Royal Holloway and Bedford New College

FEBRUARY 2005

Institutional audit

Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) exists to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education (HE) qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE.

To do this QAA carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In England and Northern Ireland this process is known as institutional audit. QAA operates similar but separate processes in Scotland and Wales.

The purpose of institutional audit

The aims of institutional audit are to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges are:

- providing HE, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard, and
- exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

Judgements

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 quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards
- 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.

These judgements are expressed as either **broad confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence** and are accompanied by examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement.

Nationally agreed standards

Institutional audit uses a set of nationally agreed reference points, known as the 'Academic Infrastructure', to consider an institution's standards and quality. These are published by QAA and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), which include descriptions of different HE qualifications
- The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of the what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. They outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the FHEQ.

The audit process

Institutional audits are carried out by teams of academics who review the way in which institutions oversee their academic quality and standards. Because they are evaluating their equals, the process is called 'peer review'.

The main elements of institutional audit are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution nine months before the audit visit
- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the audit visit
- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the audit visit
- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the audit team five weeks before the audit visit
- the audit visit, which lasts five days
- the publication of a report on the audit team's judgements and findings 20 weeks after the audit visit.

The evidence for the audit

In order to obtain the evidence for its judgement, the audit team carries out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, such as regulations, policy statements, codes of practice, recruitment publications and minutes of relevant meetings, as well as the self-evaluation document itself
- reviewing the written submission from students
- asking questions of relevant staff
- talking to students about their experiences
- exploring how the institution uses the Academic Infrastructure.

The audit team also gathers evidence by focusing on examples of the institution's internal quality assurance processes at work using 'audit trails'. These trails may focus on a particular programme or programmes offered at that institution, when they are known as a 'discipline audit trail'. In addition, the audit team may focus on a particular theme that runs throughout the institution's management of its standards and quality. This is known as a 'thematic enquiry'.

From 2004, institutions will be required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 02/15 *Information on quality and standards in higher education* published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The audit team reviews progress towards meeting this requirement.

All the Agency's publications are available on our web site www.qaa.ac.uk

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Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Royal Holloway and Bedford New College (the College) from 14 to 18 February 2005 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the College offers on behalf of the University of London, which formally awards the College's degrees.

To arrive at its conclusions the team spoke to members of staff throughout the College, to current students, and read a wide range of documents relating to the way the College manages the academic aspects of its provision.

The words 'academic standards' are 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 UK.

Academic quality is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided for them.

In institutional audit, both academic standards and academic quality are reviewed.

Outcome of the audit

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

- broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the College's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of awards offered by the College on behalf of the University of London.

Features of good practice

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

- the proactive way in which faculty assistant registrars support the academic management of faculty activity, and their contribution to quality enhancement across the College
- the role of the Educational Development Centre in supporting and leading developments in teaching and learning, and its work with the departments to spread good practice

- the CAPITAL programme to support academic staff, and the inSTIL programme to support postgraduate students with teaching responsibilities and non-established teaching staff
- the college-wide culture of teaching programmes being informed by disciplinary research
- the effectiveness of central student support and learning resources services in their work with each other, with departments and through the personal adviser system.

Recommendations for action

The audit team also recommends that the College should consider further action in a number of areas to ensure that the academic quality and standards of awards are maintained. The team advises the College to:

- move as soon as possible to a consistent college-wide approach to dealing with coursework deadlines and penalties for late submission.

In addition, the College might consider the desirability of enhancing its quality management arrangements by:

- addressing more fully the recommendation of the 2001 quality audit of 'keeping under review the role of the effectiveness of the Graduate School as an agent for quality enhancement, following the transfer of postgraduate quality assurance matters to the faculties'
- managing the availability of teaching and learning space so as to safeguard the quality of the learning environment, in the context of its strategy for increasing student numbers
- remaining alert to differences in departmental approaches to student support and, where appropriate, acting to establish clear college-wide boundaries to diversity of practice
- taking the opportunity of its review of the management structure of the Halls of Residence to clarify, for the benefit of students, the channels open to them for addressing enquiries and raising matters of concern
- developing a more concerted approach to identifying and addressing the particular learning needs and expectations of international students.

Biological Science, English, History and Management

To arrive at these conclusions, the audit team spoke to staff and students, and was given information

about the College as a whole. The team also looked in detail at the programmes listed above to find out how well the College's systems and procedures were working at programme level. The College provided the team with documents, including student work and, here too, the team spoke to staff and students. As well as supporting the overall confidence statement given above, the team was able to state that the standard of student achievement in these programmes was appropriate to the titles of their awards and their place in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* . The team considered that the quality of learning opportunities available to students in each of the programmes was suitable for a programme of study leading to the named award.

National reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team also investigated the use made by the College of the Academic Infrastructure which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The audit found that the College was making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure to inform its framework for the management of quality and standards.

The audit found that the College was preparing appropriately for the publication of the teaching quality information that institutions will be required to publish, and which is listed in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education.*

Main report

Main report

1   An institutional audit of Royal Holloway and Bedford New College (the College) was undertaken during the period 14 to 18 February 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the College's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility for conferring degrees of the University of London.

2   The audit was carried out using a process developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and Universities UK (UUK), and has been endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills. For institutions in England, it replaces the previous processes of continuation audit, undertaken by QAA at the request of UUK and SCOP, and universal subject review, undertaken by QAA on behalf of HEFCE, as part of the latter's statutory responsibility for assessing the quality of education that it funds.

3   The audit checked the effectiveness of the College's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study leading to those awards; for publishing reliable information; and for the discharge of its responsibility for conferring degrees of the University of London. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, the audit included consideration of examples of institutional processes at work at the level of the programme, through four discipline audit trails (DATs), together with examples of those processes operating at the level of the institution as a whole.

Section 1: Introduction: Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, University of London

The institution and its mission

4   The College is one of the six multi-faculty institutions comprising the Federal University of London. Also known as Royal Holloway, University of London, the College was created through the merger in 1985 of Royal Holloway College and Bedford College, both of which were members of the University of London.

The College is situated predominantly at Egham in Surrey, but also has a small unit at Bedford Square in Bloomsbury.

5   The College has three academic faculties: Arts (with nine departments); Science (with seven departments); and History and Social Science (with six departments). With the exception of MPhil and PhD degrees, the College awards degrees of the University of London through powers delegated under the University of London ordinances. MPhil and PhD awards are awarded directly by the University of London. Certificate and Diploma awards are specific College awards.

6   In 2003-04 the College had some 6,020 full-time equivalents (FTEs) on HEFCE-funded programmes. Of these, some 700 were on postgraduate taught courses and some 520 on postgraduate research programmes. Approximately 25 per cent of the postgraduate research students and 16 per cent of the postgraduate taught students are part-time. Essentially, all the undergraduate students are full-time. Total student numbers have seen an increase of approximately 10 per cent over the last five years. Student numbers are roughly equally distributed between the three faculties.

7   The initiatives on widening participation and outreach activity have resulted in the building of partnerships with local schools. Some 11 per cent of students on the undergraduate courses are mature students. The College aims to increase its proportion of postgraduate to undergraduate students, but is finding this challenging, and is devising initiatives to take effect once the increased student fee arrangements are introduced in 2006-07.

8   The current Principal joined the College in September 2002, and initiated a review of the overall shape and size of the College and its portfolio of programmes. At the time of the audit visit this review was in progress, alongside reviews of the College's commercial and estates strategies.

Mission statement

9   'The College Mission is stated as follows: 'Royal Holloway, University of London is committed to providing an environment which nurtures research, learning and teaching of the highest quality, and which advances knowledge, the personal development of its students and staff, and the public good, locally, nationally and throughout the world'.

Collaborative provision

10   Apart from its links with the University of London, the College lists 15 educational partnerships, all except one of which are within the UK. Three of these are classified as franchises, two as validations, and three are joint programmes. Seven are listed as 'other collaborations', and include practice placement arrangements for social work and health courses. While small in scale, collaborative provision is regarded by the College as important in its overall strategy.

Background information

11   The published information for the audit included:

- information on the College's website and its prospectuses
- the May 2002 report of the QAA continuation quality audit of November 2001
- reports of QAA subject reviews
- reports of three developmental engagements (not published but available to the College, HEFCE and QAA).

12   The College provided QAA with:

- an institutional self-evaluation document (SED)
- its Academic Standards Handbook 2004-2005
- its Corporate Strategy 2002-2007
- its Student Handbook 2004-2005
- its Code of Practice for the academic welfare of postgraduate research students 2004-2005
- papers of key committees, strategy documents and action plans, documents relating to governance and regulation, and examples of internal review documents in electronic form
- a discipline self-evaluation document (DSED) for each of the selected DATs.

13   During and after the audit visit, the audit team was given access to a range of the College's internal documents in hardcopy and through the College intranet. The team appreciated the unrestricted access it was given to these sources of information.

The audit process

14   Following a preliminary meeting at the College in May 2004 between a QAA officer and representatives of the College and its students, QAA confirmed that four DATs would be conducted during the audit visit. On the basis of the SED and other published information, the audit team confirmed that the DATs would focus on taught programmes in: Biological Sciences; English; History; and Management.

15   QAA received the SED and supporting documentation in October 2004, and the DSEDs in December 2004. The DSEDs were based on pre-existing internal review documents.

16   The audit team visited the College on 11 and 12 January 2005 for the purpose of exploring, with the Principal, senior members of staff and student representatives, matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the SED and other documentation. At the close of the briefing visit, a programme of meetings for the audit was agreed with the College.

17   At the preliminary meeting for the audit, the students of the College were invited through their Students' Union (SU) to submit a separate document expressing views on the student experience at the College and identifying any matters of concern or commendation with respect to the quality of programmes and the academic standard of awards. They were also invited to give their views on the level of representation afforded to them and on the extent to which their views were noted and acted upon. The student body submitted to QAA a students' written submission (SWS) produced by the SU, drawing on information and views from a number of sources and surveys. The document had been shared with the College. The audit team is grateful to the students for preparing this helpful document to support the audit.

18   The audit visit took place from 14 to 18 February 2005, and included further meetings with staff and students of the College. The audit team comprised: Professor S A Dilly, Mr P Lloyd, Dr M R Luck, Mrs J Lyttle, Dr L G Turton, auditors, and Mr M Gresson, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr D J Buckingham, Assistant Director.

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

19   The College received a continuation quality audit by QAA in November 2001. The report of that audit, published in May 2002, commended the College in a number of areas including the strategic and consistent approach to quality management; the processes of annual review and periodic departmental review; the use of well constructed action plans for ensuring that the recommendations of committees and working groups are implemented; the proactive role and impact of the Educational Development Centre (EDC); and the quality of handbooks.

20 The report also identified a number of areas for further action for consideration by the College including ensuring that any differences between departments do not compromise the basis of the College's view that 'in a mature institution, quality enhancement and the dissemination of best practice are not optimised by centralising monitoring functions at some distance from the academic community which is ultimately responsible for self-regulation'; keeping under review the effectiveness of the Graduate School as an agent for quality enhancement, following the transfer of postgraduate quality assurance matters to the faculties; and monitoring closely through a number of cycles the implementation of the new management systems for the assurance of quality and standards.

21 Since the 2001 audit, the College has inducted a new team of senior managers and consolidated the faculty structures. There has been implementation of a new committee structure and clarification of the role of the Graduate School. There have been significant changes in the composition of the senior academic management team over the last three years, but the administrative structures have been substantially stable. The faculty deans have joined the senior management team, and now attend the Principal's briefing group in order to contribute to the strategy, policy and leadership of the College. There have been some changes in the senior administrative roles, with the responsibilities of the College Secretary being taken over by the Director of Resources and the Dean of Students being replaced by a Head of Student Support Services; these changes were supported by reviews of the activities of the two areas. The College reported significant progress on the implementation of a systematic staff development programme for senior managers, in association with the 1994 group, Kingston University and St. George's Hospital Medical School.

22 In September 2000, the College introduced a new undergraduate assessment scheme, and the new scheme was used to classify students for the first time in 2002-03. The College is scrutinising the impact of these changes through the collection of statistics on student progression and performance in all years and across all courses.

23 Since the 2001 quality audit, the College has participated in two QAA developmental engagements, in Geography, Hispanic Studies and Social Work. It has received satisfactory accreditation reports from the Institute of Physics and the Geological Society.

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

24 The College's SED expressed the view that 'the outcomes of the previous academic quality audit and of recent Developmental Engagements…suggest that our internal systems are robust and compare very favourably with those elsewhere in the sector. Our approach over the last three years has been, therefore, to build on this foundation in light of new external developments and examples of good practice, rather than to initiate more substantial changes'.

25 The College's view is that 'the heart of quality assurance and monitoring lies in the faculties', but recognises the need to 'keep under review the balance of delegated and centralised control'. The SED expanded upon the College's approach to quality management by stating that 'our ethos remains that we wish to embed quality within our routine processes and gain ownership at all levels of the institution. This means that we have a system premised on collegiality and trust'.

The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision

26 The governing and executive body of the College is the Council. A review of the composition of the senior management team took place, and was implemented, in 2002-03. A review of the committee structure took place in 2003-04, and was implemented in 2004-05. This review was carried out at the request of Council, with the aim of reducing meetings and paperwork and increasing effectiveness. The SED explained that the review was also intended to release staff time for 'other activities, in particular those pertaining to developments in teaching and research'.

27 The senior body for the academic work is the Academic Board. The Board, which is chaired by the Principal, regulates and controls all matters related to teaching, learning and the award of degrees. It oversees the work of the principal executive committees (see below, paragraph 29 et seq), and the work of the three faculty boards. Within each faculty, each department has a board and a sub-board of examiners.

28 The Academic Board has overall responsibility for academic standards and the quality of educational provision, but delegates the operation of some

quality assurance mechanisms to faculty boards. One of its operational principles is 'departmental and individual ownership with accountability to the College and overall responsibility at institutional level'. The SED expressed the College's belief that 'the most constructive approach is one that embeds quality practices, trusts colleagues to adhere to the framework we have developed, and then monitors and audits compliance in an informed fashion'.

29   The Academic Development Committee (ADC) is chaired by the Principal, and has the purpose of driving forward academic policy. It is both an interfaculty committee and a steering committee for the Academic Board. It has executive responsibility for academic standards and the quality of educational provision, and is the senior body responsible for the academic work of the College in teaching, assessment and research. It has a planning role and takes strategic decisions regarding academic matters and resource issues. It commissions the periodic review of departments (see below, paragraph 58) and receives reports from periodic and annual reviews.

30   The Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (LTQC) is chaired by the Vice-Principal (Academic Affairs), and has the purpose, according to the Committee's Handbook 2004-2005, of enhancing and evaluating a College-wide culture of excellence in learning, teaching and assessment. It is responsible for devising and implementing the College's learning and teaching strategy, advising the College on developments occurring internally and externally, and developing mechanisms for quality assurance and enhancement. It works with faculties on detailed matters regarding teaching and learning, and on the implementation of educational initiatives.

31   Alongside its formal committee structure, the College has a large number of standing advisory groups, ad hoc groups and forums. These do not report directly to Council, but do have defined remits and constitutions and interact as appropriate with other parts of the management structure. Among these, the Principal's Briefing Group convenes on a weekly basis as the main meeting of senior managers; the Principal and the three Vice-Principals, three deans of faculty, the Director of Resources and College Secretary, and the Director of Information Services. All new committees, groups and forums are expected to undertake an internal review after one year of operation to determine whether they have been effective.

32   The Management Coordination Group coordinates academic and administrative functions, to allow sharing of information and discussion of policy initiatives. All senior administrative managers make annual reports to the Group on the areas for which they are responsible. The Group looks across the College to see that support services are effective and complements the academic role of ADC.

33   The Academic Standards Handbook is the central repository of guidance on standards, practice and quality assurance in academic matters. The Handbook was revised with effect from 2000-01, following devolution of responsibility for quality assurance to faculties. The aim of these revisions, according to the SED, was to 'ensure consistency on core issues' while allowing 'some room for appropriate discipline-specific variables'.

34   Operational responsibility for quality assurance and management is devolved to faculty deans. Faculty deans are appointed at the Principal's discretion, and serve for three years, or longer by arrangement. They are part of the senior management team, and the Principal is their line manager. Deans are line managers for the heads of department in their faculties. They are supported by faculty assistant registrars and by deputy deans. A faculty executive, comprising the dean, deputy dean, heads of department and faculty assistant registrar, meets at least twice per term to act as a forum and steering group. Deans are therefore in a position to provide the managerial link between quality management activities at departmental, faculty and College levels.

35   Faculty assistant registrars serve the faculty executive, and are responsible, inter alia, for ensuring adherence to the College's framework for the management of quality and standards. The faculty assistant registrars have their own informal group, which is a channel for information transfer between faculties and departments and across the management structure. The SED considered that they 'provide a bank of expertise …and knowledge', and 'working together are able to share insights and spread good practice' through the College. The audit team noted several examples supporting the College's view, and considered the proactive role of the faculty assistant registrars to be a feature of good practice.

Assessment regulations

36   In respect of its framework for the management of academic standards, the College publishes Regulations for the Conduct of Assessment,

describing the constitution and function of boards of examiners, the appointment and roles of internal and external examiners (see below, paragraph 65), procedures for the setting and marking of work and for the publication of results. The College also publishes Guidelines for Examiners and Assessors, describing procedures for marking and the moderation of marks, the classification of candidates, dealing with extenuating circumstances, and the recording of meetings of boards of examiners.

37   The College introduced new degree regulations for undergraduate programmes in September 2000, in response to preferences among staff and examiners for a system based on mark averages rather than profiles. The new scheme, which was used to classify students for the first time in 2002-03, specifies college-wide assessment and progression criteria, procedures for the calculation of average marks, and regulations for the classification of candidates within degree classes. The scheme provoked concerns among some examiners, especially in relation to the criteria for identifying and considering borderline candidates, and the SED described the actions taken by the College in response. A review of the outcomes of assessment under the scheme was undertaken in order to investigate these concerns, which continue to be monitored. A new classification scheme for taught master's programmes was introduced in 2001.

38   The College was aware that the introduction of the new regulations would result in a tightening of the criteria for progression and of borderline criteria, with the potential for a significant impact on degree classifications. It was of the view that its marking and classification system should allow for 'the exercise of academic judgement [to have] most impact on the final classification outcomes'. In association with the new classification scheme, the College has been working to develop clear assessment criteria which allow for better differentiation of levels of achievement within the First-class and Fail categories, and departments are now required to specify assessment criteria for the entire 0 to 100 per cent range. This approach has received strong support from external examiners.

39   The new regulations are now in their fourth year of operation, and have applied to two graduating cohorts to date. A careful analysis of the effects of these changes on the distribution of degree grades was presented in the SED, supporting the College's view that the new scheme for assessment of students' achievement has not caused a significant distortion of the overall classification profile.

The College is continuing to monitor the position, to compare its data with national benchmarks and to consult with staff on these matters.

40   The audit team formed the view that the new assessment scheme had been rolled out rapidly and effectively across the College, and that the revised regulations are being fully and uniformly implemented. The team found, however, some variation between departments in the application of coursework submission deadlines and in methods of penalising late coursework, and noted that procedures for the handing-in of coursework and penalties were not specified on a college-wide basis. Heads of department who met the team acknowledged that variability in this area could potentially lead to inconsistencies of treatment, particularly for joint degree students. They confirmed that such variability was already a matter of attention, and that the College was seeking ways to find and implement a consistent approach that would be acceptable across the College. The team would advise the College to move as soon as possible to a consistent college-wide approach to dealing with coursework deadlines and penalties for late submission.

41   Overall, the audit team formed the view that the College's committee structure supports its devolved approach to quality management with strong lines of vertical responsibility, and has the capacity to strike an appropriate and effective balance between local autonomy and central oversight. The Handbook provides a rigorous description of the College's approach and procedures to quality management, and gives prominence to matters of quality enhancement. The team concluded, from its reading of the SED and from meetings with staff, that the College's framework for management of academic standards and quality is fit for its purpose.

The institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards

42   The SED devoted a substantial section to the College's approach to enhancement of quality and standards, with a particular focus on processes for assuring the quality of the teaching staff. The College aims to embed quality enhancement mechanisms within its established systems, and the SED outlined current initiatives for: supporting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population; reviewing the most appropriate ways for supporting new developments in pedagogy and curricular review; and devising systems to reward staff for excellence in learning and teaching activities.

43   The EDC has an important position in the College's enhancement activities. The role of the EDC has been modified since the 2001 quality audit so that it can focus on the professional development of teaching staff, developing a College e-learning strategy, and establishing research in higher education (HE) pedagogy. The recent appointment of the Curriculum Development Officer and the removal of responsibility for generic staff development and routine quality assurance activity has meant that the EDC can concentrate on supporting departments in promoting the sharing of best practice and ensuring that College policy is implemented. The College noted that, while EDC supports departments in implementing College policy, 'compliance is ensured through the faculty deans and assistant registrars'.

44   In respect of future directions in quality enhancement, the College is developing an integrated employability strategy, with one of its aims being to embed employability skills into the curriculum. Activities underpinning this include careers service sessions aimed at supporting the development of transferable skills, and the production of skills matrices explicitly defining the skills developed through the formal learning process. A key element in this strategy is the personal development planning (PDP) process; this has begun in some departments although, as the SED explained, 'college-wide agreement has not yet been reached on the most appropriate method of record keeping'. The audit team was able to confirm that skill matrices were becoming included in the undergraduate courses and their handbooks, and heard how these were developed in collaboration with employers and professional groups.

45   Widening participation is being implemented in a phased approach, with the first phase being that of raising its profile, as described in the documents Developing a Widening Participation Action Plan and Teaching to Student Diversity. The second phase will be the construction of a mechanism to track and monitor widening participation students, and the development and implementation of a strategy to encourage more mature students to return to HE.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Curriculum approval and validation

46   The Academic Standards Handbook describes in detail the College's systems for programme approval, amendment and withdrawal. Proposals for the development and discontinuation of programmes are made on behalf of a departmental board, within the context of annual departmental and faculty plans. Forms for making new course proposals and course amendments include a course specification template, which defines aims, learning outcomes, content, teaching and learning methods and methods of assessment, and an external adviser's statement form. Completed templates and forms must be signed by the head of department to indicate departmental approval, and submitted to the relevant faculty. The SED explained that faculties annually monitor 'course unit registration thresholds' as part of course portfolio decisions, an aim of which is to ensure that 'departmental resources are not overstretched by providing courses only taken by a small number of students'. Proposals to withdraw a programme must also be made in the context of annual plans, and must be approved by the appropriate faculty board(s) and ADC. Minor programme changes are handled internally by faculties.

47   Following approval by the faculty executive, a new programme proposal would progress to ADC for endorsement. EDC has an advisory and formative role in the process, and the Handbook states that it undertakes the 'final educational appraisal' in conjunction with Information Services and Registry. This is a detailed and rigorous appraisal process which aims to lighten the load on the validation panel, enabling it to concentrate on its core considerations of rationale, aims, compliance with College regulations and accordance with subject benchmark statements and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), published by QAA. The recommendations of the appraisal are submitted with the programme documentation for final validation by a panel convened by the dean or deputy dean. The Senior Assistant Registrar (Academic Development) maintains oversight of the process of new programme validation. The SED stated that programmes involving collaboration with external bodies are subject to particular scrutiny by ADC, which is responsible for screening potential partners and ensuring that each collaborative venture is regulated by an appropriate contract.

48   The College considers its systems for programme approval to be robust, citing as evidence the outcomes of the 2001 quality audit and the later developmental engagements. The processes in place for programme approval are intended to encourage departments to reflect on the structure and evolution of the educational curriculum. Responsibility for monitoring and

improving systems and for maintaining institutional strategy lies with LTQC. Until recently, LTQC provided departments with information with which to reflect on the implications of changes in the curriculum offering over time, but now EDC assists departments in their review of the curriculum.

49   The audit team saw several examples of programme approval documentation. It found evidence of a clear regulatory framework for programme approval, reflecting QAA guidelines, with discipline-specific flexibility and reflection on the quality and validity of curricular content. The approval process appeared to be streamlined, thorough and well regulated, with clear lines of authority and academic responsibility. Institutional strategy and oversight were provided by LTQC and ADC, and quality enhancement was supported operationally by the work of EDC and assistant registrars.

Annual review

50   The College operates annual review for all taught programmes. The SED explained that this is 'an iterative process which begins in departments, feeds into faculties and culminates in an annual report to the Academic Development Committee, Academic Board and, in order to promote the spread of good practice, Faculty Boards'. Annual review provides for the monitoring of progress on agreed action points arising from external review reports, as well as a mechanism, according to the Academic Standards Handbook, through which 'generic issues can be picked up as appropriate by the Faculty Board and the Academic Board'.

51   The Handbook gives terms of reference and other information regarding the annual review process. An annual review panel, established by the faculty, uses a rich variety of sources of information including feedback from students, external examiners' reports, reports from course leaders/tutors, feedback from recent internal periodic review, external review, previous annual reviews, entrant profiles, progression and withdrawal data and information showing the reasons for withdrawal, classification profiles and first-year completion rates.

52   The annual review panel's report is circulated to heads of department and directors of undergraduate study/academic coordinators, and is considered by the faculty board. The SED explained that the report 'is designed to provide information with which Academic Board members can judge that academic standards are being maintained and that there are effective systems for quality assurance and enhancement'. The Handbook specifies that 'after

the faculty annual review reports have been discussed and approved by the three faculties, they are merged into a consolidated College annual review report by the Senior Assistant Registrar for submission to the Academic Development Committee and thence to the Academic Board'. The College makes an annual report to the University of London. This report includes a summary of substantive points raised by external examiners and any external review.

53   The inclusion of statistical information in the annual review process has been the main enhancement of the process since the 2001 quality audit; this had been an area of weakness identified by the College at that time. The SED explained that standard sets of data on student achievement, progression and withdrawals are now made available for the annual review of taught programmes 'in order to facilitate comparisons across different cohorts and subject areas', although it noted that data on the progression and completion of taught postgraduate students available to annual review has been incomplete on a small number of occasions.

54   The Handbook makes no distinction between undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes as far as annual review is concerned. However, the College noted in its SED that 'the timing of the completion of faculty processes has made it difficult to make an opportune annual report [on taught postgraduate programmes] to the Academic Board'. The timing of review of taught postgraduate programmes has therefore recently been moved so that it coincides with that of research postgraduate students.

55   The audit team saw examples of faculty annual review reports. These confirmed: the use of the specified resources as the basis for review; the consideration of issues arising from previous annual reviews and of other specific issues; that issues had been identified for wider consideration through faculty board, referral to other College committees or administrative or support departments; and that examples of good practice had been identified. The reports also contained annual monitoring reviews of undergraduate programmes from each school and department of the faculty, in the form of the panel's review of and amendments to, lists of identified action points. Progress in dealing with action points was noted.

56   The audit team considered that the College's procedures for annual review are appropriate, transparent and consistent with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA.

The procedures have clear objectives and outcomes, and allow for institutional monitoring. The team found that the annual review process was being applied consistently across all faculties, despite some instances of missing course review reports or other data which had come to light during the College's own internal monitoring. The College is taking steps to ensure that the statistical data available on all taught postgraduate programmes is as complete as possible.

57   It was evident to the audit team that staff at faculty and departmental level were engaging effectively with the annual review process. In particular, academic coordinators and programme directors maintain an overview of the portfolio of programmes being offered, of options available to students and of the overall success of teaching programmes, and are closely involved in curriculum planning and in monitoring student progress. The College's mechanisms for distilling the main outcomes of annual review, in the form of reports to ADC and the Academic Board, ensure that the College has central oversight of its annual review activity, and that items of college-wide significance can be disseminated.

Periodic review

58   Periodic departmental review (PDR) is, the SED stated, the College's 'primary method for assuring the quality of educational provision in departments'. It is focused on the whole of a department's provision rather than on individual programmes. PDR currently operates on a five-year cycle, but is moving to a six-yearly cycle at the end of the current cycle. The timetable for PDR is set by ADC, and the frequency can be varied where special circumstances arise. About four departments are reviewed each year. Preparation and follow-up activities either side of the review date mean that, in effect, a department will engage with the review process for a period of some two years.

59   The Academic Standards Handbook gives terms of reference and other information for the PDR process. The review is conducted by a panel working under the authority of the Academic Board, and is chaired by the Vice-Principal (Academic Affairs). The panel includes two or more external subject specialists, two members of College academic staff, one from the faculty of the department under review and one from another faculty, and a SU sabbatical officer. The faculty assistant registrar provides administrative support.

60   The review considers eight aspects of the department's provision: learning outcomes;

curriculum design; assessment; teaching and learning; student support; learning resources; evaluation and enhancement; and postgraduate research. It is based on the department's self-evaluation document, and on a specified set of existing documentation which includes the departmental plan and annual review documentation from the previous three years. The review results in a report which includes conclusions about the quality of provision, a summary of good practice and recommendations. The dean of the faculty and the chair of the review panel work with the head of department to form an action plan which is submitted with the report to the faculty board. The faculty board and department consider the most appropriate way forward, and the dean submits the action plan, through ADC, to the Academic Board. Progress on the agreed points for action, including any additional recommendations made by ADC, is monitored by the faculty board, which, in turn, reports to the Academic Board.

61   The College considers its PDR procedures to be a mechanism for identifying and sharing good practice. It recognises the value of achieving a constructive interaction between PDR and the departmental planning process, and it values the presence of a SU representative on the review panel. The College plans to review its PDR procedures after 2004-05, with particular reference to its relationship to the departmental planning process, staff research and external accreditation. Any changes to the structure of the periodic review report will reflect changes in the requirements for publication of teaching quality information.

62   The audit team considered the College's periodic review procedures to be comprehensive, robust and well embedded across the institution. The chairing role of the Vice-Principal (Academic Affairs) emphasises the importance that the College attaches to PDR as an institutional-level quality management process. The review procedure ensures that the faculty takes ownership of the review outcome and becomes actively engaged in effecting an appropriate response to recommendations. Institutional oversight is maintained by the Academic Board, while the involvement of ADC ensures that the response of the faculty is appropriately informed and strategically managed. The team found that departmental staff understood the structure and mechanisms of the review framework, their current position in the review cycle and their role in providing information to support it. Overall, the team was able to conclude that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the College's present and likely future

management of the quality of its educational provision through its approval, monitoring and review procedures.

External participation in internal review processes

63   The SED stated that at least one external specialist is involved in programme approval 'to advise in particular on the extent to which the proposal meets the requirements of the discipline, as may be set out in a subject benchmark statement, and of any professional bodies'. It noted that a representative from the relevant industry can also be appointed in the case of programmes with a particular vocational focus. Annual review is an internal process and does not involve external specialists, although views of the external examiners are included in the process as a matter of course. PDR panels have at least two external discipline specialists and, where appropriate, these may include employers or representatives of professional groups. The Academic Standards Handbook emphasises that ideally, the external specialists should represent 'both the new and old sector'.

64   The College considers the input of 'dispassionate' external specialists to be essential to its quality assurance procedures. It sees its use of external specialists in its review processes as robust, based on the findings of the 2001 quality audit and subsequent developmental engagements. However, it has recognised a need for better briefing of external advisers on the role expected of them, and on the substantial amount of work involved in PDR. The audit team noted that the College is reviewing the involvement and support of external panel members as part of the 2004-05 evaluation of PDR. Overall, the team considered that the College was making suitable and effective use of external advisers in its programme approval and periodic review procedures.

External examiners and their reports

65   The SED stated that, in accordance with the University of London Ordinances, 'a distinction has been made between external examiners from outside the University, and intercollegiate examiners from other University of London colleges, the aim being to appoint intercollegiate examiners in addition to external examiners where practicable, in order to promote comparability of standards and the spread of good practice across the University. In all other respects, external and intercollegiate examiners are treated and act in the same way'. The collective term used by the College and the University for external and intercollegiate examiners is 'visiting examiners' but, for the purposes of this audit, the SED used the more familiar term 'external examiners', as does this report.

66   For University of London awards, there must be at least one external examiner and normally at least one inter-collegiate examiner on each sub-board of examiners. External examiners for collaborative provision are governed by the same rules except where agreements stipulate approval by both institutions. The SED stated that the criteria for appointment and the duties of the role were written in accordance with the sections of the *Code of practice* on assessment and external examining. The detailed responsibilities of external examiners make explicit their role in assisting in the maintenance of the standard of awards of the College and the University as appropriate; helping to ensure that the process of assessing students is fair and operated equitably; advising whether marking schemes and programme content are consistent with national standards; and advising whether marking schemes and methods of assessment are appropriate to the discipline. Reference is also made to the requirement to complete an annual report form, the format of which has been reviewed recently by the College in the context of the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) data set (see below, paragraph 178). The audit team noted that the annual report requires confirmation that substantive issues raised in the previous report have been properly considered, and offers the opportunity to make recommendations for improvement at departmental or College level. The SED acknowledged that there had been some difficulties in providing central information to external examiners in recent years, and the team noted that the College is reviewing internal procedures to ensure this does not happen in future. External examiners were included in the consultation process before the introduction of the new undergraduate assessment scheme in 2000-01, and the team noted the comprehensive feedback and analysis that was provided to external examiners in 2003-04 after the first application of the new classification procedures. In its review of the new undergraduate assessment scheme for 2002-03, the College Board of Examiners Executive Committee noted that the statistical evidence showed 'that the scheme was still producing a consistent institutional award profile which was within expectations'.

67   External examiners' reports are taken into account at programme level during the annual review process, and departmental responses to reports are monitored by faculties through the annual review of taught programmes. The Academic

Standards Handbook states that an annual institutional summary of substantive points is compiled, and these summary reports are 'subjected to careful scrutiny at departmental, faculty and institutional levels' as well as 'by the University of London Senate through summaries produced by the College'. The SED expressed the view that consideration of external examiners' reports at College level generally worked well, although the practice of giving individual feedback from the Principal to external examiners is being discontinued in the interests of timeliness and 'effective communication and efficient action on more substantive recommendations'. Instead, external examiners will receive an annual summary response on substantive issues raised and good practice identified across the College.

68   Documentation considered by the audit team included departmental responses to individual external examiners' reports; annual review reports at departmental and faculty level; College summary reports on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes which were considered by LTQC; and University of London Senate reviews of reports from its constituent colleges. The team saw evidence that external examiners' views are sought on a regular basis and feedback is provided at all levels. It considered that scrupulous attention had been paid to the *Code of practice*, in reviewing College Regulations relating to external examiners, and in drafting relevant documents, and learnt that the College is reviewing its procedures in the light of the 2004 revision of the *Code*.

69   As research degrees are degrees awarded by the University of London itself, external examiners' reports on PhD examinations go to the University and a copy is sent to the relevant College department. In future, these reports will be considered as part of the departmental annual review of postgraduate research students as issues raised are likely to be discipline-specific rather than generic. Nevertheless, a copy will also be sent to the Dean of the Graduate School so that any generic issues identified can be considered and addressed at College level.

70   The audit team concluded that the SED accurately outlined the arrangements that the College has put in place with respect to its external examiners and their role in the College's quality assurance procedures. It formed the view that these arrangements, which are set out clearly in College regulations and the Handbook, are applied consistently throughout the College, and make a positive contribution to the maintenance of the academic standards of awards.

External reference points

71   The SED explained that the College's overall approach to the Academic Infrastructure and other external quality benchmarks is set out in the Academic Standards Handbook, and 'has been firmly endorsed in the previous academic quality audit and more recent Developmental Engagements'. It expressed the view that 'our programmes for College teaching staff promote awareness and consideration of external reference points'. The section of the Handbook on 'Quality Benchmarks' refers in detail to the guidance given by FHEQ, to the *Code of practice*, and to subject benchmark statements, as well as to other sectoral benchmarks.

72   The SED stated that, instead of 'adopting a minimal compliance strategy in respect of the Code of practice, we have endeavoured to adopt a more considered and constructive approach in which the different sections and component precepts are used at all levels of the institution to identify scope for further enhancement of provision'. It went on to explain that this process, which the College intends to continue as the *Code of practice* is updated, is recorded on monitoring sheets and coordinated by staff of EDC and Registry. The audit team learnt that these monitoring sheets are used by departments to map evidence of alignment with each section of the *Code*, and to identify any gaps for action, a process that is monitored by ADC. The team took the view that this approach supported the embedding of the guidance contained in the *Code* in College regulations and departmental practices.

73   The SED stated that reflection on the FHEQ 'has caused both minor and more substantial changes'. The College's awards framework sets minimum requirements in terms of the academic level and volume of study, and the academic level of individual course units is recorded so that these requirements can be monitored and the information included on transcripts. The audit team saw evidence to support the view expressed in the SED that the College is 'now confident that the nomenclature of our awards is consistent with the Framework'.

74   The SED referred to subject benchmark statements and programme specifications in the same context: 'As recognised in recent Developmental Engagement reports, subject benchmark statements have been a key source of reference in articulating and reviewing the intended aims and learning outcomes of our Honours Degree programmes. These are communicated to students in programme specifications and handbooks'. Programme specifications are required for programme

approval. The Academic Standards Handbook states that the College's primary audience for programme specifications is 'prospective and current students, and their future employers', as well as being a key element in internal quality assurance mechanisms. In discussion with staff, the team formed the view that there is some variation of perception of the utility of programme specifications, and would encourage the College to give further consideration to how well programme specifications serve their purpose in respect of their primary audience.

75　From its study of a wide range of documentation, and from its discussions with staff and students, the audit team formed the view that the College has sound procedures to ensure that its awards align with the expectations of the FHEQ, that its programme specifications are informed by relevant subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice*, and that systems are in place to review programmes and procedures as external reference points evolve. The team was able to conclude that the College engages fully with relevant external reference points through its internal procedures.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

76　The College's SED listed six professional and statutory bodies (PSBs) as currently providing external course accreditation, with plans underway for accreditation of postgraduate courses in Media Arts. It stated that 'professional accreditation is managed in the main by departments, on the basis that they are best placed to understand the specificities of this activity'. However, academic and industry specialists contribute to programme approval and PDR panels, reviews by professional bodies are considered during annual review, and questions about professional requirements are included in the report form for external examiners. From its study of relevant documentation, the audit team considered that the College makes appropriate and timely use of reports from external specialists and PSBs as part of its annual review and programme approval procedures.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

77　The report of the 2001 quality audit judged relationships between the student body and the College to be good, working to the mutual benefit of both. Formal student representation at institutional level is established through the SU. Key College committees, including the Academic Board, the Council and faculty boards, provide for student representation, and eight have specific provision for

postgraduate student membership. The College has a forum, known as the '5+5 Group', through which sabbatical officers of the SU and senior College officers can discuss issues informally. A student welfare forum allows rather broader membership and discussion opportunities. The President of the SU submits an annual report on the Union's work to the summer meeting of the Council. The SWS confirmed that student representation is present on a large proportion of committees, achieved mainly through the President and Vice-President (Education and Welfare), but with the involvement of other part-time elected officers, including postgraduate representatives.

78　Other opportunities for representation at College level noted in the SED include a number of user groups supporting the Information Services Department. Each Hall of Residence elects annually a hall committee, the chair of which represents the Hall in various ways, including attending the Student Welfare Forum and the Residence Group.

79　Every academic department is required to have a student-staff committee (SSC) which meets at least once a term. The Academic Standards Handbook and the Committees Handbook determine the minimum criteria and model constitution for SSCs. Either the chair or secretary should be a student member, although the SED acknowledged that 'there is still some way to go' in always achieving that requirement. Some departments elect to have separate undergraduate and postgraduate committees. SSCs have a formal role within institutional quality management, with published agendas, papers and minutes. Minutes of meetings, which must be made available to all students in the department, are also provided to the Head of Student Services, the SU Vice-President (Education & Welfare) and the relevant departmental board, and are described in the SED as important items in annual review and PDR. The College annual review of undergraduate provision for 2002-03 considered that SSCs were generally operating well and that departments were responsive to students' views. The SWS expressed the view of the SU that, while valuing opportunities for representation at College level, further measures could be taken to improve the effectiveness of student representation at departmental level, perhaps through more structured opportunities for class representatives to gather views from the body of students.

80　In respect of joint and combined honours students, the audit team noted that minutes of the Academic Board record that 'joint/combined students should be specifically represented on student-staff committees, as required by the

standing orders previously agreed by the Board'. However, the Committees Handbook model constitution for an SSC merely states that 'student membership should take account of the student profile of the Department', and the Academic Standards Handbook that 'student representation should reflect the profile of the department in terms of gender, undergraduate/postgraduate, mature, overseas, single/combined honours'. At all DAT student meetings the team heard that SSCs were operating effectively, although not all had joint honours student membership. The College is encouraged to continue to seek ways of ensuring adequate formal representation for joint/combined honours students to ensure that their views are appropriately represented in a system where the great majority of students are on single honours programmes.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

81   Information gathered through questionnaires feeds into the annual review process, and response rates are explicitly monitored by faculty panels. The SED explained that a standard College questionnaire has been introduced with the aim of ensuring minimum standards for the collection and presentation of information, to provide a stronger basis for comparison, although the standard course questionnaire may be supplemented by department-specific questions. The DSEDs provided evidence that student evaluation questionnaires have been regularly used to gather student opinion at course unit level in each department, and formed part of the annual and periodic review processes, although the College annual reports on undergraduate and postgraduate provision for 2002-03 noted that achieving a uniformly high rate of return on student feedback questionnaires remained a difficulty in many departments.

82   Under the recently introduced procedures for handling student feedback through questionnaires, outcomes from the standard College questionnaire will be collated and analysed centrally for departmental use. The Academic Standards Handbook is careful to emphasise that the Registry's collation of responses will be used 'only for the purposes of quality enhancement' and that heads of department 'should discuss a dispassionate summary of the feedback on each course with the lecturers concerned'. The audit team gained the impression that there is still some concern about the new procedures, particularly with regard to the questions selected for inclusion and to delays in feedback from

early exercises of the new procedures. The team heard from discussions with students during the DATs that students were not always aware of the outcomes of their input to questionnaires, or of any formal response.

83   The standard College questionnaire operates at course unit level. There is no standard questionnaire at programme level, and in June 2004 the Academic Board approved a recommendation not to introduce questionnaires at programme level but to review this decision within five years. The audit team learned that some departments issued their own programme level questionnaires, and noted that, in the 2000 School of Management PDR report, it was recommended that consideration be given to 'a 'summative' student evaluation questionnaire which complements the course-unit questionnaires by providing feedback 'on the whole programme and the School'.

84   The College's Code of Practice for the academic welfare of postgraduate research students 2004-2005 requires that feedback forms are sent annually to supervisors to distribute to their research students, to be returned to the Director of Graduate Study, who will summarise results on the departmental summary report form. The audit team noted that the College's annual review of postgraduate provision for 2002-03 reported low response rates of research student feedback questionnaires in some departments across all three faculties.

85   The SED explained that, to date, the College has not developed formal mechanisms for collecting feedback from recent graduates. The College awaits the development of the national student survey, although the audit team noted that the survey will poll final-year students, not graduates. Most departments have informal contact with recent graduates, and the SED regarded current mechanisms to obtain feedback from graduates and employers as effective. In disciplines with a more explicit professional focus, links with employers and with industry are fostered at departmental level either informally, through contacts established in staff research and third-stream activities, or through the organisation of consultative groups. The SED described how some employer links had been developed through the Careers Committee, which is to be replaced by a careers forum, allowing greater flexibility in employer engagement. The team formed the view that contact with graduates and employers is often informal, and varied in extent across departments. It was not clear to the team what evaluation of these procedures occurs, how they articulate with the College's new draft

employability strategy, or how they are linked to the work of the Careers Service.

86   The SED explained that changing mechanisms for gathering student opinion on central services is not a priority as a number already exist. The Library and Computer Centre have user groups which advise the Director of Information Services and Librarian; the Student Welfare Forum advises the Principal and Head of Student Services; an on-line questionnaire has been used for a number of years to gather views from new students on the admission and registration process; and the Registry operates an on-line feedback and complaints form. The SWS noted that the Library Users Advisory Group in particular had been 'very useful in putting across the views of students'. While plans are in place to provide students with the same opportunities to comment on all aspects of central services, the College is intending in the short term to 'focus resources on gaining maximum benefit from questionnaires operating at the level of the course unit'. The team wondered, in view of current diversity of practice, whether the decision to defer the introduction of a College-wide central services questionnaire might be revisited, to take advantage of the introduction of the central collation and analysis developed for the College-wide course questionnaire.

Progression and completion statistics

87   The SED stated that 'a weakness in the provision and use of academic management information at institutional level', identified by the College at the time of the 2001 quality audit, has either been remedied or is in the process of being remedied, and that a 'richer set of statistical information on undergraduate and taught postgraduate student achievement, progression and withdrawals is now provided routinely'.

88   The Academic Standards Handbook states that 'data on student achievement and similarly indicative information, such as withdrawal rates, play a crucial part in quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms in the College'. It specifies that statistical information provided for the annual review of undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes should include 'course outcomes, awards and progression rates against institutional and national norms for the current and previous two years'. At College level, the review considers overall award and progression profiles.

89   The SED stated that the annual review of undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes is undertaken with a light touch

'except where quantitative or qualitative information made available to the Faculty Deans demonstrates a need for more intensive intervention'. The review of postgraduate research students concentrates on individual students. At present there is no college-wide overview, but the SED acknowledged that 'further improvement is…needed in the provision of institutional information to monitor MPhil/PhD submission and completion rates'.

90   The audit team saw evidence that the statistical information currently provided is considered at programme level and informs annual review, including proposed curriculum changes. The team was told that several departments had identified progression and completion issues for individual student groups, and were actively seeking ways of identifying and addressing any underlying factors by putting further student support in place where required. Staff who met the team expressed the view that the statistical information currently provided by the College was helpful to various levels of staff and had improved over the years in depth and quality. The view was also expressed that the provision of this data had changed - and improved - the culture of annual review, for example by requiring a response to the data on withdrawals. Course unit and course cohort data, together with data provided for examination boards, were considered to be particularly valuable.

91   The audit team was told that the introduction of the new student records system will allow a wider range of detailed comparative data to be provided across the College. At present, staff can request specific statistical information as required since currently they do not have direct access to it. This is provided by the academic development officers through the faculty assistant registrars, and the team heard that this statistical information is invaluable for helping the faculty assistant registrars to maintain an overview of the departments in their faculties. The team concluded that the College had improved, and was continuing to improve, the systematic provision and use of statistical information at all levels, thereby enhancing its overall management of academic standards.

Assurance of the quality of teaching staff, appointment, appraisal and reward

92   The College's mission highlights research, teaching and knowledge transfer, and that members of staff are expected to achieve at the highest level across a broad portfolio of activities. The SED stated that 'these high standards are achieved through the adoption of a Human Resources Strategy that

promotes sound operational systems for recruitment, selection and promotion, a strong staff development programme, and rewards for outstanding performance in all areas of activity'.

93   Guidelines for the recruitment and selection of academic staff are available at the College's website. The guidelines state the responsibilities of all parties and detail the composition of appointment panels. Interview panels for posts of Professor or Reader are chaired by the Principal, and include three external advisers, one of whom must be from the University of London. Panels for all other academic appointments are chaired by a Vice-Principal, and include a senior academic from another department of the College. Selection and appointment processes are designed to comply with principles of equal opportunity, and all chairs of interview panels are required to have attended equal opportunities training.

94   The College requires all new staff to attend induction courses, covering essential information such as health and safety and equal opportunities. The College has a clearly defined policy for academic probation for all new lecturers and senior lecturers, with a probationary period normally of three years for academic staff. The minimum requirements for the successful completion of probation, which include undertaking the College's Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice in Teaching and Learning (CAPITAL) programme for new lecturers who do not already have a nationally accredited teaching qualification for HE (see below, paragraph 98), are set out in the College's guidelines on probation. These guidelines also set out the responsibilities of the head of department and the separate role of the probation adviser, appointed to give support to the probationer. Recently appointed staff who discussed these matters with the audit team confirmed the operation of induction and probationary processes as set out in the guidelines, and attested to their effectiveness.

95   The SED explained that a scheme for the appraisal of academic staff was reviewed and re-launched in 2002-03. It acknowledged that there was variability in the levels of participation in the first cycle of appraisals and criticism that the pro forma was 'rather cumbersome', and noted that evaluation of the revised scheme would be undertaken after the second cycle. The scheme is now annual, with guidance notes, a pro forma and check lists for appraisers and appraisees available on the College's website. All appraisers receive training. The guidance notes make clear the intention that the scheme should be developmental in character, with a link to career planning. From its discussions

with staff, the audit team formed the view that the revised appraisal scheme was widely understood and accepted, and was being systematically implemented. The team concluded that the College was making significant progress towards its goal of comprehensive voluntary participation in appraisal.

96   The College's procedures for promotion to professor, reader, senior lecturer and for discretionary awards are undertaken by the Academic Staff Review Group. Recommendations are fed to this group from departmental promotions committees, although individuals may make a personal submission directly to the College. The criteria for promotion are stated on the College's intranet, and are accompanied by guidance that includes advice on the compilation of a personal portfolio and a teaching profile. The SED stated that the College was aware of the need to 'reward those colleagues who are committed to learning and teaching and who prove themselves to be excellent teachers'. The audit team saw evidence of the award of the College's teaching prizes, adduced in the SED as evidence of the implementation of such reward. From its discussions with staff and from its reading of the published criteria for promotion, the team concluded that due account was taken of teaching and 'third stream' activities when considering candidates for promotion, and that the process used was fair and transparent. The team formed the view that the College's criteria and procedures for promotion and reward complemented and supported its quality enhancement initiatives in learning and teaching.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

97   The SED explained that the College was undertaking a broad range of initiatives to support staff in developing their pedagogy and reviewing curricula. The College's approach to the development and support of teaching staff entails a division of responsibilities across three central agencies - the EDC, the Staff Development Office (SDO) and the Computer Centre. The audit team was told that these agencies work in close concert with each other and that, while consideration had been given to merging the EDC and the SDO, it had been decided to retain them as separate entities.

98   The role of the EDC was clarified and strengthened following a review in 2003. Originally established in 2000 with the use of Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund funding, the EDC now concentrates on the professional development of staff in support of the College's corporate goals. It is responsible for two key training programmes;

CAPITAL and the Postgraduate Certificate in Skills of Teaching to Inspire Learning (inSTIL). These are mandatory for, respectively, lecturers who are not members of the Higher Education Academy and for postgraduate students with lead teaching responsibilities who do not already hold an equivalent qualification. Both programmes will be extended with postgraduate diploma and taught master's degree pathways to provide further opportunities for teachers who wish to continue their professional development in this field. Other College staff with teaching responsibilities, such as technicians and non-established teachers are also recruited to the programme. Staff who met the audit team confirmed their participation in these programmes and spoke positively of their value.

99 The EDC also offers other wide-ranging forms of support and enhancement to departments. In addition to events and courses which it generates itself, the EDC offers a 'bespoke' service to departments and faculties, providing guidance and running events requested by the academic community. Discussions with members of academic staff, together with documentary evidence, confirmed to the audit team the usefulness of the service provided by the EDC in support and enhancement. The SED claimed that the work of the EDC had a key role to play in the College's approach to quality enhancement and staff development, and the team formed the view that this claim was justified, and that the EDC's function of encouraging and disseminating good practice was being fulfilled.

100 The College's position on peer observation, set out in the Academic Standards Handbook, is that every academic department shall apply peer review in the interests of quality enhancement. Provided the minimum requirements laid down in the Handbook are met, departments have some discretion as to how to apply the scheme. The EDC publishes a model of good practice for peer observation on its website, together with pro formas to be completed by observer and observed. From its conversations with staff, and from documentation, the audit team found that, while there were variations in practice between departments, there was broad adherence to the requirements and guidelines in the Handbook, and significant evidence of local good practice in the pattern taken by peer review.

101 The pedagogical support provided by the EDC is complemented by opportunities for personal staff development and for sabbatical leave. Guidance is available on the College's intranet for both schemes. The audit team found evidence of care being taken at department and faculty levels to organise study leave in accordance with the requirements of the teaching curriculum. The College has a strong track record in research, and expects this to feed into and enhance the teaching activity. There was abundant evidence, principally in the form of final year options and specialised master's programmes, of the benefits to students of the high levels of research activity, for which study leave is a prerequisite.

Assurance of the quality of teaching delivered through distributed and distance methods

102 The SED explained that the College makes use of distance learning through the University of London External Programme and in 'small, free-standing units of provision'. The College's distance-learning activities have been brought within the compass of its internal review procedures, and the SED cited the periodic review of the Modern Languages Departments (London External Programmes) and the faculty review of the Science Foundation Year (free-standing unit), as examples of such reviews. The audit team considered that the College was taking appropriate measures to assure the quality of teaching delivered through distributed and distance methods. The University of London External Programme is subject to a separate QAA quality audit.

Learning support resources

103 The 2001 quality audit reported that the quality and level of information services provided for academic services was considered to be good, and that Information Services was seen to be positive in reacting to student needs. The report also commented that the College was identifying forthcoming academic resource demands in an appropriate, managed and timely manner.

104 The SED for the current audit stated that the Library, Computer Services and Archives, which together form Information Services, 'continue to operate together as an integrated, strategically-focused service supporting the information needs of high quality students and a research-active community with an international reach'. The Information Services Group monitors performance of Information Services and advises the Director, while advice on the development of facilities is provided by users' groups and the Information Services Staff-Student Forum.

105 The Library occupies three sites on campus. Borrowing privileges at the University of London Senate House are also maintained 'to ensure all students and staff may benefit' and this, together with access to the libraries of other University of London colleges, was seen by students who met the audit team as a most useful facility. The SED acknowledged that one of the major challenges for the Library during the past two years has been an increase in student numbers and further pressure on key texts. This concern was echoed in some of the team's discussions with students, and in the SWS, which acknowledged improvements such as increased opening hours and an increase in the Library's budget but also expressed anxiety about overcrowding, facilities and availability of core texts.

106 The Corporate Strategy 2002-2007 refers to a need for expansion in library facilities to accommodate growth in numbers, noting that 'an ideal library configuration would bring all library functions, currently located on three sites, into a single space'. The Estates Strategy executive summary identifies an extension to space to the Library and Information Services as one of the principal elements of essential capital requirements. Strategies to cope with increased demand include well-advanced plans to extend the Bedford Library (for which a funding campaign is being prepared), extended opening hours, increased investment in electronic resources, a series of virtual learning environment initiatives and targeting resources to expanding departments. These measures, it is claimed in the SED, have proved to be successful in 'providing for student needs without undermining research provision'. The Library is working with the EDC to devise and invest in a new e-learning strategy, which 'should not grow at the expense of learning which happens in face-to-face situations; it should complement, enhance and support existing learning and teaching methods'. The audit team considered that Information Service's plans for expansion, its role in the development of the College's e-learning strategy and the effectiveness of its work with other central and departmental partners in the integrated support of student learning were all features of good practice.

107 Pressure on existing learning and teaching space has been noted for some time, particularly in larger departments. The SWS relayed the view expressed by some students that they 'had stopped going to lectures because of overcrowding', and that 'learning facilities were not as good as they had anticipated'. The College plans to increase from some 6,000 to some 8,000 FTEs by 2010, primarily by increasing recruitment of overseas undergraduates

and overseas and home postgraduates, an increase of 33 per cent on 2003-04 numbers, with possible contingency plans to double in size if another site became available. The College has established an Expansion Working Group, whose work has, until recently, been concentrated on addressing the most urgent pressures on College space. The Group has now produced an interim progress report, which identifies a problem in this year's academic department planning round 'where the shortage of academic space has arisen as a major issue'. The progress report conceded that growth must precede resources rather than follow them, but the audit team was reassured to learn that plans for better management of current space (for example by the introduction of more effective central timetabling developing from a review of existing space) and the new learning and teaching spaces will address some of the more immediate problems.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

108 The SED described a comprehensive academic support and monitoring system for undergraduate, taught postgraduate and postgraduate research students, explaining that academic departments have initial responsibility for supporting the academic and personal welfare of students through the personal adviser system. The report of the 2001 quality audit described the College's personal adviser system, and noted that the level of support, while not always consistent throughout the whole College, was generally good. Joint honours undergraduate students have a personal adviser in each department, underpinned, according to the SED by 'reinforced staff liaison across programmes'. Postgraduate research students are allocated a research supervisor and personal adviser, who both play a part in the annual review of progress.

109 One role of the personal adviser is formally to monitor academic progress and provide guidance, for example on option choice. The Academic Standards Handbook specifies benchmark requirements that must be satisfied by all departments, including regular review meetings to consider students' progress. At departmental level, personal advisers of students on taught programmes are supervised by programme directors or academic coordinators, and research supervisors and advisers of postgraduate research students are supervised by directors of graduate study. The audit team was able to confirm, from documentation and from discussions with staff, that departmental arrangements for monitoring undergraduate, taught postgraduate and postgraduate research students are effective,

although the College is aware of some variation in the management of the system, for example in application of the regulations for transfer from MPhil to PhD. The College evaluates the effectiveness of the departmental personal adviser system as part of PDR.

110 The SED recognised that, despite a generic framework for managing the personal adviser system, the College was 'aware that arrangements are perceived to be variable by students, who themselves have different needs and expectations'. The SWS also drew attention to students having a variety of experiences with their personal tutors and advisers, with variation in the extent, and type, of contact or support. In its discussions with students and staff the audit team confirmed the perception of the variability of the personal adviser system identified in the SED. The team heard that in most cases the system worked well, with many commendations from undergraduate and postgraduate students for the care and attention shown by their personal advisers. The team did, however, note instances where the minimum requirements specified in the Handbook did not seem to be applied, or where departments interpreted the College's requirements in different ways.

111 The SWS drew attention to variable practice in academic guidance, for example in the penalising of work submitted late, the length of time before work was returned, and in the extent of feedback offered on marked work. The audit team's discussions with students confirmed this variation in practice, and also in arrangements for postgraduate research students whose supervisors took sabbatical leave. From its discussions with staff, the team learnt that the College was aware of different practices in academic guidance, and was intending to act upon the particular matter of continuity of supervision when staff took study leave. The team formed the view that the College needed to remain alert to differences in departmental approaches to academic guidance and student support, and act, where appropriate, to establish clear college-wide boundaries to acceptable diversity of practice.

112 The introduction of PDP aims to build upon the personal adviser relationship by providing a common structure and focus for the student/adviser engagement, thus addressing variation in the operation of the system. One aspect of the PDP scheme is the generation of skills matrices documenting the skills embedded in academic courses, showing where these are developed and assessed. In respect of skills matrices, the SED noted that 'there is variation in the level of detail and comprehensibility to students, which will be

addressed as the Educational Development Centre commences its two-year programme of curriculum review'. The SED explained that elements of PDP are substantially in place across the College, but recognised variation in the extent and consistency of these elements across departments, and that college-wide agreement had not yet been reached on the most appropriate method of record keeping. The College is exploring the extent to which the new student record system, currently being implemented, offers the potential for on-line record keeping. The new post of Curriculum Development Officer, located in the EDC, includes responsibility for progressing PDP across the College, an initiative strongly supported by the SU. The audit team considered that the linking of the proposed developments in PDP with the personal adviser system should achieve the College's aim of providing a common structure and focus, and effectively address the issue of diversity of practice in the operation of the personal adviser system.

113 Postgraduate research students are allocated a research supervisor and a personal adviser, who both play a part in the annual review of progress. Departments are required to monitor the progress of their research students using college-standard templates and procedures. Monitoring procedures are specified in the Academic Standards Handbook, and details are contained in the Code of Practice for the Academic Welfare of Postgraduate Research Students. Programme directors and directors of graduate studies take overall responsibility for taught and research postgraduates. The faculty supports the monitoring function by providing, through the faculty assistant registrars, a full record of each postgraduate research student's current status and progress. Each research postgraduate student undergoes an annual review of progress. At the end of the first year, the student is required to submit a report, in scale at least equivalent to a thesis chapter.

114 Procedures for monitoring progress of postgraduate research students are being reviewed by the College in the context of the Code. The SED explained that additional monitoring procedures were introduced in 2001-02 for students who are 'nearing the point at which they are expected to submit the thesis' in response to variation in completion rates in some departments. The annual report on postgraduate provision for 2002-03 noted that, although students felt better supported, the new procedure was burdensome, and deans have now been given the discretion to vary the level of monitoring. Departments and directors of graduate studies receive, as of this year, copies of external

examiners' reports from the University of London. The College is currently improving the supply of information from faculties about the status of individual research students, and directors of graduate studies will be able to make use of this in the encouragement of better completion rates.

Personal support and guidance

115 The SED stated that 'the College has an explicit commitment and distinguished record of offering pastoral care to its students across a range of disciplines and for a variety of needs', and pointed to the consistent maximum rating achieved in QAA subject review across all departments for this aspect of provision. It recognised, nonetheless, the 'need for the system to evolve to cater for the broader range of students now entering the institution', and stated that the College has 'embarked upon a strategy of reinforcing these crucial departmental roles by altering the structure of central Student Services provision to ensure that awareness and expertise are available to students in departments, where most of their time is spent'.

116 In 2003, a focus group exercise was conducted to gain feedback from students on all the central Student Services. The SED commented that this showed 'some services to be highly appreciated (in particular Careers and Counselling), others to be less highly rated (Chaplaincy), and some confusion existing around the role of hall wardens. Management of the central services has now been integrated into the Registry, under a new post of Head of Student Services, 'in the expectation that this will aid more consistent delivery and more effective communication with academic departments'.

117 Monitoring of central Student Services is undertaken in various ways. Formal account of student support is taken during programme validation and PDR. Annual reports, evidenced by statistical data, are required from the Careers Service and the Counselling Service. The College's Student Handbook 2004-2005 notes that the Welfare Group 'discusses and considers all matters relating to the welfare of students, and the provision of welfare services'. The audit team learnt from its meetings with students and staff that, in particular, the Careers Service, the Counselling Service and the Educational Support Office, liaising with a network of special needs coordinators in academic departments, were effective and highly regarded by both students and staff. The team heard that the Careers Service was particularly proactive in regularly contacting students. It was working with EDC to develop the College's PDP scheme, and

supporting the development of skills matrices. The services issue a range of handbooks supplemented by excellent websites and a have a central 'Student Service Point' located in the main building of the College. The team considered that the quality of the services provided, together with the effectiveness of their work with other central and departmental partners in the integrated support of student learning, was a feature of good practice.

118 A high proportion of first-year, final-year, international and postgraduate students, and students with special needs live in halls of residence, which are a significant aspect of the College's student learning environment. New halls have recently been completed and a programme of refurbishment is under way for existing premises. The SED described some confusion around the role of wardens and deputy wardens. The audit team did not gain a clear view of where overall responsibility for the management of halls belonged, and noted that the College has engaged external consultants to advise on the solution to current management difficulties. The team heard that students are sometimes confused about whom to approach when problems arise, and would encourage the College to take the opportunity provided by its review of the management structure of the halls of residence to clarify the channels available to students for addressing enquiries and raising matters of concern.

119 While the College plans to increase the recruitment of international students, it is aware of retention and support issues experienced by current international students. For example, analysis of data in one faculty, reported in 2002-03, appeared to show that non-white non-UK students are less likely to progress to the second year at the first attempt and the annual review of undergraduate provision for that year commented 'it is assumed that English language ability is one of the major factors behind this trend'. In 2004, the Faculty Board of History and Social Science, concerned that it was possible for 'the increasingly large cohorts of overseas students to avoid practising English except in the classroom', recommended that 'student support services and the Students' Union should consider ways of improving the opportunities for overseas students to interact socially with home students and to practise the English language'. Concerns about the support and integration of international students, raised in the SWS, were also expressed to the audit team in its meetings with students and staff.

120 The College is taking a number of measures to respond to these concerns. The Language Centre

offers a range of programmes and support for students whose first language is not English. An Adviser to Overseas Students is based in the Educational and International Liaison Office, which produces an Overseas Students Handbook. A member of staff in Student Services has been given responsibility for developing good practice in support for international students. While noting these various measures, in view of the College's plans to increase its intake of international students, the team would encourage the College to take a more concerted approach to identifying and addressing the particular learning needs and expectations of international students.

121 The SED explained that College has clarified the role of the Graduate School following a review in 2002-03 of the working of the Graduate School Committee. The audit team was unclear about the scope of the review. The paper on the review of the Graduate School Committee stated that the report of the 2001 quality audit recommended that the College 'keep the role of the Graduate School Committee under review in the context of its new enhancement priorities. Therefore this report is confined only to a review of the Graduate School Committee, rather than the wider Graduate School'. In fact, the report of the 2001 audit recommended that the College may wish to consider 'keeping under review the effectiveness of the Graduate School as an agent for quality enhancement, following the transfer of postgraduate quality assurance to the faculties'.

122 The audit team noted that a number of initiatives had been developed by the Graduate School, particularly in the provision of research training for postgraduate students. However, although the team heard that the School performed a useful role, in its discussions with staff and postgraduate students the team noted some diversity in the extent of engagement with, or knowledge of, the Graduate School and its activities. The team also noted that the Graduate School's annual plan, which is considered alongside departmental plans, did not give an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Graduate School's role in quality enhancement. The team did not gain a view from discussions with staff and students of the Graduate School's work having significant impact. The team considered that the recommendation of the report of the 2001 audit, that 'the effectiveness of the Graduate School as an agent for quality enhancement should be kept under review…', might be more fully addressed.

Collaborative provision

123 The College has a small amount of collaborative provision, almost all within the United Kingdom. The SED pointed out that collaborations are generally used to 'ensure the critical mass to enhance research and taught provision'. The planning, quality assurance and quality enhancement for collaborative provision is included in the standard College procedures. The Academic Standards Handbook gives procedures for programme approval in collaborative arrangements. The approval process addresses financial arrangements and resource issues, and representatives of Information Services visit potential collaborating institutions to assess the likely adequacy of resources. Since the previous quality audit, decisions around collaborative arrangements have been transferred from the Collaborative Provision Panel to ADC. Final approval, and the strategic decision as to whether to proceed with a particular collaborative opportunity, rests with ADC.

124 The College benefits from its relationship with the University of London, which allows students access to resources and subjects offered elsewhere within the federal university. There are specific collaborations with University College London related to joint teaching of an MSc in Quaternary Science; an MA in Crusader Studies with Queen Mary College, University of London. An award-bearing programme is planned in collaboration with the University of London Institute in Paris. Postgraduate specialist programmes benefit from collaborations with the British Library, the British Museum, the Museum of London and the Royal College of Music. The College has links with other groups who provide courses that allow progression onto undergraduate programmes. These include Brooklands College in Surrey and Strodes College in Egham. The College is currently pursuing a collaboration with Kingston University and St George's Hospital Medical School to provide training and research in Life Sciences, Arts & Humanities and Health Service Management, to be built around the participating institutions' complementary activities.

125 The audit team was provided with comprehensive documentation concerning the Memoranda of Understanding and Agreements covering these programmes. The team saw committee papers that covered the process for setting up new collaborations and of their annual monitoring, and found from these evidence of sound management during the setting up of agreements and of collaborative programme monitoring. It heard of a systematic approach to meetings and peer observation at partner institutions that assist in assuring the quality

and standards, and to the management of joint programmes with external partners. Overall, the team was satisfied that the management of collaborative programmes was managed appropriately through the College's established procedures.

Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline audit trails

Discipline audit trails

Biological Sciences

126 The DSED for the Biological Sciences DAT was based on the report of the PDR of the School of Biological Sciences, October 2003, supplemented by the SED produced for the PDR, a paper giving an update since the PDR, a paper describing the monitoring of actions from PDR and current data on student progress and achievement. The programmes covered by this DAT were those covered by the PDR, comprising the full-time single and combined/joint honours BSc degree programmes in organismal and molecular biosciences, and the full-time MSc programme in Biological Sciences Research.

127 Programme specifications were provided for all these programmes. The format used across the College is in transition, and both new and old style specifications were provided. The specifications are informed by the *Subject benchmark statement* for biosciences, and by the FHEQ. Students who met the audit team reported that they had found the original style programme specifications very useful when deciding their choice of university course, and particularly appreciated the high level of detail.

128 The main mechanisms for internal monitoring and review are the annual reviews of undergraduate and postgraduate provision, the annual review of postgraduate research students, and the PDR. The annual reviews are scrutinised by the Faculty Annual Review Panel. The Panel undertakes a general discussion of matters of common interest and provides individual responses to each report, plus individual action plans. Progression and completion data for programmes are scrutinised and commented upon in a specific section of the annual review report. Recruitment, progression, retention and student achievement are considered for the various cohorts and different student groups (eg. international). The analysis compares performance with previous years and discusses the possible contributory factors. In addition, each course has an annual report sheet, which includes the assessment results and the course leader's report commenting on these and on any trends. PDR provides the opportunity to consider this data over a longer time frame.

129 Documents available to the audit team comprised: the 2003 PDR; annual review reports for undergraduates (2003-04, 2002-03, 2001-02, 2000-01); annual review reports for taught postgraduates (2000-03) and for research postgraduates (2000-03); and minutes of the meetings of the Faculty Annual Review Panel for the last three years. The team noted that the Panel had methodically considered the completeness of the documentation, feedback, peer review and examples of best practice. In the 2004 undergraduate review, Biological Sciences was commended for: its system of peer review, which involves pairing new with experienced staff; its close interaction with EDC, especially around tailored training sessions and student focus groups; and compulsory assessment training for all staff on regulations and impact of changes. Overall, the team concluded that monitoring and review was thoroughly, systematically and effectively carried out at all levels.

130 External examiners' reports were included in the annual review of undergraduate and taught postgraduate students. They comprised a checklist confirming the standards of the awards, the standards of student performance and the processes for assessing and determining the awards. Free-form comments were elicited to cover particular strengths of the programme, recommendations for enhancement, and general recommendations to the College. The individual responses sent to the external examiner were included in the annual review documents. The School is required to include in the annual report issues raised by external examiners, with indications in the action plan of how these would be addressed.

131 The assessment strategy, outlined in the Undergraduate Degree Programme Guide, explained the key principles adopted. These include: the balance of formal examinations and course work and how there is a shift towards the latter in later years of study; the need for specific course assessments to test certain skills, such as field work or analysis of statistical data; and the essential requirement for an independent third year project. Examples of students' assessed work seen by the audit team included some undergraduate written examinations, undergraduate practical work, master's course dissertations and undergraduate student research projects. A selection of the marking criteria, mark sheets and examiners' comments was included. Some examination questions with examples of good and poor answers were included in the tutorial handbooks provided to staff. From these documents, the team was able to confirm that student achievement matched the expectations of

the programme specifications. The team was satisfied that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

132 Student questionnaire summaries form part of annual review. The summaries include ratings for individual lecturers and for each course. Further feedback is available in the form of minutes from SSCs, which deal with issues of current concern as well as regular items on year reports, library issues, equal opportunities and special needs matters, curriculum changes and reports from the Principal's meeting and Library Users' Group. An action summary table is included. Student focus groups provide opportunities to discuss topics raised in the questionnaires. Follow-up should be achieved through the formal School response and action plans, but students who met the audit team expressed the view that there was not always good feedback to them about any actions resulting from the student feedback questionnaires. They also commented that usefulness of feedback might diminish if specific departmental, programme and course questions were 'lost' in the move to a standard college-wide questionnaire.

133 Student handbooks were praised by students and staff as being clear and up to date. The Undergraduate Handbook sets out the assessment structure for each course, and includes skills matrices to aid the identification of the programme intended learning outcomes at the level of the individual course units. The audit team considered the document A Study Guide for Students to contain helpful practical advice to students in planning their learning and creating good quality coursework.

134 Little mention is made of learning resources and support in annual review reports, although some issues have been raised by the students. The audit team noted that the SSC frequently discussed the matter of library resources and the availability of specialist books and loan arrangements. Student focus groups appear to discuss predominantly programme-specific content and assessment issues rather than more general learning resources and support needs. Laboratory equipment and textbook provision have been recorded as areas of concern by both staff and students. The SED for the PDR indicated that any expansion of student numbers will require further duplication of classes and put significant pressure on space for research project supervision. The report of the 2002-03 annual review of taught postgraduate students noted that funding constrained recruitment to the programme. These concerns were confirmed to the team by staff

but generally the students expressed satisfaction with the availability of learning resources and support. In particular, students who met the team praised the personal adviser system and the proactive work of the Careers Service, and recognised the value of being taught in a research-led environment in the later stages of their study. Overall, the team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities for students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the named awards.

English

135 The DSED for the English DAT was based on the report of the PDR of the English Department, January 2002, supplemented by the SED produced for the PDR, a departmental update, a paper describing the monitoring of actions from PDR and current data on student progress and achievement. The programmes covered by this DAT were those covered by the PDR, comprising the full-time single and joint honours BA degree programmes and the taught MA degree programmes offered by the Department and jointly with other departments.

136 Programme specifications were made available to the audit team. These cover all programmes offered by the Department and are consistent with, and make reference to, the *Subject benchmark statement* for English. They provide a wide range of information for students, including clear and detailed statements on both subject-specific and generic skills.

137 Monitoring and review of provision takes the forms of: annual review at departmental level of undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, based on individual course reports, progression data and external examiners' reports; an annual progress review of postgraduate research students; Faculty annual review; and PDR. Examples of all the above forms of review and monitoring covering the period 2001-02 to 2003-04 were seen by the audit team. Faculty annual reviews, in addition to noting general issues and examples of good practice, contained summaries of the scrutiny of each individual department. The team found evidence that the Faculty Annual Review Panel takes account of subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice*. In the Faculty's annual review reports for undergraduate programmes, the team found that detailed attention had been given to examples of good practice and matters to be addressed. The team considered that the College's systems for monitoring and review had been systematically and sensibly used, and provided an effective means of both assuring and enhancing quality.

138 Student progression and achievement is commented on in annual review, with appropriate

reference to course-specific issues that may have contributed to general patterns. In the PDR report, the College was asked to standardise statistical data on students. The update in the DSED provided evidence of the provision of fuller data than had been available at the original PDR, and the audit team learnt that the provision of standard data sets was now routine.

139 External examiners' reports seen by the audit team confirmed the security of the academic standard of the Department's programmes. The reports gave due prominence to the achievements of the Department's students, but were also clear in calling to the department's attention any issues which it should address. The Department, in turn, has responded directly to points raised by external examiners, and the action taken is recorded in the subsequent annual review report. External examiners, for their part, are called upon to confirm that they have received a response to substantive points raised in the previous assessment round. The team considered the English Department's handling of external examiners' reports to be exemplary in its promptness and specificity.

140 The 2002 PDR report recommended that the Department should 'draw up and implement plans for more varied and effective assessment of the full range of programme and course-unit learning outcomes, including transferable skills' and 'review the assessment demands of undergraduate course units with a view to establishing a greater degree of consistency in the coursework load'. The update prepared for the DSED explained that advice had been taken from the EDC on assessment methods, and that a student assessment workload matrix had been developed for all years of the undergraduate programmes.

141 The update also referred to departmental coursework cover sheets, used to feed back comments to students. These were regarded favourably by students who met the audit team, and the team considered them to be clear, effective vehicles for formative assessment. The team found that students whom it met were fully aware of the assessment and classification criteria set out in the Department's handbooks, and understood what was required of them in academic performance.

142 Examples of assessed work from both coursework and examinations were made available to the audit team. The examples included work at all levels of undergraduate study, together with some assessed work from master's students. The team was able to see feedback to students and to judge the standard of the work in relation to learning outcomes at both programme and course unit levels. It found clear evidence of progression across levels of study and, in particular, that the Department's strong insistence upon appropriate standards of written English and clear presentation was being consistently applied. This was exemplified by the core first-year workshop-based course which stresses the importance of good written English for purposes of employment, as well as scholarship, and which seemed to the team to be a model of its kind. Overall, the team was able to confirm that student achievement matched the expectations of the programme specifications, and it was satisfied that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

143 The audit team examined a range of handbooks, covering each undergraduate year, each master's programme, and postgraduate research, along with examples of course unit handbooks and the Department's staff handbook. It considered these to be clear documents, containing, as appropriate, information relating to assessment criteria, learning outcomes, course and programme content and the practices and conventions required in the presentation of assignments. The weightings of assessment components are clearly stated. Of particular note were the strong, detailed statements made about what constitutes academic malpractice and what penalties would be incurred as a result of it. The various handbooks seemed to the team to exemplify the way in which the Department was seeking to initiate students into a particular 'community of practice'. Students who met the team expressed very positive views about the range and specificity of the information available to them, and were in no doubt about matters such as the penalties for plagiarism. The team concluded that the Department's handbooks were a valuable aid to the student learning experience, and were consistent with the College's general regulations and frameworks.

144 Matters relating to learning resources and support are monitored through the SSC and in annual review. The issue of the suitability of teaching rooms, resulting from the need to increase numbers of students per seminar group, was raised in the 2003-04 annual review report for undergraduate programmes as a 'frequent student concern'. Students who met the team confirmed that there were sometimes problems with the size and suitability of teaching rooms.

145 Student feedback within the Department is systematically gathered and given due

consideration. Annual review reports have a substantive section for issues identified by students. The audit team was able to read SSC minutes from which it was apparent that students engage seriously with matters of concern to them and, with staff, seek solutions to problems. SSC minutes also showed that students feed back to the Department their appreciation of particular features of the provision. Students who met the team confirmed that the Department was open and responsive in its handling of student feedback.

146 The Department's programmes demonstrated application of the College's policy of making available to students research-informed teaching. Overall, the audit team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities for students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the named awards.

History

147 The DSED for the History DAT was based on the report of the PDR of the History Department, March 2002, supplemented by the SED produced for the PDR, a departmental update, a paper describing the monitoring of actions from PDR and current data on student progress and achievement. The programmes covered by this DAT were those covered by the PDR, comprising the single and joint honours and major/minor combination BA degree programmes offered by the Department, the six taught MA degree programmes offered by the Department, and the College-based and federal master's programmes to which the Department contributes. The Department has recently sought validation for a part-time undergraduate programme, and contributes to the on-line distance learning External Programme of the University of London.

148 The single honours undergraduate programme specifications were included in the DSED. These were in the College's 'old style' and demonstrated extensive reference to the *Subject benchmark statement* for history, reflecting very positive engagement with the statement in the area of curriculum development. They contained no explicit references to the FHEQ or to the *Code of practice*, but the template included provision of programme aims and learning outcomes, and reference to the range of skills embedded in the curriculum. The College's programme specification template has been revised in consultation with the EDC and drafts of 'new style' programme specifications were available for the audit team, although these have not yet been issued in student handbooks. Staff who met the team considered these to be more 'student friendly', with greater emphasis on key transferable skills. The team noted that the course unit specification template did not require an explicit link

between learning outcomes and assessment.

149 The primary instruments for managing the quality of provision are annual review and PDR. The report of the 2002 PDR gave a thorough analysis of departmental provision, making reference to a range of evidence including statistical data, external examiners' reports and student opinion. Issues addressed in the PDR included the quality of all aspects of the student learning experience, enhancement and future developments. A summary of commendations noted good practice. The large number of recommendations appeared to the audit team to be unwieldy, but the update provided as part of the DSED noted that recent PDR reports are shorter and more focused.

150 Data on applications, entry qualifications and performance were included in the SED for the PDR. The external advisers had commented that one aspect of the review that could have been improved was the quality of the statistical data. A PDR recommendation on the need to improve these data, in collaboration with the College Registry, was referred to the College in the PDR action plan. The Faculty report on 2002-03 annual review of undergraduate programmes noted that it remained difficult for departments to analyse progression and performance of particular groups of students. The College annual review of undergraduate provision for that year noted that College had significantly increased the range of statistical information on student profiles, progression and achievement which is provided for review, and that improved data for individual student groups for all departments was planned for 2003-04. The update for the DAT included current data on, and analysis of, student progression and achievement, and was considerably clearer than that provided for the 2002 PDR SED.

151 The PDR report discussed postgraduate research admissions and completions. It praised rigorous departmental procedures to determine transfer from MPhil to PhD. The Faculty annual review of postgraduate research students 2002-03, however, noted that the College was not yet in a position to produce data on completion/submission dates, and in 2004 a report was submitted to the Departmental Board stating that greater diligence was still needed in following College policy on upgrades from MPhil to PhD. Meetings with staff confirmed to the team that improved data was now routinely provided by the College; the College is clearly aware of the need

for, and is making considerable progress in providing, improved data.

152 The departmental annual review process is thorough and robust. Annual review reports for undergraduate programmes seen by the audit team demonstrated engagement with data on performance, issues identified by students, issues identified by external examiners, curriculum development, staff development, an action plan, and a review of progress on the previous year's action plan. They include external examiners' reports and the Department's response.

153 The College's Academic Board of March 2003 agreed that faculty boards should be 'asked to ensure that' joint and combined programmes should continue to be a specific feature of annual review. Joint honours programmes are not listed in the 'programmes' section of the History annual review report form, although there is mention of joint honours students within the body of the report itself. The systematic inclusion of provision for joint honours students within annual review may need further consideration by the College.

154 The departmental Board considers annual review reports, and an edited version is made available to students. Departmental annual review reports are subsequently discussed at faculty and College levels, with procedures in place to ensure that action points are retained, good practice identified, and follow-up on the previous year's actions monitored. Faculty annual review reports seen by the audit team provided evidence of thorough review at faculty level of the Department's undergraduate programmes, postgraduate taught programmes and postgraduate research programmes.

155 External examiners' reports feature prominently at each level of review, highlighting key issues and good practice. Formal consideration of, and response to, external examiners' reports can be traced through faculty and College stages of the annual review process, up to and including the College report to the University of London, noting key issues and identifying best practice.

156 The PDR reported on the Department's undergraduate and postgraduate assessment strategy, including compliance with the College's decision to zero-weight the first year of undergraduate programmes. It also noted the strong synergy between staff research and provision at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, although the management of sabbatical leave sometimes conflicted with course availability. The audit team heard from staff that occasionally funding for

research leave was notified very late, which could lead to difficulties in the planning of sabbaticals without due warning to students, although in most cases this was alleviated by adhering to the College policy of team teaching for compulsory courses.

157 The PDR report noted that the department 'had made a considerable effort to widen the range of assessments'. The report recommended that 'the Department review its assessment strategy with a view to the possible inclusion of a compulsory coursework component in summative course assessment'. The PDR action plan of 2002 noted that this was included in first-year work, but that the department is opposed to its inclusion in second and third years. The Department has formulated revised generic marking criteria which are included in student handbooks.

158 The audit team saw samples of marked and moderated assessed student work. External examiners' reports consistently praised the examining process, the range and variety of a curriculum reflecting staff research interests, and confirmed both the academic standard of awards and the quality of programmes. From the assessed work sampled, the team considered that the aims of the subject provision as set out in the programme specifications were being met, and was satisfied that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

159 The audit team saw student handbooks and website material provided for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The team considered the handbooks, which included programme specifications and, at undergraduate level, a skills map, to be clear and comprehensive. The quality of information provided in them was praised by students, including the clear guidance on plagiarism and the submission of work. The BA Degree Programmes Handbook specifies the penalties for the late submission of coursework, which are not currently consistent across the institution, although the team noted that the possibility of adopting the History scheme as college-wide policy in this regard was under consideration by the College. The team heard from staff that there was good integration of support for postgraduates between the Department and the Graduate School, although it noted that taught postgraduate and postgraduate research student handbooks made very little reference to the Graduate School. Overall, the team considered that handbooks and on-line material provided full and valuable information for students.

160 Learning resources are evaluated as part of PDR but not explicitly in annual review. Discussion with staff and students indicated to the audit team students' general satisfaction with the Library, and the usefulness of access to the libraries of other University of London colleges and the Senate House collection. Problems with teaching accommodation, however, seemed still to be an issue, as they had been at the time of the PDR in 2002. Students who met the team reported that, in some classes, insufficient space or seating were available, a point also raised in the SWS. History staff and College managers informed the team of plans for a large lecture theatre, additional seminar rooms, an extension to the Library, and the introduction of central timetabling of rooms that should alleviate the problems.

161 Through SSC meetings and formal feedback mechanisms students make an effective contribution to the management of programmes, although students expressed to the audit team the view that feedback on the results of course questionnaires could be improved. The 2002 PDR report recommended that the Department should publish an overall analysis of student questionnaire returns.

162 The PDR reported on student support and monitoring procedures, which it described as robust, with a system of graduated warnings. The system for dealing with extenuating circumstances, the operation of the personal adviser system and, in particular, the thorough annual review of each student's academic performance, were all commended in the PDR report. The audit team heard from both undergraduate and postgraduate students their appreciation of academic and pastoral support provided by staff, and of the help provided by departmental administrative staff. Central support services, particularly the Careers Service, were reported to be good. The minutes of the departmental Learning and Teaching Committee confirmed that the Department's personal adviser scheme is kept under review, particularly in view of the introduction of PDP. The team formed the view that the Department successfully fostered a strong sense of community embracing staff and students which was recognised and valued by students. Overall, the team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities for students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the named awards.

Management

163 The DSED for the Management DAT was based on the report of the PDR of the School of Management, October 2000, supplemented by the SED produced for the PDR, papers giving an update since the PDR, papers describing the monitoring of actions from PDR and current data on student progress and achievement. The process, and style of report, for the 2000 PDR predates current College procedures. The SED produced for the PDR was also the base document for the QAA Subject Review in December 2000. The update papers referred to recommendations of both PDR and QAA Subject Review. The programmes covered by this DAT were those covered by the PDR, comprising the full-time single and joint honours BA and BSc degree programmes and the taught MA, MSc and MBA degree programmes offered by the School.

164 The audit team took the view that this approach to the DSED provided a useful window on the collective self-evaluative process which the School has undergone in recent years. The DSED explained that the School had taken three key actions as a result of these reviews: restructuring of the undergraduate curriculum (validated in 2002); institution of a Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC); and introduction of peer observation of teaching and appraisal, which is now in place across the School. The DSED noted that the School had expanded rapidly in the last few years, and that the numbers of international students had risen considerably; the latter constituting some 40 per cent of the School's undergraduate population and 70 per cent of its postgraduate population.

165 Programme specifications are clear and informative, although in two different formats due to the transitional status of the College template. The undergraduate programme specification refers to the relevant subject benchmark statement, and clearly differentiates levels of study. At postgraduate level, all programmes, other than the MBA, have two streams: an applied stream for those who wish to pursue a career in business and a research stream for those who may wish to continue with PhD study. The team heard from staff and students alike that research-informed teaching is embedded in both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

166 The DSED noted that the 'annual review cycle clearly flags operational and strategic quality issues for action', and the audit team saw evidence in annual review reports that it is undertaken conscientiously and thoughtfully by the School. Particular attention has been paid to taking action on the follow-through from PDR and QAA reviews in 2000. Staff told the team that College quality assurance systems have been helpful in enabling them to reflect on their activity and to benchmark themselves against other Management Schools. The DSED stated that a Staff Quality Handbook had

recently been developed and, although too soon for formal evaluation, it was hoped that this would help to ensure that all staff are fully aware of key internal processes.

167 A range of assessment methods is used so that methods of assessment are appropriate to the learning outcomes of the course units, and a skills matrix details how these are incorporated and assessed at each level. The School's marking criteria are set out in the Student Handbook. To obtain a first-class mark, undergraduate students are expected to show 'evidence of wide reading which includes recent research papers and reviews', underlining the importance of 'research-connected' teaching. Students are aware of the penalties for the late submission of coursework, which are applied consistently with extensions permitted in cases of medical or exceptional circumstances. At present, the School's policy is that coursework should be returned within five weeks, which is usually achieved, although the team heard that the School is considering moving from double marking to moderation in order to reduce this time.

168 Progression and completion data are considered as part of the annual review of programmes. This has highlighted a number of issues for further investigation within the School, one example being the differing levels of achievement of international students. The DSED outlined some of the additional support mechanisms, both academic and pastoral, being put in place for these students and the team heard from staff that statistical data prompts further investigations and subsequent action on any issues identified, which are then monitored by the TLC.

169 The audit team saw examples of examination scripts and undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations from several programmes. The samples covered the range of marks, and illustrated double marking and consideration by the external examiner. Minutes of sub-boards of examiners demonstrate the careful attention paid to the application of the College's assessment scheme and to consideration of individual cases. The team noted that some administrative errors had occurred, but that these had been promptly and appropriately handled without ultimate detriment to the students. External examiners confirm that student achievement is generally high and is comparable to that in similar institutions. The team was satisfied that the standard of student achievement in these programmes is appropriate to the titles of the named awards and their location within the FHEQ.

170 Student handbooks, one for each taught programme and one for postgraduate research students, set out a range of useful information on the curriculum; welfare and facilities; study methods; degree programme and course units. Undergraduate students, in particular, commented to the audit team that they appreciated the comprehensive handbooks. Clear information is given on plagiarism, both by way of advice and as a warning, and the team was told that guidance on how to avoid plagiarism is reinforced at induction and in each course unit.

171 The DSED identified 'severe budgetary difficulties and constraints' over recent years as having been a constraint on the development of some support activities, in particular on the enhancement of the personal adviser system, which is perforce less personal than in smaller departments. The audit team heard that monitoring of attendance and submission of work is undertaken with a view to contacting students to identify any difficulties before these become acute. The team agreed that this should help to minimise the potential disadvantages of less frequent meetings with personal advisers. In its meetings with students, the team heard predominantly positive comments about the accessibility and helpfulness of personal advisers. The DSED explained that a senior member of staff has responsibility as an 'identified central focus for overseas students', given the rapid growth in numbers and difficulties that have been identified with respect to English language and progression. The Language Centre and EDC are working with the School in a range of initiatives, which include in-sessional language support and first-year study skills courses for international students and staff sessions on, for example, pedagogical strategies for working with large groups. Staff who met the team reported that the EDC is valued in its role as internal consultant.

172 Student feedback is sought through regular SSC meetings. The audit team saw from the minutes of SSC meetings that course-specific and information-gathering questions raised at these are responded to, either at the meeting itself or shortly afterwards, and are reported on no later than the next meeting. Minutes are posted on a notice-board. The team heard from both staff and students that issues concerning physical resources, including social space, have recurred over a number of years without resolution. The main issue concerns the availability of sufficient and appropriate rooms, including lecture space, for the increased undergraduate population in the School, although the team noted that plans for

physical expansion were now under way. Overall, the team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities for students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the named awards.

Section 4: The audit investigations: published information

The students' experience of published information and other information available to them

173 The report of the 2001 quality audit commended the College for 'the quality of the range of handbooks and documents developed for use by both staff and students'. The current audit team found that the quality of printed information available to students remained high. The Student Handbook is detailed, explicit and has a prominent statement about additional information that is available on the College's website. The Handbook incorporates the Student Charter. Additionally, there is a Handbook for Students with Special Needs and an Overseas Students Handbook. The College's Code of Practice for the Academic Welfare of Postgraduate Research Students is clear and well referenced. The Undergraduate Prospectus, 2005 and the Postgraduate Prospectus 2005 are clear and informative. They feature the necessary disclaimers about information given in good faith and, in the case of the Undergraduate Prospectus, there is a concluding section that contains information and guidance on the application process, entrance requirements, financial information, terms and conditions of admission and academic quality.

174 The published information available at institutional level is complemented by a wide range of handbooks for students published departmentally. Guidance on what should be included in departmental handbooks is available to staff on the College's intranet. Departments are subject to the Code of Practice for the Academic Welfare of Students on Taught Courses that stipulates the key information that must be provided for students at departmental level, and the audit team found adherence to that code in the areas that it sampled. The team found that, while the departmental handbooks were not uniform in their presentation, there was appropriate commonality between them, and that the information in them was complementary to that provided centrally, with appropriate cross-references to College policies and procedures. Students who met the team during the DATs were generally confident that they could find information they needed, and were positive about the quality of information provided.

175 The information available to students electronically on the College's website is easily accessed and navigated. The Registry pages of the website features a 'student service point' from which students are guided to information regarding both their welfare and their studies. This information includes guidance on general educational support, special needs and financial matters, together with a 'frequently asked questions' section and a link to all College handbooks and regulations. Overall, the audit team found that published information available to students was abundant and clear, with good presentation.

176 The College's Information Strategy notes that, while external communications policy is set by the External Relations Committee, internal communications policy has developed in 'a fragmented way', and that an Internal Communications Implementation Team (ICIT) has been established 'to move policy forward and to ensure the timely adoption of new procedures by the range of stakeholders'. ICIT is one of a number of working groups dealing variously with marketing, communications and external affairs. The Committees Handbook explains that the purpose of replacing formal committees with these working groups is to enable the groups to 'work more flexibly to focus on the task'. The audit team formed the view that the role of the Vice-Principal (Communications, Enterprise and Research), who is a member of ICIT and has overarching responsibility for communications, was a key feature of the College's procedures for assuring the quality of published information. Overall, the team concluded that published and other information available to students was accurate and fair, that the College recognised the need for clear lines of responsibility in generating information, and that it had robust policies for assuring the quality of that information.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

177 The College conforms to the requirements of the 2000 Freedom of Information Act by its adoption of a publication scheme. Access through the College's website leads to a wide range of quality information which the College routinely makes available. The quality of web-design is good and user-friendly, and the integration of information of different kinds and at different levels is effective. From its sampling of published information, the audit team concluded that both electronic and

printed information sources and publicity materials were reliable, accurate and accessible.

178 The SED did not make a central statement about meeting the requirements specified in HEFCE's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance* concerning TQI, but the audit team noted the appointment, in September 2003, of an Academic Development Officer 'to support the College in meeting external obligations and internal objectives in respect of teaching quality information'. From its scrutiny of the TQI site, the team found that the College has published all the information so far required of it, namely summaries of its learning and teaching strategy and links with employers, summaries of external examiners' reports and, where appropriate, summaries of the results of internal periodic reviews. The team concluded that the College was well advanced in its preparations to complete the required set of TQI on schedule.

Findings

Findings

179 An institutional audit of Royal Holloway and Bedford New College (the College) was undertaken during the period 14 to 18 February 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the College's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility as an awarding body. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with the Higher Education Funding Council foe England, the Standing Conference of Principals and Universities UK, four discipline audit trails (DATs) were conducted. This section of the report summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged during the audit, and making recommendations to the College for action to enhance current practice.

The effectiveness of the institution's procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

180 The College's management of the quality of programmes at operational level is premised on collegiality and trust, such that quality assurance is intended to be embedded within all routine processes and owned at all levels of the institution. Since the last QAA audit in 2001, there has been a systematic devolution of executive responsibility for the operational management of quality of educational provision, with the number of College committees being reduced substantially, and a corresponding increase in the number of groups and forums concerned with specific tasks or areas of interest. In particular, the College seeks to achieve good collaboration and communication between working groups, and to avoid the risk of isolation where management activity takes place outside a formal committee. The College continues to monitor the effectiveness of this approach, and committees are required to carry out evaluations of their own performance and to reflect on their usefulness and effectiveness. The Academic Standards Handbook provides a comprehensive description of the College's approach and procedures, and gives prominence to matters of quality enhancement. Although the process of streamlining committee structures and processes is considered by the College to be still underway, it appeared to the audit team that it was achieving the desired reduction in unnecessary committee work, and bringing greater focus to decision-making in the management of quality.

181 Strategic management of quality and standards at College level operates through the Principal's Briefing Group, and is executed through the Academic Board and its constituent senior committees. The Vice-Principal (Academic Affairs) chairs key committees with a quality remit, and, together with the deans of the faculties, is responsible for the direction and management of quality assurance and enhancement. The audit team considered that the College's current committee structure supports its devolved approach to quality management with strong lines of vertical responsibility. It formed the view that quality and standards are being monitored effectively at faculty and departmental level, and that strategic and developmental issues are addressed effectively at College level.

182 At faculty level, the dean and the faculty executive oversee routine quality management processes and ensure that departmental responsibilities are properly exercised. Faculty assistant registrars play an important and proactive role in quality assurance and enhancement across the College. The faculty assistant registrar is a key member of the faculty executive, with particular responsibility for oversight of information and data on academic performance. Through their informal group, the faculty assistant registrars share information, and good practice, across the College, and are in a position to ensure that their faculties receive timely and appropriate intelligence on administrative and quality management matters. The audit team formed the view that, in the systematic devolution of quality management to the wider academic community, the College was striking an appropriate and effective balance between local autonomy and central oversight.

183 The devolution of some responsibilities for quality management to faculties and departments naturally leads to some diversity of practice. Such diversity may be appropriate, particularly in the context of the subject-specific needs of students and staff. Nevertheless the College needs to ensure that departments have, and are aware of, the limits within which they can operate. The audit team would remind the College to remain alert to the recommendation of the 2001 quality audit that the College should seek to ensure that any differences between departments do not compromise the basis of the College's view that 'in a mature institution, quality enhancement and the dissemination of best practice are not optimised by centralised monitoring functions at some distance from the academic community which is ultimately responsible for self-regulation'.

184 Programme approval takes place within the context of annual departmental and faculty plans, and proposals are subject to college-level scrutiny. All taught programmes and postgraduate research provision are reviewed on an annual basis at faculty level, with reports going to the Academic Development Committee and then to the Academic Board. Periodic departmental review (PDR) of the whole of the provision offered by a department takes place under the authority of the Academic Board. Annual review takes into account such aspects as: feedback from students; external examiners' reports; reports from course leaders; feedback from recent PDR, previous annual reviews; any recent external review by QAA or professional body; entrant profiles; progression and withdrawal data, and information of the reasons for withdrawal; and classification profiles.

185 PDR currently operates on a five-year cycle, but will move to a six-year cycle. PDR panels have at least two external discipline specialists, and, where appropriate, these may include employers or representatives of professional groups. PDR requires a department to carry out a self-evaluation, building upon the reports of annual review reports and other information. The use of annual review reports as evidence in periodic review, and the relatively long time scale over which emerging developments are expected to ensue, makes PDR a pivotal element of the College's quality assurance and enhancement arrangements. The audit team considered that the College has in place appropriate and effective mechanisms for the approval of programmes, for the annual review of taught and postgraduate research programmes and for the periodic monitoring of its educational provision.

186 In its self-evaluation document (SED), the College expressed confidence in the effectiveness and robustness of its quality management procedures, based on the outcomes of the 2001 quality audit and of recent Developmental Engagements, coupled with a belief that the recent changes to its committee structure and in the devolution of quality management have improved the efficiency, responsiveness and rigour of its operations. The audit team concluded that the College was justified in this expression of confidence. The College's approach to quality management is one of appropriate devolution of responsibility, linked with the embedding of quality awareness in all activities. The team found evidence that responsibility for quality is taken at all levels of operation, supported by documents that provide a clear descriptive framework for quality assurance

and by a senior management structure that has the capacity to maintain an effective institutional-level oversight. The findings of the audit confirm that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the College's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes.

The effectiveness of the institution's procedures for securing the standards of awards

187 The Academic Standards Handbook outlines the principles of the College's methods for securing the standards of its awards as being: external comparability within the University of London and against standards at similar UK universities and external benchmarks; consistency in the implementation of internal processes; and departmental and individual ownership, with accountability to the College which has overall responsibility for its academic standards.

188 One aspect of externality is obtained through the external examiners, known within the University of London system as 'visiting examiners' in recognition that some external examiners are intercollegiate within the University. Sub-boards of examiners include at least one external examiner from outside the University of London and at least one intercollegiate examiner. External examiners' reports are taken into account at programme level as part of annual review of taught programmes, with departmental responses to these reports also being monitored by faculties through annual review. Annual reports require confirmation that substantive issues raised by external examiners have been properly considered. The audit team formed the view that these arrangements are applied consistently, and make a positive contribution to the maintenance of the academic standards of awards throughout the College.

189 Research degrees are awarded by the University of London itself, so external examiners' reports on PhD examinations go to the University with a copy sent to the relevant College department. In future, these reports will be considered as part of departmental annual review of postgraduate research students, and also by the Dean of the Graduate School so that any generic or college-level issues can be drawn from them.

190 A new assessment scheme and regulations for undergraduate and taught master's programmes was introduced in September 2000. The scheme specifies college-wide assessment and progression criteria, procedures for the calculation of average

marks, and regulations for the classification of candidates within degree classes. External examiners were included in the consultation process before the introduction of the scheme, and they were given comprehensive feedback and analysis in 2003-04 after the first application of the new classification procedures.

191 The College was aware that the introduction of the new scheme and regulations for assessment of students' achievement would result in a tightening of the criteria for progression and of borderline criteria. The scheme is now in its fourth year of operation, and has applied to two graduating cohorts. A careful analysis of the impact of the scheme on the distribution of degree grades was presented in the SED, supporting the College's view that the scheme has not caused a significant distortion of the overall classification profile. The College is continuing to monitor the position, to compare its data with national benchmarks and to consult with staff and external examiners. The audit team formed the view that the new assessment scheme and revised regulations are being fully and uniformly applied in maintaining the academic standards of awards.

192 The Handbook also draws attention to the important part played by statistical data in quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms in the College. The SED outlined the development in the academic management information since the 2001 quality audit, and noted that a richer set of statistical information is now provided to schools on a routine basis, including cohort intake analysis; examination results, progression and completion data; and graduate destination information. This information forms part of the annual review of programmes and helps the College at departmental, faculty and institutional level to identify issues for further consideration and opportunities to enhance student provision. The team saw evidence of the increased utility and importance of this data to departments, which is being used not only to help maintain academic standards but also to enhance the quality of academic and learning support for students. The findings of the audit confirm that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the College's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards offered on behalf of the University of London, which formally awards the College's degrees.

The use made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure

193 The Academic Standards Handbook places the elements of the Academic Infrastructure at the heart of the quality benchmarks used by the College. It explains that, in the setting and maintenance of the standards of its awards the College seeks consistency with external standards, some of which form part of the Academic Infrastructure. The College has adopted a considered and constructive approach to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, which involves departments evidencing their alignment with each section and identifying any gaps for action, a process facilitated by the Educational Development Centre (EDC). The audit team considered that this systematic approach represented both an effective use of the *Code of practice* as it is at present and as a mechanism for evolution as sections of the *Code* are updated. The College's reflection on *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) has generated an awards framework which determines minimum requirements in terms of the academic level and volume of study. The College's awards framework is set out clearly in the College's regulations and underpins the development of its programme specifications.

194 The Handbook makes clear how the Academic Infrastructure is to be taken as a point of reference in programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review. Overall, the audit team found that the College was making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure as a point of reference in the management of academic standards and quality of provision.

The effectiveness of the institution's procedures for supporting learning

195 Students are supported by a personal adviser who monitors their progress and provides academic guidance. The College specifies its expectations for the role of personal adviser in the Academic Standards Handbook, and evaluates through PDR the effectiveness of the departmental personal adviser activity. The audit team confirmed the overall effectiveness, and students' appreciation, of the personal adviser system, although it noted some diversity of local practice. The students' written submission also referred to variability in operation of the personal adviser system, and in aspects of academic guidance and feedback to students. The College is aware of different practices in the operation of support and academic guidance for students.

While some differences of local practice may be entirely appropriate for meeting different needs and expectations, they contain the potential for inconsistencies of treatment, particularly for students on joint degree programmes, and the College is encouraged to make sure that departments are clear about the boundaries of acceptable diversity of practice.

196 The College is introducing a personal development planning (PDP) scheme for students, which aims to provide a common structure for the student/adviser engagement, and, in itself, should therefore limit variability in operation of the personal adviser system. College-wide agreement has yet to be reached on the method of record keeping for PDP, but the audit team noted with interest the aspect of the scheme that documents the skills embedded in academic courses, showing where these are developed and assessed.

197 Postgraduate research students have a research supervisor and a personal adviser, both of whom play a part in the annual progress review, which incorporates, at the end of a student's first year of study, the submission of a report equivalent to a thesis chapter. The faculty supports the monitoring function by providing, through the faculty assistant registrars, a full record of each postgraduate research student's current status and progress.

198 The College takes very seriously its duty of care to its students, and drew attention to the consistent maximum rating achieved in the student support and guidance aspect of QAA subject review. It recognises, however, that it is increasingly catering for a broader range of student background and experience of learning, and stated in its SED that it has 'embarked upon a strategy of reinforcing these crucial departmental roles by altering the structure of central Student Services provision to ensure that awareness and expertise are available to students in departments, where most of their time is spent'.

199 The College plans to increase from some 6,000 to some 8,000 full-time equivalents by 2010, an increase of 33 per cent on 2003-04 numbers. Pressure on existing learning and teaching space has been noted for some time, and the College recognises that its plans for expansion raise that pressure. The availability of suitable teaching and learning space was a topic raised by students, and staff, in several meetings with the audit team, both about the current situation and a potential worsening of the current situation as student numbers increase. The planned expansion has a particular focus on international students, both

undergraduate and postgraduate, but the audit team heard of concerns, echoed in the students' written submission, about the current support and integration of international students. The College is taking a number of measures to respond to these concerns. Nevertheless, in the context of its planned expansion, it will wish to give close attention to safeguarding the quality of the learning environment in general, and to learning support for international students in particular.

200 In respect of the support for learning provided by academic staff, the role of the EDC has been revised so that it can give greater focus to its work in the professional development of teaching staff and establishing research in higher education pedagogy. EDC is responsible for two key training programmes, the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice in Teaching and Learning (CAPITAL), which is mandatory for lecturers who are not members of the Higher Education Academy, and the Postgraduate Certificate in Skills of Teaching to Inspire Learning (inSTIL) for postgraduate students with teaching responsibilities and non-established teachers who do not have an equivalent teaching qualification. EDC also offers a 'bespoke' service to departments and faculties, as well as developmental courses and events aimed at enhancing the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and course design. The audit found that the College actively promotes, through EDC and other services, good practice and staff development in support of the teaching function.

201 Support for the professional development of staff is complemented by opportunities for personal staff development and for study leave. The College has a strong track record in research, and expects its staff to use their research activity to inform their teaching. The audit team saw evidence across the College of staff research being used to enrich taught programmes, and found that students recognised and appreciated the benefits of research-informed teaching.

Outcomes of the discipline audit trails

Biological Sciences

202 The DAT covered the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered by the School of Biological Sciences. Documentation for the DAT was based on the report of the most recent PDR of the School, supplemented by the SED for the PDR, papers giving an update and describing the monitoring of actions from PDR, and current data on student progress and achievement. The documentation illustrated the effectiveness of the College's annual and periodic review procedures for

assuring the quality of provision and maintaining the academic standard of awards. Programme specifications set out appropriate educational aims and intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods and assessment schemes. Programme learning outcomes reflect the relevant subject benchmark statements. The audit team noted the positive comments from external examiners on student achievement. From its study of students' assessed work, the team was able to conclude that the standard of student achievement in these programmes was appropriate to the titles of the named awards and their location within the FHEQ.

203 Student handbooks were praised by students. The Undergraduate Handbook sets out assessment structures, and includes skills matrices to aid the identification of the programme intended learning outcomes at the level of the individual courses. Student evaluation of the programmes was positive, although laboratory equipment and textbook provision have been recorded as areas of concern by both staff and students; the view was expressed that any expansion of student numbers will require further duplication of classes. Students who met the audit team had particular praise for their personal adviser system and the proactive work of the Careers Service, and recognised the value of being taught in a research-led environment. The team found that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the named awards.

English

204 The DAT covered the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered by the English Department. Documentation for the DAT was based on the report of the most recent PDR of the Department, supplemented by the SED for the PDR, papers giving an update and describing the monitoring of actions from PDR, and current data on student progress and achievement. The documentation illustrated the effectiveness of the College's annual and periodic review procedures for assuring the quality of provision and maintaining the academic standard of awards. Programme specifications provide a wide range of information for students, including clear and detailed statements on both subject-specific and generic skills. They are consistent with, and make reference to, the *Subject benchmark statement* for English. External examiners' reports confirm the security of the academic standard of the Department's programmes. The audit team considered the Department's handling of external examiners' reports to be exemplary in its promptness and specificity. The team was able to

conclude that the standard of student achievement in these programmes was appropriate to the titles of the named awards and their location within the FHEQ.

205 The Department has sought ways of introducing more varied assessment, and has taken advice from the EDC on assessment methods. An assessment workload matrix had been developed for the undergraduate programmes. Students expressed very positive views about the range and specificity of the information available to them in handbooks, which include information about assessment criteria and weightings of assessment components. The audit team considered that the various handbooks exemplified the way in which the Department was seeking to achieve a 'community of practice'. The team found that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the named awards.

History

206 The DAT covered the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered by the History Department. Documentation for the DAT was based on the report of the most recent PDR of the Department, supplemented by the SED for the PDR, papers giving an update and describing the monitoring of actions from PDR, and current data on student progress and achievement. The documentation illustrated the effectiveness of the College's annual and periodic review procedures for assuring the quality of provision and maintaining the academic standard of awards. Programme specifications demonstrate effective use of the subject benchmark statement in the design of the undergraduate curriculum. External examiners' reports praised the examining process, the range and variety of a curriculum reflecting staff research interests, and confirmed both the standard and quality of programmes. From its study of students' assessed work the audit team was able to conclude that the aims of the subject provision as set out in the programme specifications were being met, and that the standard of student achievement in the programmes was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

207 The quality of information provided in handbooks was praised by students, including clear guidance on plagiarism and the submission of work. The Department has formulated revised generic marking criteria which are included in student handbooks. The audit team noted students' satisfaction with the Library, and the usefulness of access to the libraries of other University of London colleges and the Senate House collection. Problems

with teaching accommodation remain, and students who met the team reported that, in some classes, insufficient space or seating were available. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students expressed their appreciation of the academic and pastoral support provided by staff, and of the help provided by departmental administrative staff. The team formed the view that the Department successfully fostered a strong sense of community that was recognised and valued by students. The team found that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the named awards.

Management

208 The DAT covered the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered by the School of Management. Documentation for the DAT was based on the report of the most recent PDR of the School, supplemented by the SED for the PDR, papers giving an update and describing the monitoring of actions from PDR, and current data on student progress and achievement. The documentation illustrated the effectiveness of the College's annual and periodic review procedures for assuring the quality of provision and maintaining the academic standard of awards. The audit team saw examples of students' assessed work, and noted the positive comments from external examiners on student achievement. Skills matrices are linked to course unit specifications and programme specifications which make clear the intended learning outcomes and their assessment at each level of study. Subject provision meets the expectations of the subject benchmark statement. The team was able to conclude that the standard of student achievement in these programmes was appropriate to the titles of the named awards and their location within the FHEQ.

209 The School has experienced recent rapid expansion in student numbers, particularly of international student numbers. This has put additional pressure on physical teaching facilities, which the College is taking steps to remedy. The School makes good use of statistical information provided for the annual review process to identify areas where student learning opportunities could be enhanced, and engages with EDC in seeking creative ways forward. Undergraduate and postgraduate programmes demonstrate research-informed teaching. Students are appreciative of the personal support systems in place, and of their access to staff, despite the relatively large number of students in the School. The audit team found that the quality of learning

opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the named awards.

The utility of the SED as an illustration of the institution's capacity to reflect upon its own strengths and limitations and to act upon these to enhance quality and standards.

210 The audit team found the SED helpful in its description of the College's arrangements for securing the standards and quality of its awards. The SED was evaluative but, on occasions, this appeared to be reflections of individuals rather than of the institution as a whole. There appeared to the audit team, therefore, to be some variation in the quality and style of reflection that made the SED less useful as a vehicle for judging the capacity of the institution as a whole to reflect upon strengths and limitations. Overall, while acknowledging the openness of some aspects of reflection and evaluation in the SED, the team considered that the document did not always do justice to the level of self-awareness that was demonstrated through internal documentation and discussions with staff.

Commentary on the institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards

211 The SED devoted a section to the Colleges' approach to enhancement. The audit team was able to confirm that the College has set in place a variety of mechanisms to ensure that good practice is identified and shared. Many individuals across the College are actively engaged in quality enhancement activities, and there are institutional-level initiatives aimed broadly at enhancing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Of particular note is the work of the EDC, which works closely with departments on curriculum and pedagogic developments, complemented by the work of the faculty assistant registrars in identifying and disseminating good practice. EDC is also the main provider within the College of programmes and events in support of the professional development of teaching staff in the context of teaching and learning, and the team noted the strong collegial link between the EDC and the wider academic community of the College. Of the new strategies for quality enhancement, the team noted the progress made with that relating to integrated employability, linked with a college-wide approach to the identification of key skills and the methodical delivery and assessment of these in the undergraduate programmes.

Reliability of information

212 The Undergraduate Prospectus, 2005 and the Postgraduate Prospectus 2005 are clear and informative. Information available at institutional level is complemented by a wide range of departmental handbooks. The College stipulates the key information that must be provided for students at departmental level. While departmental handbooks are not uniform in their presentation, there is appropriate commonality between them. The information in them complements that provided centrally, with appropriate cross-references to College policies and procedures. Students who met the audit team were generally confident that they could find information they needed, and were positive about the quality of information provided.

213 The College's website is easily accessed and navigated. It features a 'student service point' from which students are guided to information on both their welfare and their studies, including guidance on general educational support, special needs and financial matters, with links to College handbooks and regulations. The College has established an Internal Communications Implementation Team 'to move policy forward and to ensure the timely adoption of new procedures by the range of stakeholders'. The Vice-Principal (Communications, Enterprise and Research) is a member of the Internal Communications Implementation Team and has overarching responsibility for the College's procedures for assuring the quality of published information. Overall, the team concluded that information available to students was accurate and fair, that the College has robust policies for assuring the quality of that information.

214 From its sampling of published information, the audit team concluded that both electronic and printed information sources and publicity materials were reliable, accurate and accessible. The team found that the College had published all the teaching quality information (TQI) required of it at the time of the audit visit, and was progressing the completion of the required information set. The team was satisfied that the College is taking a sound approach to the production of accurate and reliable TQI.

Features of good practice

215 Of the features of good practice noted in the course of the audit, the audit team noted the following in particular:

i   the proactive way in which faculty assistant registrars support the academic management of faculty activity, and their contribution to quality enhancement across the College (paragraphs 35, 91)

ii   the role of the EDC in supporting and leading developments in teaching and learning, and its work with the departments to spread good practice (paragraphs 43, 47, 48, 99)

iii   the CAPITAL programme to support academic staff, and the inSTIL programme to support postgraduate students with teaching responsibilities and non-established teaching staff (paragraphs 94, 98)

iv   the college-wide culture of teaching programmes being informed by disciplinary research (paragraphs 101, 134, 146, 156, 165)

v   the effectiveness of central student support and learning resources services in their work with each other, with departments and through the personal adviser system (paragraph 117).

Recommendations for action

216 The College is advised to:

i   move as soon as possible to a consistent college-wide approach to dealing with coursework deadlines and penalties for late submission (paragraphs 40, 111).

216 In addition, the College might consider the desirability of enhancing its quality management arrangements by:

i   addressing more fully the recommendation of the 2001 quality audit of 'keeping under review the role of the effectiveness of the Graduate School as an agent for quality enhancement, following the transfer of postgraduate quality assurance matters to the faculties' (paragraphs 69, 122)

ii   managing the availability of teaching and learning space so as to safeguard the quality of the learning environment, in the context of its strategy for increasing student numbers (paragraphs 107, 134, 144, 160, 172)

iii   remaining alert to differences in departmental approaches to student support, and, where appropriate, acting to establish clear college-wide boundaries to diversity of practice (paragraphs 110, 111)

iv   taking the opportunity of its review of the
      management structure of the Halls of Residence
      to clarify, for the benefit of students, the
      channels open to them for addressing enquiries
      and raising matters of concern (paragraph 118)

v   developing a more concerted approach to
      identifying and addressing the particular
      learning needs and expectations of international
      students (paragraphs 120, 171).

Appendix

Royal Holloway, University of London's response to the audit report

Royal Holloway welcomes the audit report and acknowledges the thorough and constructive approach adopted by the audit team at all stages of the process. Beyond confirming the quality of our programmes and the standards of our academic awards, the report highlights the distinctive features of the student learning experience in a research-led institution such as Royal Holloway, and the effective role of central services in supporting our students and academic staff.

Proposals to introduce a College-wide approach to dealing with coursework deadlines and penalties for late submission of work were already under discussion at the time of the audit visit, and we welcome the added impetus which the report has given to this. It has since been agreed that a common policy will be introduced from September 2005.

The audit report confirms that Royal Holloway takes its duty of care to its students very seriously. Again, many of the issues highlighted by the audit team were already under discussion at the time of their visit. We expect therefore that their recommendations will be helpful as we sustain this commitment to all our students, while recognising some of the specific needs of international and postgraduate students, over a period of growth.