London Business School

JUNE 2008

Preface

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes

- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research

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

If the audit includes the institution's collaborative provision, the judgements and comments also apply unless the audit team considers that any of its judgements or comments in respect of the collaborative provision differ from those in respect of the institution's 'home' provision. Any such differences will be reflected in the form of words used to express a judgement or comment on the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the academic 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 and the report, without the annex, are published in hard copy. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (*Institutional audit handbook: England and Northern Ireland 2006* - Annexes B and C refer).

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the London Business School (the School) from 2 to 6 June 2008 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the School offers, on behalf of the University of London.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its domestic provision, on behalf of the University of London; limited confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its collaborative provision

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students in its domestic and collaborative provision, on behalf of the University of London.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit found that the School has a highly responsive environment, but that, in that its approach to quality enhancement is largely reactive, it has a little way to go before it can be said to have a strategic approach designed to ensure the enhancement of the quality of its provision.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit found that overall the School's arrangements for its postgraduate research students demonstrate awareness 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 provide evidence of full and proper attention being paid to the quality of learning opportunities and the academic standards of the awards the School makes on behalf of the University of London.

Published information

The audit found that reliance can reasonably placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the School publishes about its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

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

- the responsive and collaborative culture the School has created as a context for securing the active engagement of students in its feedback processes

- the quantity and quality of information available to students on the Portal and in the form of published guides, both prior to and following their admission

- the School's proactive approach to the use of alumni and alumnae in recruitment and admissions

- the work of the programme offices in providing support to students throughout their period of study

- the quality and timeliness of feedback to students on their assessed work

- the School's academically rigorous management of the assessment of those of its students who take the foreign language programme offered as part of its collaborative provision arrangements.

Recommendations for action

The audit team recommends that the School consider further action in some areas.
In particular, the team considers it essential for the School to:

- devise and implement a means of ensuring independent oversight of all credit derived from summative assessment within collaborative provision which contributes to an award

- establish, implement and monitor such a systematic set of institution-wide processes and reporting systems as will ensure the effective oversight of all aspects of its collaborative provision.

The team advises for the School to:

- ensure it has in place a full and formal process for the routine monitoring of programmes over time, including overseeing the cumulative impact of incremental changes to curricula

- give further consideration to the involvement of external examiners in the assessment process for elective courses

- ensure that it develops and implements procedures for the systematic deliberative oversight of the quality and standards of its educational provision as a whole, with particular reference to the nature and level of its engagement with external reference points

- ensure that all certificates and transcripts issued to graduates on the basis of work undertaken in collaborative provision record the name and location of the partner organisation concerned

- ensure that all members of staff acting as supervisors of research students undertake such development activities as will enable the School to be assured of their competence in this role.

It would be desirable for the School to:

- formalise and document its management and consideration of, and response to, external examiners' reports

- continue to develop a strategic approach designed to secure steady, reliable and demonstrable improvement in the quality of learning opportunities

- require both research degree supervisors and students to maintain records of all formal supervision meetings.

Reference points

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

- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, (Code of practice)*

- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland

- subject benchmark statements

- programme specifications.

The audit, while drawing attention to specific issues concerning the School's use of the *Code of practice* and the FHEQ found that the School takes due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities availble to students.

Report

1   An institutional audit of the London Business School (the School) was undertaken in the week commencing 2 June 2008. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the School's management of the academic standards of the awards it offers on behalf of the University of London and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2   The audit team comprised Professor J Feather, Dr P Hartley, Professor D Miers and Professor N Taylor, auditors, and Ms M Sheehan, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor R Harris, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

3   The School, a chartered institution and a full college of the University of London, was established in 1965 as a single subject graduate college. It awards degrees of the University and maintains a number of beneficial links with other colleges. The present Dean joined the School in September 2007; he is immediately supported by two deputy deans with respective responsibilities for programmes and faculty (academic staff), both of whom he appointed early in his tenure. The School's 98 core faculty are supported by 21 adjunct faculty and teaching fellows and bought-in lecturers. All core faculty are required to be research active.

4   The School has seven subject areas, each managed by a subject area chair (a senior faculty member). Its educational portfolio consists of a two-year full-time MBA; a part-time Executive MBA (EMBA), which includes one stream taught in Dubai; a part-time EMBA-Global (a dual degree programme with Columbia Business School); an MSc Management; an MSc Finance; and a five-year PhD Programme, which includes two-year provision for the compulsory Master of Research. Each programme is managed by an associate dean (a professional manager with responsibility for all of the non-academic elements of the programme as well as curriculum development, working with academic faculty). The School also has an extensive elective portfolio of some 70 courses, offered by faculty on the basis of their research and academic interests and expertise, managed by the Deans and Directors Committee and available to students on all programmes.

5   The EMBA Dubai stream, which received its first students in September 2007, has identical requirements to those of the London programme; it is delivered by School faculty in four-day blocks. The School, aware of the limitations of current facilities, is moving into more suitable accommodation in September 2008.

6   The School's collaborative provision, in addition to the EMBA-Global, currently consists of an International Exchange Programme, which permits up to one-third of second-year full-time MBA students to spend a term at one of around 35 selected partner institutions in 15 countries earning elective credits; and an agreement with King's College, London for the provision of language instruction to full-time MBA students. A joint degree in collaboration with Columbia Business School and Hong Kong University is scheduled to commence in May 2009.

7   The School's previous institutional audit resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in its current and likely future capacity to manage the quality of its academic programmes and the standards of its awards; in the course of the audit seven features of good practice were identified, as well as six advisable recommendations (one flagged a priority) and one desirable recommendation. In 2006 the School's research degree provision was reviewed by QAA as part of the national review; its ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programmes was considered appropriate and satisfactory. The School is also subject to the international accreditation of its awards by the professional bodies concerned: it places the highest value on such bodies' accreditation of its awards and has a clearly defined objective of achieving a global standard of excellence. It benchmarks its performance against international

competitors, on the quality of its intake and the salience of the corporate destination in which its graduates are employed; criteria include journal citations, faculty seniority and the number and mix of electives available.

8   The School's institutional-level framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities is headed by the Management Board (responsible to the Dean and Governing Body for the development and implementation of major policies) and Management Committee (in theory a predominantly operational body but chaired by the Dean and described by senior staff as the School's academic engine room). The Faculty Board advises on matters of academic policy; Assessment Policy Committee approves degree regulations and changes to assessment policies, appoints external examiners and receives reports from examination boards and external examiners; Deans and Directors Committee reviews cross-programme strategy and management, including grading, feedback and the Academic Infrastructure; PhD Committee ensures the academic quality and standards of the PhD Programme, and advises the Programme Chair on all relevant matters; boards of examiners are responsible for making recommendations on the award of degrees and for monitoring assessment practice against the regulations determined by the Assessment Policy Committee.

9   Like all University of London colleges, the School is required to submit an annual report covering student completion statistics, summaries of external examiners' reports and subsequent actions arising from them, commentary on topics selected by the University to contribute to best practice, and copies of the reports of any audits which have taken place during the year.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

10   A range of committees, all ultimately responsible to the Governing Body, oversees the institutional management of academic standards. Each has clearly stated terms of reference, though in practice there is overlap among them. In academic year 2007-08, the School undertook a review of its internal governance. This led to the preparation, early in 2008, of the School Decision-Making Review, which, at the time of the audit visit was close to being agreed.

11   For approval, monitoring and review the School relies on a combination of internal and external mechanisms and points of reference: internally these comprise a parallel system of six-yearly programme and subject area reviews and student feedback; externally it relies largely on external examiners, the University of London and international accreditation arrangements.

12   The current programme approval procedure is very recent and at the time of the audit no programme had completed the process. In principle, however, the procedure appeared robust, but, in that it does not apply to new elective courses, not comprehensive.

13   The School's approach to annual programme monitoring is wholly dependent on the analysis of student feedback, with incremental changes, which are collectively potentially considerable, not subject to monitoring or review; it is possible for elective courses never to be reviewed. The School, which is aware of these limitations, is advised to ensure it has in place a full and formal process for the routine monitoring of programmes over time, including overseeing the cumulative impact of incremental changes to curricula.

14   For periodic review the School operates separate six-yearly review cycles at subject area and programme levels. Whilst there is evidence that until recently the reviews did not always run to schedule, the process has recently been reinvigorated. A new periodic (programme) review process has recently been introduced, with a similar procedure to subject area review: the procedures for both kinds of review appeared satisfactory, and the School responded appropriately to the advice of the last institutional audit to use external examiners' reports to inform subject area reviews. Nevertheless, when the audit team reviewed reports from both kinds of review it found that while subject area review was wholly satisfactory, in the case of programme review only one had been completed; the process had, however, recently been revised and the MSc Finance review was nearing completion on target.

15   The audit team enquired whether the School sought to use these parallel review procedures to inform its overall understanding of the quality of provision. It was informed that subject area reviews are stand-alone events that review the entire composition of a subject area; they are largely research-driven and do not articulate closely with programme reviews. The team considered the School would find it helpful to consider whether this separate approach is denying it the opportunity of gaining a holistic perspective on its procedures.

16   The School places substantial reliance on student views as a benchmark against which to measure both academic standards and learning opportunities. The Course Evaluation Questionnaire, which has recently been conscientiously enhanced, is used to elicit formal feedback, as is the London Business School Student Association's annual end-of-year student survey, which the School actively supports. Each programme office also conducts end of first year and exit questionnaires. The audit found evidence of prompt and efficient responses to issues raised by students, and of steps being taken to prevent repetition. More informally, students have almost constant opportunities to raise matters of academic concern, and there is ample evidence to confirm the School's readiness to amend its practices in response to student feedback outside of the formal review processes.

17   The School appoints external examiners at both programme and course level. Appointment procedures are clear and accessible, and the audit found that the documentation with which such examiners are provided offers an adequate statement of external examiners' role within School assessment procedures. Nevertheless, external examiners' authority does not extend to routinely seeing samples of work from all elective courses taken in any one year. Accordingly the School is advised to give further consideration to the involvement of external examiners in the assessment process for elective courses.

18   The most recent summary for the annual report submitted to the University of London stated that external examiners are generally positive about academic standards and student achievement, but raised five matters requiring action: in each case an individual or committee was identified to investigate and respond. This was conscientiously done, and for the most part the academic standards of the School's awards are appropriately set and assured. Nevertheless, not all issues raised by external examiners are reported back to the next board of examiners, and it was learnt that instances exist of a lack of procedural clarity. Accordingly it is desirable for the School to formalise and document its management and consideration of, and response to, external examiners' reports.

19   The School's two boards of examiners have clearly specified functions, and scrutiny of the recent minutes of both enables their competence and professionalism, including the manner in which they respond to issues raised by external examiners, to be confirmed.

20   The School began reviewing the detailed implications of the recommendations of the last audit in academic year 2005-2006, and by the time of the present audit was able to state that the Academic Infrastructure had informed the development of its procedures. While the audit found that many of the School's procedures now reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, the School's engagement with the Academic Infrastructure has yet to be fully embedded in its review procedures. In particular it has yet to map the precepts of the *Code of practice* across its entire provision, and it does not make systematic use of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*.

21   The School effectively communicates the details of assessment principles and methods to students, including a forced distribution system introduced in response to external examiners' concerns about possible grade inflation. The system involves a percentage-based grade distribution for all Pass grades (with some discretion at the margins) once the absolute Pass-Fail decision has been made. The system appears robust and is accepted by the large majority of students; it is not without its challenges, however, in particular the danger of distortion deriving

from small class sizes, and it is assumed that the School will monitor the system to ensure also the equitable distribution of Distinctions.

22   The School does not publish explicit assessment criteria specifying what a student must demonstrate to achieve an improved mark, leaving it to the student to discover this by reading, discussing feedback on previous work with the member of staff concerned and studying model answers on the Portal. Students informed the audit team that these arrangements are largely fit for purpose, although the School may nevertheless find it helpful to work towards a more precise articulation of the criteria by which students are to be assessed. The School also assesses class participation, in relation to which it is currently piloting a Statement on Class Contribution. This Statement expresses its aims rather broadly and its method rather vaguely, however; and the School may find it helpful, as part of the piloting process, to bear in mind the precision in assessment information recommended in the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*.

23   The School stated that the brevity of its taught programmes means that the annual monitoring of progression statistics would be of little value. As required by the University, the School submits a year-on-year comparison of results as part of its annual reporting arrangement, although it was only in the current academic year that it began referring its completion rates to the Assessment Policy Committee. The success with which the School delivers its taught and postgraduate research provision could usefully be informed by a more systematic approach to management information.

24   Overall, confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards the School makes on behalf of the University of London.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

25   The School's procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes, as described in the previous section, identify some inefficiency in the relationships between relevant committees. It is noted also that the School has yet to set out clearly the procedures to be used to introduce changes in elective and core courses; that it still has no formal approval procedure for proposed new electives; that it depends heavily on consumer feedback in annual programme monitoring; that it has yet to find a satisfactory means of systematically monitoring the effectiveness of the implementation of recommendations deriving from programme review; and that there remains scope further to strengthen and systematise its engagement with the Academic Infrastructure. With these caveats the School's current arrangements for subject area and programme review meet expectations and are increasingly efficient and effective.

26   While the Management Board, Management Committee, Assessment Policy Committee and Deans and Directors Committee have oversight of all aspects of academic affairs, the absence of any subordinate body offering specialist advice on such matters means that the burden of work, including consideration of the Academic Infrastructure, falls on the heavily committed Quality Assurance Manager and Deputy Dean (Programmes). Even allowing for the distinctive characteristics of a small specialist institution, the existing deliberative structure means that the School lacks any mechanism to withstand future changes in personnel. The School is advised to ensure that it develops and implements procedures for the systematic deliberative oversight of the quality and standards of its educational provision as a whole, with particular reference to the nature and level of its engagement with external reference points.

27   The Student Association is the formal mechanism for student representation, and its representatives sit on all key committees, liaising as appropriate with faculty, associate deans and programme directors. It enjoys a good relationship with the School, expressing complete satisfaction with the feedback and consultation mechanisms available and describing a supportive but rigorous academic climate in which students play a full part. The responsive and collaborative culture the School has created as a context for securing the active engagement of students in its feedback processes is a feature of good practice.

28   Although as a wholly postgraduate institution the School is unable to take part in the National Student Survey, it supports the annual student survey conducted by the Student Association in so far as the results are widely disseminated, both formally and informally, and used in the annual staff review. The School's routine feedback mechanisms elicit the views of all students; in particular, returning study abroad students are encouraged to provide feedback on their experience.

29   The library is modest in size but relevant to teaching needs. Full-time MBA students understand that they must buy their own textbooks (which are, however, provided to students on other programmes). Students also have access to a wide selection of electronic resources as well as the many resources available elsewhere in the University and in London generally, and express themselves satisfied with provision. The School's intranet system, the Portal, is a very significant contributor to both learning and personal support, and is universally praised as the key source of information for all needs. The Portal is a comprehensive source of information, covering all aspects of student life, from admission requirements and information prior to commencement through advice on living in London and details of personal support services to detailed programme specifications and the appeals and complaints procedures. The quantity and quality of information made available to students on the Portal and in the form of published guides, both prior to and following admission, constitute a feature of good practice.

30   Admissions decisions are made by programme admissions committees, which are appropriately constituted and supported. Applicants are interviewed, typically by an alumnus or alumna, on the basis of relevant and helpful written guidelines and a detailed interview report form. The recruitment and admissions process, which is meticulously conceived, well-designed and effectively managed, enables the School to have confidence in the consistency and fairness of the system. In particular, the deployment of graduates in such a responsible role indicates a constructive engagement with employers and constitutes evidence of the seriousness with the School takes its outward-facing responsibilities. Its proactive approach to the use of alumni and alumnae in recruitment and admissions is a feature of good practice.

31   Academic support and guidance are mainly delivered through the School's three programme offices, each of which provides out-of-hours access by email or telephone. Students consider these arrangements excellent, the audit found the sensitivity and efficiency with which this service is provided exceptional, and identifies the work of the programme offices in providing support to students throughout their period of study as a feature of good practice.

32   Students commented very positively on the nature, quality and timeliness of the feedback they receive on assessed work, including examination performance, which is offered, orally and in writing, in an informal but engaged and constructive way, supported by advice as to how to make best use of the model answers available on the Portal. The audit found that such feedback supports students' development as learners and professionals, and that the quality and timeliness of feedback to students constitute a feature of good practice.

33   Support for academic staff has been significantly strengthened since the previous institutional audit, and the Academic Affairs Office provides a framework, opportunities and funding to help faculty develop themselves in their teaching, research and overall careers, of which full details are available on the Portal.

34   Overall confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

35   In terms of management information the School identifies three enhancement mechanisms: the annual student survey; the provision of localised opportunities for student feedback, in particular exit questionnaires and student representation; and the role of programme offices.

36   In its Briefing Paper the School identified ways in which it believes its staff development and reward mechanisms contribute to the enhancement of provision, including the annual award system, which comprises a Distinguished Contribution Award (for a member of non-academic staff), a Student Teaching Award (based on a student vote) and an Excellence in Teaching Award (selected by the deputy deans). The audit team, whilst acknowledging this arrangement's potential to be a contributory element in a quality enhancement process, considers the approach would benefit from being integrated into an explicit framework of deliberative procedures focused on the improvement of learning opportunities.

37   The audit team confirms that the School is justified in describing itself as having a highly responsive environment, but found also that its approach to quality enhancement is largely reactive, and that there is some work to be done before it can be said to have a strategic approach designed to ensure the enhancement of the quality of provision. It is desirable for the School to continue to develop a strategic approach designed to secure steady, reliable and demonstrable improvement in the quality of learning opportunities.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

38   In its Briefing Paper the School described its collaborative provision as comprising the EMBA-Global (Columbia); the International Exchange Programme; and the MBA Language Learning Programme delivered under contract by King's College London. The School is also developing a new joint MBA in collaboration with Columbia Business School and Hong Kong University, which has been approved in principle and is undergoing detailed preparatory work with a view to commencing in May 2009.

39   The EMBA-Global, which is said to have the same quality assurance processes and standards as all the School's programmes, is described by the School as a 'partnership of equals', with both duties and benefits shared, and the programme supported by regular meetings and teleconferences. Students are taught in intensive monthly blocks of several days each, alternating between New York and London, although the programme structure allows for up to 75 per cent of credit to be based on study at either institution. The programme is a dual award, with graduands awarded a degree by both institutions based on mutual credit recognition and an agreed exchange rate for marks awarded.

40   External examiners are present at the Board of Examiners which makes recommendations for the University of London award, but since grading policies and the evaluation of work undertaken in New York rest entirely with Columbia faculty they have no modifying input to grades awarded there. The audit team strongly encourages the School to open discussions with a view to achieving a mutually acceptable procedure whereby external examiners have effective oversight of the standards of summative assessment undertaken in New York which contribute to the University of London degree. The School is also advised to ensure that all certificates and transcripts issued to graduates on the basis of work undertaken in collaborative provision record the name and location of the partner organisation concerned.

41   The International Exchange Programme involves about one-third of second-year full-time MBA students spending a term with one of around 35 exchange partners, based in 15 countries. Students are issued with a helpful International Exchange Handbook, which acknowledges frankly that occasionally host institutions do not give equal access to exchange students in comparison to their own students, and that, although courses which count towards students' 'specialisation' are reviewed in advance by a senior faculty member, students are otherwise responsible for selecting their own elective courses at the partner institution (but with no guarantee that the courses selected will be available). Overall, the audit found that the School has only limited control over, or input to, those elements of the University of London award constituted of elective courses taken in the International Exchange Programme.

42   Students are able to accumulate up to one-sixth of programme credits from such courses, with neither faculty nor external examiners involved in assessment or moderation. The audit team, while appreciating that imposing external examiners on some 35 institutions in 15 countries would be impractical, considers it paramount that the School find a means of assuring itself that the academic standards of each of these institutions is comparable with each other and with those of a UK masters-level award. Accordingly it is essential for the School to devise and implement a means of ensuring independent oversight of all credit derived from summative assessment within collaborative provision which contributes to an award.

43   The School is developing a joint degree in collaboration with Columbia Business School and Hong Kong University, building upon its existing links with these two institutions. At the time of the audit the programme had been approved in principle, and detailed planning was in progress. Following discussions a detailed and well-documented regulatory framework with a clearly articulated governance and management structure is in place. The programme will be externally examined, an arrangement to which Columbia Business School has agreed. It is, however, strongly suggested that the School would find it helpful to extend the remit of external examiners to the summative assessment of elective courses before the programme is operational.

44   The School meets its requirement that, by graduation, all full-time MBA students should have business-related fluency in one foreign language through a contract with the Language and Communication Centre, King's College, London. The information available to students about the language programme is clear and comprehensive, and contains a lucid exposition of the language competence required; the School takes the requirement very seriously, referring students who failed to meet the required competence level. The School's academically rigorous management of the assessment of those of its students who take the foreign language programme offered as part of its collaborative provision arrangements constitutes a feature of good practice.

45   The School does not yet have a clearly defined strategy for approving, monitoring and reviewing collaborative arrangements with other academic institutions, although at the time of the audit a document was under construction which would, when both completed and approved (this is currently scheduled for December 2008), align approval arrangements with the existing programme approval process. It would also include an audit visit to proposed partner institutions, with a senior internal team overseen by an external assessor. Because the paper as yet lacks some key sections, the School does not currently have systematic institutional-level processes for the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision; nor does it have a procedure for ensuring that credit-bearing courses taken at partner institutions have been evaluated with regard to their level, content or their alignment with other external indicators. The lack of such reference points constitutes a current threat to academic standards, and it is essential that the School establish, implement and monitor such a systematic set of institution-wide processes and reporting systems as will ensure the effective oversight of all aspects of its collaborative provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

46   The School refers to its research degree students (whether registered for MRes, MPhil or PhD) as following its 'PhD Programme' (the Programme). Within the Programme, MRes students are subject to the School's regulations, while MPhil and PhD students are subject to University of London regulations. Other than in exceptional cases, postgraduate research students are required to graduate with a two-year MRes before being permitted to register for the research phase of the Programme: normally, therefore, a four to five year period of full-time study is involved.

47   Responsibility for the Programme lies with the Programme Director and Programme Chair, assisted by a PhD Committee, which contains student representation. The Programme is subject to the School's Procedures for Periodic Review and reports annually to the Management Committee and to the University Research Degrees Committee. In both these areas the audit found weaknesses. First, there has been slippage in meeting the requirement that programmes be reviewed every six years. Nevertheless, whilst this highlights a management weakness

(currently being addressed), there is no reason to question the appropriateness of the research environment or to doubt that the School meets the relevant precept 5 of the *Code of practice*. Secondly, the audit found variability both in the quality of reporting undertaken by the Programme (the most recent report reproducing verbatim elements of the corresponding section in its predecessor) and in the extent to which general issues raised by the University Research Degrees Committee are considered within the School.

48   Data made available to the audit team indicate that, of students admitted between 1999 and 2002, 30.5 per cent left prematurely or were terminated, and 74 per cent of those remaining completed within the five-year period. On the face of it, a timely completion rate of little over 50 per cent, particularly given the excellence of the intake, would be of concern, although the School believes the figures to be skewed by a large intake in 2000 - an experiment which was not deemed successful and which has not been repeated.

49   The research environment is assured by the fact that all core faculty are research active, and the publication of original research of international standing and relevance to the School's objectives is a key criterion in initial appointment and tenure. The School's excellent performance in successive research assessment exercises and high international ranking among business schools stand testimony to the success of this approach. Nevertheless, the School acknowledged that it currently has no internal mechanism for giving ethical approval for staff or student research projects, but has an arrangement with the London School of Economics, whereby all research projects requiring ethical approval are processed through the latter's Ethics Committee. The audit team assumes, not least given the rapidly evolving nature of the field, that the School will monitor this arrangement very closely, weighing carefully the respective merits of continuing with this arrangement and establishing a research ethics committee of its own.

50   The career development of PhD students is encouraged by the expectation that they provide faculty with 40 days' assistance on research papers, case writing, tutoring and grading. At the same time, the Programme hires the consultancy services of a professional development adviser, who works closely to identify individual students' needs and provide feedback. The adviser observes students' presentations, runs a presentation skills workshop using videotaping facilities to work with small groups of students and ensures that students are provided with guidance on presentation and interviewing skills.

51   The School's procedures for applications and admissions are meticulous and non-discriminatory in design, and conscientiously applied. The induction process is similarly well-conceived; new students are matched with a first-year supervisor who provides mentorship during the coursework period; effective mechanisms and resources exist for research training and all supporting aspects of students' educational experience. Nevertheless, in spite of these great strengths, and in spite also of the size and culture of the institution, which facilitate high levels of informal contact, no obligation exists for supervisions to be recorded. Not only could this omission place the School in difficulty, but the recording of the progress of successful students is of potential value to both parties. It is desirable for the School to require both research degree supervisors and students to maintain records of all formal supervision meetings.

52   The School could also be better assured of the quality of supervision by making an introductory seminar for new faculty about the PhD Programme compulsory, and providing refresher training for experienced supervisors. The School is advised to ensure that all members of staff acting as supervisors of research students undertake such development activities as will enable the School to be assured of their competence in this role.

53   On the basis of its scrutiny of recent reports, the audit team confirms that the School's arrangements for its postgraduate research students meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1*, and provide evidence of full and proper attention being paid to the quality of learning opportunities and the academic standards of the awards the School makes on behalf of the University of London.

Section 7: Published information

54   Proper procedures are in place to ensure the accuracy of information published in brochures and on the School's website, and the School provides a wide range of information about its programmes, inviting prospective applicants to contact its graduates and current students for information and to attend sample classes. Students are positive about the quality of published information, are consulted on the development of course brochures and web pages, and have opportunities to raise concerns about promotional material with appropriate senior members of the School. Reliance can reasonably placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the School publishes about its educational provision and the standards of the awards offered on behalf of the University of London.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

55   As a result of its investigations the audit found that:

●   confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its domestic provision; limited confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its collaborative provision

●   confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students in its domestic and collaborative provision.

Features of good practice

56   The audit team identified the following features of good practice:

●   the responsive and collaborative culture the School has created as a context for securing the active engagement of students in its feedback processes (paragraph 27)

●   the quantity and quality of information available to students on the Portal and in the form of published guides, both prior to and following their admission (paragraph 29)

●   the School's proactive approach to the use of alumni and alumnae in recruitment and admissions (paragraph 30)

●   the work of the programme offices in providing support to students throughout their period of study (paragraph 31)

●   the quality and timeliness of feedback to students on their assessed work (paragraph 32)

●   the School's academically rigorous management of the assessment of those of its students who take the foreign language programme offered as part of its collaborative provision arrangements (paragraph 44).

Recommendations for action

57   The audit team recommends that the School consider further action in some areas. In particular, it is considered essential for the School to:

●   devise and implement a means of ensuring independent oversight of all credit derived from summative assessment within collaborative provision which contributes to an award (paragraph 42)

●   establish, implement and monitor such a systematic set of institution-wide processes and reporting systems as will ensure the effective oversight of all aspects of its collaborative provision (paragraph 45).

58   It would be advisable for the School to:

● ensure it has in place a full and formal process for the routine monitoring of programmes over time, including overseeing the cumulative impact of incremental changes to curricula (paragraph 13)

● give further consideration to the involvement of external examiners in the assessment process for elective courses (paragraph 17)

● ensure that it develops and implements procedures for the systematic deliberative oversight of the quality and standards of its educational provision as a whole, with particular reference to the nature and level of its engagement with external reference points (paragraph 26)

● ensure that all certificates and transcripts issued to graduates on the basis of work undertaken in collaborative provision record the name and location of the partner organisation concerned (paragraph 40)

● ensure that all members of staff acting as supervisors of research students undertake such development activities as will enable the School to be assured of their competence in this role (paragraph 52).

59   It would be desirable for the School to:

● formalise and document its management and consideration of, and response to, external examiners' reports (paragraph 18)

● continue to develop a strategic approach designed to secure steady, reliable and demonstrable improvement in the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 37)

● require both research degree supervisors and students to maintain records of all formal supervision meetings (paragraph 51).

Appendix

London Business School's response to the Institutional audit report

The School is pleased that the QAA have placed confidence in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its domestic provision, and in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to its domestic and collaborative provision.

The School welcomes the recognition given to areas of good practice, notably in relation to engaging students whilst obtaining feedback, the quality of the information available to students both in hard copy and on the School's Portal, and the use of alumni in recruitment processes. In addition the work of the programme offices in supporting students was praised, as was the quality and timeliness of feedback provided to students. Finally the team also felt that the academically rigorous management of the foreign language training provided as part of our collaborative arrangements was noteworthy.

The School acknowledges the QAA's view that only limited confidence can be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its collaborative provision.

The School takes very seriously the QAA's recommendations, especially those categorised as essential. Since August 2008, we have worked with our International Exchange Partners and our dual degree partner school, all world-class business schools, to enhance our existing joint working procedures to reflect these recommendations. We have also put in place an overarching set of comprehensive procedures relating to Collaborative Provision, which provide a framework for the specific working procedures we have with our partners. Finally, we have expanded the oversight of external examiners on modules taught at partner schools. Therefore, we believe that the two essential recommendations from the Audit Team have now been addressed.

The School is committed to working in a constructive manner with the QAA. We are in the process of addressing the remaining recommendations in the institutional audit, and we will continue to liaise with the agency to ensure that the appropriate improvements in our procedures are undertaken in a timely and thorough manner.