



# **City University London**

Institutional Review  
by the Quality Assurance Agency  
for Higher Education

October 2012

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## About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at City University London. The review took place on 15-19 October 2012 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Emeritus Professor Richard Allen
- Professor Fiona Church
- Mr Ray Farmer
- Mr James Canty (student reviewer)
- Mrs Alison Jones (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by City University London and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report, the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on:
  - threshold academic standards<sup>1</sup>
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the information provided about learning opportunities
  - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- provides commentaries on the theme topic
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the [key findings](#) can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

In reviewing City University London, the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The chosen theme is Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>2</sup> Background information about City University London is given at the end of this report. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for [Institutional Review](#) of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland<sup>3</sup> and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

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<sup>1</sup> For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx)

## Key findings

This section summarises the QAA review team's key findings about City University London (the University).

### QAA's judgements about City University London

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at City University London.

- Academic standards at the University **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.
- Information about learning opportunities produced by the University **meets UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at City University London.

- The University's system for the analysis of external examiners' reports by Academic Services and its ability to prompt action by programme teams (paragraph 1.2.4).
- The proactive approach to student engagement and the effective contribution of students to quality assurance (paragraph 2.3.5).
- The use of Student Ambassadors to facilitate student engagement and widening participation activities in local schools, and the activities of 'student buddies' at induction to support new students (paragraph 2.5.3).
- The University's holistic approach to employability, bringing together careers advice, placement, personal development planning and skills development (paragraph 2.7.6).
- The targeted and systematic mechanisms which provide students with evidence of actions taken in response to their feedback (paragraph 4.4).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team **makes the following recommendations** to City University.

- Further develop its use of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* so that the outcomes at each level of a programme and the requirements for progression from level to level are explicit; the process to achieve this to be defined not later than the start of the 2013-2014 academic year and implementation to be completed within that year (paragraph 1.1.2).
- Revise its process for the management of amendments to programmes at School and University levels by March 2013, to provide greater clarity in the definitions and ensure that the Education Committee is fully informed of such changes to ensure effective oversight (paragraph 1.4.6).
- Make explicit the relation of programmes to subject benchmark statements at approval and review by the start of the next academic year (paragraph 1.5.2).

- Introduce a requirement for postgraduate research students and/or teaching assistants in all Schools to undertake adequate and appropriate preparation prior to commencement of teaching by March 2013, and ensure that all postgraduate research students who teach have undergone such preparation by the start of the next academic year (paragraph 2.1.4).
- Undertake an effective analysis of the performance of students with disabilities as part of formal monitoring by the start of the next academic year (paragraph 2.8.4).
- Ensure that all programmes involving a collaborative partner are formally recorded on the institution's collaborative provision database by March 2013 (paragraph 2.11.9).
- Strengthen the process for managing the quality of information produced about its partnership provision by March 2013 (paragraph 2.11.11).
- Strengthen its mechanisms for the management of quality and standards within partnerships in Schools and oversight of partnerships at University level by the start of the next academic year (paragraph 2.11.13).

## Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following actions** that City University London is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The work in progress by the University to ensure the effectiveness and timeliness of feedback on assessment (paragraph 1.3.6).
- The University's plans to ensure School and Students' Union representatives are formal members of the Equality Committee (paragraph 2.8.1).
- The development of the Academic Partnerships Coordinators' Forum to increase the consistency of approach to the management of the quality and standards of the University's collaborative provision (paragraph 2.11.12).
- The University's commitment to improve the visibility of the student charter ('City and You') and to continue with the recommendations from the Student Community Working Group report action plan (paragraph 2.14.2).

Prior to the review visit, QAA received an application to its concerns scheme which the review team investigated and resolved as part of the review.

## Student Involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

City University London employs a wide variety of mechanisms to support and promote student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement. Staff were able to articulate clearly the systems that exist to support student involvement and the ways in which students are able to contribute to them. The University has effective mechanisms in place for letting students know what actions have been taken in response to their input.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the operational description and handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx)

## About City University London

City University London aims to provide 'academically excellent education, research and enterprise for business and the professions'. The University is the fifth largest in London, with 17,000 full-time equivalent students across undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research degree programmes. It has approximately 4,000 students registered on programmes provided by collaborative partners. More than two-thirds of the University's programmes are recognised by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs).

Following the arrival of the current Vice-Chancellor in August 2010, the University agreed a new vision: 'to become a leading global university committed to academic excellence, focused on business and the professions and located in the heart of London: proud of the quality of its education, research and enterprise and ranked within the top two per cent of universities in the world'. In March 2012, the University's Council approved the Strategic Plan 2012-16 that sets out how the University intends to achieve the vision.

In the student written submission, students comment that the enhancement agenda that has formed in the past two years has helped to foster a change in the University's culture and elevate 'the importance of the student voice and experience'.

The period since the last QAA review (Institutional Audit) coincides with significant institutional changes in leadership and strategy for the University. These changes in leadership inevitably brought a degree of uncertainty to the University, as well as changing priorities. The University states that, despite this, a significant volume of positive change was achieved through the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2008-12 to develop the University's provision and enhance the student experience, including strategic projects, institution-wide process change from the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and community development.

The key challenges identified by the University include:

- ensuring a more consistently strong level of student satisfaction across the University's programmes; the reasons for current variations (both high and low) have been audited, analysed and actions are being progressed
- supporting significant senior management change through the induction of new Deans for Arts and Social Sciences, Law, Engineering and Mathematical Sciences, and Informatics and Cass Business School, from September 2012
- improving the community feel of the University and thereby overall satisfaction levels; work arising from the Student Community Working Group will inform work arising from the Strategic Plan
- following the significant commitment to invest in the University's estate and IT infrastructure and systems, ensuring that - while this will create benefits for future students - any interim disruption is minimised for current students; the Students' Union President will be a member of the group overseeing developments.

## Explanation of the findings about City University London

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.<sup>5</sup>

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#)<sup>6</sup> is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.<sup>7</sup>

### 1 Academic standards

#### Outcome

The academic standards at City University London **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

#### Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 The University has developed a clear credit framework, aligned with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), which enables this expectation generally to be met.

1.1.1 During programme approval, external advisers are asked to say if a proposal meets higher education requirements, including the level at which it is offered within the FHEQ. External examiners are required to approve the assessments compiled by the internal examiners and to report on the standards achieved. Sampling of external examiners' reports indicates that students achieve learning outcomes which match the requirements of the FHEQ.

1.1.2 The use of the FHEQ does not, however, extend to indicating outcomes at different levels in a programme and progression through the programme. The University's framework does not include level-specific qualification descriptors, although references to these can be found in some documents. Programme proposals and programme handbooks, for example, do not specify - and thus enable students to understand - how progression will be achieved to the outcomes required through the programme of study, even when there are intermediate exit points in the programme. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University further develop its use of the FHEQ so that the outcomes at each level of a programme and the requirements for progression from level to level are explicit; the process to achieve this to be defined not later than the start of the 2013-14 academic year and implementation to be completed within that year.

#### Use of external examiners

1.2 Scrupulous use is made of external examiners and the University's Quality Manual provides comprehensive support, taking account of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

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<sup>5</sup> The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However, it is available on request for inspection. Please contact QAA Reviews Group.

<sup>6</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx)

<sup>7</sup> See note 4.

1.2.1 There are transparent and comprehensive criteria for the nomination of external examiners, which ensure that relevant expertise is available and that examiners are drawn from a wide range of other institutions.

1.2.2 The role of the external examiner is clearly defined. On appointment, all external examiners are invited to induction events at programme and at University levels. The University maintains a repository of external examiner reports and sampling of these reports indicates that external examiners carry out their role conscientiously.

1.2.3 The University has a robust process for the consideration of external examiners' reports. A report is received and analysed by Academic Services before being passed to the Programme Director. The report and the response of the Programme Director are then considered by the appropriate Board of Studies. When the Board of Studies has agreed the response, the reports and responses are passed back to Academic Services, which then prepares a thematic report for consideration by the Education Committee. External examiner reports are taken into account during Annual Programme Evaluation and are part of the information base for Periodic Review. Closely analogous processes are used for validated provision, with the validated institution coordinating the Programme Committee (based at the validated institution) and Academic Services coordinating the Course Board (taking the role of the Board of Studies) for the University.

1.2.4 Academic Services plays a pivotal role in the coordination of the external examiner process, but two aspects of their work give it particular strength. The repository of external examiners' reports, dating back to 2005-06, provides a valuable source of information. More importantly, the initial analysis of external examiners' reports by Academic Services ensures an independent dimension to the dialogue between programme teams and external examiners, prompts responses on specific issues raised, and more effectively enables the University to draw on evidence of systemic strengths and weaknesses as perceived by examiners. The review team identified the University's system for the analysis of external examiners' reports by Academic Services and its ability to prompt action in programme teams as a **feature of good practice**.

## Assessment and standards

1.3 The University's Assessment Regulations provide a comprehensive framework for assessment and explicitly require that assessment is linked to learning outcomes.

1.3.1 More than two-thirds of the University's programmes are recognised by PSRBs. The requirements of PSRB recognition are taken into account during the design of programmes and modules to embed appropriate learning outcomes and the achievement of relevant skills. The focus on learning outcomes ensures that these requirements are taken into account in module and programme assessment strategies and the strategies are explained to students through programme specifications and programme handbooks. Scrutiny of a sample of module and programme specifications indicates that there is typically some variety of assessment in all programmes.

1.3.2 The timing of assessment is locally determined and is not usually specified at the programme approval stage. Comments in the student written submission suggest that submission dates have often come close together in ways that are difficult for students and those who mark their work. There was evidence during the review that discussion in programme teams of the new University policy on the timeliness of feedback (see paragraph 1.3.6) is prompting a review of module assessment strategies to limit the bunching of assessment deadlines.



1.3.3 Grading criteria are required for all assessments. Model generic grading criteria are provided and programmes are responsible for producing more detailed criteria. Samples of programme handbooks seen by the team did include more specific statements to enable students to understand how their work is assessed.

1.3.4 Programme and module specifications and programme handbooks make clear to students what is expected of them. Standardised information on extenuating circumstances is included in programme handbooks and the website tells students how to make a claim. In 2011-12, the University responded to suggestions that students may not be treated equally under the extenuating circumstances process by establishing an Assessment Working Group, and the work in progress foreshadows better definition of roles and the possibility of School-wide panels. Model paragraphs on plagiarism and referencing are included in programme handbooks and refer students to a 'StudyWell' website providing further guidance. Students submit a cover sheet with each assessment which requires them to affirm that their work follows good practice. Although increased use is being made of 'Turnitin', this resource is not available to students.

1.3.5 Guidance on marking is given. Double marking is prescribed as the norm and assessment boards are 'encouraged' to use anonymous marking, a term which seems to underplay current practice in the higher education sector. Marking is scrutinised by external examiners and the evidence seen by the team indicates that processes are followed and standards are met.

1.3.6 Over the past three years, and with National Student Survey (NSS) data and the outcomes of the last QAA Institutional Audit as particular drivers, the University has focused on the timeliness and quality of feedback on assessment. Where feedback was provided on average six weeks after submission, the policy now requires feedback within three weeks and compliance is closely monitored and reported to Senate. In meetings, staff confirmed that this requirement had been accepted in a generally positive spirit and gave examples of how it had led to modifications to teaching. Module evaluations include specific questions on the promptness of feedback and perceptions of its effectiveness, and evaluation scores inform the Academic CV, which encourages staff to reflect on their performance (see paragraph 2.1.2). Staff development on assessment and feedback is provided and the team found consistent references in staff forums to assessment practice. The student written submission notes that 'there is a culture change regarding the importance of feedback on assessments and its role in learning' and the review team found impressive evidence to support this in meetings with students and staff, and the most recent report to Senate noted clear improvements on previous NSS data. The review team **affirms** the work in progress by the University to ensure the effectiveness and timeliness of feedback on assessment.

1.3.7 The University provides staff development to improve assessment and feedback practice. The team also regards the consistent references to assessment and feedback in staff forums as a prompt for staff to engage in discussion about good assessment practice.

1.3.8 The language of study in all types of provision is English, although this is not spelt out in Senate Regulations. The University has on at least one occasion allowed assessment in other languages. The evidence of that occasion seen by the team indicates that submission of assessment in other languages is closely managed, in this case by the use of four external examiners who have professional and language expertise to cover the languages permitted in the scheme.

1.3.9 Assessment Boards monitor progression and decisions on the award of degrees and classification for a programme, or group of programmes. The University aims to ensure that all Assessment Boards operate consistently and is in the process of implementing the results of a recent evaluation. Meetings with staff including those responsible for the

recording of assessment decisions provided evidence that these systems work with accuracy and integrity.

## **Setting and maintaining programme standards**

1.4 Principles and practice for the design, approval and monitoring of programmes are sound and well linked into governance and executive structures.

1.4.1 The design of programmes takes place within a framework of wider planning, particularly the annual strategic plan approved for each School. This ensures that programme design, while usually originating within departments, takes into consideration the strategic direction of the University.

1.4.2 Programme approval is a robust two-stage process at both School and University levels. Senate delegates authority for the approval of programmes to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, who is advised by the Education Committee and the University Programme Approval Committee (UPAC). At School level, Boards of Studies have delegated authority for the maintenance of academic standards and quality. The Programme Approval and Review Committee (PARC) has formal responsibility for programme approval and also reports decisions to the relevant Board of Studies for endorsement. The Dean is the final authority at the School stage, ensuring that only proposals that fit the School's academic strategy and financial plans can proceed. The University encourages student involvement in discussions about the development of new programmes through representation on the relevant committees.

1.4.3 Comprehensive guidance on the full academic specification is provided for the programme team, the School PARC and UPAC, and includes advice on learning outcomes, consideration of external reference points, discussion of external adviser comments, resources, placements, admissions criteria, accreditation of prior and experiential learning, and graduate prospects/employability. The requirement to create a draft student handbook at this stage places a valuable emphasis on the student experience. Strategic fit and market issues are also scrutinised at School PARC and UPAC before a final recommendation is made to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

1.4.4 External advisers are appointed to attend School PARCs and report to UPAC. The evidence of reports seen by the review team is that in principle this process is robust and provides an important additional summative perspective. However, the review team's sampling suggested some variation in practice and that the views of the external adviser were reported in a formulaic way.

1.4.5 Partnerships and validated provision are managed within the same or an analogous framework. Proposals for partner links are considered within the framework described above. For new validated programmes, a panel established by the Validation and Institutional Partnerships Committee comprising Course Board members and the external adviser takes on the role of the School PARC, and the Validation and Institutional Partnerships Committee takes the role of UPAC.

1.4.6 Programmes are amended following a process that distinguishes between amendments according to whether they 'make a significant change to the market viability or educational purpose of a programme'. Where there is a significant change, the amendment must be pursued through a full programme approval process. Where there is no significant change, the amendment can be agreed by the Board of Studies and reported to the Education Committee. Board of Studies amendments take the form of a simple list with no indication of the frequency of such amendments. Although the review team saw no evidence of inappropriate action, it could be argued that only if the whole tenor of the programme were

changed was a full approval process required. This in theory allows for a programme team to propose, and a Board of Studies to approve, serial amendments over a number of years that could amount to significant change. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University should revise its process for the management of amendments to programmes at School and University levels by March 2013, to provide greater clarity in the definitions and ensure the Education Committee is fully informed of such changes to ensure effective oversight.

1.4.7 Programmes are monitored by an Annual Programme Evaluation (APE), Periodic Review and Module Evaluation. APE reports are considered by the programme team, the Board of Studies, the Head of Department, the Associate Dean (Education) and the Dean, allowing action to be taken at several levels. A thematic report is prepared for the Education Committee to share good practice. The review team found that the APE process is taken seriously by programme leaders and used effectively by Schools.

1.4.8 Periodic Review of a programme is required every six years. The review panel is appropriately independent. To ensure strong student input the panel meets with students, and Staff-Student Liaison Committee minutes are included in the evidence base for the review. Sample reports provided to the team indicate that the evidence base is extensive and there was evidence that Periodic Review reports are considered carefully and action points addressed and monitored.

1.4.9 The results of termly Module Evaluations in Schools are linked not to programme review but to the individual lecturer, and the results feed into the Academic CV and appraisal process (see paragraph 2.1.2). Boards of Studies consider outcomes from module evaluations. Data is also analysed at University level as part of the ongoing drive to improve student satisfaction scores.

## **Subject benchmarks**

1.5 The review team found that the University signals the importance of the use of external reference points such as subject benchmarks and PSRB requirements in some of its guidance on the approval and monitoring of programmes.

1.5.1 The University's focus on 'academic excellence for business and the professions' and the high proportion of programmes which have PSRB recognition leads to a strong focus on the integration of subject benchmarks and PSRB requirements. The possibility of recognition is raised at the first stage of the approval process. The University also aims to schedule Periodic Reviews so that they coincide with any PSRB review for practical reasons, and to enable effective discussions of the relationship between standards set and any possible conflicts.

1.5.2 Reference to subject benchmarks is, however, absent from programme-related documentation used in institutional processes. Programme approval forms do not require an explicit statement of the relation of the proposed programme to a subject benchmark. The Annual Programme Evaluation form and the Guidance for Periodic Review similarly do not require the identification of relevant benchmark(s). In contrast, there is a brief reference to subject benchmarks in the template for the student-facing programme specifications. External advisers at programme approval and external examiners are required to state whether the programme meets benchmark standards, but they are not asked to identify the benchmark, nor are they told (except through the brief reference in the programme specification) which benchmark the programme is measuring itself against and how. The review team therefore **recommends** that the relation of programmes to subject benchmark statements should be made explicit at approval and review by the start of the next academic year.

## 2 Quality of learning opportunities

### Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at City University London **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

### Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 The review team found that professional standards for teaching and support of learning are upheld. The University has clear strategies in place to ensure that staff and others involved in the delivery of teaching are appropriately qualified, and for the continuous development of its staffing base.

2.1.1 New staff are inducted into the institution, and mentors assist with this process. Staff report that they are well supported and a good range of staff development and continuing professional development opportunities are available: the Learning and Development Centre provides support on learning and teaching and technology-enhanced provision; a fellowship scheme provides learning and teaching champions and a network of expertise for the dissemination of good practice; and an established peer review scheme is in place. The MA in Academic Practice offers opportunities for staff to gain a teaching qualification and for research students who teach to take selected modules. Accreditation of Prior Learning is available in some circumstances and Higher Education Academy accreditation is given on completion of the programme. Individual Schools offer bespoke support for learning and teaching, such as the Cass Business School's teaching coach scheme, which was commended by staff from other Schools.

2.1.2 There is a good range of opportunities for staff to discuss, share and develop pedagogy and student learning opportunities (see paragraph 4.5). Staff are encouraged to reflect on their delivery of modules through the use of the Academic CV, which asks them to identify 'things students liked about my teaching' and 'things students didn't like', together with suggested actions. This approach firmly establishes the lecturer's responsibility for continually improving the learning experience. Staff report that the appraisal process is useful in informing their development plans. The Academic CV is updated annually with feedback on performance and is one of the bases of appraisal, prompting outcomes such as an offer of coaching to improve performance, or a nomination for a University prize. School Learning and Teaching Awards and the Student Voice Awards recognise good teaching practice and allow students to express their appreciation for staff. The University is currently piloting the use of a push-button voting system to provide instant feedback in lectures.

2.1.3 Research, scholarship and/or professional practice are incorporated into teaching activity, and considerable strategic investment is planned to enhance the research base of the University. The Doctoral Track encourages staff to undertake doctoral qualifications and a Research and Enterprise Development Programme is also available for staff to support both subject and pedagogic practice.

2.1.4 The student written submission indicates high levels of satisfaction with teaching and learning and acknowledges ongoing improvement. Students who met with the team found the teaching intellectually stimulating, were aware of research feeding into modules and appreciated the expertise and experience of lecturers, but some expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching delivered by some postgraduate research (PGR) students. The team therefore **recommends** that the University introduces a requirement for postgraduate research students and/or teaching assistants in all Schools to undertake adequate and appropriate preparation prior to commencement of teaching by March 2013, and ensure that all PGR students who teach have undergone such preparation by the start

of the next academic year. PGR students and/or teaching assistants in all Schools undertake adequate and appropriate preparation prior to commencement of teaching by March 2013. Minor concerns were also voiced about lecturers who had excellent industrial experience, but were not necessarily trained teachers. Students felt that module evaluations allowed them to give feedback on teaching and learning, but would prefer these to be submitted centrally rather than to the individuals they are commenting on. However, students were confident, based on previous experience, that feedback on teaching and learning would be acted upon.

## **Learning resources**

2.2 The review team found that learning resources enable students to achieve their learning outcomes.

2.2.1 The team found that the collective expertise of staff is suitable for the effective delivery of the curricula; the overall teaching, learning and assessment strategy; and the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The University has committed significant investment to increasing the staffing base.

2.2.2 The University has a strategy for the deployment of learning resources and is clearly taking steps to enhance both physical and virtual resources for students. The student written submission indicates that student opinion on learning resources has improved year on year, but that there is still room for improvement.

2.2.3 The Learning Spaces project is designed to improve teaching and learning accommodation and the student written submission points to significant improvements in relation to student social space and the renovation of buildings. Students were able to influence the planning of these improvements through representation on key working groups and committees, and the well-received Student Academic Representatives Conference (STARS) and Speedback student feedback/discussion sessions.

2.2.4 Subject book and periodical stocks are appropriate and accessible. A range of enhancements to library provision have taken place during 2011-12 and the review team was informed of a significant additional allocation to the library budget in the current academic year which will further enhance provision. The student written submission indicated that there is still a level of dissatisfaction with library resources, however the Cass Business School and Law School specialist libraries were particularly appreciated by students, as were the improvements to the Postgraduate Centre. The Students' Union (SU) has contributed to discussions on future library provision and students are able to address local learning resources issues through representation on relevant committees. Focus groups have also been held to gather student views, and these have resulted in actions to improve access to resources, for example 24-hour library opening during exam periods.

2.2.5 Suitable equipment and information technology facilities are available to learners. Students expressed some dissatisfaction with these resources but also positive acknowledgement of the numerous improvements made. Evidence presented by the University showed considerable investment in IT infrastructure and improved levels of service, including email and Wi-Fi upgrades. As part of the ongoing development of the Strategic Learning Environment, the University has implemented a new virtual learning environment (VLE), Moodle, with further enhancement planned in 2012-13. Students commented very positively on the VLE and also on the role of the dedicated learning technologists, who provide opportunities for sharing good practice in online and blended learning in each School. Assistive technology laboratories have been refurbished and upgraded, and students are now able to access the NorMAN out-of-hours helpline all year round.

## Student voice

2.3 The University has a policy setting out how students contribute to quality assurance and enhancement, and the review team saw many positive examples of student engagement.

2.3.1 Over 500 programme representatives were registered by the end of 2011-12 and students are represented across the range of institutional decision-making bodies and working groups. The student written submission notes the 'progressive and positive changes' which have provided 'ample opportunity for students to be further embedded in the quality assurance processes', but acknowledges that the level of student engagement varies between Schools. The SU was very positive about the close engagement students have with the University and commented favourably on the 'strong and open relationship' with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and monthly meetings with the Vice-Chancellor.

2.3.2 Students are supported in making their voice heard, although the level of support varies from School to School. The SU supports programme representatives, and students who met the review team reported one-to-one mentoring meetings and a weekend course for Student Representation Officers among the activities provided.

2.3.3 Effective arrangements are in place to gather feedback from students on their learning experience and to act on that feedback at programme level through the committee and representation structures. Students are surveyed once a year to measure overall levels of satisfaction, and NSS data is seen as a catalyst for enhancement and improvement. Survey results are reported to Senate and action plans agreed at University and School level, and there is tracking and monitoring of progress, with regular reporting. Leaflets are produced to outline the actions taken in response to feedback (see paragraph 4.4). The review team also noted the use of social media to receive and respond to feedback.

2.3.4 Examples were given of efforts made to gather feedback from part-time or distance learning students, including revised office hours so that evening students can meet with staff, ensuring meetings take place when students are present, Moodle resources, and the use of blogs and discussion groups. The arrangements for gaining feedback from collaborative students are outlined in paragraph 2.11.8.

2.3.5 The Strategic Plan has clearly articulated performance indicators in relation to NSS scores and other surveys that the University intends to work towards, and the effectiveness of University policies and procedures for promoting the contribution of students to quality assurance and enhancement are regularly reviewed. The team found evidence of strong student representation throughout the committee and representative structures of the University, excellent relationships between the University and SU, and a clear acknowledgement from students that their feedback was valued and led to meaningful action. The team identified the University's proactive approach to student engagement and the effective contribution of students to quality assurance as a **feature of good practice**.

## Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.4 The University uses a comprehensive range of data and management information to safeguard quality and standards, and to promote the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

2.4.1 Centrally administered policies and systems allow for the collection of relevant management information, and a wide range of performance indicators is used to inform progress against key strategic drivers. There is evidence that the University has made progress in addressing the recommendation from the last QAA Institutional Audit, in that

management information is considered at appropriate intervals by senior decision-making bodies to inform enhancement and that feedback data is used to inform planning.

2.4.2 The success of PGR programmes is monitored against appropriate internal and/or external indicators and targets. Senate receives an annual report 'Research Degree Qualifications' which comments on data quality. Some issues have been identified with data quality and accessibility of data in the past and the University has put strategies in place to improve this.

2.4.3 Information is collected by the University on student disclosure of impairments and is used appropriately to monitor applications and admissions processes and inform student support plans, however there is no analysis of the performance of students with disabilities (see paragraph 2.8.4).

## **Admission to the University**

2.5 There are policies and procedures in place, together with Key Information Sets (KIS) and other general information, to ensure that the University's admissions processes are clear, fair and consistently applied.

2.5.1 The SU has been consulted in relation to the content of pre-arrival information. Entry requirements for undergraduate programmes are published in the prospectus, on the website and in UCAS entry profiles.

2.5.2 Admissions tutors have academic responsibility for the oversight of the admissions process for their programmes, and the Admissions Tutors' Forum, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, allows for institution-wide discussion of admissions issues. The International Office supports international student applications and liaison with appropriate agencies ensures oversight of the qualifications which students present with.

2.5.3 As part of the University's widening participation portfolio, 66 Widening Participation Student Ambassadors were working in 17 schools as tutors/academic mentors and 180 students were also trained to go into schools and colleges to deliver presentations on being a university student, and their contribution was recognised in the Student Impact Awards. The 'student buddy' scheme offers support to new students, who reported that they had settled into university life more quickly and that the scheme had made them less apprehensive about studying at the University. Some students have gone on to become buddies after experiencing the support themselves. The team identified the use of Student Ambassadors to facilitate student engagement and widening participation activities in local schools, and the activities of student buddies at induction to support new students, as a **feature of good practice**.

2.5.4 Students who met the team were positive about their admissions experience, saying that they had been provided with useful information and that the application process had run smoothly. PGR students were particularly satisfied with the process, stating that it had been very fair and that they had received clear guidance on the application criteria.

## **Complaints and appeals**

2.6 The review team found that effective complaints and appeals policies and procedures were in place and accessible to students.

2.6.1 Procedures for complaints and appeals are set out in the University Regulations and Complaints and Appeals Policies, and in the Validation and Institutional Partnerships Handbook, with partnership-specific information in the Memorandum of Agreement. Students

are provided with information about complaints and appeals in programme handbooks, on the VLE, and through information sent out with transcripts and confirmation letters. Students are also directed to the SU Support Service for guidance. The University's stated policy in responding to complaints is for 'early resolution', however, the student written submission indicated dissatisfaction with the length of time taken to resolve some complaints. Students who met with the review team reported issues with access to information, stating that it is held in multiple locations, but were positive about the process, indicating that it was fair and easy to use, and several examples were given of prompt and effective action taken to address an issue.

2.6.2 Advice is provided to enable students to avoid academic misconduct. The student charter 'City and You' contains clear statements in relation to mutual responsibilities and sets out the expected behaviours of students, and there are codes of conduct for the Library and Information Services. Students acknowledged the University's drive to inform them about plagiarism.

2.6.3 Boards of Studies (or equivalent) and Senate receive annual reports on appeals and complaints, including an analysis of outcomes of referrals from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. A review of appeals arrangements was undertaken in 2012 in response to an increasing number of appeals, which included consultation with students to improve the operation of the system. An appeals administrators' group meets twice a year to discuss appeals-related issues and share good practice, and complaints and appeals are used to inform future improvements to provision.

## **Career advice and guidance**

2.7 There is a very well-organised careers and guidance service, providing a range of excellent opportunities for students.

2.7.1 Support for career education, information, advice and guidance is delivered within programmes and through the University's Career and Skills Development Service (CSDS). Students were very aware of the University's excellent industry links and were very positive about the support, resources and range of opportunities available to improve their skills development and employability.

2.7.2 There is general encouragement across the University to gain PSRB approval for programmes. Consequently, module specifications articulate the professional skills students will gain and a range of activities is built into programmes, such as visiting speakers, employer events and careers fairs.

2.7.3 Work experience is encouraged, and professional development and skills modules support this, for example the Law Pro Bono Programme. A Personal Development Planning Policy - supported by resources such as 'Pebblepad', 'Improving my success' and 'Upgrade' - is in place. There is a focused careers service in the Cass Business School to meet the particular needs of its postgraduate students, and the School of Informatics has a dedicated placements unit.

2.7.4 A dedicated Employer Liaison Team assists with the development of employer-related activities. 'Industry Insight' events offer opportunities for students to meet employers and find out about particular sectors of industry, and mentoring schemes facilitate professional mentoring. The CSDS team works in collaboration with Schools to ensure a coordinated approach to employability across the institution, and provides a careers consultant as a specific School contact point.



2.7.5 Programme specifications provide information about graduate destinations as well as marketing information and the KIS. 'Access to Destinations Interactive' produces a range of reports, including graduate destinations and internal rankings of Schools and programmes. Destinations data is managed by CSDS and reports inform monitoring, evaluation and action planning at all levels. CSDS monitors service usage and uses this to enhance and develop provision.

2.7.6 Careers development permeates the curriculum, and the team found the University's holistic approach to employability, bringing together careers advice, placement, personal development planning and skills development, to be a **feature of good practice**.

## Supporting disabled students

2.8 The team found that the University's management of the quality of learning opportunities to meet the entitlements of disabled students is generally effective.

2.8.1 The University's Equality Committee advises the Executive Committee on all matters relating to the University's strategic approach to equality and diversity, and its membership has recently been under review. The review team **affirms** the University's plans to ensure School and SU representatives are formal members of the Equality Committee.

2.8.2 Students are provided with helpful information through publications and the website, and training is provided for staff. The review team was able to confirm in meetings with staff that information regarding a disclosed disability is passed to the programme manager and personal tutor of the relevant department so that appropriate adjustments can be made.

2.8.3 The University provides a range of support services through the Learning Success Team. Students referred by Disability Services or Dyslexia Support are given access to additional support facilities through the Assistive Technology Centre. Some concern was raised in the student written submission regarding access to resources, but in meetings with students the quality of support for students with disability, including assistive technology, was described as good. In meetings with staff it was noted that additional funding has been put in place for the Assistive Technology Centre to update equipment and software.

2.8.4 Although there is some analysis regarding the use of the support services provided, there is no comparative analysis of the performance of students with disability to evaluate the effectiveness of this support. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University should undertake an effective analysis of the performance of students with disabilities as part of formal monitoring by the start of the next academic year.

## Supporting international students

2.9 The team found that policies and procedure were applied appropriately to support the quality of learning opportunities for international students.

2.9.1 The University has a dedicated International Student Advice Team who provide a wide range of support, including a drop-in service. The University provides comprehensive guidance on admissions for international students through the website, and international students confirmed in meetings that they had been well supported through the admissions process. International students also appreciated the 'buddy' scheme deployed during induction. There are clearly defined English language entry requirements and students who have not achieved the required entry level may attend one of three different pre-sessional English courses.

2.9.2 The University has brought together a multi-faith team to support its increasingly diverse community and is considering other developments to improve the international student experience.

### **Supporting postgraduate research students**

2.10 The team found that appropriate support was given to PGR students to complete their programmes and to enable staff to fulfil their responsibilities.

2.10.1 The Senior Tutor for Research Forum advises the Education Committee on the development and application of institutional policy and procedure for research degree provision to assure the quality and standards of research degree programmes and to enhance research degree provision across the University. Each School is responsible for the approval of the admission, monitoring and progress review, examination and award of its PGR students, and is supported by Academic Services through the recently instituted Graduate School. Frameworks for good research design, ethical considerations, submission for external funding, publication and misconduct are provided for all research students and staff. There are appropriate criteria for the appointment of external examiners, and the use of independent chairs ensures consistency of practice.

2.10.2 The University's Research Doctoral Scheme funds outstanding PGR candidates and support is available for staff pursuing a research degree.

2.10.3 The admissions process involves constructive dialogue between the applicant, the School or Department, and the prospective supervisor. In meetings, PGR students informed the review team that this helps to develop a good relationship between student and supervisor from the outset.

2.10.4 The roles and responsibilities of the PGR student and supervisor are well defined and the administrative procedures are clearly explained. The University's policy for research supervision states that the first supervisor must have appropriate experience of supervision before they are given the role. Training is provided for new supervisors through the MA in Academic Practice and other staff development sessions, including Research Development Days and a Researchers' Symposium. Students commented in meetings with the review team that research supervision was very good.

2.10.5 In 2011-12, the University introduced an online system for monitoring doctoral supervision and PGR student progress, and its implementation is continuing. Students who had started using it found it useful. Progress is formally reviewed annually with supervisors and is reported to the Board of Studies and the Senior Tutor for Research.

2.10.6 The University participates in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey; results are considered by Senate and inform Annual Programme Evaluations. The review of Student Experience Committees recently presented to Senate identified the need to have wider involvement of PGR students. In meetings, the review team was informed that PGR students felt that their voice was heard and responded to.

### **Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements**

2.11 The team found that, overall, the quality of learning opportunities delivered as part of collaborative arrangements is managed effectively to enable students to achieve their awards.

2.11.1 The University's Executive Committee has strategic responsibility for all collaborative provision. Each collaboration is underpinned by a Memorandum of Agreement

which ensures that students' interests are safeguarded in the event of the collaboration being terminated. When collaboration is terminated, the University activates an exit strategy which is detailed in the agreement.

2.11.2 The University categorises its collaborative provision as 'validated', 'institutional partnership' and 'School-managed partnership'. It publishes a collaborative register, which showed that in 2011-12 validated provision accounted for 3,981 students and partnerships accounted for 1,453 students - a significant increase since the last QAA Institutional Audit.

2.11.3 Validation is seen by the University as a mutually beneficial strategic relationship with a high-profile partner. Validated provision is managed and governed centrally by the Validation and Institutional Partnership Committee, chaired by the Dean of Validation. Each validation arrangement has a Course Board to oversee the operation of the programmes and to monitor quality and standards.

2.11.4 Partnerships include activities such as franchising and joint provision, articulated provision, access/feeder programmes and off-site delivery. Partnership provision is managed through Schools and their Boards of Studies, and is subject to the same policies and procedures as internal provision. The Associate Dean (Education) has a key role with regard to partnership provision and the Associate Deans (Education) Forum provides a mechanism for sharing good practice.

2.11.5 Where a partnership institution is running programmes from more than one School, the collaboration is managed under the validated framework to provide a consistent and unified interface. If a collaborative partner runs validated programmes as well as franchised programmes, this too is managed under the validated framework to ensure consistency.

2.11.6 The Collaborative Provision Working Group reviews and develops the University's quality and standards framework for credit and award-bearing partnerships, utilises existing good practice within the University and at other institutions in developing an appropriate framework, and identifies strategic issues relating to collaborative provision for consideration by the Executive Committee. In meetings with representatives from validated and partnership provision, the review team was impressed with the commitment of both the University and the partners to work in mutually beneficial collaboration.

2.11.7 The Collaborative Provision Working Group has been instrumental in addressing the recommendation from the previous QAA Institutional Audit to continue to move towards convergence of its collaborative provision processes for validation and partnerships, recognising that partnerships provision required strengthening. It has overseen the review of the partnership Memorandum of Agreement, developed the role of Academic Partnership Coordinator and strengthened the approval process for new relationships. The process starts with an initial evaluation of the proposed provision and considers the compatibility of the partner and any potential risk to the University. The review team was able to examine documentation from a recent approval and to confirm that due diligence checks were thorough and partnership site visits addressed the necessary issues.

2.11.8 The arrangements for student feedback from partnership provision are equivalent to those at the University. For validated provision, University members of the Course Board and the external adviser(s) meet annually with students from the validated programmes. This is in addition to the validated partner's own mechanisms for student liaison and feedback. Student feedback is incorporated into the Annual Programme Evaluation, which is considered within the validated partner institution by its Board of Studies (or equivalent) before being considered by the Course Board, and the institution provides responses on the resulting actions to the students. At revalidation, students meet with the revalidation panel.

2.11.9 During the review, the team considered an issue regarding a programme that was delivered in part by a partner institution. This provision had not been considered by the University as part of its collaborative provision and was not listed on its collaborative register. The review team **recommends** that the University should ensure that all programmes involving a collaborative partner are formally recorded on the institution's collaborative provision database by March 2013.

2.11.10 The team sought clarification on the checking of information provided about collaborative provision. The team found that information for students on validated courses is monitored by a small group headed by the Dean of Validation. Evidence was provided to illustrate the effectiveness of the process described in the Validation and Institutional Partnership Handbook. A meeting with the Dean of Validation confirmed there was rigorous oversight of what can be said about the University by its validated partners and that there could be sufficiently rapid turnaround in updating inaccurate information.

2.11.11 The Academic Partnership Coordinator has responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of information published about partnership provision in Schools and the process by which this is checked. An example was provided of the well-managed and speedy removal of some inaccurate information, but the underpinning process was not clear to the review team. The team therefore **recommends** that the University should strengthen the process for managing the quality of information produced about its partnership provision by March 2013.

2.11.12 The University has recently set up an Academic Partnership Coordinators' Forum to support Academic Partnership Coordinators and share good practice. The review team **affirms** the development of the Academic Partnerships Coordinators' Forum to increase the consistency of approach to the management of the quality and standards of the University's collaborative provision.

2.11.13 Building on the work of the Collaborative Provision Working Group, the Senate has agreed to enhance the current arrangements for the oversight of partnership provision. Actions have been identified where oversight could be made more explicit and a new Partnerships Sub-Group of the Education Committee has been established with the remit to provide an enhanced focus on the operation and development of the partnership provision. The review team considers that these steps are likely to be appropriate, but has certain reservations: partnership activity in Schools is growing, and is becoming increasingly complex; the team saw no evidence of changes in management at School level to accommodate this development and no evidence of how the new Partnerships Sub-Group would provide oversight. Further review at senior management level is therefore desirable to ensure strong strategic management to match any enhanced operational activity. Consequently, the review team **recommends** that the University should strengthen its mechanisms for the management of quality and standards within partnerships in Schools and oversight of partnerships at University level by the start of the next academic year.

### **Flexible, distributed and e-learning**

2.12 The University develops, manages and operates its flexible and distance learning provision using the same regulations and procedures as for its other provision, and the review team found that the quality of learning opportunities delivered through flexible and distributed learning, including e-learning, is managed effectively.

2.12.1 Moodle is the principal platform for flexible and distance learning. The University has clear plans to develop the use of the Strategic Learning Environment to support student learning in all modes of study and to increase staff engagement with this technology across all Schools. The Learning Development Centre provides support and guidance for staff developing flexible and distance learning provision, and further support is available from

School Learning Technologists. The MA in Academic Practice includes specialisation at Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma in Technology-Enhanced Activity and appears to be popular with staff.

2.12.2 External examiners' reports discuss teaching and learning methods, which in the sample reviewed commented favourably on the support for distance learning. Samples of distance learning materials shown to the review team were of a high quality and students confirmed that they were good.

### **Work-based and placement learning**

2.13 The review team found that the quality of learning opportunities delivered through work-based and placement learning is effective.

2.13.1 Work-based and placement learning are integral parts of the learning experience offered to students at the University and programme specifications include details of the placement opportunities available. The policy for placements states that they may be compulsory or voluntary, and each placement is supported by an agreed written statement between the employer, the University and the student. The nature and role of placements varies from School to School and there is local operational management. Where placements are compulsory, the arrangements are considered by the programme approval process to ensure that they support the programme learning outcomes and the student experience. For longer placements, there are a minimum of two supervisory visits.

2.13.2 Work-based and placement learning are monitored through Annual Programme Evaluation and placements are also considered as part of Periodic Review. External examiners' reports include a section on placements which ask for comment on their assessment. Feedback from students on placement is sought and the review team was able to confirm in meetings with students that they felt the support for placements was good.

### **Student charter**

2.14 The University has a student charter, 'City and You', which addresses students' expectations and responsibilities appropriately.

2.14.1 The student charter was developed in conjunction with the SU and approved by Senate. It is available on the University website and included in programme handbooks issued to students during induction. The review team was able to confirm that the charter applied to all University students, except those at validated partners who are not enrolled on University programmes. In meetings with students, it was clear that they were largely unaware of the student charter and its purpose. Nonetheless, they were clearly aware of the University's expectations of them and what support and services were available to them.

2.14.2 The Student Community Working Group has produced an action plan, which outlines specific proposals for short, medium and long-term action to strengthen student engagement in the University community and to enhance the student experience. The review team **affirms** the University's commitment to improve the visibility of the student charter ('City and You') and to continue with the recommendations from the Student Community Working Group action plan.

### 3 Information about learning opportunities

#### Outcome

The information about learning opportunities produced by the University **meets UK expectations**. The intended audience finds that the information about the learning opportunities offered is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

#### Findings

3.1 The University's Quality Assurance Framework provides guidance for staff on how to ensure that published information is 'valid, reliable, useful and accessible' and refers to methods for checking that include student feedback.

3.2 Marketing and Communication have overall responsibility for signing off web-based and print information, and a range of evidence was provided to demonstrate the effectiveness of processes for maintaining the quality of information, including a complete review of programme and module specifications in 2011-12. However, the University acknowledges that not all aspects of the review - designed to address the recommendation on published information from the last QAA Institutional Audit - have been completed owing to the need to reprioritise and respond to the introduction of the KIS.

3.3 The University's website is the principal source of information for the public. The Strategic Plan and 'City Vision' are available online, along with statistics about the composition of the student body. Alumni can keep up to date through 'City Magazine'. Work towards the collection of the KIS has been ongoing since October 2011. It is clear that there has been a concerted effort to ensure the quality and usefulness of the information produced. The KIS is published on the University's website and all programmes have the relevant data presented at the bottom of their respective web pages.

3.4 The website provides information for prospective students in accessible language which matches the hard copy prospectus. An issue was raised at the meeting with PGR students regarding additional information required from international students once accepted onto a programme. The University provided evidence that it is taking appropriate steps to give international students correct and timely advice, and the majority of international students who met the team were happy with the pre-course information they received.

3.5 Students are invited to comment on published information through various response mechanisms. Feedback from the student written submission and in meetings with students on information provided at programme level was generally positive. Moodle is becoming the main source of information about programmes. Students were aware, for example, that external examiners' reports are made available online as a matter of course, although they did not routinely make use of them. Although enthusiastic about the VLE environment, students commented on the variability of Moodle provision between Schools and the lack of a common set of rules governing communication. The University indicated that it was considering extending the minimum standards criteria already adopted by some Schools, but that it was also wary of inhibiting the creative development of the VLE.

## 4 Enhancement of learning opportunities

### Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at City University London **meets UK expectations**. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

### Findings

4.1 The review team found that the University has a clear strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities and that quality assurance procedures are used to identify opportunities for enhancement and involve staff and students at every level.

4.2 A wide range of student feedback is used to inform change, and effective use is made of surveys such as Student Voice and the NSS to inform future enhancements. The student written submission comments that when the University's vision was open for consultation, more students fed back on the vision than staff. The University integrated this feedback into an enhancement strategy, the Education and Student Experience Strategy, which is currently under development.

4.3 The Strategic Plan and vision give focus and draw together the various improvement strands and key performance indicators. Some of the identified actions are very recent, but there was strong evidence from meetings with staff of shared ideals and priorities and an assurance of the importance of the student voice. There is evidence of a focus on student feedback that permeates the University through the committee structure. The student written submission comments favourably that consultation with Boards of Studies by Senate has increased and states that 'the student viewpoint is often raised early in discussions, at times prompted by staff, and SU Officers are regularly consulted during the design and amendments of policies and the formulation of reports'. The sentiment that the University is working for them was echoed in meetings with students.

4.4 Senate regularly monitors operational plans, and post-Senate briefing reports ensure that initiatives are communicated to Schools and students. An example of innovative student-facing output is the 'You say...we listen' leaflet campaign which outlines the various ways in which the University has enhanced the student experience. The team found that the information provided on enhancement to students through the 'You say... we listen' campaign was clear, accessible and tailored to the needs of students, not just at School level, but also at programme level. The team identified the targeted and systematic mechanisms which provide students with evidence of actions taken in response to their feedback as a **feature of good practice**.

4.5 The team identified a number of ways in which good practice in teaching and learning is more systematically identified and disseminated, as recommended in the last QAA Institutional Audit. Annual Programme Evaluations feed into the committee structure; Programme Directors' Forums and the Associate Dean (Education) Forums share ideas; and dissemination is facilitated in a variety of ways, including the annual Learning@City conference, Learning Development Projects, Moodle site videos and the Learning Development Associates and Fellows Schemes. Staff were able to cite examples of teaching and learning initiatives from the Learning and Development Annual Showcase, and the Educational Vignettes Blogs appeared to be a popular and well-maintained means of sharing good practice.

## **5 Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement**

Each academic year, a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for especial attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams. In 2012-13 there is a choice of two themes: (a) First Year Student Experience or (b) Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

The review team investigated student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement at City University London. Staff and students concurred that student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement was effective and promoted in a variety of ways.

### **Innovations in student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement**

5.1 Since the last QAA Institutional Audit, the University has established a closer relationship with the SU Sabbatical Officers, who contribute to University developments such as the Strategic Plan 2012-16. The SU Officers are supported by a network of student representatives, and Student Experience Committees have been established in each School that enable student representatives and SU Officers to discuss issues relating to the student experience with both academic and professional staff. The Student Community Working Group is chaired by the SU President, contributing to the enhancement of the University community in response to student feedback. The students confirmed that the role of the SU Student Representation Officers had been developed further since the last QAA Institutional Audit to provide greater links between the SU and Schools, and the review team noted plans for further development through the trialling of Lead Representatives within Schools.

5.2 Students were very positive about their involvement in University projects, such as the Boards of Studies governance review (2011), which resulted in greater formal student representation on all committees that report to Boards of Studies, and the SU Vice-President (Education) is now a formal member of all Boards of Studies and Student Experience Committees.

### **Staff experience of/participation in student involvement in quality**

5.3 The review team heard that the SU President and Vice-President (Education) meet monthly with University representatives from professional services, with fortnightly meetings with the Deputy Director of Academic Services. An annual meeting is held between University staff and students on partnership programmes to discuss issues arising from their learning experience.

5.4 Since the last QAA Institutional Audit, resources have been allocated to support student engagement and representation, including a dedicated staff team in Academic Services that provide a direct link to SU representatives' work. University staff pointed out the benefits accrued by the high level of engagement that takes place with students to enable them to provide constructive feedback, evidencing the recent achievement of the high participation rates in student surveys in comparison with other London-based institutions.

### **Acting on student contributions and 'closing the feedback loop'**

5.5 The revised Annual Programme Evaluation and Development Plan has an increased focus upon student satisfaction and facilitates student input to and engagement with the process. The format of the report requires specific responses to issues arising from the NSS, module feedback, Your Voice, Student Voice awards and from Staff-Student Liaison Committees. The programme level Student Satisfaction Plan is then shared with



students, with a requirement for regular updating as responses are put into action through the year to demonstrate how they are being addressed and resolved. The School Board of Studies monitors the updating of the Student Satisfaction Plan during the year and reports on progress are made to Senate.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions. For example, pages 18-19 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of threshold academic standards, learning opportunities, enhancement and public information.

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx).

If you require formal definitions of other terms, please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx).

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **glossary** on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx).

**Academic Infrastructure** Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **Code of practice**. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

**academic standards** The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

**Code of practice** *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

**credit(s)** A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

**enhancement** Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

**feature of good practice** A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

**framework** A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

**framework for higher education qualifications** A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

**learning opportunities** The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

**learning outcome** What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

**operational definition** A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

**programme (of study)** An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

**programme specifications** Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

**public information** Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

**Quality Code** Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is being developed from 2011 to replace the **Academic Infrastructure** and will incorporate all its key elements, along with additional topics and overarching themes.

**subject benchmark statement** A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

**threshold academic standard** The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

**widening participation** Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

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