has been substantial interest in the meetings, with more than 400 delegates registered, representing the full range of academic and management interests across the higher education sector. Similar meetings are also being organised to gain input from the professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and from the students' organisations.

Within the contexts of the Agency's new institutional audits, and the Cooke recommendations on public information, one series of meetings is focusing on external examining and public reporting on standards, and the other on programme specifications and their uses in public information, internal review and external audit.

The format of the meetings has been designed to provide ample opportunity for small-group discussions, a feature that has been widely welcomed. The input to each of the discussions is noted and will be coordinated. Interim papers will be provided to Universities UK, SCoP and the Agency's committees in early summer and more substantive papers after the end of the series of meetings. Reports will also be prepared to provide feedback to the participants and others.

The aim of the meetings on external examining is to explore the diversity of institutional contexts and practices, and the continuing validity of the section of the *Code of practice on external examining*, with regard to the new approach to review and audit. The *Final report of the Task Group on Information on Quality and Standards in Higher Education* (the Cooke report) and its references to external examining have featured in the discussions. Other recurring issues include:

- the needs for diverse systems each to demonstrate explicitly and transparently that they are secure;
- how best to convert the potential data overload of tens of thousands of external examiners' reports into valuable public information;
- approaches to the induction of external examiners, and issues concerned with their recruitment and reward.

The second series of meetings seeks to explore the different approaches institutions are taking in developing programme specifications. These have great value in the development of academic programmes, but they are also used to provide information on what is available to students and/or what is required of them, and to assist with internal reviews and external audits. Issues being explored in discussions include: what is the primary purpose (academic development or quality assurance); what is necessary within a programme specification, what is sufficient; and do different audiences and purposes need different versions?

These jointly organised meetings represent a new phase in work between the Agency, Universities UK, SCoP, the higher education sector and its stakeholders. We hope to arrange more jointly-sponsored meetings, which will provide feedback on other issues concerned with the implementation of the academic infrastructure, its maintenance and its further development.

The higher education sector includes autonomous institutions that represent a wide diversity of mission and context, and it provides great diversity

of opportunity; it is also innovative. Quality assurance should not be a burden, it should accommodate the diversities and innovation, but it should also provide funders and users of higher education with the confidence they require, and sufficient information to support that confidence. These meetings are concerned with exploring and identifying the best ways of meeting those overlapping needs.

Nick Harris

The work of the Agency in Scotland

Future arrangements

On 26 April 2002, the consultation on the proposed 'enhancement-led approach to quality assurance' in Scotland ended. Decisions on the way forward will probably be announced in July. The consultation activities undertaken by the various partners involved (SHEFC, Universities Scotland, the Agency and the student associations) have been marked by a broad and strong consensus in support of the general enhancement-led approach. In July, the detailed work on the development of the model will start, with an expectation that the main operational elements, including the handbook for the new audit method, will be agreed and published by the end of 2002. We look forward with enthusiasm to playing our role in the further development and applications of this innovative new approach. In parallel with these developments, the Board and Scottish Committee of the Agency are considering the most effective organisational structure for our future activities in Scotland, in light of the new arrangements across the UK. This will be reported on more fully in future editions of *higher quality*.

Development activities in Scotland

Our work in Scotland is set within an increasingly interesting and changing context of wider developments in higher education. Recent features include: the Interim Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Lifelong Learning; the Scottish Higher Education Review being undertaken by the Scottish Executive; and the Parliament's 'national debate' on education. We look forward to working with the sector and with other key groups and organisations in responding to these changes and supporting the future development of higher education in Scotland.

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

The Interim Report of the Inquiry into Lifelong Learning was of particular interest to our work with Universities Scotland and Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) on the SCQF. While we must wait for the final report and for the announcement of the Scottish Executive's strategy for lifelong learning, the issues identified in the Interim report have highlighted a pivotal role for the SCQF. Much of our development work is increasingly set within and reflects the implementation of this national framework.

Together with colleagues at Universities Scotland, SQA and the Scottish Executive, we support the Joint Secretariat to the Joint Advisory Committee for the SCQF (chaired by Dr Andrew Cubie, CBE) and the recently established SCQF Implementation Group. This Group has the task of developing a comprehensive plan for implementation of the SCQF as the new national framework for all learning and qualifications in Scotland. By autumn 2002, the Group aims to publish the first implementation plan. This will be widely distributed across all sectors of education and training in Scotland and all associated stakeholders.

In January 2001, the timetable for HEIs to bring their qualifications into accordance with the framework was published (*The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*). The full Implementation Plan, however, will cover all sectors of education and training in Scotland and include, for example, the development of SCQF-wide arrangements for credit rating/integrating other learning and qualifications within the SCQF; and the development of agreements on harmonising records of achievement/transcripts across the SCQF.

FE-HE Group

In collaboration with the Association of Scottish Colleges, the Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access (SACCA - a joint committee of the Agency and Universities Scotland) has established an FE-HE Working Group with the broad remit to work with and support the further education and higher education sectors in facilitating and enhancing credit-based links, and associated issues of student and learner support at the FE-HE interface.

The members of the Group are drawn from higher education, further education, SQA and the student bodies. This Group is arranging to meet with the Regional Access Fora to consider how best they can work together in supporting developments and links at this important interface within the SCQF.

Personal Development Planning (PDP)

The PDP Working Group has been jointly established by the Agency and Universities Scotland to support the sector in developing a better and shared understanding of the nature, purpose and features of PDP and how PDP might relate to overall teaching and learning strategies. Members of the Group are drawn from the higher and further education sectors and the associated student bodies. Amongst other things, the Group will consider the potential role of PDP in supporting enhanced progression, including progression at the FE-HE interface.

The Agency's Student Forum

The Agency's Scottish Office greatly values and benefits from its work to inform and liaise with the student bodies in Scotland. In addition to the student member of the Advisory Committee for Scotland, student members are now also included on the FE-HE Group and the PDP Group. The Agency continues to hold three meetings a year of the full Student Forum of representatives of all the student associations in Scotland. The Student Forum continues to be a most valuable and important source of advice in the consideration of the new quality assurance and enhancement arrangements in Scotland.

Benchmarking of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting degrees in Scotland

In December 2001, the Benchmarking Group for the Scottish Ordinary Degree level in Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting was established. Members were drawn from the higher education sector, the then National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, and the Health Trusts. The Group has produced draft benchmark statements and these have been issued widely for consultation. Copies of the draft benchmark statements are available on our web site.

Academic review of subjects in Scotland

Reflecting on reviews 2000-01

In May 2002, we delivered our seventh quarterly report to SHEFC. A substantial part of the report concentrated on academic review of subjects in Scotland during 2000-01. The report provided both an overview and summary of the judgements arrived at from the 24 reviews completed. Drawing on the published reports, it also contained a qualitative analysis of the strengths and issues in both standards and the quality of learning opportunities, and identified emerging themes.

The outcomes of the 2000-01 reviews confirmed a generally high quality of higher education provision in Scotland. In all 24 reviews, reviewers had confidence in the academic standards of the provision under scrutiny. There was no provision where reviewers had 'limited confidence' or 'no confidence' in academic standards. With regards to the quality of learning opportunities, most provision was found to be 'commendable' (65 judgements; 87 per cent of all judgements) and a minority 'approved' (10 judgements; 13 per cent of all judgements). There was no provision where reviewers deemed the quality of learning opportunities to be 'failing'.

Reviewers made judgements on three aspects of the quality of learning opportunities: teaching and learning; student progression; and learning resources. Within each aspect, the majority of provision was judged to be 'commendable' (85, 88 and 88 per cent respectively). A small number of 'approved' judgements were arrived at under each aspect. Of the eight reviews in which an 'approved' judgement was reached, it is noteworthy that in only one of these was more than one aspect of provision judged 'approved'. This, again, confirms the generally high quality of provision reported on in these reviews across Scotland's higher education institutions.

In 2000-01, there were three reviews where aspects of provision were judged to include 'exemplary features'. In two reviews elements of 'student progression' were judged to be exemplary. In the third, the teaching and learning strategies adopted in one option and a travel project were exemplary, as was the utilisation of learning resources in the specialist departmental library.

Progress of reviews 2001-02

2001-02 is the second year of academic review in Scotland. Fifty reviews are scheduled for 2001-02, timetabled to take place in two phases: 19 reviews up to the end of December 2001; and 31 reviews from January 2002 onwards. The programme of reviews is now well advanced and is approaching completion. To date, 48 reviews have been completed and 16 review reports have been published. These can be accessed on our web site at www.qaa.ac.uk/revreps/acrev/scotintro.htm

Planning for review 2002-03

At the request of SHEFC, academic review at the subject level will only continue in Scotland for the small number of higher education institutions that are relatively new to the sector. During 2002-03, four reviews are planned at UHI Millennium Institute, and three at Bell College.

We are also in discussion with the Scottish Agricultural College regarding a schedule of reviews. It is anticipated that three reviews will be undertaken prior to institutional audit in 2005, the first subject review commencing in spring 2003.

Norman Sharp

Developments in Wales

Discipline-based reviews

During the calendar year 2002, a programme of discipline-based reviews is taking place in Wales. These reviews have been agreed by the Higher Education Council/Education and Learning Wales (HEC-ELWa), HEIs and the Agency. The reviews are limited in scope and provide an opportunity for HEIs to engage with the process of external review and to adapt and refresh, where necessary, their own internal processes of quality assurance. The reviews are regarded as developmental in nature and provide an opportunity to maximise the inherent quality enhancement that springs from reviews. The reports, which are confidential to the institution, HEC-ELWa and the Agency, focus on judgements about the appropriateness of academic standards, student progression, and on the quality of resources supporting the programmes of study.

Five of these reviews are now completed and the remaining 15 are scheduled for the autumn term of the next academic session. In the meantime, HEC-ELWa has established a working group, chaired by Dr Phil Gummet, Director of Higher Education at HEC-ELWa, with a view to putting together proposals for longer-term arrangements for quality assurance in the higher education sector in Wales. The intention is to provide draft proposals for consultation later in the year.

Committee for Wales

At the meeting on 21 May 2001, the Board endorsed proposals for strengthening the role of its Committee for Wales, which is a sub-committee of the Board. The terms of reference have been reformulated to enable the Board to be better informed about the wider

context within which the higher education sector in Wales operates, and the consequent implications for quality assurance arrangements. The constituency of the Committee's membership has been enlarged considerably in order to achieve this and the Committee is to be re-designated as the Advisory Committee for Wales. The membership of the Committee will be established over the summer, with a view to the new Committee holding its first meeting early in the new academic session. In association with this development, Mike Laugharne, Assistant Director in the Agency, has been designated regional officer for Wales.

Welsh Language Scheme

The Welsh Language Board (WLB) has served notice to the Agency on the need to prepare a Welsh Language Scheme under the terms of the Welsh Language Act (1993). Initial discussions with the WLB have taken place and a draft scheme will be prepared for consultation in 2003.

Guidance on Assessment

The Agency has completed the preparation of guidelines for institutions in Wales for effective practice in examining and assessing in a language other than the language of tuition. These guidelines are a supplement to precept 14 in the section of the *Code of practice* on assessment of students. They are intended as a source of reference for institutions in Wales in the context of the requirements of the Welsh Language Act, which would provide choice for students to be assessed in their preferred language.

If you have any queries, please email m.laugharne@qaa.ac.uk

Mike Laugharne

International matters

Quality assurance in higher education is not a phenomenon peculiar to the UK. While we are reading the runes or examining the entrails of developments in our own back yard, others elsewhere are busy developing and introducing a wide range of processes and procedures designed to improve and guarantee the quality and standards of higher education in their own countries and internationally. The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) which represents agencies in all continents, now has over 120 members. In Europe, ENQA (the European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) is taking a leading role in the Bologna process.

The international quality assurance agenda is dominated at present by two related issues: how can transnational or 'borderless' higher education be assured; and whether there is a need for some sort of international accreditation system - of programmes, institutions or quality assurance agencies.

These discussions will ultimately have repercussions for the way UK higher education institutions provide programmes and awards in other countries.

Meanwhile the Agency, through its overseas audit programme, is providing a unique means of demonstrating both the quality of the UK's overseas activities, and the seriousness we attach to assuring it.

Teams of auditors have recently returned from visits to Malaysia, Singapore and western Europe, and their reports are now being prepared. An earlier set (2001) of audits of links in Israel, although not published because a visit to Israel was not possible, has nevertheless yielded a wealth of information about managing links in that country. These will form a short report to be published by the Agency in a few weeks time. For those interested to see the headline messages (many of which are of more general applicability than just to Israel) the following are key findings:

- The importance of making an early and full assessment, at institutional level, of the necessary conditions to ensure success in the delivery of the programme. As well as a full assessment of the partner institution and its commercial and financial

standing, such conditions would include, for instance, the resource requirements in terms of staff time for teaching and development support, the cost of translation (where required), the number and the required expertise of external examiners.

- The need to carry out a regular assessment of risk when operating in a commercial environment, in which company ownership may change and the circumstances of operation may be unpredictable.
- The importance of understanding fully the significance of the requirements of the Israeli Council for Higher Education licence, and the likely conditions for successful adherence to these requirements.
- The presence of effective management structures and flow of information, so that internal accountability and reporting can identify changes in the partnership which need to be considered in strategic decision-making at the institutional level.
- The need to ensure that the contract with the partner organisation is legally binding under UK law, that it addresses the possible termination of the relationship, and that it includes details of an appropriate 'exit strategy' that safeguards the continuing interests of registered students.
- Ensuring that the arrangements for marking, internal and external moderation by the university, and reporting on standards within the programme, are such as to be broadly equivalent to those used in the UK university.
- Where the programme is delivered in English, ensuring that students in the partner institution have the appropriate admission qualifications and linguistic confidence to meet the learning demands of the programme, and/or to provide appropriate support to ensure that they can do this.
- Where the delivery and/or assessment of the collaborative programme is in a foreign language, giving full consideration to the implications for maintaining standards. In particular taking into account the management of assessment, moderation and external examining, the attendant cost of translation, the appropriateness of policies for sampling or summarising, and the requirements for effective liaison and support.

Peter Williams

Distance learning

The results of a survey in Hong Kong

Introduction

In the Spring of 2001, the Agency audited selected partnership links between UK higher education institutions and institutions in Hong Kong. In planning the programme of audits of partnership links, we invited all UK institutions to provide a list of their collaborative links with partners in Hong Kong. It was clear that a number of UK awards offered through distance learning arrangements were available to students with the assistance of partners in Hong Kong. We therefore took the opportunity of the visit to conduct a survey of some of the models of distance learning that were being delivered by UK institutions in Hong Kong. We are grateful for the kindness and hospitality shown by all those in the UK and Hong Kong who gave generously of their time to support it in this survey.

The survey consisted of three elements. The first took place in the UK and started with nine institutions that offer distance learning programmes in Hong Kong providing a short commentary on the model they were using. The second element was in the form of informal discussions with seven of these institutions. The third element was a visit to Hong Kong in March 2001. In the course of the visit, discussions took place with three organisations that provide some support to the UK institution in Hong Kong.

This note explores one outcome of the survey, which is a suggestion that rather than trying to define what is or is not a distance learning programme, there may be advantage in reviewing the way that the Agency and the higher education sector currently categorise distance learning and other forms of off-campus provision.

Distance learning

For the purpose of this survey, 'distance learning' has been taken to have the same meaning as that used in the Agency's *Guidelines on the Quality Assurance of Distance Learning (the Guidelines)* which is: 'a way of providing higher education that involves the transfer to the student's location of the materials that form the main basis of study, rather than the student moving to the location of the resource provider'. The *Guidelines* point out that there are no clear, let alone fixed, boundaries around distance learning and the findings of this survey support that statement.

Information gathered from the distance learning models

All the models of delivery that form the basis for this report were defined by the providers as distance learning, but they were significantly

different one from another. This may be as a result of 'distance learning' being the title given to all off-campus provision that cannot be classified as franchise or validation. In some cases, the description was modified to 'supported distance learning' to describe the involvement of a partner to assist the provider and the student to deliver the programme. In order to provide a framework within which to classify the models in more detail, and in particular to identify where lies responsibility for assuring quality and standards, three elements have been identified: delivery, assessment, and learner support.

Delivery at a distance

All the models used a common method of delivery which included providing printed materials as a resource pack to students. Some providers had already, or were considering, replacing some of the printed materials with web-based material. However, the students' perception of the materials was of a 'box' of resources for learning, whether real or virtual.

Assessment at a distance

The spectrum of assessment methods adopted across this small range of distance learning models ranged from examinations entirely under the control of the provider through to assessment only by a local assessor appointed by the provider, with a number of combinations in between. There is no common thread of assessment that would serve to characterise a programme as 'distance learning'.

Learner support at a distance

All the programmes employed an element of learning support. In terms of the dimensions described in the *Guidelines* they included:

- programme components delivered by travelling teachers;
- learning supported locally;
- learning supported by the providing institution remotely.

All the models that were part of the survey made use of travelling teachers and learning supported by the providing institution remotely, and most used local tutors but in a variety of ways. This area has the greatest scope for the intentions of the provider to be jeopardised despite the best intentions of all concerned. There is a lot of evidence for this from the strengths and weaknesses of local tutor support as seen by the provider and by the students, but the addition of an optional element of local support can significantly change the provider's original expectations for the programme. This becomes most obvious when seen from the perspective of the students, who consider themselves to be on a programme with an easily accessible local tutor rather than on a UK programme delivered at a distance.

All the models that were seen used a resource pack as a principal means of delivery. There were several examples of good practice in the organisation and quality of the resource packs, and in the guidance that they provided to the learner. However, in at least one instance, learners had been deterred by the size and complexity of the resource materials provided at the beginning of the programme.

Conclusions drawn from the distance learning model

The challenges of assessing student achievement on programmes delivered at a distance were addressed in different ways by the programme providers. There were examples where the need to take care over the rigour of assessment and security of standards was highlighted.

Most of the problems, or potential problems, hinged around views of the role of the local tutor as seen by the provider, the student and the tutor, views which appeared rarely to be in harmony. The provider may see the local tutor as having a low-level academic support role, but the tutor, if an experienced academic, finds it difficult to stay within the boundaries imposed by that role, and neither do the students expect them to. What appears to be happening is an 'expectation drift', which the provider might encourage at first in the hope that this will enhance the student's experience. Only later might the provider become aware of the implications of this, which is in many ways a drift from distance learning to collaborative provision.

Wider inferences

A drift away from distance learning to active collaboration is not in itself a problem. Calling something distance learning, however is not in itself sufficient to identify a standard package for ensuring quality and standards. The models that were considered under the heading of distance learning were, in practice, not very different in operation from other models of collaborative provision. The conventional categorisations of 'franchise' or 'validation' suggest to the Agency and to providers that there is some distinct quality assurance package attached to each, but this is not true where the boundaries between categories are

blurred. There is nothing wrong with these definitions as indicators of general approach to a programme of study, but by trying to force a programme into one of the definitions does not provide the best service to the student, the partner or the provider. The outcomes of the survey suggest that consideration of how quality and standards are maintained in the separate elements of delivery, assessment, and learner support, might be a more practical way of approaching the quality assurance of all kinds of off-campus provision.

Separating the variables in off-campus activity

There may be benefit in looking at all types of off-campus provision under the separate variables of delivery, assessment and learner support without being too insistent on categorisations on the preponderant mode of operation - franchise, validation or distance learning. Although separation of these variable elements might lose the principle of looking at provision as a whole package, this might be a reasonable trade-off against the greater freedom to focus on aspects of provision where quality and/or standards are not under the direct control of the provider.

The conventional categorisations of off-campus provision do not help students. What is important to students is that the material delivered to them, the assessments against which they are judged and the support that they receive as learners are of assured quality and secure standards. The important part for students is that they are getting good learning opportunities in a form that suits their needs and that they are able to achieve the standards expected of an UK award.

We will be considering the revision of the section of the *Code of Practice* on collaborative provision and the *Guidelines*, and will explore the approach outlined in this note in the course of these revisions. The views of practitioners on making use of the proposed categorisation of delivery, assessment, and learner support, in the consideration of collaborative arrangements or distance learning would be welcomed. Please email n.channon@qaa.ac.uk

David Buckingham
Nicola Channon

Report from the Board

Four Board meetings have been held between November 2001 and May 2002.

Development of external quality assurance methods

At each meeting, the Board considered and discussed the progress that was being made to develop the new methods of external quality

assurance that will be introduced from October 2002. The *Operational Description* and draft *Handbook for institutional audit: England* were published in March and April 2002 respectively. In Scotland, the Agency is working with SHEFC and Universities Scotland to develop the details of the arrangements to be introduced from 2003-04 (see The work of the Agency in Scotland, page 6).

In Wales, a working group is to be established to determine arrangements in Wales from January 2004. Future needs in Northern Ireland are also under discussion.

Financing the Agency's work

The move towards new external quality assurance methods has involved reviewing the existing basis for financing the Agency's work. To date, in broad terms, funding council contracts have paid for subject reviews; institutional subscriptions have paid for audits, development work, overseas work and access; with subscribers and funding councils both contributing to the Agency's organisational overheads. The significant reduction in subject reviews in HEIs and the development of the new institutional audit method, make allocation of costs on the former basis more problematic. The Board has endorsed a revised structure for apportioning costs, in the light of individual and collective discussions between the Agency and the main partner organisations. That model will be used as a basis for apportioning costs in 2002-03. The Board agreed the Agency's draft 2002-03 operating plan and budget at its meeting in May 2002.

Quality enhancement and benchmarking

The Board is actively engaged in the development of the Agency's policy on quality enhancement, and has had a preliminary discussion of proposals for the development of a benchmarking 'recognition' scheme. The Board will return to this at its meeting in July 2002.

Grant of university title

The Board advised the DfES, after scrutiny of an application from the (then) Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, that the College had satisfied the requirements for the grant of university title.

Representations (appeals)

The Board has considered one representation against an outcome in a subject review. The representation was unsuccessful. The Board has appointed a sub-group to consider and report to it on a representation received in May 2002.

In relation to Access recognition and licensing the Board has adopted appeals procedures consistent with the existing subject review representations procedures.

Annual Report and Accounts 2000-01

The Board presented its annual report and accounts to the company's Members at the AGM in January 2002. The *Annual Report* was published in March 2002.

Business Plan

The *Business Plan* published by the Agency in October 2000 is out of date. A new Business Plan, looking ahead to 2005, should be published by the turn of the year.

Governance

The Board has adopted a Risk Management policy, established its 'risk appetite', identified the key business risks facing the Agency and established systems for controlling and monitoring those risks. The Agency's senior management will report to the Board on a six-monthly basis on the main risks and annually on all risks.

In January 2002 the Board adopted an updated treasury management policy. Implementation of the policy will be reviewed in July 2002.

In line with the recommendations in the *Combined Code: Principles of Good Governance and Code of Best Practice* (Turnbull) and the *CUC Guide for Governing Bodies*, the Board has adopted a *Schedule of matters reserved to the Board*.

The Board has endorsed in principle proposals to allow the Advisory Committee for Scotland (which may be re-named) a wider degree of operational autonomy in the way it manages the work of the Agency in Scotland. Details should be finalised by August 2002.

Board members

The Board re-appointed Mr Graham Mackenzie and Professor Peter McKie to serve as independent Board members for a further term.

The Board was pleased to welcome Professor Arthur Lucas, Principal of King's College, London, to membership of the Board (in succession to Maggie Deacon).

Martin Johnson

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ENCLOSURE 4

**The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Scottish health subject benchmark statements**

[Health visiting](#)
[Midwifery](#)
[Nursing](#)

[Response questionnaire \(on-line\)](#)
[Response questionnaire \(Word\)](#)

If you have any queries regarding these statements or questionnaire, please contact Sheila Dunn -
s.dunn@qaa.ac.uk

Dear Colleague

Benchmarking the threshold standards for Programmes leading to Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting Registration in Scotland

On behalf of the Scottish benchmarking group I am writing to invite your views and comments on the attached draft benchmark statements. They describe the nature and standards expected from programmes of study in nursing, midwifery and health visiting that lead to the subject awards made by higher education institutions in Scotland.

The benchmarking of standards in nursing, midwifery and health visiting in Scotland were undertaken by groups of appropriate specialists drawn from higher education institutions, service providers and the professional and statutory regulatory bodies, inclusive of members of the original UK benchmarking group.

The challenge for the Scottish Benchmarking group was to draft benchmark statements within the Scottish quality assurance infrastructure and cross-reference them to the appropriate statutory competencies for professional registration in the United Kingdom.

Scotland continues to embrace the development and award of the Scottish Ordinary Degree for a range of vocational and professional programmes of preparation. However, the Diploma of Higher Education in Nursing and Midwifery remains the threshold award standard for pre-registration preparation in Scotland, but attracts 60 credit points at SCQF level 9 (SHE level 3) Scottish Ordinary Degree level. Also programmes of study in health visiting in Scotland attract the award of Scottish Ordinary Degree.

It is for these reasons that the Scottish Benchmarking statements for nursing, midwifery and health visiting have been designed and are presented in a way that differs slightly from its counterparts in the rest of the UK, while remaining congruent with the overall purpose and value of the work already undertaken, including that of an emerging health professions framework.

The work completed by the benchmarking group will also be scrutinised by critical readers and a consultation event took place on 6 June 2002 as part of this wider consultation process. We would welcome your feedback and comments. Responses should be submitted by 15 July 2002.

Please use the on-line form to submit your comments. Alternatively, there is a Word version of the questionnaire which can be completed and returned to:

Ms Sheila Dunn
Development Officer
The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
183 St Vincent Street
Glasgow
G2 5QD

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/cmntwork/benchmark/scot/intro_textonly.htm

14/07/2002

Arrangements during the transitional period 2002-2005 for Higher Education Institutions in England

Introduction

- 1 The purpose of this note is to provide guidance on the operational arrangements for the transitional period, 2002-2005, and describe the method for the developmental discipline-level engagements.
- 2 The programme of subject reviews previously proposed by the Agency for individual institutions from 2002 onwards, and set out in the *Handbook for academic review* published in 2000, will not now take place. However, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) requires that, during the transitional period 2002-03 and 2003-04, those institutions that are still awaiting their first audit (for this purpose, the year in which an audit takes place is excluded from the calculation) should have some interactions with the Agency at the level of the discipline. The benefits to the institution of having these interactions include: the opportunities to test, develop and refine internal review processes; the generation of up-to-date qualitative information that will serve both internal processes and institutional audit; and the opportunity to have first hand experience (through the involvement of nominees from the institution, addressed in paragraphs 11 and 18 below) which might assist further with the institution's arrangements to identify, enhance and disseminate good practice.
- 3 The majority of these discipline-level interactions will be developmental engagements. The main purpose of these engagements is to provide an opportunity for institutions to test, in co-operation with the Agency, the strength of their internal review procedures at the level of the discipline or programme, and the robustness of the evidence they use in those procedures. In the interests of enhancement, these will lead to threshold judgements on standards and the quality of learning opportunities in the discipline and, where appropriate, matters for further consideration by the institution. They will employ a standardised method, derived from the principles and methods which will be adopted in the discipline audit trails that will accompany future institutional audits (please refer to paragraphs 39-51 in the *Handbook for institutional audit: England*).
- 4 A smaller number of discipline-level interactions will take the form of subject review, using the method described in the Agency's *Handbook for academic review*. This sets out the opportunities for applying the new method with flexibility and with a minimum of additional burden on institutions that have robust internal review and reporting processes. The method will also be applied giving due emphasis to the importance attached to the review process making a contribution to the continuing improvement of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities within the subject. Further guidance on the part that subject reviews can play in the enhancement of learning and teaching will be provided for those institutions undertaking them.
- 5 Reports of subject reviews and developmental discipline-level engagements will be submitted to the institution and to HEFCE and their findings will be used as part of the evidence base that informs a subsequent institutional audit. Subject review reports will be published. The reports derived from developmental discipline-level engagements will not be published.
- 6 Discussions will be held with individual institutions to agree a programme of discipline-level interactions in the transitional period, informed by agreement on the timing of the institutional audit and the criteria for the eligibility for the different types of discipline-level interactions.

Subject Review

- 7 A small number of discipline-level interactions will take the form of subject reviews, using the method described in the *Handbook for academic review*. The 42 units of review listed in Annex K of that *Handbook* will be applied to subject reviews. However, when determining the scope of

reviews, account may be taken of structure and pattern of provision and their preferred lines for internal reporting. Between 2002 and 2005, subject reviews will be carried out in institutions that, under the 1995-2001 subject review programme, received:

- either two or more subject reviews with the profile totalling 17 points or less;
- or two or more subject profiles containing two or more Grades 2.

8 In these institutions, the provision that is eligible for review will be:

- subject areas not previously reviewed by the Agency or HEFCE, from which at least one complete cohort has graduated;
- subject areas which, under the method for the assessment of the quality of higher education applying prior to 1995, received a 'satisfactory' judgement from HEFCE based on the self-assessment report, but were not visited;
- all subject areas which received three or more Grades 2 in the post-1995 review programme.

9 Subject review using the method described in the *Handbook for academic review* may also apply where:

- the institution requests one or more full subject reviews for its own purposes. For example, it may be that an institution seeking degree awarding powers or university title might wish to have the fullest possible external evidence of high quality and standards, and therefore take the initiative to request the subject review method;
- the relevant Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) requires that the subject review method be used as a basis for its decisions about accreditation. That is a matter for the PSRB to decide.

10 The arrangements for subject review will include discussions with the institution concerning the scope of the review and the availability of the outcomes of internal reviews. It is not the intention to revisit any subject areas that received a Grade 1 in the post-1995 review programme, because they will have already been revisited and action will have been taken either to improve or to close the programmes concerned. A schedule of subject reviews will be agreed with each institution that comes under the criteria set out in paragraphs 7 and 8 above, when the schedule of institutional audits has been agreed. The method of review will be that described in the *Handbook for academic review*. If the institution presents a record of continuing improvement, for example in a recent continuation audit, to a subject eligible under paragraphs 7, 8 and 9 above, the Agency will be willing to consider applying the subject review process with a lighter touch in line with the *Handbook for academic review*.

11 The value of the role of the subject review facilitator to the review process is generally acknowledged. Although the nomination of a facilitator is voluntary, institutions will be encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity during the transitional period.

12 Guidelines for producing self-evaluation documents, programme specifications, the role of the subject review facilitator, and on the availability of supporting documents will be found in annexes C, D, E, F and H of the *Handbook for academic review*. Institutions may find it helpful to take up the invitation contained in the *Handbook for academic review* to draw upon existing internal review reports and other relevant evidence in preparing its self-evaluation.

Developmental discipline-level engagements during 2002-03 and 2003-04

Eligibility and selection

13 Institutions whose institutional audits are not scheduled for 2002-03, and which are not required to undertake subject reviews during 2002-05 (see paragraphs 7-10 above), will undertake a limited programme of developmental discipline-level engagements. All these institutions will be expected to have at least one engagement, and not more than two, in each of the years before they have their institutional audit. Institutions may put forward a proposal for up to four developmental discipline-level engagements in the period commencing 2002 up to a year prior to their scheduled institutional audit. Institutions scheduled for institutional audit in 2003-04 will be expected to have one or two discipline-level developmental engagements in 2002-03. Institutions scheduled for institutional audit in 2004-05 will be expected to have one or two developmental engagements in 2002-03 and one or two in 2003-04. Using the Subject Groups

defined in the new Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) (<http://www.hesa.ac.uk>) for reference, a programme or group of programmes within a discipline area will be identified for each engagement.

14 Discipline areas that will have priority for a developmental engagement are those which include programmes that:

- were not previously reviewed by HEFCE or the Agency, and from which at least one complete cohort has graduated; and
- under the HEFCE quality assessment method applying prior to 1995, were included in subjects that received a 'satisfactory' judgement from HEFCE on the basis of the self-assessment report, but were not visited.

15 The disciplines selected for these developmental engagements will be agreed during the course of preliminary discussions between the Agency and the institution. It is not intended that all discipline areas that meet the criteria for an engagement should have one. Where no discipline can be identified that meets either of the two criteria above, the discipline will be chosen by the Agency in consultation with the institution. In practice, a discipline area will normally be a programme of study or a cluster of related programmes leading to a named award or a cluster of related named awards.

The process

16 The process of the developmental engagement will, so far as possible, reflect the principles which will apply to institutional audit and discipline audit trails, in order that they can be used developmentally during the transitional period to assist institutions to refine their internal procedures and to prepare for institutional audit. The process will employ the academic infrastructure documents, including appropriate uses of the external reference points, and capture the students' view.

17 The developmental engagement will begin with the preparation of a short **self-evaluation document (SED)** on quality and standards. The guidelines for producing a discipline-level self-evaluation report are provided in Annex C of the *Handbook for institutional audit: England*. The students' representative body – normally the Students' Union, or its equivalent – has the opportunity to make a **written submission** in advance of the visit. There will be a period of preparation by the team, using the SED prepared by the institution as the main source of information. The Agency's Information Unit will provide the team with an analytical digest of information. An initial discussion with the institution may be advantageous. During the preparation stage, members of the team will be expected to communicate freely, preferably by email, on their preliminary views of matters arising from their reading of the SED. The period of preparation will be followed by a **two-day visit** of either two consecutive or two single days to the institution. Following the visit, the team will produce a report which will be submitted to the institution and the HEFCE. The report of a developmental engagement will make two threshold-based judgements, expressing confidence, or otherwise, in the academic standards set and achieved in the discipline, and in the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. Reports of the developmental engagements will not be published, but their findings will be used as part of the evidence base that informs the subsequent institutional audit. If, however, the engagement finds evidence of serious cause for concern, the report will recommend that a subject review as described in the *Handbook for academic review* is undertaken.

Team composition

18 The composition of the teams for discipline-level engagements will be in keeping with their developmental nature and in support of the linkages between the discipline and the institutions' internal processes. It is envisaged that most teams will combine internal and external membership, together with specialist expertise in the discipline and the institutional perspective. Each team will consist of a coordinator, a specialist and an institutional auditor appointed by the Agency and may also include a nominee of the institution. If an institution chooses not to nominate a member of the team, no extra member will be provided by the Agency. Institutions can nominate any employee they wish; while some may want to nominate a colleague who is or has recently been a specialist in the discipline area, others may prefer a member who represents the institutional perspective. In either case, the internal member of the team is expected to apply

their knowledge of the institution's policies, systems and procedures for quality assurance. The coordinator will have a particular role in preparing the engagement, coordinating the process and finalising the report. Each member of the team may offer more than one area of expertise so that, for example, the institutional nominee may contribute specialist knowledge or an institutional perspective or both, and the coordinator and the institutional auditor may have expertise in the discipline. The JACS codes, the self-evaluation and preliminary discussions between the Agency and the institution will be used to determine appropriate expertise within the discipline areas. All team members are expected to play a full and equal part in the engagement. The members appointed by the Agency will be selected against criteria that reflect the process of developmental discipline-level engagements, and they will have received training. The Agency will also provide training for the institutional members.

Self-evaluation

19 Self-evaluation is central to a developmental engagement. The institution will be invited to provide a document or a set of documents that presents a summary of the internal review processes and the outcomes of the internal review in the discipline. In addition, it will supply the relevant programme specifications. A recent internal report on the review of a programme or cluster of programmes within the discipline might well be sufficient to serve. If it so wishes, for example should the internal documentation for any reason be unsuitable for this purpose, the institution may prepare a self-evaluation document (SED). Institutions will note the advantages of ensuring that their internal processes are capable of generating evaluative reports that can serve, with minor adaptation, both for developmental engagements and for the discipline-level audit trails of institutional audits. The institution may wish to consult Annex C of *the Handbook for institutional audit: England* and the proposed framework for the developmental engagement report in paragraph 28 below to consider an appropriate framework and format.

20 Although no strict word count will be imposed, as a guide to its brevity a set of papers presenting self-evaluation derived directly from internal review, and offering an introduction or overview and index, should be no more than approximately 40 pages excluding the programme specifications. If employing a freestanding SED prepared especially for the engagement, a guide of 3,000 words maximum excluding programme specifications should be applied. The set of papers or SED should serve all the programmes within the discipline. The emphasis should be on the evaluation of the effectiveness of the curricula and arrangements for assessment in supporting the stated aims and intended learning outcomes, and of the student achievement of the appropriate academic standards, and an evaluation of the learning opportunities offered to students to support their learning and achievements. Description of the programme(s) should be the minimum necessary for the team to be able to understand the background of the self-evaluation. It is likely that the programme specifications appended to the papers or the SED will cover most or all of the descriptive material that will be needed.

21 Institutions are encouraged to make as much use as possible of summaries of evidence available from internal review processes and other sources, including structured comments from present and past students, to form the basis of the self-evaluation. Institutions need not restrict themselves to the information set described in *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final report of the Task Group (HEFCE 02/15) – the Cooke Report*. Equally, it is understood that in the early part of the transitional arrangements, the full range of the information set may not be available.

Supporting documentation

22 The method proposed for the conduct of the developmental engagement places proper responsibility on institutional staff for the provision of evidence to support the self-evaluation. This principle is fundamental both to institutional audit and to the discipline-level engagements. Supporting documents which the team might expect to have access could include:

- programme approval (validation) and review reports;
- programme or subject handbooks;
- learner support materials, including module or unit guides;
- student handbooks;
- records of staff-student liaison committees, or equivalent;

- assessment criteria and guidance to markers;
- samples of students' work;
- examination board minutes;
- external examiners' reports (typically for the last three years);
- student feedback summaries;
- outcomes of consultations and other engagements with students;
- recruitment and progression data, including into employment;
- staff development documents relating to the provision;
- PSRB accreditation reports, if relevant.

23 There will be no requirement for a documentation 'base-room' of a type familiar to institutions with the previous style of Agency review, as all these documents should be to hand within institutions. The team will request documents only when required. Institutions may wish to consider granting electronic access to records (eg through its intranet) to the team. The Agency's Information Unit will provide the team with the institution's published information set, as described in *HEFCE 02/15*.

The visit

24 The visit of the team to the institution will take the form of a developmental engagement with a series of discussions between the team and staff engaged in the teaching and management of the programme(s), and between the team and a representative group, or groups, of students. The visit might be two consecutive days or two separate days, by agreement with the institution. Discussions will normally focus on specific issues derived from the self-evaluation and its analysis, and from issues identified during the initial discussions with the institution. Institutions will recognise that the quality of their self-evaluation and the reporting that arises from internal review processes will have a strong influence on the nature and coverage of discussions during the visit. As with discipline audit trails and thematic enquiries in institutional audits, the focus of these developmental engagements will be on the institution's own procedures, and its evaluation of them, for setting, monitoring, maintaining and improving quality and standards, with an emphasis on the outcomes - the quality of programmes as experienced by students and the academic standards they achieve. This is a key feature of commonality between the developmental discipline-level engagements and institutional audits.

25 During the visit, the team will gather evidence, documentary and oral, with some reference to primary evidence, to enable it to produce its report (see below, paragraph 28). The team will examine the basis of information about the quality and standards of programmes provided to potential students, employers and other stakeholders, including the completeness, accuracy and usefulness of the programme specifications. The approach taken by the team will vary in detail from one engagement to another, but teams are likely to draw upon aspects of the *aide-mémoire* for subject review, set out in Annex E of the *Handbook for academic review*. Annex E is, however, designed to support full subject review, and developmental engagement teams will take a 'lighter' and more selective approach, focusing on outcome standards, the quality of the learning opportunities and the means of achieving and assuring them.

Judgements

26 Using the self-evaluation documentation as the prime source of information, the team will evaluate the quality of learning opportunities and the outcomes in terms of the academic standards achieved by students for the programme(s) involved in the developmental engagement. The team's evaluation will be in terms of a general overview rather than very detailed scrutiny. The outcome of developmental engagements will not overturn or replace existing published outcomes derived from earlier subject reviews. Judgements will take the form of information that the institution can benefit from, and incorporate statements of:

- 'confidence', or otherwise, in the academic standards set and achieved, for the programme(s) involved in the engagement. The judgement focuses on whether the learning outcomes of the programme(s) are appropriate in content and academic level for the named award(s), and whether actual student achievement is generally consistent with the intended outcomes;

- 'confidence', or otherwise, in the quality of the learning opportunities that support students in achieving the academic standards of the award(s) to which the programme(s) lead. Any need for differentiation in this confidence statement between the aspects and the programmes covered under the 'quality of learning opportunities' heading will be reflected in the report's conclusions and the recommendations for further development (see below, paragraph 28).

27 In coming to its judgements, the team will make use of oral evidence gained through the visit, and documentary sources of evidence, particularly internal review reports or the SED, submissions from students, external examiners' reports, student and/or programme handbooks and other curricular documents, and samples of student work. Where the team identifies matters relating to the strength of the internal review processes, the self-evaluation reports and the robustness of the evidence base that in its view deserve further consideration by the institution, the report will make recommendations. Where such documents are not available, or their form or content do not allow a satisfactory evaluation to be made, or where there are other causes for concern, the team will report such matters to the Agency. A decision as to whether a subject review is needed will then be made.

Reports

28 The team will be expected to produce a report of no more than 2,000 words on the outcomes of the developmental engagement. The report will normally adopt a standard framework:

- an introduction on the process of developmental engagement at discipline level;
- the programme(s) covered by the developmental engagement;
- a statement of overall educational aims of the programme(s);
- an evaluation of the quality of the learning opportunities provided by the programme(s);
- an evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme(s) in achieving the intended outcomes and the extent to which the students achieve the programme(s) aims and intended learning outcomes;
- the conclusions reached and the judgements made;
- the strength of the internal review processes, the suitability of the self-evaluation documentation and the robustness of the evidence base together with any recommendations for further development.

29 A key function of the report is that it should be useful to the institution. The detailed structure of reports may vary within the broad framework set out above to suit local circumstances.

30 Reports of developmental discipline-level engagements will be submitted to the institution and to HEFCE. They will not be published. Recommendations for further development will be aimed at the institutional audience. Their purpose, in keeping with the developmental nature of the engagement, will be to offer the views of the team on how the institution might consider enhancing its current practice, or extending existing good practice, in the quality of provision in the discipline and in securing its academic standards.