



# Institutional audit

**City University London**

DECEMBER 2008

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## Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To this end, QAA carries out institutional audits of higher education institutions.

In England and Northern Ireland, QAA conducts institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector, to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council in England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations to assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills (now the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills). It was revised in 2006 following recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, a representative group established to review the structures and processes of quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland, and evaluate the work of QAA.

Institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. It forms part of the Quality Assurance Framework established in 2002 following revisions to the United Kingdom's approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aim of the revised institutional audit process is to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges of higher education in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of:

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner
- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications
- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and feedback from stakeholders.

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes
- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research

- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

If the audit includes the institution's collaborative provision the judgements and comments also apply unless the audit team considers that any of its judgements or comments in respect of the collaborative provision differ from those in respect of the institution's 'home' provision. Any such differences will be reflected in the form of words used to express a judgement or comment on the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

### **Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex**

The reports of quality audits have to be useful to several audiences. The revised Institutional audit process makes a clear distinction between that part of the reporting process aimed at an external audience and that aimed at the institution. There are three elements to the reporting:

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students
- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences
- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (*Institutional audit handbook: England and Northern Ireland 2006* - Annexes B and C refer).

## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited City University London (the University) from 8 to 12 December 2008 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.

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

In Institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the United Kingdom (UK). The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for the students.

### 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 provision
- 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 audit found the University's commitment to quality enhancement evident in a number of activities; it found also that these activities would benefit from greater coordination and that there is in particular scope for the more effective dissemination of good practice.

### Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit found the supervision and support arrangements for postgraduate research students at City University London are satisfactory and meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*.

### Published information

The audit found that reliance can largely be placed on the accuracy of the information the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards, but that some aspects of version control and accuracy would benefit from management attention.

### Features of good practice

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

- the innovative use of educational balance sheets to assist the University's educational planning and as an aid to communication with members of the University Council
- the contribution made by the school-based educational development associates to institution-wide developments in support of good academic practice

- the quality management processes for validated provision, with particular reference to the use of external advisers and the annual meetings with students
- the recent emphasis on constructive dialogue with students, as exemplified in the strengthening of student representation on the Student Affairs Committee.

### **Recommendations for action**

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

- ensure that feedback to students on their assessed work is consistently timely and effective in supporting learning.

It would be desirable for the University:

- to systematically to disseminate the lessons and good practice identified through its quality management processes
- to consistently analyse and use management information to inform decision-making and action-planning in its institutional-level academic deliberative structures
- to continue to move towards convergence of its collaborative provision processes for validation and partnership
- to satisfy itself that all published information, including that which is online, is accurate, accessible and current.

### **Reference points**

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure which provides a means of describing academic standards in UK higher education. It allows for diversity and innovation within academic programmes offered by higher education. QAA worked with the higher education sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure which are:

- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, (Code of practice)*
- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

The audit found that the University took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

## Report

### Preface

1 An Institutional audit of City University London (the University) was undertaken in the week commencing 8 December 2008. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Professor E Evans, Ms H Johnson, Professor T Moscovitch and Professor I Robinson, auditors, and Ms S Welham, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor R Harris, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

### Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The institution was founded in 1894 and awarded University status in 1966. Subsequently it has significantly expanded its educational provision, particularly through institutional amalgamations in the fields of health and law. The University is based on a number of sites; it has some 13,000 full-time equivalent students, two-thirds of them undergraduates, and 780 academic staff, who are supported and complemented by a larger number of visiting and support personnel. It prides itself on its close links to the City of London, branding itself 'the university for business and the professions', a focus reflected in almost all its core activities. Over two-thirds of its programmes are subject to external accreditation, and many students undertake work placements.

4 Since the last Institutional audit, in 2004, considerable structural change has taken place: a number of key posts have been recently or newly created, as has the committee structure. The Vice-Chancellor, who has been responsible for introducing a number of these changes, took up office in August 2007, and the key post Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), became full-time in August 2008. The University has approved a new and, in the audit team's view, ambitious Strategic Plan and Learning and Teaching Strategy, designed, among other things, to align the University with a range of international developments. It will be a recurrent theme of this report that the roles and practices involved in implementing the many changes taking place have yet to be fully embedded in day-to-day operations.

5 As Chief Executive Officer, the Vice-Chancellor is supported by three deputies, of whom one, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) has executive responsibility for almost all matters with which the present audit is concerned. Executive Committee, an advisory body to the Vice-Chancellor, is made up of the University's senior managers; Senate, as the University's supreme academic body, operates on the basis of delegated authority from Council.

6 Academically the University is structured around seven schools, each of which was, at the time of the audit, headed by a dean, supported by senior office-holders, who include an associate dean of learning and teaching. All schools have a broadly similar suite of deliberative committees, invariably headed by a board of studies responsible for academic quality and standards and reporting to Senate. The existence of strong, diverse, schools operating within what was, in the course of the audit, authoritatively described as a 'plural university', is central to its structure and culture. There are in addition a Dean of Students (whose remit includes quality enhancement, appeals, complaints and disciplinary matters for students on collaborative as well as internal programmes) and a Dean of Validation, both of whom report to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education).

7 The Academic Development Unit, instituted in April 2008 and whose Head also reports to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), has a remit covering most aspects of quality management and the framework for managing academic standards; it advises both Senate (and its constituent committees) and schools. Its duties include overseeing the University's three main handbooks, all of which the audit team found to be competent and accessible.

8 The University operates a limited amount of collaborative provision, which functions on the basis that the quality and academic standards of the awards made there must at least match those of internal programmes.

9 The University's previous Institutional audit resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the University's management of the quality of its academic programmes and the standards of its awards. The audit identified six areas of good practice and made three recommendations, relating to the consistency of communication with students; student representation; and arrangements for supporting and developing visiting lecturers. The present audit found considerable efforts had been made in all these areas, particularly since the arrival of the new Vice-Chancellor, although the University accepts that feedback to students on assessed work requires further attention (see paragraph 28).

## **Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards**

10 Programme approval is a two-stage process. It begins with the identification, at school level or below, of activities with the potential to be developed into academic programmes, and proceeds with detailed sequential scrutiny of proposals at school and institution level, invariably involving a minimum of one external expert. The audit team found that the documentation is appropriate and comprehensive, that institutional procedures are followed, and that second-stage scrutiny involves extensive and fruitful debate. While a review of approval procedures is planned for the current academic year with a view to procedural enhancement, present programme approval procedures are thorough, appropriate and reflective.

11 Annual programme evaluation requires schools to reflect on a wide range of programme and course-level data, as well as student information. After detailed consideration at school level, Academic Development Unit produces a summary report for the Academic Practice, Programmes and Standards Committee. The University specifies issues for consideration in detail; in that these issues do not include the consideration of statistical information on the outcome of student feedback questionnaires, they have not as yet fulfilled their potential contribution to the management of quality and standards. Overall, however, the audit team found the process appropriate and rigorous.

12 Periodic programme review, which operates on a five or six-year cycle, has clear and proper objectives. The audit team found proper procedures were followed; reports made detailed, relevant and constructive comments and were discussed at school and institutional level; and responses and action plans were submitted and followed to completion. The process is currently under review, with the aims of achieving closer alignment with institutional strategic planning and making better use of external and student contributions. The audit found the University's willingness to engage in constructive reflection constitutes encouraging evidence of a self-evaluative enhancement-oriented approach.

13 Internal academic audit, conducted by the Academic Development Unit, is designed to enable the University to assure itself of the consistency and effectiveness with which schools implement strategy and academic policy. The audit team found that this process is rigorous and meets its objective.

14 The audit found the approval and review process as a whole is thorough and appropriately engaged with the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. Nevertheless, the University may wish to keep the cumulative impact of the process on all staff under review.

15 Each award-bearing programme has at least one external examiner, who may be a suitably qualified industry professional. On appointment, all external examiners receive a briefing pack; those new to the role also receive, on request, a face-to-face introduction. The audit team found that, while these procedures are generally satisfactory, there is some scope for greater systematisation. The comprehensive External Examiner's Handbook is regularly updated.

16 External examiners' reports, the contents of which are overwhelmingly favourable, are presented on a standard template. This template is particularly thoughtful, not least in its encouragement of the identification of good practices. Institutional procedures for receiving, addressing and responding to external examiners' reports were found to be appropriate in design and conscientiously followed; there was evidence of such reports leading to institutional policy development.

17 The recent introduction of PRISM, an internally-produced software package designed to manage all programme information, is intended to facilitate the publication of all programme specifications on the University website. The audit team found that this process, which has not been straightforward, remains incomplete, and that a number of steps have still to be taken before accurate and complete information is available.

18 The fact that many programmes are subject to professional and other forms of accreditation ensures that the University engages with a range of external reference points: the audit found it scrupulous in doing so. Nevertheless, in that most such reports are considered only at school level, introducing a greater element of institutional deliberation would increase the University's capacity to identify and address any cross-school issues arising.

19 Overall, while noting a number of unresolved technical issues, the audit team found that the University engages constructively with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points.

20 Institutional assessment regulations were found to be comprehensive, properly documented and well understood by students. The University has recently approved revised regulations, developed with appropriate student involvement. These are clear, potentially beneficial and a logical development of an already sound structure, in that they are designed to provide consistent advice to all schools and assessment boards. Overall, the University's assessment policies and regulations are effective in assuring the maintenance of academic standards.

21 The University has pursued various initiatives to develop its capacity for producing and considering management information on student admission, progression and completion; most recently it has adopted a single data source, tracking students from admission to award. It acknowledges, however, that this system has some way to go before it produces data of such a quality as can reliably inform decision-making.

22 The University has recently introduced a system of educational balance sheets, produced as reports to provide qualitative as well as quantitative information on the academic and financial health of specified aspects of educational provision. It considers these particularly useful in giving Council a rounded appreciation of institutional activity. The audit team found that the use of educational balance sheets, both in assisting educational planning and as an aid to communication with members of Council, is a feature of good practice.

23 The University, while stating that it has made significant progress in the use of management information, acknowledges that further work is required to develop a comprehensive framework through which to analyse it. The audit team confirms that such data could be compiled more systematically and used to better effect. External examiners have also drawn attention to problems of information deployment at assessment boards.

24 Overall, the audit team found that a more strategic approach to the use of information would support the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and that in the light of recent developments the University could usefully update its Management Information Strategy. It would be desirable for the University consistently to analyse and use management information to inform decision-making and action-planning in its institutional-level academic deliberative structures.

25 Nevertheless, from its overall analysis of relevant indicators, the audit team found that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

### Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

26 The University stresses that its 'plural' nature means that students' educational experience will differ by campus and discipline. It identified the Annual Report on Quality and Standards as a significant feature of quality management and enhancement; this view was confirmed in the audit.

27 The University gathers data from students by means of module feedback, institutional surveys of identified groups and the National Student Survey. In the academic year 2006-07, it piloted a revised feedback framework, which aims to provide a common data set and to specify procedures for considering and acting upon the outcome. It has also instituted a mechanism to facilitate the consideration of National Student Survey results. This process, together with a consolidated report of all schools' feedback gathering, was found to facilitate the identification of themes potentially requiring attention.

28 The audit found that these new mechanisms have the potential to help the University respond constructively to student views. Nevertheless, the issue of the timeliness and effectiveness of feedback to students on assessed work identified in the previous audit remains unresolved, albeit that the University has identified it as a priority action area. It is advisable for the University to ensure that feedback to students on their assessed work is consistently timely and effective in supporting learning.

29 The University regards student representation as a core feature of its committee structure, and has taken steps to strengthen it since its last institutional audit. Of particular value, have been the supportive and advisory work of the Academic Development Unit and the establishment of the Student Affairs Committee, a body that has directly strengthened the student voice. The recent emphasis on constructive dialogue, as exemplified in the strengthening of student representation on the Student Affairs Committee, is a feature of good practice.

30 The University's engagement with business and the professions often involves the use of placements, internships or work experience. The audit team found that the University is fully alert to, and has considered the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. In addition, several schools offer flexible learning opportunities: these are approved, managed and reviewed in the same way as mainstream provision. While the team found that the quality of student support for distance learners had been raised as an issue in some schools, with minor and remediable exceptions, flexible learning arrangements reflect the *Code of practice*.

31 The Learning Development Centre provides and promotes the delivery of innovative education, particularly in respect of e-learning and flexible delivery. The Centre works closely with schools, each of which has an e-learning champion, and with the Research Development Unit, with which it hosts events on education research. Available developmental opportunities include an online tutoring course, advice on such matters as creating an online community, and an annual E-Learning Champions Showcase, in which e-learning champions disseminate their experiences and techniques. The audit team found several examples of research contributing directly to the development of learning opportunities.

32 The University's investment in its learning infrastructure includes a major classroom refurbishment project. Nevertheless, given its dispersed physical character, the University faces difficulties in providing leading-edge facilities on an equitable basis, and the audit team found that some students consider it has some way to go before it can be said to have done so. Students stressed, both in meetings and in their written submission, that experiences vary considerably by site. While the University explained how it had responded to criticisms, and while it is accepted that some areas subject to criticism are not amenable to speedy solutions, the University will wish to continue reflecting on its systems for ensuring equity of support and access to learning opportunities for students across all sites.

33 The University's Admission Policy provides an overall statement of requirements, supplemented or interpreted for particular programmes. At the time of the audit, the University had just completed a review of this area to ensure that it both reflects current policies and reflects the *Code of practice*. In reviewing current admissions procedures, while the audit team found them generally satisfactory, they did not appear to have been significantly aided by the institutional-level use of statistical data or other management information. This appears to be a missed opportunity, and it is desirable for the University consistently to analyse and use such information to inform decision-making and action-planning in its institutional-level academic deliberative structures.

34 The Student Centre is the hub for student services, including accommodation, financial advice, support for students with special needs and international student support. Student advisers function as gatekeepers to a variety of services; international student advisers support the Strategy for Internationalisation. The Student Support Strategy was under review at the time of the audit, when it appeared likely that it would be embedded in the Learning and Teaching Strategy. This Strategy in turn is linked to the wider environment, in particular the University's engagement with business and the professions.

35 The University considers personal tutoring for all undergraduate and taught postgraduate students central to supporting learning opportunities. A review undertaken in academic year 2007-08, however, which highlighted variability of practice, led to a wide-ranging debate culminating in a decision to support personal tutoring by additional training and time allocation. The University's responsiveness to the review, and the energy with which the topic has been pursued, are notable.

36 Personal development planning is a strong element of many professionally orientated programmes; more generally, the University has established a technical infrastructure to support it, and aims, in the longer term, to embed personal development planning in the curricula.

37 The University has appointed a member of each school as an educational development associate. Educational development associates are charged with enhancing good academic practice, with particular reference to assessment design and the avoidance of academic misconduct, and, increasingly, developing good assessment practices. Already they have introduced a number of innovations, and their contribution to institution-wide developments in support of good academic practice constitutes a feature of good practice.

38 In terms of human resources, the University has revised its arrangements for reward, appraisal and competence assessment; introduced a revised appraisal scheme; and begun to review its procedures for academic promotion, recruitment, leadership and management development. It considers staff development plays a significant role in supporting research, scholarly activity and student learning opportunities and the links among them, and has a well-established Staff Development Policy explained in a comprehensive handbook.

39 The induction of new academic staff takes place mainly within schools, although those new to teaching are encouraged to participate in the modular MA Academic Practice, which covers a range of topics, and offers opportunities to contribute to curriculum development and to research one area of practice. The audit found that, in spite of recent promising trends, the participation rate remains variable, and that most participants complete only the Certificate. The Teaching Observation Policy requires schools to establish a teaching observation scheme; it expects all probationary staff to be observed. The audit team, noting that one school has taken an initiative to increase the participation rate among lower scoring lecturers, encourages the University to include consideration of this initiative as it develops its policy.

## **Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement**

40 Quality enhancement is central to the Learning and Teaching Strategy and Good Practice Policy; it is embedded in annual programme evaluation, periodic programme review and all main committees' terms of reference. The Learning and Teaching Awards Scheme rewards staff who demonstrate innovation in learning and teaching; the Learning Development Centre is responsible for supporting the dissemination of good practice; and the Academic Development Unit encourages a range of enhancement-orientated activities. At school level, boards of studies 'assure and enhance academic quality' and both the Associate Dean Learning and Teaching and the Educational Development Associate (see paragraph 37) are charged with supporting enhancement.

41 The audit team found a number of instances of innovation and other good practice that had proved beneficial and had contributed to enhancing students' learning opportunities. These include annual programme evaluation reports; school-level e-learning champions; the extensive use of external (professional) advisory panels; improvements in supporting research student supervisor development; and providing students with better email facilities.

42 While the audit team confirms the University's view that the Annual Report on Quality and Standards contributes significantly to quality enhancement, it also found that in some respects it has yet to realise its potential. In particular, and in spite of the University's efforts as a whole, because the minutes of the Academic Practice, Programmes and Standards Committee meetings, where the reports are considered, do not reflect the depth of the discussion which has taken place, the opportunity to recognise, coordinate, and further share excellence in learning and teaching is not always taken. It would be desirable for the University systematically to disseminate the lessons and good practice identified through its quality management processes.

43 While student progression, retention and performance data is managed almost exclusively by schools, the introduction of educational balance sheets brings such data to senior managers' attention, with the result that it is considered in the annual planning round. Although student performance now receives an appropriate level of executive consideration, the University may wish to reflect further on whether its procedures would be enhanced were its deliberative committees also to consider this data.

44 The University has initiated cross-institutional thematic reviews in areas including personal tutoring and the Classroom Experience Initiative; it has also initiated major reviews of both undergraduate and postgraduate education, which have the potential to lead to significant enhancements. Such initiatives represent deliberate institutional-level steps to enhance the quality of the student learning experience.

45 The University has established robust quality management processes, which routinely consider matters pertaining to the enhancement of student learning: enhancement is truly embedded within the deliberative structure. Nevertheless, these processes focus more on addressing and closing down issues of concern than on the coordination and dissemination of good practice. Accordingly, while the University's commitment to quality enhancement is evident, its activities would benefit from greater coordination and a clearer focus on dissemination.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

46 The University's preference is for selecting collaborative partners whose institutional goals reflect its own; it is therefore particularly attracted to working with London-based institutions and/or those with a business or professional orientation. The audit team noted a number of creative initiatives in the pursuit of these goals, some of them exceptional: for example, one external examiner described a validation arrangement leading to professional doctorates at a prestigious specialist partner institution as 'a model of enlightened collaboration between the University and the conservatoires'.

47 The University operates two types of collaborative provision: validation (involving eight partner organisations and around 2000 students) and partnerships (involving some 600 students on joint programmes, franchises and articulated arrangements). In both cases, students receive a University award, although validated institutions are permitted considerably more freedom in programme planning and design.

48 The University's Validation Policy is clearly and comprehensively articulated in the Validation and Institutional Partnerships Handbook, a document the audit found exemplary. Executive responsibility for collaborative arrangements is clearly articulated and understood; the relevant institutional-level deliberative body is the Validation and Institutional Partnerships Committee. At programme level, deliberative responsibility lies with the course board, chaired by a senior member of University staff and comprising both members of the University and validated institution staff, and an external adviser of distinction in the discipline. Such advisers were found to add value to quality management and enhancement.

49 In addition to operating normal feedback procedures, the University holds an annual meeting with students at each collaborating institution to discuss their experiences and enable them to draw any issues to its attention. Reports from these meetings serve as a basis for discussion with the institution, and the audit team found that these reports have improved the quality of learning opportunities in some programmes. Especially, though not exclusively, in the light of this and the preceding paragraph, the team considers the University's quality management processes for validated provision, with particular reference to the use of external advisers and the annual meetings with students, a feature of good practice.

50 The audit team involved a close scrutiny of the University's dual-track collaborative provision policy for validated and partnership provision, and found that to move towards convergence would both simplify and strengthen the process. Accordingly, and noting in particular that the University has recently adopted a unified initial selection procedure for collaborative arrangements, it is desirable for the University to continue to move towards convergence of its collaborative provision processes for validation and partnership.

51 The assessment procedures required of collaborative institutions match those applicable in internal provision. While these procedures are robust, the difficulties experienced in providing timely and high-quality assessment feedback to internal students (paragraph 28) often apply here too. On a collaboration-specific issue, it was noted that the University does not require the imposition of standard penalties for late or non-submission of work. Although this can be a delicate matter, the University will wish to assure itself as to the consistency and equity of its internal and collaborative systems as a whole, and, therefore, to keep the matter under continuing review.

52 The audit team found a number of examples of the dissemination of good practice, but confirms the University's view that the potential exists for a more strategic approach to be taken. In particular, a comparative analysis of student data between collaborative and internal provision could yield helpful information.

53 The University has clear expectations of partner institutions in respect of staff development (and makes some of its own provision available to staff in such institutions), but recognises that, particularly in respect of non-validation partnerships, a review of its present arrangements would be beneficial. The audit team findings support this view.

54 The audit team confirms that collaborative provision arrangements are 'equitable' to those for internal provision, a noteworthy achievement given the complexity of some validated programmes, and meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

## **Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students**

55 The Review of research degree programmes, published by QAA in 2006 confirmed the University's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of provision. The University has since taken steps to address the report's one recommendation (to monitor the volume of supervisory responsibilities and the new supervisory training programme), and has begun to explore the provision of further development opportunities for early career research staff and students.

56 The framework considered by the review changed significantly following institutional restructuring in 2008, although it retains a number of previously well-established procedures to which the Research Studies Handbook makes periodic reference. The University will doubtless continue to exercise appropriate oversight of its research environment and the quality of the research student experience.

57 Application and admission procedures for research students are clear, appropriate and comprehensive. Registration normally takes place during a biannual induction event, which complements the main school-based programme. A guide, summarising and signposting appropriate procedural and support information, has proved so helpful to new students that the University plans to produce a parallel version for staff. Detailed regulations exist concerning the appointment of external examiners, the submission of theses, the conduct of the viva voce examinations, complaints and appeals. All procedures and regulations appear appropriate, and are conscientiously followed.

58 The University maintains and updates a register of approved supervisors. It distinguishes between experienced and inexperienced supervisors, requiring all supervisory teams to contain at least one experienced supervisor. It has clear requirements or expectations in matters such as the frequency and recording of supervisory meetings, progress monitoring and review, and transfers to PhD and writing-up status. A strong supervisory structure exists for first-year students; all research students are encouraged to record their progress on a template learning agreement.

59 School senior tutors are responsible for preparing an annual evaluation of research degree programmes for the school board of studies and, ultimately, the Academic Practice, Programmes and Standards Committee. The audit team found that, in that these evaluations identify both aspects of good practice and matters requiring remediation, some of them quite sensitive, they show schools to be appropriately self-aware. Nevertheless, as with the annual reports on Quality and Standards discussed earlier (paragraph 42), the team was unable to find evidence from the minutes that any potential lessons are formally considered, with solutions consistently identified and acted upon.

60 The audit team found that the supervision and support arrangements for postgraduate research students at City University London meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

## **Section 7: Published information**

61 The University has clear procedures and lines of responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of institutional-level materials for both internal and collaborative programmes. Although the large majority of published information, whether electronic or hard copy, is satisfactory, significant sections of the Teaching Quality Information on the Unistats website are unavailable or incomplete, and the University website contains inconsistencies in regard to programme specifications. The University is encouraged to give further consideration to this issue.

62 Students' views differ as to the accuracy of information relating to their learning opportunities, particularly concerning details of facilities available on different campuses. While the audit team found that the information provided is strictly correct, published materials have not always communicated effectively with a diverse and dispersed student population, and it

would be desirable for the University to satisfy itself that all published information, including that which appears online, is accurate, accessible and current.

63 The audit team found that reliance can largely be placed on the accuracy of the information the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards, but that aspects of version control and accuracy would benefit from management attention.

## **Section 8: Recommendations and features of good practice**

64 As a result of its investigations the audit team found that:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its provision
- 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.

### **Features of good practice**

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

- the innovative use of educational balance sheets, to assist the University's educational planning and as an aid to communication with members of the University Council (paragraph 22)
- the recent emphasis on constructive dialogue with students, as exemplified in the strengthening of student representation on the Student Affairs Committee (paragraph 29)
- the contribution made by the school-based educational development associates to institution-wide developments in support of good academic practice (paragraph 37)
- the quality management processes for validated provision, with particular reference to the use of external advisers and the annual meetings with students (paragraph 49).

### **Recommendations for action**

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

- ensure that feedback to students on their assessed work is consistently timely and effective in supporting learning (paragraph 28).

67 It would be desirable for the University:

- consistently to analyse and use management information to inform decision-making and action-planning in its institutional-level academic deliberative structures (paragraphs 24, 33)
- systematically to disseminate the lessons and good practice identified through its quality management processes (paragraph 42)
- to continue to move towards convergence of its collaborative provision processes for validation and partnership (paragraph 50)
- to satisfy itself that all published information, including that which is online, is accurate, accessible and current (paragraph 62).

## Appendix

### City University London's response to the Institutional audit report

City University London welcomes the outcome of the Institutional audit and is pleased that QAA is able to place confidence in our current and likely future management of academic standards and the learning opportunities that are available to students. The positive nature of the report is reflected in the examples of good practice highlighted and the limited number of recommendations that have been outlined. We are particularly pleased that QAA has acknowledged our approach to ensure that we have open and constructive dialogue with students at both at City and in partner institutions. Additionally, we were glad to note the continuing positive comments made in relation to our approach to the management of validated provision at other institutions and especially our Validation and Institutional Partnerships Handbook which was acknowledged as 'exemplary'.

The outcomes of the audit process reflect the commitment of City University London staff and students, and the hard work that has been undertaken at all levels of the University to ensure that we continue to provide the most effective and highest quality of learning experience.

Reassuringly, the one advisable recommendation - that the University 'ensure that feedback to students on their assessed work is consistently timely and effective in supporting learning' - had already been identified by the University and as such was highlighted in our Learning and Teaching Strategy Operational Plan for 2008-09. At the time of the audit, work on this action was already underway and it has continued in 2009. The four desirable recommendations that QAA has identified also accord with this plan and therefore are supportive of ongoing activity.

A number of other helpful reflections and observations have been indicated within the audit report and the University will consider these points in more detail and incorporate them into our action plan for 2009-10, as appropriate. The outcome of the audit has been positive, and has reinforced our confidence in the approach that we take to the management of academic quality, standards and the enhancement of learning opportunities. We will continue to maintain these high standards so as to support our students in receiving a high quality educational experience at City University London.

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