

London Metropolitan University

Institutional audit

November 2010

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited London Metropolitan University (the University) from 22-26 November 2010 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards
- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University is committed to enhancing the learning opportunities of its students through a range of formal and informal processes based on a shared ethos.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The University has put in place effective procedures for the management of its research programmes, which meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

Reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

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

- the practical and scholarly support provided in the Assessment Framework and the taught provision manuals (paragraphs 12 and 25)
- the University's systematic approach to improving taught provision through programme enhancement meetings (paragraph 21)
- the deployment of personal academic advisers and their regular use of diagnostic data to identify and support undergraduate students at academic risk (paragraphs 48 and 57)
- the University's integrative approach to developing and managing collaborative provision (paragraph 69).

Recommendations for action

The audit team considers it would be desirable for the University to:

- ensure that the terms of reference of the Research and Development Committee and the Research Degrees Committee accurately reflect their activities and relationship (paragraph 9)
- require external examiners' reports to be written in such a way as to facilitate their being shared consistently with student representatives (paragraph 18)
- maintain annual institutional oversight of developing trends in the number and nature of student appeals and cases of academic misconduct (paragraph 27)
- embed evaluation measures within enhancement plans (paragraph 58)
- strengthen internal quality reports by the inclusion of more quantitative data (paragraph 65).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 London Metropolitan University, formed in 2002 by the merger of the University of North London and London Guildhall University, has over 32,000 students, 17 per cent of whom are undertaking programmes with a collaborative partner, and almost a quarter of whom are taught postgraduates: postgraduate research student numbers remain constant at around 450 (two per cent of the population). Academically, following a period of academic and organisational consolidation, the University is structured around eight faculties (some subdivided into departments or schools), of which one, the Business School, contains around one-third of all students. This consolidation has been matched by an estate rationalisation which has seen the closure of some poorly-rated buildings, the opening of a new multi-purpose Science Centre, a significant investment in a Learning Centre, and the majority of teaching now undertaken in two campuses some three miles apart. The University has given due consideration as to how best to minimise any possible negative impact its geographical structure might have on the quality of student learning opportunities.

2 The University's Mission involves: transforming lives through education and research; meeting society's needs through a socially responsible agenda; and building rewarding careers for students, staff and partners. It is supported by five associated strategic priorities: these relate to education (providing a quality learning experience for students, enhancing student participation and ensuring fair access); research and enterprise (advancing new knowledge and its applications); sustainability; and investment (emphasising information and communications technology).

The information base for the audit

3 The University provided a briefing paper and supporting documentation. The index to the briefing paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the University's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of awards and the quality of its educational provision. The audit team had access to the report of the previous Institutional audit and collaborative audit reports (respectively May 2005 and May 2006) and the special review of research degree programmes (July 2006) and Integrated quality and enhancement review reports relating to two of the University's collaborative partners. The team also received copies of all documents referenced in the briefing paper and other documentation requested, normally in electronic form. The London Metropolitan University Students' Union produced a written submission, setting out students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, their experience as learners, and their role in quality management. The audit team thanks the Students' Union for its submission, to which members made repeated reference in the course of their enquiries.

Developments since the previous audits

4 The 2005 and 2006 audits expressed confidence in the University's management of quality and standards. The Institutional audit, which identified three features of good practice, advised the University to: undertake a review of its entire committee structure; proceed with embedding a streamlined quality framework; continue to refine its use of management information; ensure that external examiners' reports were fully addressed and consequential changes communicated; and ensure that monitoring and reporting arrangements incorporated realistic deadlines. The Collaborative provision audit, which identified four features of good practice, advised the University to: ensure that partners

received formal feedback on the outcomes of annual monitoring; ensure that academic departments responded to external examiners' reports and shared their responses with partners; and reconsider the appropriateness of student appeals being initially considered by partners. It was found desirable for the University to: ensure there was an appropriate forum for considering strategic and operational matters; ensure that student feedback was reported more systematically; make greater use of student data; and secure effective control of public information.

5 The present audit team confirms that the University has generally built upon the good practice and addressed the recommendations of both audits. Notably it has: developed the Taught and Collaborative Taught Provision Manuals (see paragraph 12); created the Quality Enhancement Unit (see paragraph 7); established programme enhancement meetings for both on-campus and collaborative programmes (see paragraph 21); and aligned monitoring and course committee arrangements for collaborative provision with those for on-campus programmes.

6 The University has also, during this period, experienced a number of well-publicised difficulties, including: a substantial (£36m) funding clawback, which will continue on a cumulative basis until 2014; an immediate loss of £15m annual revenue and the rebasing of its future annual income by that amount; a loss of almost 15 per cent of substantive academic posts in the two-year period to June 2010; a decline in the overall workforce of almost 17 per cent (the number of hourly-paid support staff in particular has declined by over 40 per cent); changes in governance and management at the most senior level; and a number of labour relations challenges. The cumulative impact of these difficulties is as yet incomplete, and, while both their origins and the circumstances surrounding them fall outside the scope of Institutional audit, their implications for academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities do not. Accordingly the audit team, while not addressing the difficulties directly, has taken full cognisance of them in reaching its conclusions.

The University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

7 The University manages academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities through a range of deliberative bodies, with executive oversight provided by the Executive Group (consisting of the Vice-Chancellor, the two deputy vice-chancellors, the Director of Human Resources, the Director of Finance and the University Secretary). Academic Board's recently-revised responsibilities include awarding academic qualifications; it delegates powers as follows: admissions, student discipline and awards to the University Awards Board; taught programmes and teaching and learning strategy to Academic Development Committee; taught postgraduate programmes to Research and Development Committee; research degrees to Research Degrees Committee. These bodies in turn receive reports from subsidiary bodies which include subject standards boards, the Accreditation of Prior Learning Board, and Teaching and Learning Committee. While operationally quality management is largely devolved to faculties, each one is supported by a dedicated quality officer from the Quality Enhancement Unit, a central support body charged, among other things, with keeping the quality framework and its delivery under review and providing risk assessments for institutional approval activities.

8 A number of these bodies, including the University Awards Board and Academic Development Committee, are chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), who also considers all external examiners' reports, has executive oversight of the development of partnership activity, and leads a number of other groups. The present post-holder retires during the present academic year (as does the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Development)). While their responsibilities will be reconfigured, with one new post assigned

to the oversight of academic activities as a whole and one to that of support activities, the audit team considers that the proposed posts as presently designed are, though extremely challenging, fit for the purpose of managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

9 The audit team confirms the general effectiveness of the deliberative structure, but found inconsistencies between the formal responsibilities and practical activities of Research and Development Committee and Research Degrees Committee: whereas the latter (which also has a direct reporting line to Academic Board) reports to the former, the terms of reference of the former do not refer to research degrees, and those of the latter do not include reporting to the former. It is desirable that the University ensure that the terms of reference of the Research and Development Committee and the Research Degrees Committee accurately reflect their activities and relationship.

10 The Business Development Group, jointly chaired by the two deputy vice-chancellors, is a large and significant body with senior academic and administrative membership. Its responsibilities embrace the whole portfolio of academic activities, and its duties include assessing, on the basis of a detailed schema, the risks associated with new programme proposals and new collaborative partners. It reports as appropriate to Academic Development Committee, Research and Development Committee and the Executive Group, advising on whether a proposal should proceed and if so under what conditions. The audit team learned that deans, all of whom serve on the Group, value its contribution to portfolio development and its encouragement of inter-faculty collaboration. The team concurs with this positive evaluation.

11 Faculty academic committees report to Academic Board, and faculty taught provision committees to Academic Development Committee. Each academic department has an academic committee, and, normally, a taught provision committee and a research and third stream committee. In addition, each taught course (programmes are sometimes referred to as courses) has a course committee as the primary level at which students are represented. These arrangements are explained in a helpful Committee Handbook.

12 The regulatory frameworks for all awards and for professional and personal development programmes are published in the annually-revised Academic Regulations; the University also publishes a comprehensive Assessment Framework (see paragraph 25). Taught awards are covered by modular undergraduate and postgraduate schemes: both are managed by a director, and are designed to permit and encourage interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary study and a focus on such thematic initiatives as employability. The conduct of taught programmes is regulated by the Taught Provision Manual (or, as appropriate, the Collaborative Taught Provision Manual), the online versions of which provide hyperlinks to other relevant documentation. The audit team identifies the practical and scholarly support provided in the Assessment Framework and the taught provision manuals as a feature of good practice.

13 The University, which has in the past adopted a centralised organisational approach, now devolves many operational responsibilities to faculties, permitting or encouraging local decision-making as to how best to achieve institutional ends. This approach applies also to collaborative provision, where, while the University largely integrates its quality framework into its arrangements for campus-based programmes, it sometimes permits procedural variations designed to be commensurate with the experience, competence and circumstances of each partner organisation. The audit team considers that the level of devolution is properly judged and in no way diminishes the central oversight of academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities.

14 The Vice-Chancellor, who took office in January 2010, was at the time of the audit completing a major Review of Undergraduate Education, due to report in March 2011: this will include a consideration of demand, curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and funding. The review is overseen by a project board containing two student representatives and two external advisers, one of them from a partner organisation. The main recommendations of the Review are scheduled for implementation in academic year 2012-2013. While the audit team cannot comment further on work in progress, it confirms that the parameters of the enquiry address squarely and in a pertinent manner the most significant internal and external challenges, financial as well as academic, facing the University.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

15 At present a Joint Standards Board of Academic Board and the Board of Governors, which among other duties reports annually in the light of internal audits commissioned by the University Awards Board, is central to the management of academic standards. While the audit team was initially concerned that this arrangement might, unintentionally but unhelpfully, conflate governance and management, experience has led to governors' active interest in academic standards being perceived internally as a considerable strength. Nevertheless, the team learned of a proposal to replace the Joint Standards Board with an Academic Strategy Committee to advise the Board of Governors on, among other matters, the adequacy of arrangements for planning, delivering and assuring the academic standards of academic programmes. Clearly such a Committee, working with Academic Board and the Vice-Chancellor in a manner which acknowledges their distinctive roles, would remove any possibility of conflation.

External examiners

16 The University appoints external examiners in two tiers. In the first tier, subject external examiners, nominated by departments, are appointed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) to be members of subject standards boards (see paragraph 21), normally for four years. They are fully briefed and inducted, and their duties involve: confirming that assessment has been properly conducted, students have been assessed fairly, and the mark range correctly reflects performance relative to national norms and requirements; advising on the assessment scheme and instruments (and on proposed changes); reading a relevant sample of assessed work; attending one or more performance enhancement meetings annually (a duty identified as valuable by at least two such examiners); producing an annual report in a standard format; where necessary raising urgent issues directly with a senior institutional manager, up to and including the Vice-Chancellor.

17 In the second tier, the University appoints and briefs a number of senior external examiners to the Awards Board, some of whom are invited also to serve on the Joint Standards Board. Their duties include: attending Awards Board (and, as appropriate, Joint Standards Board) meetings; confirming that awards have been conferred in accordance with Academic Regulations and good practice nationally; helping monitor academic standards; reviewing assessment policy; submitting annual reports.

18 External examiners' reports are included in annual monitoring (see paragraph 21) and considered in an overview report prepared annually for Academic Development Committee. These arrangements were found to be satisfactory, as were those for analysing, addressing and responding to external examiners' reports. Nevertheless, while programme committees make summaries of such reports available to students, on some occasions it

has proved difficult to produce fair and accurate summaries which do not constrain what external examiners feel able to write, in particular about individual students. It is desirable that the University require external examiners' reports to be written in such a way as to facilitate their being shared consistently with student representatives.

19 Overall, the University's external examining system is well-considered and well-documented, and contributes appropriately to setting and maintaining the academic standards of its awards.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

20 New programmes require approval from the Business Development Group (mainly in respect of strategic and commercial matters). Academic consideration, which may be granted by the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Scheme Director (see paragraph 12) under delegated powers from Academic Board, is normally aided by external opinion and involves the submission of detailed documentation. Advice on preparing such documentation appears in the Taught Provision Manual, which also offers guidance on the additional information required where proposals involve flexible or distributed learning; support in curriculum design is available from the Centre for Academic and Professional Development. The process is complete once conditions have been met and the documentation logged. Programme closure is carefully handled, with the interests of affected students conscientiously and sensitively addressed.

21 Annual monitoring is based on faculty annual taught provision performance statements deriving from a continuous monitoring log (see paragraph 34). These are reviewed by the Quality Enhancement Unit on behalf of the Executive Group: the Unit follows up any recommendations to emerge from this process, reporting back to the Group on progress in addressing them. Of particular relevance to annual monitoring, however, is the biannual performance enhancement meeting, held by departmental taught provision committees following the Subject Standards Board's deliberations on student achievement. Such meetings, which work to a standard agenda and trigger action points culminating, following faculty consideration, in a summary report to Academic Development Committee, provide a forum for departments to discuss, with external and internal examiners and the nominated quality officer, the fitness for purpose of their academic provision. The audit team noted the enthusiasm for these meetings expressed orally by staff members it met and in writing by some external examiners; it found evidence of the findings of such meetings being followed up centrally; and it confirms from documentary evidence the meetings' impact on both quality enhancement and the assurance of academic standards. The University's systematic approach to improving taught provision through programme enhancement meetings constitutes a feature of good practice.

22 Programmes are normally reviewed every six years, either individually or in the context of a subject area or faculty/department review. The process involves the submission and consideration of a self-evaluation document covering, among other things, the programme's engagement with institutional and external requirements and expectations; periodic review aims to refresh provision, learn from the past and promote future good practice. Procedural requirements in respect of panel composition (including externality), documentation and procedures (including timescales, reporting routes and mechanisms for disseminating good practice) are fully aligned with the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*.

23 The audit team found programme approval, monitoring and review carefully constructed and contributing to maintaining and developing the quality of learning opportunities and assuring the academic standards of awards.

Academic infrastructure and other external reference points

24 The University states that its Academic Regulations operate within the parameters of The *framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and are aligned with all relevant external reference points, including the European Credit Transfer System and, by its own choice, the requirements of the Middle States Commission for Higher Education. The audit team confirms that the University completed a formal mapping exercise against the *Code of practice* in July 2010, with which specific action points were associated, and that procedures exist for identifying and notifying changes to the Academic Infrastructure more generally. The University's commitment to widening access is particularly strong, and Academic Regulations specify that schemes and programmes must be designed to set no unnecessary barriers to access to higher education by disabled people. Programme specifications are expected to take account of the requirements of any relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body: the oral assurances received by the audit team that this is consistently achieved were confirmed in the team's documentary study. The team found that the University actively aligns its processes with the Academic Infrastructure and takes account of other external inputs, including international ones, to help set and maintain the standards of its awards. It makes systematic use of the *Code of practice* and other external inputs to support and enhance the quality of learning opportunities.

Assessment policies and regulations

25 Because the University operates single undergraduate and postgraduate taught schemes, Academic Regulations, which specify the requirements to complete each level of study, progress to the next level and qualify for the relevant award, apply to all taught provision. The readily-available and up-to-date Assessment Framework is aligned with the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* and deals, in a practical as well as descriptive way, with assessment of all types, supporting the information provided with templates and other usable materials. In covering a comprehensive range of topics the Framework gives particular attention to marking; examples of the University's thoughtful approach here include: the assessment tariff scheme, which aims to ensure reasonable assessment loads and promote consistency; and the requirement that all staff involved in marking, including those moderating marks, sign the mark sheet. The audit team received persuasive oral evidence that the Framework is widely used and students made aware of it. The practical and scholarly support provided in the Assessment Framework and the taught provision manuals is again (see paragraph 12) identified as a feature of good practice.

26 Assessment results are handled locally by the relevant subject standards board and centrally by the University Awards Board. The latter's functions, as specified in Academic Regulations, include: determining, on behalf of Academic Board, awards for all taught students (Research Degrees Committee acts similarly in respect of research degrees); monitoring academic standards and assessment policy (including auditing faculties to explore their assessment processes and establishing whether these processes are facilitated by institutional frameworks and procedures); confirming the configuration of subject standards boards; receiving reports from such boards. The University's assessment policies and regulations were found to be clear, comprehensive, well-understood and contributing properly to the maintenance of academic standards.

27 The audit team did, however, identify areas where there is scope for improvement. The team particularly noted slippage in the production of an annual analysis of the incidence of, and trends within, academic misconduct and appeals. While senior staff informed the team of rectification plans, at present the University's ability to identify and respond to changes in incidence and emerging trends is unavoidably restricted. It is desirable that the

University maintain annual institutional oversight of developing trends in the number and nature of student appeals and cases of academic misconduct.

Management information (statistics)

28 The University Planning Office provides information on retention, progression and achievement from module level upwards, for use at all institutional levels. The Office is currently working with the Academic Planning and Information Unit to improve the utility of cohort analysis, for example by focusing on specific challenges in particular year groups, and testing for any correlation between English competence of students on an overseas collaborative programme and their academic performance.

29 The University makes a variety of uses of statistical data. The audit team noted, first, that data downloaded from the Planning Office's website contributes to standing items on the performance enhancement meetings' agenda, including: performance statistics for all modules and programmes; cohort analysis; and modules of concern (these are reported ultimately to Academic Development Committee, where consideration is given to statistical data and consequent actions). Secondly, the team saw a detailed, thought-provoking and critical analysis of admissions, performance and recruitment prepared for Academic Board: among other valuable intelligence, this analysis presented data on seven performance indicators in respect of undergraduate retention, progression, achievement and graduate destinations. Thirdly, and in relation to the University's concern to increase the number of students who complete and pass modules at the first attempt, Academic Board received a detailed analysis of completion rates following changes in the rules governing reassessment.

30 While elsewhere (see paragraphs 58, 65, 67, 71 and 76) the present annex identifies areas where the University could bolster its documentation by greater use of quantitative data, the audit team concludes that the University makes extensive use of statistical data to inform its management of academic standards, and is improving its capabilities through better cohort analysis. The level of statistical information and analysis deployed provides valuable support towards the setting and achieving of strategic goals.

31 Overall, confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

32 All aspects of external examining, programme approval, monitoring and review and institutional engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points are described in Section 2.

Management information (feedback from students)

33 Since its previous Institutional audit the University has invested heavily in its student data system. The system is now sufficiently robust to permit personal academic advisers (see paragraph 48) to monitor student attendance and performance, and students themselves to enrol and register online, correct personal details, access their academic records and receive assessment outcomes.

34 In all taught programmes students elect representatives to serve on the appropriate course committee, the responsibilities of which include considering student feedback and external examiners' reports. The audit team confirms the centrality of students in such

committees, and found evidence of representatives contributing to developments in quality management. All modules are subject to student evaluation, the results of which are included in the module or course log (a running record maintained by module and course leaders, which, once discussed and acted upon in committee, is placed on the staff intranet). Arrangements for student representation and module evaluation are satisfactory.

35 The University encourages participation in the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Postgraduate Research and Taught Experience Surveys; it monitors the user surveys undertaken by professional service areas; and it is currently commissioning a study to strengthen the reliability of available feedback data. NSS results are widely promulgated, and discussed at all institutional levels. The University's approach to the NSS was found to be both comprehensive and, in that it has led to material benefits for students, practical. The University has already responded to the two postgraduate surveys by initiating a Postgraduate Research Student Society (see also paragraph 70), which will host an annual postgraduate research conference, and by planning a more strategic response to both surveys in future years. It was found that the University makes constructive use of national surveys and is generally effective in informing itself of, and responding to, students' views.

Role of students in quality assurance

36 As noted previously (see paragraph 34), the University has a well-developed student representative system, with representatives acting as a conduit for communication between course teams and students as well as representing their peers on course committees. In addition, one departmental representative is elected to sit on the Students' Union Council, thereby creating a formal link between student representation and the Students' Union. The system, which the University has reinvigorated following a Union review of representation, is supported by Student Services, the Union (which is responsible for training) and faculties, some of which have developed creative and innovative mechanisms to engage more effectively with student representatives. The audit team noted that while the student written submission stated that student attendance at committees is variable, numerous meeting records demonstrate that, while individual attendance might be described as such, student members are almost invariably present and appear to contribute to deliberations.

37 At institutional level all appropriate deliberative committees have student membership, either elected by the constituency or nominated by the President of the Union; this is also so at faculty and course levels. Students are not members of institutional-level review teams, though consideration is being given to their future inclusion and they serve on other institutional-level policy development and review groups. The University has effective arrangements for engaging students in quality management.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

38 The University currently supports research primarily through research centres, institutes and units: responsibility for these has been transferred to faculties, to strengthen the synergy between research and teaching. The University has also identified three integrative strands (Media, Children & Young People, and Health), intended to offer opportunities for inter-faculty research and teaching. The University is conscious of the need to develop its research profile, and commits itself (in its new Strategic Plan) to reviewing its organisation and support of research and (in its revised Learning and Teaching Strategy) to enhancing pedagogic excellence and fostering research supporting learning and teaching. All newly-appointed academic staff members are introduced to these commitments; the theme emerges in the Research & Graduate School's programme of support workshops for

researchers; and recent changes to promotion criteria for teaching staff bring additional encouragement for career development by pedagogic as well as discipline research.

39 The audit team noted that: recently-approved taught master's provision is rooted in areas of established research; at validation and review programme teams are required to identify how the curriculum draws on current research and scholarship; and fractional professional staff are regarded, by students as well as the University, as significant in introducing scholarship-through-practice, both in on-campus and collaborative provision. The University's taught degree provision was found to be properly research-informed, but likely to benefit from the more systematic approach currently under development.

Other modes of study

40 The University has no distance or online programmes. It has, however, invested heavily in its virtual learning environment (which currently supports over 80 per cent of modules, and about which students spoke generally positively); it views technology-enhanced learning as central to its longer-term pedagogy; it ensures that the minority of modules not supported by the virtual learning environment have some form of e-presence; it provides comprehensive training and support for staff and students through the Teaching and Learning Technology Centre; and it has recently taken steps to embed learning technology in institutional culture by creating a network of 24 academic staff to serve as blended learning coordinators within faculties. These arrangements, while in some cases still works in progress, were found to be contributing constructively to the management of learning opportunities.

41 Placements and work-based learning, ranging from short work experience to full placements, are features of many taught programmes: opportunities available to students include a University-wide placement learning module, delivered and supported by Student Services (Career Development and Employment). While the mode of support for placements and work-based learning varies, with some faculties having their own placement unit and others relying largely or wholly on Student Services, the audit team found that placement learning is well-managed, consistently mapped against the *Code of practice: Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*, and contributes appropriately to student learning.

Resources for learning

42 As noted previously, the University has, in spite of its large and increasing financial burden (see paragraph 6), invested heavily in its estate (paragraph 1), student record system (see paragraph 33) and virtual learning environment (see paragraph 40); it is responsive to feedback and all student services undertake user surveys, which are carefully monitored (see paragraph 35). The University has taken steps to ensure that senior Library staff and the Director of Information Systems and Services in particular sit on relevant institutional committees. The Library relies for user comments not only on traditional user surveys but on participation in a survey developed in the USA, which, while producing generally positive results, also identified areas for improvement. The audit team was informed that these are currently being addressed. In respect of information and communications technology, in spite of a number of improvements to the quality of service, the University has unfortunately yet to complete the integration of the systems of its two predecessor institutions.

43 The student written submission made critical comments about both the organisation and the quality of learning resources: these were investigated in the course of the audit. Aspects of timetabling and room allocation were subject to particular comment in the submission: the audit team confirms that there have been instances of incorrect timetabling

information and the assignment of inadequate teaching rooms. The University, while emphasising that the problem is atypical, acknowledges that there is scope for improvement and is currently exploring possible solutions or ameliorations. Some students also drew attention to the impact on support of the reduction in academic staff numbers, although scrutiny of course committee minutes, meetings with other students and the results of student surveys suggest that most students are broadly content with the support they receive.

44 Overall, while some learning resources are significantly stretched, the University is aware of and responsive to the problems arising. It has mechanisms to enable it to identify critical difficulties and apply remedial action, but has some way to go before it can state with confidence that its organisation of learning resources is wholly effective or that all such resources approach the quality of the best.

Admissions policy

45 The admission process is aligned with the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme, which in turn meets the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*. Applicants are aided by a website which provides comprehensive information and advice, including the minimum English language requirement. The process is managed centrally, with the Admissions Office authorised to make standard offers and applications from students with non-standard qualifications considered by the department concerned. Consistently with its focus on student success, retention and completion, the University now only admits students deemed capable of completing (as opposed to benefiting from) their chosen programme, and this has led to most entry requirements being raised. Standard offers are reviewed annually at both faculty and institutional levels, with further annual reviews of admissions undertaken on behalf of both Academic Development Committee and the Board of Governors.

Student support

46 While, under the two modular schemes, students enrol for a named award largely delivered within a single discipline area, the locus of responsibility for student support is the Scheme Office, which, through a network of local branches, deals with queries and handles all administrative functions from registration to appeals. Regulatory and other information of direct relevance to students is readily accessible on the intranet; students also receive comprehensive and consistent handbooks; programme specifications are embedded in course handbooks; and module handbooks make assessment criteria clear and unambiguous. The audit team confirms the student view that the handbooks and other information sources are helpful and sufficient for purpose.

47 The audit team learned that induction is generally well regarded by home students, but that its fitness for purpose for international students invites reflection. The team was told, however, that such reflection is already taking place, not only in respect of induction but more generally in terms of the institutional approach to curriculum design.

48 For undergraduates, academic guidance is provided by a personal academic adviser (for taught postgraduates this function is fulfilled by the course leader). Such advisers' extensive responsibilities range from advising on timetable and option choices to considering accreditation of prior learning applications, and from advising on resources available within the University to developing recovery plans for students in academic difficulty. The audit team heard that the role is increasingly interventionist with first-year students generally, while focusing particularly on those considered at risk of failure or withdrawal. Advisers receive regular and comprehensive data to facilitate attendance,

engagement and achievement tracking, and the team heard examples of such data being used constructively and proactively. The deployment of personal academic advisers and their regular use of diagnostic data to identify and support undergraduate students at academic risk constitute a feature of good practice.

49 In addition to a study skills module, compulsory under the Undergraduate Scheme, students experiencing academic difficulties currently (though this provision is under review) have access to support from the Writing Centre and the Learning Development Unit: the latter, which works with personal academic advisers to encourage early referral of at-risk students, offers workshops and drop-in advice on a wide range of topics. Further support is available from the Matrix-accredited Department of Student Services, which enjoys strong links with professional support and academic departments throughout the University, and provides advice ranging from finance to immigration, appeals to disability support, and accommodation to employment. The services provided by the Department, the activities of which have been mapped against the *Code of practice, Section 3: Disabled students* and *Section 8: Career education, information, advice and guidance*, attracted particularly positive student comment in audit meetings.

50 The audit team found not only that support services for students contribute significantly to meeting the goals of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, but also that the University has commissioned further work to enable it to develop this work further. The support provided for students throughout their membership of the University plays a central role in maintaining the quality of student learning opportunities.

Staff support (including staff development)

51 The new Strategic Plan emphasises the importance of staff development if the University's developing needs and priorities, now and in the future, are to be met. The University's commitment to staff development is well-established, and was identified as a feature of good practice in both the previous Institutional audit and collaborative audit. Evidence of the strategic approach taken by the University includes the fact that the Staff Development Unit produces an annual detailed staff development review, which considers the provision of development support during the year and makes use of data from faculty appraisals in order to plan support activity for the future.

52 Opportunities for staff development are available from a number of sources and take a number of forms. The audit team particularly noted: support for staff in developing learning materials for the virtual learning environment; programmes to support staff new to research or research supervision; a high-profile annual learning and teaching conference, which invites national figures for keynote input but involves University staff showcasing their own work; the constructive role of blended learning coordinators; learning and teaching fellowships; and a new promotion route to associate professor which recognises excellence and leadership in learning and teaching. The team considers that these initiatives have invigorated staff and are strengthening the University's pedagogy and overall culture of learning (see paragraph 56).

53 New members of academic staff are required to undertake a formal induction programme; staff new to teaching, including hourly-paid teaching staff and research students with teaching responsibilities but lacking prior experience, are required to take a Higher Education Academy-accredited programme, or modules thereof commensurate with their duties. New staff members are assigned an experienced colleague as probationary year mentor with clearly specified responsibilities. These arrangements were found to be satisfactory. While the audit team was initially concerned to read reports of students having difficulty understanding the language of some lecturing staff, when this issue was raised with

senior staff the team was informed that the staff members concerned had been identified and training provided. The team naturally hopes that these arrangements will resolve the issue, and expects the University, in making future staff appointments, to be alert to the importance of all lecturing staff having appropriate language skills.

54 Overall, confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of students' learning opportunities.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

55 The University's commitment to the centrality of quality enhancement is not new. Merging two former offices to create a Quality Enhancement Unit in 2009 constituted a major step towards rationalising procedures and harmonising practice, leading in particular to the introduction of faculty-based but centrally-managed quality officers to support consistency of practice and draw attention to areas where improved performance was required. At institutional level, the enhancement-focused activities in which the University engages include: the dissemination of good practice through Learning and Teaching Committee, Academic Development Committee and the Centre for Academic Practice and Development; the work of research centres and units; and the three interdisciplinary strands (see paragraph 38). Individual good practice by members of staff is identified mainly through publication, presentation, peer review and support and appraisal, and recognised through promotion or the conferment of professorial title, teaching fellowships and appraisal-related financial reward.

56 Acknowledging that these approaches would benefit from further coherence and systematisation, the University approved a Quality Enhancement Strategy in June 2010: this involves improving both institutional and student learning; the associated action plan is currently rolling out. So far as institutional learning is concerned, the University aims to embed a culture of learning both within and across faculties, particularly through encouraging pedagogic research, improving the dissemination of good practice and increasing student involvement in quality management. Improving student learning, an aspiration which draws directly on the revised Learning and Teaching Strategy, involves (in summary) transforming students into learning partners and increasing the creative and innovative aspects of the curriculum (with particular reference to e-learning and employability). This Strategy emphasises giving students maximum opportunity to study at a place and time of their own choosing. In aiming to engage fully with a digitised, distributed and mobile world it commits the University to developing e-learning as a key element of quality enhancement, and therefore to taking a blended approach to learning. While the audit team noted the synchronicity of the Quality Enhancement and Learning and Teaching Strategies, the recency of both means that it would be premature to predict their effectiveness in delivering such an ambitious pedagogy.

57 The University is well aware of the need to develop a more accurate and reliable means of capturing student numbers and profiles. It states, however, that it uses management information to support quality enhancement. The audit team, noting this claim, confirms that the University is taking measures to strengthen the utility of such information, and draws attention again to the effective provision of student data available to personal academic advisers, already identified as a feature of good practice (see paragraph 48).

58 The University is now taking wide-ranging and deliberate steps at institutional level to enhance quality. The audit team confirms that: the Quality Enhancement Strategy and associated Action Plan are consonant with the Learning and Teaching Strategy; both are increasingly embedded in business planning and quality processes; both put the student at the heart of the educational mission. Nevertheless, the Enhancement Strategy remains

embryonic, and, in spite of the sophistication of the data which the University produces in other contexts and for other purposes (see paragraph 30), the documentation available to the team suggests that appropriate quantitative measures have yet to be put in place to enable the University consistently to measure the effectiveness of the Strategy or to identify and eliminate areas of weakness. It is desirable that the University embed evaluation measures within its enhancement plans.

59 The University is committed to enhancing the learning opportunities of its students through a range of formal and informal processes based on a shared ethos.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

60 The University collaborates with 35 overseas and domestic partners in the delivery of some 140 programmes ranging from certificate to master's level. The portfolio is mainly inherited from the two predecessor institutions, with only a minority of partnerships initiated by the University. The strategic purposes of collaboration were described as: institutional reputation-building; creating pathways for students to continue their studies in London; promoting engagement with employers; generating income; and contributing to the diversity of the student population.

61 The University states and the audit team confirms (from documentary study, discussions with partner and University staff and students, and tracking the operation of the system) that the quality management of collaborative arrangements is closely aligned to that of on-campus provision. With very few negotiated exceptions, therefore, the system is as specified in Academic Regulations. Where additional considerations come into play - for example due diligence, institutional memoranda of agreements, institutional approval forms, course-level agreements and collaborative risk assessment forms - the key considerations (including compatibility, financial capability and integrity, termination, the academic qualifications of teaching staff and quality considerations) are comprehensively addressed in the approval process and associated conditions.

62 The audit team explored the measures taken to ensure the equity and security of assessment procedures. The team was told that: great care is taken to ensure that cross-border and identical assessments are sat at the same time; assessments devised by the partner organisation are formally approved by the University; samples of student work are second marked by University staff; external examiners are University appointees and trained accordingly; assessment boards are chaired by University staff; appeals follow on-campus procedures (complaints are resolved locally where possible, if necessary with the assistance of the liaison tutor); and, throughout, procedures are designed to ensure close alignment with institutional policy. The team confirms these claims on the basis of its study of all relevant regulatory, policy and procedural documents.

63 The audit team noted that: a statement of learning resources, including staffing and staff development, is included in all approval and re-approval documentation; these statements are comprehensive and well-aligned with on-campus arrangements and expectations; and learning resources are regularly monitored to ensure their continuing compliance with developing course needs and expectations. The University offers appropriate and realistic development opportunities to partner organisation staff, particular examples of which are: an annual Partnerships Day, at which University and partner staff discuss current and proposed developments and focus on a topical theme; and the academic liaison forums organised by the Quality Enhancement Unit, where liaison tutors, faculty quality representatives and partner staff meet to share knowledge and experiences. Overall, the team found the institutional approach to partner organisation staff development thoughtful and well-targeted.

64 The Collaborative Taught Provision Manual (see paragraph 12) specifies requirements in respect of the *Code of practice*, the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements and programme specifications. The audit team paid particular attention to institutional engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points with partners in countries where aspects of some subject benchmark statements might render their use problematic. In this connection liaison tutors informed the team that, while procedures exist to make use of local benchmarks, it has rarely if ever been necessary to do so. Overall, the team found strong evidence of engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in the University's collaborative arrangements.

65 In order to ensure that procedures are scrupulously followed, each partner is issued with the Collaborative Taught Provision Manual and assigned both an officer from the Quality Enhancement Unit and an appropriately qualified academic liaison tutor from the faculty or department concerned. The audit team heard that: monitoring and support are effected by regular visits to partner organisations by academic liaison officers; email contact between partners and the University is reliably sustained; and partner organisations' annual monitoring reports are increasingly complemented by programme and module logs. The team reviewed a number of such documents, and found them well-structured and self-evaluative. Nevertheless, noting also their breadth of scope, discursive nature and limited use of trends and comparisons, the team considers that, from the point of view of institutional management and enhancement of the collaborative portfolio, it is desirable for the University to strengthen internal quality reports by the inclusion of more quantitative data (see also paragraphs 58, 67, 71 and 76).

66 The audit team noted that, in parallel with on-campus arrangements, performance enhancement meetings are increasingly the vehicle for module monitoring and review, and that they are an effective means of addressing student feedback. Given the impact of such meetings on on-campus provision, where their use has been identified as a feature of good practice (see paragraph 21), the team considers this development has the potential in future to enhance students' learning opportunities.

67 The audit team learned, from liaison tutors, senior managers of partner organisations and students with experience of such organisations that: procedures for student representation largely mirror on-campus arrangements; other opportunities exist for students to provide informal as well as formal comment; all modules are subject to student feedback using a standard University template which can, however, be revised by agreement with the liaison tutor; and accordingly students who transfer to the University from collaborative organisations find their transition well-organised and facilitated by the similarity of procedures. Nevertheless, while the team found evidence of the use of student feedback to inform decision-making and, more broadly, evidence of enhanced learning opportunities in annual monitoring reports, the examples cited would have been strengthened had they been buttressed by more quantitative data.

68 The audit team found that in respect of all key processes concerning collaborative provision the University maintains an effective and integrated approach to the development, production, quality, accuracy and currency of information, publicity and marketing materials. Procedures for the approval of electronic and paper material produced by partners and both liaison tutors are clearly communicated, and partner staff state that the system is effective - a view confirmed by online and paper-based information, the reporting and actions listed in partners' annual monitoring reports, and discussion with students from partner organisations.

69 Overall, the audit team found evidence of the University's effective management of collaborative provision: collaborative arrangements are well-articulated, understood, practised and reviewed, and the system is appropriately aligned with the *Code of practice*,

Section 2. The University's integrative approach to developing and managing collaborative provision is a feature of good practice.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

70 In March 2009 the University noted, and took action in relation to, a low timely completion rate among research students. At that time, the management of research degree programmes was dispersed, with seven research student progress groups operating outside the then departmental system responsible for the University's 450 research students (of whom almost one-third are reading for professional doctorates). Following the 2009 report, such groups were relocated within faculties and the Research & Graduate School was instituted. The audit team found that this change has contributed to: improving inter and intra-faculty communication about research; increasing the number of research active staff; reinforcing scholarly activity; and enriching student learning. In addition, and as noted previously (see paragraph 35), the School has instituted a Postgraduate Research Student Society. While participation to date is modest, this appears to be a positive development with potential for future growth.

71 This reorganisation of the management of research students has led the University to claim to have a 'vibrant and pervasive research culture': the audit team, while confirming that progress has been made towards developing such a culture, and noting both that the number of supervisors is increasing and that the breadth of supervisors' expertise is appreciated by students, takes the view, on the basis of its own analysis of the available data, that this claim is as yet aspirational. Research students described the physical environment in which they work as varying between 'world-class' and 'quite the opposite' (a comment buttressed by the results of the 2009 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey; see also paragraph 35); it was said, however, to be more often than not conducive to study. The team considers that the University, in attempting to demonstrate both internally and to the outside world the value of investment in research and scholarship, would find it helpful to include relevant quantitative data in its planned data dashboard.

72 The clear and accurate Research & Graduate School website provides comprehensive guidance for potential students: the audit team particularly noted the useful information about possible supervisors, and the provision of contact details of individuals able to respond to queries. Students spoke well of admission and induction: although the adequacy of the cultural introduction for some international students was gently questioned, the team found the needs of such students and how to address them well covered in the Handbook for Supervisors.

73 Supervision is undertaken by teams of two or three, the University taking this opportunity to blood new supervisors and expand the influence of research across faculties. The respective roles of supervisory team members, including the Director of Studies (responsible for ensuring progress review, preparing annual reports and overseeing adjustments to the work plan), are clearly articulated in a well-regarded Code of Practice, as are many other facets of the research student experience. Timetabled supervision sessions (the key points arising from which are recorded by students) are supplemented by email and telephone contacts as necessary: understandably part-time students saw these latter arrangements as particularly helpful. While research students who met the audit team expressed the view in passing that some of their colleagues would have benefited from being 'pushed harder', their overall positive view of supervisory arrangements (which extends to the administrative support provided by the Graduate School Research Office) is consistent with the results of external and internal survey data.

74 The Researcher Development Programme web pages list a range of events, past and future, covering many aspects of skills and knowledge: the audit team considers these events appropriate to the different levels of research student. The University also makes available several commercially-available software tools designed to help students develop their professional skills and approach to research. While usage of some of these software packages is variable, overall the team considers the opportunities for research students to develop their skills a growing institutional strength.

75 The Vice-Chancellor's PhD Scholarship Scheme, established in academic year 2009-2010, requires scholars to undertake up to six hours of teaching-related duties weekly. They are also required, in association with this, to take the Learning and Teaching Practice course. Although the audit team was initially uncertain that this was so (the available documentation was unclear, and some staff referred to what was available rather than what was required), senior staff confirmed that some training is also mandatory for all research students with teaching responsibilities.

76 A range of formal and informal methods is deployed to receive, consider and respond to research students' feedback, including progress reports, formal and informal complaints, supervisions, and communication with the Research Office: these methods are described in course handbooks and committee minutes. The audit team considers the University effective in handling and responding both to day-to-day feedback and to recurrent issues demanding a more strategic approach. The main channels for collating, evaluating and responding to internal and external feedback are: module and course logs; research student progress groups; Research Degrees Committee; and, ultimately, Academic Board. The team confirms the effectiveness of these arrangements, but notes again that they would be strengthened were greater consideration given to quantitative data on the nature of the feedback received and the strength and frequency with which it was made.

77 In summary, while the Research & Graduate School faces challenges in what may be difficult years ahead, the audit team concludes that the University has increasingly strong and generally sound systems and procedures to develop the research and other skills of postgraduate research students. The team confirms that the University has put in place effective procedures for the management of its research programmes, which meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 7: Published information

78 Published information relevant to this audit is of three main kinds: regulatory or similar material relating to quality and standards; institutional profiling; and student achievement and other quantitative data. The University, which acknowledges that it does not have a consolidated information management strategy, is currently undertaking an institution-wide project to collate these disparate sources of information, set out a formal process of information management, and ensure that all published information is definitive and current.

79 The Director of Marketing and Communications has overall responsibility for the content and style of the website; the Planning Office is responsible for producing data for returns to the Higher Education Statistics Agency; Information Systems and Services provides technical support. The Information Security Committee, chaired by the University Secretary and reporting to Audit Committee, oversees the Information Protection (Security) Policy, which vests responsibility for ensuring that all information under their control is securely held and properly managed by heads of department. In addition, each faculty and professional service department has a nominated content provider charged with ensuring that web-related responsibilities are properly discharged. Students who met the audit team,

while drawing attention to specific omissions (the cause of which was found on investigation to lie outside the University's control), were generally satisfied with the accuracy and completeness of published information.

80 The University's central document management system serves as the repository of definitive programme and module specifications; extracts from module specifications are placed on the website to provide outline information for students, potential applicants and others; programme specifications appear consistently in course handbooks: like other information for students these are constructed on standard templates and double-checked by the Academic Registry.

81 It is confirmed that the externally available information required by the Higher Education Funding Council for England guidelines is published on the University's website, and that the teaching quality information on the Unistats website appears accurate and complete.

82 Overall the audit found that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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