QAA

# Institutional audit

## Institute of Education

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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 the 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 then Department for Education 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 to 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 (UK) approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aim of the 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* (FHEQ) 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 on 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 the 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.

# Summary

## Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Institute of Education (the Institute) from 30 November to 4 December 2009 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 Institute offers.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the Institute and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the Institute 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 Institute of Education is that:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers
- confidence 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.

## Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit found that the Institute has a range of activities in place and under development which constitutes an effective institutional approach to quality enhancement.

## Postgraduate research students

The audit found the Institute's arrangements for postgraduate research students met the expectations of the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*), *Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and are effective in securing academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities.

## Published information

The audit found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the Institute publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

## Features of good practice

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

- the strategic approach to the integration of research and scholarship with teaching
- the effectiveness of the Centre for Academic and Professional Literacies as a research-informed support service for academic writing, in particular for students learning at a distance
- the Doctoral School Code of Practice and handbook for students

- the provision of well managed and resourced specialist library services
- the provision of course information to students through the portal and through the advice of programme leaders and administrators.

## Recommendations for action

The audit team recommends that the Institute consider further action in some areas.

The team advises the Institute to:

- ensure that the collaborative provision procedures for initial approval, including partner approval, meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Sections 2 and 7*
- ensure that ongoing monitoring arrangements of the learning environment for students in collaborative arrangements meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2*
- ensure an up-to-date and authoritative listing of collaborative provision is publicly available.

It would be desirable for the Institute to:

- continue to review faculty roles, responsibilities and their relationship to faculty structures to ensure clear and direct focus on quality assurance. The Institute should ensure that resultant changes to quality assurance and enhancement procedures are communicated effectively to staff.
- ensure that any changes to the Academic Infrastructure are identified, and that any appropriate modifications to Institute procedures and policies are implemented, in a timely and systematic manner and disseminated to staff
- evaluate the effective adoption, by staff, of quality enhancement activities and the consequent influence of such activities on all teaching
- review supervisory arrangements for postgraduate research students to secure the advantages of the supervisory team approach outlined in the *Code of practice, Section 1*
- review the use of independent chairs to further secure fairness and consistency in postgraduate research examination boards.

## Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by the Institute 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*
- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

The audit found that, subject to the caveats indicated in the recommendations, the Institute of Education took account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

# Report

1 An Institutional audit of the Institute of Education (the Institute) was undertaken during the week commencing 30 November 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the Institute's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers on behalf of Institute of Education and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Mrs Jacqueline Hare, Dr Anne Miller, Ms Jenny Rice, Professor Richard Allen, auditors, and Ms Sara Welham, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor Chris Clare, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

## Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The Institute is a self-governing College of the University of London that was established in 1902 as the London Day Training College in order to deliver high-quality training for teachers. It was incorporated into the University of London in 1932 as the Institute of Education and became a College of the federal University with its own Royal Charter in 1987. The Institute was granted degree awarding powers in 2006 and these powers were exercised from the beginning of the 2008-09 academic year.

4 During 2008-09 the Institute had just over 6,650 students, 3,241 full-time equivalent students. Approximately 1,603 students were full-time, of whom 67 per cent were pursuing Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes. Overall, 67 per cent of the Institute's students were registered for professional development programmes, 21 per cent for ITE programmes and 12 per cent for research degrees. The Institute offers a range of academic awards in the field of education and related social sciences and, as a result, interacts with a number of external agencies. The commitment to ITE has been maintained and over 1,400 graduates register annually for Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programmes, offered in partnership with approximately 1,000 schools and colleges in the London area.

5 The Institute's mission is to pursue excellence in education and related areas of social science and professional practice. In undertaking this mission the Institute aims to adhere to the highest standards of academic rigour in all its work, to be guided by a concern for truth and justice, and to make a positive contribution to the development of individuals, institutions and societies facing the challenges of change. To this end, it aims to engage in:

- research and scholarship of national and international significance
- high quality, research-informed postgraduate and post-experience learning and teaching programmes
- the promotion of new ideas in policy and professional practice grounded in its research and teaching expertise
- consultancy and other services to support and develop the quality of educational systems and related fields of policy and practice.

6 The audit team concluded that the Institute had taken action on the outcomes of the previous audit (2003) and responded to its recommendations. However, it is now difficult to isolate the effect of particular responses within the broader range of more substantial changes that have taken place, namely the grant of degree awarding powers in 2006 and a wide restructuring of the Institute and its governance and management that has taken place since 2007. Since the 2003 audit, the Institute's 12 schools have been redefined as departments within a structure of three faculties - Children and Health, Culture and Pedagogy, and Policy and Society, together with the Doctoral School (which manages key aspects of postgraduate research programmes). This reorganisation has added a layer of management but this was justified on the grounds that it would bring greater effectiveness.

7 Senate retains overall responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, but a Teaching Committee has been introduced which is an important focus for policy and decision making and is supported by a set of sub-committees with responsibility for particular areas. Since the 2003 audit, the Institute has also appointed a new Deputy Director and two assistant directors to support the Director and provide stronger institutional leadership. In addition to increasing managerial effectiveness the changes have been explicitly designed to enhance teaching and, particularly, to put research informed teaching at the centre of the Institute's work. Responses from the senior staff that the audit team met indicated that they believed the restructuring had had a beneficial effect and, on the basis of the evidence available to them, the team concurred.

8 As part of the reorganisation into faculties, the Institute requires that faculties other than the Doctoral School have similar management structures focused on a set of functions and responsibilities: learning and teaching, quality assurance and quality enhancement, postgraduate research students, and research, consultancy and knowledge transfer. Each of the three faculties has at least one Director in each of these areas, with the directors for learning and teaching, and quality assurance and quality enhancement being supported by learning, teaching and quality managers. All deans have established committee structures in their faculties, with committees usually chaired by the appropriate faculty director. These have similarities but vary depending on the size of the faculty and the nature of its offering.

9 The audit team had a concern in relation to faculty management and governance, and particularly the possible overlap of responsibilities leading either to confusion or to duplication of effort. For example, while from one point of view it is logical to have a faculty director of learning and teaching, and a separate faculty director of quality assurance and quality enhancement, in practice the team found that the enhancement of learning opportunities falls within both portfolios. Consequently, the team recommends that it is desirable for the Institute to continue to review faculty roles, responsibilities and their relationship to faculty structures to ensure clear and direct focus on quality assurance. The Institute should ensure that resultant changes to quality assurance and enhancement procedures are communicated effectively to staff.

10 The Institute focuses on three main areas: initial teacher education; academic study and professional development in Education at master's and doctoral levels; and research. These latter two areas are closely linked to Institute's research strategy. Strong performance in the RAE 2008 was a very significant part of the developments at the Institute since last audit. However, the audit team also heard that more recent developments are likely to pose challenges for the Institute: success in RAE2008 was matched by a reduction in income rather than an increase; special funding previously enjoyed by the Institute had been reduced.

## Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

11 The Institute manages its academic standards through policies and procedures developed and maintained by central committees and based on the QAA Academic Infrastructure. Academic regulations provide a framework to define and maintain the academic standards of the Institute's awards. The key mechanisms for the development and maintenance of academic standards are programme approval, annual monitoring, periodic review and the use of external examiners and other external reference points. Details can be found in various documents in the quality assurance section of the Institute Calendar.

12 A new system for the approval of programmes was put in place in 2009-10; this now separates the planning considerations from the programme's curriculum development. Proposals for new programmes are considered initially at the Faculty Validation Panel which scrutinises the use of the Academic Infrastructure and particularly *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), the programme specification and the support for the programme by external sources. The Institute Validation Sub-committee then scrutinises the documentation and the panel's views and recommends to the Teaching

Committee to approve with or without conditions. Senate notes the final approval to run the programme. Collaborative programmes follow the same process as internal approvals with the addition that from 2009-10 prospective partners will be vetted.

13 Annual monitoring is organised at faculty level and undertaken by programme teams through annual programme review. It considers external examiner comments, student progression and completion data and comments from student feedback to inform an action plan (see paragraph 25). The system for monitoring these reports through the faculty, Teaching Committee and Senate is rigorous and effective.

14 The Institute normally reviews programmes on a five-yearly cycle by a Review Panel that includes an external adviser (see paragraph 26). The Validation Sub-Committee agrees the annual timetable for review, approves the reports, monitors the resulting actions and reports to the Teaching Committee and Senate. The audit team noted that the cycle of reviews for some individual programmes was outside of the five years.

15 The Institute regards the reports submitted by external examiners as 'a vital element of the process by which the Institute assures the standards of its awards and of the processes by which its awards are made'. The online academic regulations contain clear guidance on the external examining process. There is a board of examiners for each award or related group of awards. External examiners are appointed by Senate and an induction event is available to all examiners. External examiners' reports are received by the Assistant Director Learning, Teaching and International, and the Academic Registrar. Within faculties reports are circulated to a number of senior staff: the dean, faculty director of quality assurance, programme leader, learning, teaching and quality manager, and chair of board of examiners. For research degrees the report is sent to the Dean of the Doctoral School, the programme leader for the degree and the chair of the board of examiners.

16 In 2008-09 a Scrutiny Panel was set up to address cross faculty issues and draw attention to recommendations for actions by the external examiners. It highlights areas of concern to faculties and it raises overarching institutional issues with the Assistant Director Learning, Teaching and International for the Teaching Committee's business. Faculty programme teams develop an action/improvement plan approved by the Dean. Both the programme leader and the faculty director of quality assurance contact the examiner outlining the actions that will be taken. The Scrutiny Panel also receives a copy of the response to the external examiner. All issues and actions taken are included in annual programme review. The Examinations section of Registry produces summaries of external examiner reports and presents them to Teaching Committee every year. Senate also receives them with programme action plans to ensure 'additional security' in view of its newly acquired degree awarding powers.

17 The documentation read by the audit team and the discussions with staff and students confirmed that the Institute operates an effective external examiner process and this supports a judgement of confidence in the Institute's management of academic standards.

18 The Academic Infrastructure is applied in the development and maintenance of Institute policies and procedures to ensure the academic standards of awards. The approval and review process of awards draws on the FHEQ and subject benchmarks. Programmes are developed and codified in programme specifications. The *Code of practice* is used to develop policies and practice. The *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance* were accepted by the Institute in 2005.

19 The Institute has developed its regulatory framework in the context of receiving degree awarding powers in 2006. A Code of Practice on Assessment is currently being developed. Current guidelines on assessment are available and contain clear guidance on the roles of chair of board of examiners and external examiners, moderation and academic offences. Further information for students is provided covering academic regulations, complaints and code of conduct, extenuating circumstances and equal opportunities. The Institute Student Handbook

(for Foundation Degree, BEd, diploma and master's degrees) includes information on assessment matters including plagiarism and appeals. Each programme also provides a handbook with information on assessment. Students whom the audit team met expressed satisfaction with the information they received including the appeals and complaints procedure.

20 The management information systems and student records section of the Registry is responsible for data production and analysis. It offers a service to faculties so that staff can access reports on cohort analysis, student applications, enrolments and progression, which are particularly useful for annual monitoring. It is also used to provide evidence for evaluations such as periodic reviews, information to Ofsted and to collate data for submission to HESA.

21 The overall conclusion reached by the audit team is that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of its academic standards.

## Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

22 The Academic Infrastructure and external reference points are considered in the creation and support of student learning opportunities. In particular, the Student Experience and Widening Participation Sub-Committee of the Teaching Committee ensures its learning opportunities policies and procedures take account of the *Code of practice*. There is information about the *Code of practice* available electronically on the Quality Assurance section of the Calendar, including a Learning and Teaching Handbook. Staff have appropriate access to information to support them in the process of approval, monitoring and review of programmes.

23 The audit team concluded that the Institute was applying the Academic Infrastructure and professional statutory and regulatory body considerations particularly in approval, monitoring and review. Its move to ensure that its codes and policies meet the expectations of the *Code of practice* is developing since degree awarding powers were granted. However, the rate at which each section is being addressed could be timelier to benefit student's learning opportunities. Consequently, the audit team recommends it desirable for the Institute to ensure that any changes to the academic infrastructure are identified and that resulting modifications to Institute procedures and policies are implemented in a timely and systematic manner and disseminated to staff.

24 Within the approval process (paragraph 12), learning opportunities are considered at the Faculty Validation Panel through the assessment by the library, computing and the Learning Technologies Unit (LTU) of the required level of resources. When the programme is to be delivered by distance learning the LTU provides specialist advice and programme teams are provided with guidance on how to prepare documentation and consult with external advisers and students. The Faculty Validation Panel oversees any changes that are required before forwarding the agreed proposal to the Validation Sub-committee. This Sub-committee may also require changes before it requests approval from the Teaching Committee.

25 Annual monitoring is conducted at programme level and reports through the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee. This offers a thorough process to monitor student learning opportunities and track through an action plan. Faculties produce summary reports that are discussed at the Teaching Committee and a summary of all key issues at faculty and Institutional level is produced for Senate.

26 Academic provision is reviewed on a five year cycle. The periodic review panel is chaired by a senior member of staff from another faculty who has received training for the role. The panel also includes an external member nominated by the Dean to the Validation Sub-Committee. The Learning and Teaching Handbook provides guidance on the process. The programme team is expected to produce a reflective self assessment document for the review that will aid the procedure and provide opportunities for consideration of future development.

27 Processes for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes are effective in confirming and maintaining the quality of student learning opportunities. The use of independent external advice in approval and periodic review supports a judgement of confidence in the Institute's present and likely management of the quality of learning opportunities.

28 The Institute has a range of mechanisms to gather feedback from students. At Institute level, students sit on key committees. At faculty level student representatives sit on programme committees and the Doctoral Students Consultative Committee, where they have opportunities to directly engage with programme leaders and tutors and see external examiner reports. Students' feedback on their programme through module evaluation forms. The Institute carries out a number of general student surveys and internal focus groups, in particular, the annual Institute Student Satisfaction Survey and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey. The results of evaluations are considered by the Student Experience and Widening Participation Sub-committee and the Doctoral School Committee where actions are put in place to address any issues.

29 Students are represented on faculty and other central committees including the Teaching Committee, Senate and its sub committees; however they do not always attend regularly. Every programme has at least one programme representative who is entitled to attend the programme committee in order to raise any issues highlighted by students. The Students' Union holds a Student Representative Committee six times per year in order to gain an institutional oversight of matters raised by students. Currently no formal training for student representatives is in place.

30 Students are involved in other aspects of the quality assurance processes such as periodic review and annual programme review. Students also cited examples of involvement in new programme development and strategic development. However, the Institute has a range of specific challenges in relation to the distinctive nature of its student population. The vast majority of the students are registered on professional development programmes, many studying on a part-time basis or through accredited offsite provision. The Institute has continued to explore a range of ways of securing effective student representation from part-time students and those with demanding professional commitments outside of their academic studies. However, they have not been successful to date in securing high levels of student engagement in this activity.

31 Overall lines of communication between students and senior management are open and effective as are mechanisms for involving students more generally in the life of the Institute. However, the effectiveness of formal student representation varies across programmes.

32 The Institute has a commitment to continually reviewing the curriculum and pedagogy in response to research findings and to be a community in which research plays a significant role. The Institute has a large proportion of academic staff undertaking research and scholarly activity at international level and the great majority of these staff, including professors teach on at least one of the Institute's programmes. Students whom the audit team met highlighted the benefits of being taught by leading researchers. The development and design of new programmes as a result of staff research interests is a proactive feature within the Institute.

33 The Learning and Teaching Strategy makes explicit reference to the integration of research and teaching and its promotion. Similarly the Staff Development Strategy is directed at supporting the institutional focus on the scholarship of teaching and assists in the forging of a strong and overt link with the Institutional Research Strategy so that all teaching becomes research informed. The audit team considered the strategic approach to the integration of research and scholarship with teaching to be a feature of good practice.

34 The Institute is committed to increasing the flexibility of its provision to enable students on some programmes to undertake all or part of their studies through active and flexible learning approaches. E-learning is mostly utilised at 'M' and 'D' level with an overall emphasis on blended learning. E-learning validation guidelines were recently produced which specify requirements as to how technology operates within the programme and how it is expected to enhance and support the student experience. The Learning Technologies Unit provides pedagogic support consultation and training to academic staff in the use of technology for learning as well as in experimentation with new technology and evaluations of effectiveness. The Head of the Unit attends all validations and is also involved in all major reviews of programmes involving significant elements of e learning. Overall the Institute has effectively developed the oversight of other modes of study. Students who met with the audit team noted the value and flexibility of such approaches to their learning.

35 The Learning and Teaching Strategy 2007-10 is committed to the enhancement of provision of information resources in a range of media to support both staff and students. The Information Services Department holds regular meetings with the Students' Union to discuss the annual service development plan and to receive student feedback on services. The service also has liaison officers for each faculty to promote further understanding of needs.

36 The Institute has long recognised the importance of a high quality library service and has enabled the development of exceptional collections and an excellent professional support service. The Library Service has received positive evaluations in the two most recent Institute Student Satisfaction Surveys and from discussions with staff and students the audit team concluded that the specialist library services exceed the expectations of students and staff. The team therefore regarded this as an area of good practice (see also paragraph 51).

37 An explicit ICT Strategy is in place which provides strategic direction for ICT development and is intended to ensure the provision of a focused service environment in liaison with faculties and other support units. Open access computing facilities and an extensive wireless network are available to staff and students. The Institute portal is available for remote users and gives students access to internet services, personal files, study materials, and e-journals.

38 The Institute is committed to a fair and efficient admissions procedure. Staff met during the audit visit highlighted ongoing work in relation to APL and APEL requirements. Students are selected according to published criteria by programme leaders which are reviewed regularly by the programme team and the Faculty Quality Committee. All programme specifications include a clear description of the criteria for admission, including the requirements for English language proficiency.

39 Entry to the Institute's courses is extremely competitive with limited places and at least two members of academic staff will consider each application. Unsuccessful applicants may request feedback by submitting a request to the Assistant Registrar. Overall, the Institute is effective in ensuring consistent implementation of its admissions policy to ensure that the processes are fair and transparent.

40 The availability of both academic and pastoral support is set out in the Student Handbook and on the website. A student guide to Institute policies and procedures acts as a necessary reference tool for students. A clear induction guide supports students in their introduction to the Institute. Students highlighted the flexibility of the induction programme especially the rotation of certain events so that all students could access the sessions.

41 International students receive a tailored induction programme. This is implemented by the international student coordinator who reports regularly to the Student Experience and Widening Participation Sub-Committee, which is responsible for monitoring all aspects of student support and for developing appropriate policies and practice in this area. Regular meetings also take place between the Directorate and the Students' Union where a range of support issues are discussed.

42 There is a clear definition of student entitlement to academic support and the role and responsibilities of the personal tutor within the Institute Student Handbook. However, in meetings with the audit team, students have raised the need for greater consistency in the provision and the benefits of formal recording of personal tutorials. The team therefore welcomes the proposed review of the guidance for student entitlement during 2009-10.

43 The Centre for Academic and Professional Literacies (CAPLITS) delivers a range of initiatives to promote excellence in academic writing and is highly regarded both by students and staff. The audit team also found that it supports students studying at a distance in a range of innovative ways and considered it a feature of good practice.

44 Overall, the Institute's arrangements for academic support and guidance are comprehensive and implemented effectively to maintain the quality of learning opportunities.

45 All academic staff recruited to the Institute are required to have relevant academic and professional expertise. In relation to postgraduate research degree supervision, those new to supervision are required to attend induction and other seminars and workshops on supervisory practice, and are mentored by a more experienced member of staff. All new lecturers not already qualified to teach must attend appropriate modules from the Professional Certificate/Diploma programme in order to ensure that all staff are able to reflect the appropriate standards, as outlined in the Higher Education Academy Professional Standards Framework.

46 Induction procedures are in place for all new members of staff, including those on short term contracts, with support provided centrally through the HR Department. The Directorate and Staff Development Team arrange formal induction sessions twice per year. Staff met during the audit visit were satisfied with the thoroughness and flexibility of the induction arrangements.

47 Staff also highlighted their clear understanding of the promotion and re-grading procedure. The Institute's staff review and development policy aims to assist every member of staff to develop their full potential. An annual learning, training and development plan is produced in each faculty which informs the central staff development programme.

48 Each faculty has a Staff Development Co-ordinator, an Equal Opportunities Co-ordinator and a HR Manager. Staff development coordinators meet regularly with the Head of Staff Development who has overall responsibility and reports to the Finance and General Purposes Committee. A peer observation system operates for academic staff, each faculty determining its own approach with a focus upon the development of the individual. The Institute is, however, moving towards a more generic centralised system. Overall, the Institute's arrangements for assuring the quality of staff support and development are effective.

49 The overall conclusion reached by the audit team is that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the Institution's present and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

## Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

50 The Institute's strategic priorities commit it to the ambition of 'a major player in innovation in learning and teaching in higher education'. Matching this, the audit team saw that enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities has been central to recent changes in the Institute, driven particularly by the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2007-2010. The team found clear evidence that the aims of the Learning and Teaching Strategy are being followed through and are benefitting students in the ways envisaged. Furthermore, the team considered that the strategic approach to the integration of research and scholarship with teaching was a feature of good practice.

51 Annual programme review reports are being used systematically at faculty and Institute level and discussions at the Teaching Committee promote good practice. Faculty directors responsible for learning and teaching and quality enhancement and learning, teaching and quality managers based in faculties ensure that suggestions for enhancement are captured and more widely discussed. Suggestions for enhancement made by external examiners in the context of a particular programme are also captured in the same process. Committee papers made available to the team indicated that these requirements are carried through, especially in the discussion of Annual Course and Programme Reports. Periodic Programme Review operates to the same effect.

52 The Learning and Teaching Strategy provides clear evidence of the Institute taking the deliberate steps envisaged towards improvement. The plans to create professional synergies and to share and celebrate good practice have been realised in the Learning and Teaching Conference held for the first time in 2009, and to be repeated in January 2010. The Institute also successfully entered the National Teaching Fellowship scheme for the first time in 2008.

53 Despite these activities, the audit team did not see evidence of a comprehensive assessment of the effects of enhancement activities which would assure the Institute that its investment in resources was having a benefit in enhancement of the teaching for all staff. It therefore recommends it desirable for the Institute carry out such a systematic evaluation of the effective adoption, by staff, of quality enhancement activities and the consequent influence of such activities on all teaching.

54 Innovation in learning and teaching in higher education is a Strategic Priority (paragraph 50), featuring in the Learning and Teaching Strategy and is potentially of benefit to students, particularly those studying part-time and overseas. The audit team found that there was evidence from meetings with students, for example, that the use of virtual learning environments was not fully embedded across all programmes. An e-Learning Task Group was set up in August 2007 and reported to the Teaching Committee in February 2008 and Senate in June 2008. An E-Learning Implementation group was subsequently set up in the autumn of 2008, reporting short term recommendations to the Teaching Committee in February 2009 and long term recommendations in autumn 2009. The team encourages the Institute to review the priority given to these enhancements.

55 The audit team found that the Institute has a range of activities in place and under development which constitutes an effective institutional approach to quality enhancement.

## Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

56 The latest Corporate Strategy and revised International Strategy commit the Institute to refocusing international developments, extending global reach and forming partnerships in the UK and abroad to foster collaboration in research, scholarship, consultancy and teaching activities. The Institute aspires to become an international institution, enhancing reputation, profile and income through a range of collaborative partnerships in research, teaching and consultancy with leading international institutions in the UK and overseas. Gradual and cautious development of collaborative activity is planned, based on staff interests and professional contacts.

57 Until it attained taught degree awarding powers in September 2008, the Institute was not permitted to franchise its taught programmes of study and it remains cautious about such developments. Instead, it developed the following types of collaborative partnerships in taught provision: partnership programmes or modules delivered by Institute staff at a partner organisation; dual awards; joint awards; and articulation/progression agreements. A revised Policy on Collaboration specifies procedures for development and management of collaborative partnerships. Two discrete sets of procedures are stipulated for partnerships in research, consultancy or knowledge transfer and for the development and quality assurance of partnerships that lead to an Institute award.

58 Responsibilities of the Senate for defining, maintaining and assuring the academic standards of collaborative provision are delegated to the Teaching Committee and its sub committees. A Scrutiny Panel on Collaborative Partnerships considers proposals for new partnerships of any type. The audit team found that it uses a less formal and relatively light touch approach to the approval of proposed partnerships which can mean that decisions to approve partnerships are not recorded systematically. The Scrutiny Panel is chaired by the Director of International Affairs and, given the thrust of the International Strategy, the team noted the potential for a conflict of interests.

59 Approval of a proposed collaborative partnership is based on a potential partner checklist drawn up by the proposer of the partnership in collaboration with the proposed partner organisation. Approval by the Scrutiny Panel authorises the production of a memorandum of understanding. For partnerships that lead to the award of credit, where there are contractual obligations, the Institute uses a memorandum of agreement to specify the roles and responsibilities of partners, and for partnerships in research, consultancy or knowledge transfer, a contract is drawn up. The audit team was shown checklists, memoranda and reports that were not signed or where signatures were undated and in one case a partnership programme was operating without a current contractual agreement, which had lapsed.

60 The Institute does not require a formal externally referenced approval process or a formal institutional visit that involves an external adviser to evaluate the capacity of a potential partner to fulfil their designated role in the arrangements. The rationale given for this position is that the Institute works with leading international institutions and sends its own staff to deliver already approved Institute programmes. The audit team was advised that local staff were not involved in the delivery of Institute programmes. However, it became clear that aspects of learner support are provided by local staff whose suitability is not formally evaluated. The Institute requires that all proposed partnerships that lead to the award of credit should be approved at both faculty and Institute level in accordance with the standard Institute procedures, however the audit team was advised that some taught collaborative partnerships had not been subject to a formal externally referenced approval process, such as validation. The audit team concluded that record keeping could be improved and considered that some of the detailed matters that can affect the quality of the student learning experience are not formally evaluated in an approval process that is externally referenced. It therefore recommends it advisable for the Institute to ensure that the collaborative provision procedures for initial approval, including partner approval, meet the expectations of sections 2 and 7 of the *Code of practice*.

61 The Institute requires that all partnership programmes, joint awards and dual awards are subject to annual monitoring review in accordance with the standard Institute procedures. The audit team saw a sample of such reports and noted that whilst monitoring of the programme takes place for UK provision, and there were examples of effective annual monitoring review reports which covered home and partnership versions of taught programmes, a biennial cycle was used for an overseas dual award programme. There is no requirement for routine on-going monitoring of the quality of the learning environment at a partner organisation to ensure that a partner continues to fulfil their designated role in the arrangements. The audit team concluded that there is scope to improve the monitoring of the quality of the learning environment, as described in section 2 of the *Code*, so that the Institute can be confident that its expectations of the quality of the student learning experience are fully realised in practice. Consequently, the audit team recommends that it is advisable for the Institute to ensure that ongoing monitoring arrangements of the learning environment for students in collaborative arrangements meet the expectations of section 2 of the *Code of practice*.

62 Assessment arrangements for students on award bearing collaborative provision mirror those for the equivalent home provision and operate within the regulations of the Institute. Arrangements for joint or dual award provision may also incorporate arrangements and regulations of the partner organisation. The Institute appoints a common external examiner for

internal and collaborative versions of the same provision, where possible to facilitate comparison and systematic consideration of outcomes at a common examination board and in an external examiner's report. External examiners are appointed, briefed and invited to report according to the procedures for internal provision and do not normally visit international partner institutions to meet students. The Institute issues certificates, diploma supplements and transcripts of student results as the sole awarding body for partnership programmes and modules, and under shared authority for joint and dual award provision. The language of study, normally English, is given on the diploma supplement. Location of study, as indicated by section 2 of the *Code*, was not always specified on the transcript, certificate or diploma supplement except for some joint and dual awards.

63 Student representatives in international collaborative provision are normally in regular email contact with the staff at the Institute which can enable remote engagement with programme meetings that occur in London. The audit team was advised that the Institute administers standard internal surveys to collaborative students but does not gather specific feedback on the learning experience of collaborative students using a survey dedicated to their needs.

64 The CAPLITS team provides bespoke e-learning materials for specific groups of international collaborative students whose first language is not English and who require support in academic writing. In other cases programme teams provide access to digitised materials and material on the virtual learning environment, Blackboard.

65 Where international partnership programmes and modules are mainly delivered by Institute staff, approval arrangements do not evaluate learning resources including staffing. By contrast approval arrangements for UK based partnerships programmes and modules include consideration of the suitability of learning resources and members of a programme team who are employed by a partner organisation. The audit team found that there is scope to ensure that the approval and monitoring arrangements in relation to those who provide local support for learning are strengthened (see paragraphs 60, 61).

66 Student handbooks contain details of the complaints and appeals arrangement, and a common handbook is normally used for collaborative and home provision. This means that all students receive the same information and it is not customary to provide collaborative students with specific types of information such as the formal channels through which to contact the awarding institution directly in the case of a complaint or appeal. Memoranda of agreement contain a requirement that partner organisations provide publicity and marketing materials for checking by programme teams and the Institute marketing team.

67 The audit team noted that, during the audit, the Institute's Collaborative Provision Register was incomplete. Subsequently, this deficiency was corrected. However, the team would strongly urge the Institute to make certain that it has robust processes for ensuring the Institute's Collaborative Provision Register is comprehensive and that there is current representation of all partnerships established by the Institute (see paragraph 85).

68 Overall, the audit team considered that the arrangements for the assurance, monitoring and review and management of collaborative provision, especially in an international context offered considerable scope for improvement to reflect sector best practice as presented in the *Code of practice*, especially sections 2 and 7.

## Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

69 Policies for research, consultancy and knowledge transfer at the Institute are formed within the framework of the Institute's Research Strategy. Postgraduate research programmes fall within the overall remit of Senate which delegates responsibility for the quality and standards of postgraduate provision to the Doctoral School Committee. This committee advises Senate, the Teaching Committee and other committees, as appropriate, on the introduction of postgraduate

programmes and the implementation of research degree regulations and policies. Senate delegates responsibility for the creation and maintenance of frameworks for research governance and ethics to the Research Governance and Ethics Committee. This committee, in turn, sets a framework for faculty research ethics committees which manage any issues that arise from postgraduate work. Postgraduate programmes are managed jointly by faculties and by the Doctoral School. Deans of Faculties and the Dean of the Doctoral School report to the Deputy Director. The audit team found general evidence of a sense of partnership in this relationship and no evidence of conflict; the quality of provision is in fact enhanced by the interaction between faculties and the Doctoral School and the opportunities for dissemination of good practice that it offers. Faculties have established structures which enable them to manage the postgraduate programmes they host; each has a Director of Postgraduate Research and a postgraduate committee. In addition to the School Committee the Doctoral School has two sub-committees, the Board of Examiners for Doctoral Awards and the Doctoral School Consultative Committee.

70 Postgraduate student processes generally are well supported by clear documentation, easily available to students and staff. The Code of Practice for Research Degrees is comprehensive and re-issued annually; informative and effective student handbooks are issued annually. The audit team was particularly impressed with the clarity and readability of these documents and students' views of them. They are comprehensive and communicate very effective guidance to students and the audit team considered them a feature of good practice.

71 The audit team found evidence that the Institute was fully aware of the *Code of practice* as it applies to postgraduate programmes and had mapped its own structures and processes again the precepts, indicating broad compliance with the *Code*. The audit team felt, however, that a staff handbook could provide a valuable addition to the present documentation, drawing together all aspects of the postgraduate programme in a way that would be beneficial for new staff and as a means of further informing staff and enabling consistency across faculties.

72 The Institute provides an exceptionally rich research environment for postgraduate students in terms of quality and quantity. Postgraduate students have access to very rich resources through the Newsam Library and students and staff confirmed its excellence to the audit team. Students also benefit from the location of the Institute in Bloomsbury and the collaborative working arrangements that exist between the Institute, Birkbeck College and University College London. The team considered the provision of well managed and resourced specialist library services to be a feature of good practice. Students also told the team of the commitment of supervisors, of the energising effect of working with authoritative figures in their fields, and of a fruitful postgraduate culture characterised by extensive seminar programmes.

73 Applicants most commonly draw information about the Institute's postgraduate programmes through the online prospectus. All applications must be submitted to the Doctoral School which retains responsibility for the admission process up to acceptance but working closely with faculties. All EdD applicants, including international students, are interviewed (with telephone or email interviews being used for candidates outside the UK). The situation for MPhil/PhD is not so categorical; formal interviews are a regular but not necessary feature and most applicants will have had at least an informal face-to-face review meeting with a prospective supervisor. The audit team would encourage the Institute to keep this matter under review, especially so as to ensure parity for all applicants.

74 Induction was identified as a feature of good practice in the Review of research degree programmes and the audit team's investigations found that this was indeed effective. The Induction week programme for international students, for example, is offered more than once so as to ensure, so far as possible, that students negotiating visas or travel arrangements have an opportunity to attend. Information is provided systematically to all students with the Code of Practice for Research Degrees 2009-10 and student handbooks being issued to all new students on a 'pen drive'.

75 The Institute's Code of Practice emphasises that supervision is a two-way relationship and provides clear guidance on the complementary roles and responsibilities of student and supervisor. All students have a main supervisor (ie with at least 60 per cent responsibility for supervision) and this determines the student's departmental affiliation. The Student Handbook sets out an expectation of very regular meetings as part of the strong support PGR students receive. The Code signals that joint supervision can be available as an exceptional arrangement. An Advisory Panel (with responsibility for ensuring continuity of supervision and overseeing progress reviews) is appointed for each student containing the supervisor (or supervisors) and two other members of academic staff. For all the strengths of these systems the audit team considers that there are additional benefits that can be derived through a supervisory team, particularly access to a multi-faceted support network, managing the risk that the supervisee may become enclosed intellectually by their supervisor's approach, and providing opportunities for supervisor training. As a consequence, it recommends it desirable for the Institute to review supervisory arrangements for postgraduate research students to secure the advantages of the supervisory team approach outlined in section 1 of the *Code of practice*.

76 The Institute's Code of Practice for Research Degrees 2009-10 sets out the broad framework for progress and review of PGR students. For those registered for an MPhil/PhD this includes: the 'upgrade' process by which students are registered for a PhD; the annual progress review system; and a 'candidacy' process which precedes the submission of the thesis. The Institute aims for processes for EdD students which are as parallel as possible. The MPhil/PhD Student Handbook 2009/2010 sets out the annual review process for students. It begins with a self-assessment by the student in parallel with an assessment with the supervisor. Each sees the other's report before a joint report is compiled which is reviewed by the student's Advisory Panel, by the Faculty Director of PGR, and finally by the Doctoral School.

77 The process for monitoring progress of EdD students makes use of the Annual Monitoring process just described but supplemented by progress reviews at each stage of study. The Programme Team works with a panel of external examiners appointed to the EdD Programme who act as moderators.

78 The breadth of opportunities open to PGR students is detailed in the Institute's MPhil/PhD Research Training Programme 2009-2010 which provides evidence of the links between the Institute's renewal of its teaching mission and research. PGR students are encouraged to compile their training progress as a Personal Training and Development Portfolio.

79 The close relationships established between students and their supervisors provide a first means for collecting feedback, supplemented by information provided as part of the annual monitoring process. The Doctoral School has particular responsibility for the research environment in the Institute and provides a more formal route for feedback through the Doctoral Students Consultative Committee. The Institute entered into the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey in 2008. In 2009 a similar Survey was organised internally, benchmarked against national outcomes.

80 PGR degrees are now awarded under the Institute's own regulations but there are still some students originally registered when the Institute was subject to the University of London requirements. The audit team found that arrangements for the change were well documented. PGR students have the responsibility in the decision to submit, but the submission form must be signed by the supervisor; this is again beneficial in reducing the risk of inappropriate submissions and failure. The format of the examination is regulated with rules freely available to students in the Handbook. Examiners must be approved by the Board of Examiners for Doctoral Awards, and an independent chair is appointed. Judgements are made according to publicly stated criteria. Results of examinations are reviewed by the Board of Examiners.

81 The independent chair is described by the Institute 'as a neutral observer and a guarantor of fair play'; the fact that the independent chair has no role in the academic content of the

examination provides clarity in the role. The audit team found an inconsistency in that the independent chair withdraws with the student when the examiners discuss their decision rather than continuing as a neutral observer. The audit team recommends it desirable for the Institute to review the use of independent chairs to further secure fairness and consistency in postgraduate research examination boards.

82 The audit found the Institute's arrangements for postgraduate research students met the expectations of the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and are effective in securing academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities.

## Section 7: Published information

83 The Institute has a systematic procedure to ensure the accuracy of published information that is provided for students. Information supplied by programme teams is published according to a thorough protocol managed by the marketing department. Information made available by partners is checked both by direct scrutiny and viewing over the intranet.

84 The audit team saw a range of material including programme directories; course information linked, in most cases, to comprehensive programme specifications; an excellent induction guide; induction programmes for home and international students; student handbooks; and found them to be comprehensive and written in an accessible style and language. The Unistats website contains a full set of required information and National Student Survey results were available for the small number of undergraduate students. Students confirmed that information on web pages and in print is informative, accurate, helpful and borne out in practice. Students reported high levels of satisfaction with the responsive and timely support from Institute staff and stated that expectations were met and frequently exceeded. On reviewing the information and responses to it, the team considered that the provision of course information to students through the portal and through advice of programme leaders and administrators was a feature of good practice.

85 There is no publicly available list of collaborative provision and so the Institute is not fulfilling one of the requirements of section 2 of the *Code*. A database of collaborative partnerships provided for the audit team did not contain an up-to-date, accurate and sufficiently detailed record (paragraph 67). The team was advised that listings of international activity on Institute web pages were not always accurate. The team therefore recommends it advisable for the Institute to ensure an up-to-date and authoritative listing of collaborative provision is publicly available.

86 The audit team found that individual items of published information were well written in an accessible style and that students regarded them as accurate and realistic. However, there was scope for the Institute to improve the information that it makes publicly available about its collaborative partnerships, and to ensure that programme specifications are published for all programmes that lead to an award of the Institute. Overall, however, the audit found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the Institute publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

## Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

### Features of good practice

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

- the strategic approach to the integration of research and scholarship with teaching (paragraphs 33, 50)

- the effectiveness of Centre for Academic and Professional Literacies (CAPLITS) as a research-informed support service for academic writing, in particular for students learning at a distance (paragraph 43)
- the Doctoral School Code of Practice and handbook for students (paragraph 70)
- the provision of well managed and resourced specialist library services (paragraph 72)
- the provision of course information to students through the portal and through advice of programme leaders and administrators (paragraphs 84).

**Recommendations for action**

88 Recommendations for action that are advisable:

- to ensure that the collaborative provision procedures for initial approval, including partner approval, meet the expectations of sections 2 and 7 of the *Code of practice* (paragraph 60).
- to ensure that ongoing monitoring arrangements of the learning environment for students in collaborative arrangements meet the expectations of section 2 of the *Code of practice* (paragraph 61)
- to ensure an up-to-date and authoritative listing of collaborative provision is publicly available (paragraph 85).

89 Recommendations for action that are desirable:

- to continue to review faculty roles, responsibilities and their relationship to faculty structures to ensure clear and direct focus on quality assurance. The Institute should ensure that resultant changes to quality assurance and enhancement procedures are communicated effectively to staff (paragraph 9)
- to ensure that any changes to the Academic Infrastructure are identified, and that any appropriate modifications to Institute procedures and policies are implemented, in a timely and systematic manner and disseminated to staff (paragraph 23)
- to evaluate the effective adoption, by staff, of quality enhancement activities and the consequent influence of such activities on all teaching (paragraph 53)
- to review supervisory arrangements for postgraduate research students to secure the advantages of the supervisory team approach outlined in section 1 of the *Code of practice* (paragraph 75)
- to review the use of independent chairs to further secure fairness and consistency in postgraduate research examination boards (paragraphs 81).

# Appendix

## The Institute of Education's response to the Institutional audit report

The Institute of Education welcomes the confidence placed by the QAA in the Institute's present management of both the academic standards of its awards and in the quality of the learning opportunities for its students as well as in our future ability to maintain high quality provision. It also welcomes the acknowledgement as good practice of the Institute's provision of specialist library services, the effectiveness of its Centre for Academic and Professional Literacies, the strategic approach taken to the integration of research and teaching, the Doctoral School Code of Practice and handbook for students and the provision of course information to students both remotely and face to face by key staff. The Institute particularly welcomes the QAA's recognition of the important role played by programme administrators in providing information to students.

The need for further steps to ensure that all procedures relating to the development, approval and monitoring of collaborative provision, together with the publication of an up-to-date listing of all such provision, fully meet the requirements of the QAA's *Code of practice*, is acknowledged by the Institute. Refinements to procedures are already underway.

A full action plan is being drawn up covering both advisable and desirable action points and the implementation of all appropriate action will be monitored by the IOE's Teaching Committee.

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