Queen Mary, University of London

Institutional audit

November 2010

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Queen Mary, University of London from 15 to 19 November 2010 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the institution makes under its own degree awarding powers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of Queen Mary, University of London is that:

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

In the audit team's view, the institution's approach to improving teaching quality and the quality of the student learning experience is firmly rooted in institutional strategy and supported through the resourcing of special projects, managed primarily at institutional level. The approach is characterised by schemes that give recognition to staff who are outstanding teachers or are involved in innovative projects, and by demonstrable efforts to engage with students' views on enhancing their learning experience.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

In the audit team's view, institutional arrangements for research students are providing an appropriate research environment and student experience. However, there have been recent revisions to both organisational and procedural arrangements with which the updating of documentation has not fully kept pace.

Published information

In the audit team's view, the institution has systems in place to ensure that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy of the information it publishes about the standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. It meets the current national expectations for public information on teaching quality.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the extensive development of outreach work by schools, which contributes to the institution's 'widening participation' strategy (paragraph 81)
- the opportunities the institution makes available to students for enhancing their employment prospects (paragraph 85)
- the coordinated support for teaching, learning and enhancement projects, provided through the Learning Institute (paragraphs 89 and 97)

- the academic and support infrastructure, the policies and the staff commitment which sustain the collaboration with Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications (paragraph 104).

Recommendations for action

The audit team recommends that the institution considers further action in some areas.

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- to revise its guidance to examination boards on their scope for discretion in deciding the degree classification of students so as to ensure that the lower limit of the mark range within which discretion may be exercised is uniformly applied (paragraph 42)
- to bring to a conclusion its debate on the process for handling extenuating circumstances in the context of decisions on assessment and the granting of awards, and to implement a consistent approach across the institution based on clear and equitable criteria (paragraph 43)
- to ensure the timely production and appropriate dissemination of regulatory or policy documentation, including the timely notification to users of changes as and when they are made (paragraphs 44, 79, 90 and 122).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- to ensure that its monitoring mechanisms at both faculty and institutional levels routinely involve consideration of reports from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (paragraph 57)
- to establish a mechanism which ensures that any research student undertaking teaching, assessment or similar duties has received appropriate training (paragraph 87)
- to develop guidance for staff in their support and progress-monitoring of research students studying off-campus, drawing on existing good practice (paragraph 105).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   Queen Mary, University of London (Queen Mary) was admitted to the University of London in 1915 and assumed the Queen Mary name in 1934 on the grant of a royal charter. As constituted, since 1995 it is an amalgamation of four discrete institutions: Queen Mary College, Westfield College, St Bartholomew's Hospital (Barts) Medical College, and the London Hospital Medical College, incorporating the London Dental School. Queen Mary has its own degree awarding powers (granted in 2007), although it continues to offer University of London awards, which it makes under delegated authority.

2   Queen Mary is located on four campuses. The main residential campus is at Mile End in east London; other campuses are in Whitechapel, Charterhouse Square and Lincoln's Inn Fields. It is organised into three faculties: Humanities and Social Science, Science and Engineering, and the School of Medicine and Dentistry, which has faculty status. Each faculty comprises a number of academic schools; those in the School of Medicine and Dentistry are called institutes.

3   Queen Mary has over 14,000 students on its award-bearing programmes, analysed in the table below (figures relate to 2010-11).

Faculty	Undergraduate		Postgraduate taught		Research		Total
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	
Humanities and Social Science	4,389	3	1,239	185	401	76	6,293
Science and Engineering	4,031	2	275	44	485	26	4,863
Medicine and Dentistry	2,192	19	299	210	257	38	3,015
Distance Learning			17	122			139
Total	**10,612**	**24**	**1,830**	**561**	**1,143**	**140**	**14,310**

4   In addition, around 2,400 students study through collaborative arrangements. The most significant partnership, involving almost 2,000 undergraduate students, is with Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications. Of Queen Mary's total students, approximately 23 per cent are on programmes accredited by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

5   The primary objective of the institution's Strategic Plan, 2010-15, is to 'build on its distinctive position as a leading research-based higher education institution with a strong commitment to engagement in its London location, to be fully established by 2015 within the top ten universities in the UK on the basis of objective and widely respected criteria'. This it aims to achieve by improving its processes of knowledge creation (including research) and dissemination (including teaching).

The information base for the audit

6   The institution provided the audit team with a Briefing Paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The Briefing Paper referenced sources of evidence to illustrate the institution's approach to managing the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision.

7   The Queen Mary Students' Union provided a written submission, prepared by relevant student officers with input from Union staff. This covered undergraduate, postgraduate taught and research students, drawing on the results of both internal and external surveys, supplemented by evidence from focus groups aimed at under-represented student groups, including the joint programme students in Beijing. The submission set out the students' views on the utility and accuracy of student information, the experience of students as learners, their experience of assessment, and the effectiveness of student feedback and representation systems. It also dealt with the institution's handling of student complaints, academic appeals (known as requests for review of examination board decisions) and assessment offences, through a series of anonymous case studies. The conclusion of the submission comprised a number of recommendations for consideration by the institution.

8   In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the previous Institutional audit report, QAA, November 2004
- the mid-cycle follow-up report on the Institutional audit, November 2007
- the Integrated quality and enhancement review report relating to the partner further education college
- sample reports produced by professional bodies
- internal documents as requested by the audit team
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the mid-cycle follow-up on the last audit

9   QAA's last audit of the institution, in November 2004, resulted in an overall judgement of broad confidence in the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The audit recommendations were subject to a mid-cycle follow-up by QAA in November 2007. Based on documentation provided by the institution, this concluded that good progress had been made in addressing the recommendations. It identified the following areas as being of particular interest for the present audit:

- the full implementation of revisions to the degree classification scheme
- the implementation of the new academic credit framework
- developments in monitoring processes
- the implementation of the collaborative framework
- regulations covering research degree programmes
- matters arising from the transfer of administrative processes from the University of London to Queen Mary.

10   The audit team paid attention to each of the above areas and relevant comments are included below. In broad terms, the team found that Queen Mary had taken appropriate action; in particular, monitoring processes have been further developed (see paragraphs 24 to 26 and 55 to 56), an effective framework for collaborative provision has been introduced (see paragraph 101) and suitable regulations for research degree programmes are in place (see paragraph 107). The team also looked at the implementation of the Student Support Strategy, 2008-10 (see paragraph 82). Given Queen Mary's strategic decision to continue to offer University of London awards, the team confirmed, from its scrutiny of documentation, that the institution's quality assurance framework conformed with the University of London's regulations for academic awards.

11   During 2009, Queen Mary appointed a new Chairman of Council, its governing body, and a new Principal, who together initiated a major academic governance review. A new structure came into effect in September 2010, transferring much of the responsibility for academic decisions from committees to accountable individuals operating at executive, faculty and school levels. The changes were introduced in order to maximise efficiency and effectiveness and to secure what the institution calls a 'more streamlined approach' and 'greater agility', enabling it to respond quickly to external pressures.

Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

12   Council, as well as being the principal finance and business authority, also has responsibility for approving the strategic direction of the institution, including its long-term academic plans and key performance indicators. Senate, replacing Academic Board as the principal academic authority, acts as custodian of academic standards and exercises overall responsibility for academic activity, under the superintendence of Council. Its membership is arranged such that there is always a majority of elected representatives, currently 51 per cent.

13   In a radically revised structure, the number of academic subcommittees has been reduced. However, there has been no shift in the locus of responsibility for setting academic standards and confirming attainment of those standards by students. Operational responsibility for the management of academic standards and for regulatory compliance sits with several boards that have delegated authority from Senate and report to it the Programme and Module Approval Board (see paragraph 21); taught degree examination

boards, which are informed by the recommendations from subject examination boards (see paragraph 30); and the Research Degrees Examination and Awards Board (see paragraph 119). These boards are retained from the previous structure, although the forerunner of the Programme and Module Approval Board (the Programmes Committee) dates only from January 2010. Also reporting to Senate is the Research Ethics Board.

14   In contrast, there has been a shift in the locus of responsibility for programme monitoring and other aspects of the student experience. The detailed work, formerly the remit of a number of committees, is now the responsibility of designated individuals accountable through executive structures. These individuals will report, usually in overview form, to Senate, which may make recommendations for action. However, the monitoring processes themselves, such as Annual Programme Review (see paragraphs 24 and 55 to 56), annual reporting on appeals (see paragraph 48) and the six-yearly review of academic schools (see paragraphs 27 and 58) remain largely unchanged. These processes are to be supplemented by consultative exercises, led by members of the executive and undertaken by task and finish groups. The move to individual accountability is accompanied by an increased emphasis on measurable outcomes and performance management.

15   The Senior Executive Group meets weekly; it comprises the Principal and seven vice principals. Three of the vice principals are also the faculty executive deans, three have thematic briefs, respectively for Teaching and Learning, Research and International Affairs, and External Relations, while the last, the Senior Vice Principal, has broader responsibilities, including development of the estate. The vice principals for Teaching and Learning, and Research and International Affairs, each appoint an advisory group to work with them in their respective areas. These groups do not have formal decision-making remits, unlike Senate boards, and produce 'action notes' rather than formal minutes.

16   The identification of individuals to lead on teaching and learning, and on research, is mirrored at faculty level (with slight variation in the School of Medicine and Dentistry) by the appointment of a dean for taught programmes and a dean for research. These individuals, plus an executive officer, comprise the faculty executive, headed by an executive dean, who is also a vice principal. Together with heads of school, they form the core of their faculty advisory group. It is intended that the executive model in operation at central and faculty levels will be replicated at the level of schools.

17   The main strategy documents relevant to the audit are the Strategic Plan and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, both covering the period 2010-15. At faculty level, and also for the administrative and professional support services, planning and accountability reviews will monitor progress against the Strategic Plan; the Senior Executive Group will conduct an annual assessment of overall progress and make a report to Council. The Vice Principal (Teaching and Learning) has responsibility for the implementation of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. Embedded within the Strategy is a series of 'identifiable steps', each with its own key performance indicator, designed to cover the totality of the student experience from pre-application through to graduation and on to further study or entry to employment. Appropriate reference is made to the Academic Infrastructure.

18   The audit team noted the Strategy's emphasis on the wider student experience, including the development of an international perspective, work-based learning (see paragraph 73) and the transition to employment (see paragraph 85). Closely linked to the Strategy is the recently approved Statement of Graduate Attributes, which identifies, under key themes, the broad characteristics to be expected of the Queen Mary graduate. It is intended that this statement will inform future curriculum development and promote innovative practice in teaching and assessment (see paragraphs 51 and 68).

19   Since so many components of the institution's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities were new at the time of the audit, the audit team was not able to judge their operational effectiveness over a cycle of work. Through meetings with staff and study of documentary evidence, the team gained a clear understanding of the rationale for the changes. The team did, however, see these changes as substantial, in placing the overall emphasis more upon individuals and executive action and less upon deliberative structures. It was of the view that, in addition to assessing the impact of the changes at appropriate points in the cycle of work (as already planned by Queen Mary), a review of their impact as a whole should be undertaken at the conclusion of the cycle.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

20   The standards of awards are set and maintained through programme approval and review processes that also look at the quality of the student learning experience. Programme approval is an extensive and rigorous two-stage process involving approval in principle based on an outline proposal, followed by approval of a detailed academic submission, incorporating the programme specification, proposals for any new modules, any programme-specific regulations, and comments from at least one external adviser. The Programme and Module Developer's Guidelines (new for September 2010) provide a clear articulation of the process and require programme developers to demonstrate how their proposal takes account of the Academic Infrastructure (see paragraphs 36 to 37) and other key internal and external reference points.

21   Operational responsibility for the approval of programmes and modules is now vested in the Programme and Module Approval Board, established in September 2010. This replaces the previous arrangement, in which the operational aspects of programme approval were the responsibility of faculty boards reporting to the Quality Enhancement Committee. Queen Mary had become concerned that faculty boards were unable to give sufficiently thorough consideration to the increasing volume of programme proposals and that in some cases poor quality and incomplete paperwork was being submitted to them. Another concern was the potential for impartiality to be undermined, given that those involved with programme proposals might also be faculty board members. The institution believes that the new Programme and Module Approval Board, chaired by the Vice Principal (Teaching and Learning) and comprising a small, but experienced and focused, group will be able to scrutinise programmes in greater detail and ensure that an appropriate level of consistency is achieved.

22   Acting in a transitional capacity until the new structure came into place, and providing an element of continuity between the old structure and the new, a Programmes Committee considered programme and module proposals during the first half of 2010. The audit team noted that this Committee had given detailed critical scrutiny to a wide range of proposals and concluded that its work afforded a valuable blueprint for the new Programme and Module Approval Board, whose terms of reference are very similar.

23   The audit team accepted that the changes to the approval procedure were likely to improve the rigour and efficiency of the process, while also acknowledging that the previous process was generally rigorous, as evidenced by the fact that proposals were frequently referred back to their originators for revision after scrutiny by a faculty board or the Quality Enhancement Committee. The team noted concerns raised at faculty level that opportunities

for the sharing of good practice in programme development and intra-faculty collaboration between schools might be reduced within the new structure. The institution may wish to give these aspects particular attention when it reviews the changes it has introduced.

24   Taught programmes are reviewed each year at three levels: school, faculty and institution. Under new reporting arrangements introduced in September 2010, advisory groups at school and faculty levels will consider reports on programmes, which will then be scrutinised in the Academic Registry and Council Secretariat (ARCS). Issues requiring immediate attention will be addressed in discussion with the Vice Principal (Teaching and Learning). ARCS staff will produce two overview reports, respectively on undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes, for consideration by Senate. The previous route for Annual Programme Review reports was from schools, through faculty boards, to the Quality Enhancement Committee.

25   The audit team was able to look at the overview report on the reviews of postgraduate taught programmes for 2008-09, which was a pilot for future reviews across the institution. This identified key themes, concentrating on reviews of the previous year's action plans, curriculum and assessment, programme management, programme statistics, external examiner reports, and feedback on the student experience (see paragraph 61). The team found this pilot to be a thorough and self-critical exercise which made constructive suggestions for amendment to some aspects of the pro forma used by schools in preparing their review reports.

26   It is Queen Mary's intention to integrate Annual Programme Review within the recently introduced, but currently parallel, process of Planning and Accountability Review, whose purpose is to hold faculty vice principals, heads of school and deans for taught programmes and research to account for the activities of their schools and faculties. This will allow quality and standards issues to be evaluated within the wider context of the institution's plans and strategic objectives and the audit team could see the potential for developing further in the new structure what had been a robust and reflective review process under the previous arrangements.

27   Internal Review, covering the totality of a school's activities (including collaborative provision), takes place on a six-year cycle and involves self-evaluation, peer review and follow-up action. The process looks in-depth at the school's programmes, and its purpose, scope and procedures are detailed in the Quality Handbook. The Vice Principal (Teaching and Learning) takes responsibility for the reviews, nominating the chair of the review panel, whose membership includes two external reviewers with knowledge of the relevant subject discipline, as well as a student representative (see paragraph 65).

28   Through the sampling trails, the audit team had access to the supporting documents for Internal Review. These provided evidence of how schools had responded over time to internal and external review reports, external examiner reports and student surveys. While noting that this evidence emanated from the previous quality assurance system, the team considered Queen Mary's evaluation procedures to be thorough. The team was not able to assess the operational effectiveness of revised processes beginning only in the current academic year, but the clear elements of continuity with previous practice gave it confidence that the institution's review processes would continue to be effective.

External examiners

29   Through the work of its external examiners, Queen Mary aims to ensure comparability in the standards of its degrees with those awarded by other UK universities and fairness and consistency in its student assessment and classification procedures.

30   Operating within a two-tier system, subject examination boards consider the entire profile of students' results and report to degree examination boards, which take a final overview of attainment. A minimum of two external examiners are appointed to each subject examination board, where they act as subject experts. They may also attend degree examination boards, although this is not a requirement unless the functions of the two boards are combined. Degree examination boards have separate external members whose role is to comment on process and the application of regulations. One of their specific duties is to offer advice, within the permitted scope of institutional policy, on the use of discretion in reaching decisions on progression and award.

31   Both external examiner and external member appointments are made according to published criteria and nominations are checked centrally. Appointments to subject examination boards require approval by the relevant faculty dean for taught programmes, while appointments to degree examination boards require approval by the Vice Principal (Teaching and Learning). On appointment, an external examiner or member is briefed by the chair of the relevant examination board. The audit team judged that the appointments procedure was transparent and effective. There are separate arrangements for the appointment of external examiners for research degrees (see paragraphs 119 to 120).

32   Queen Mary publishes Guidelines for External Examiners containing generic information relating to the role and outlining the activities in which they are likely to be involved. Their letter of appointment directs them to a 'resources' web page designed to ensure that they are working with current versions of guidelines and academic regulations. ARCS is responsible for keeping this web page up to date.

33   External examiners are required to make two reports. They report orally to the examination board and have recourse to the Academic Secretary if the board does not respond to critical comments in a positive manner. They also produce a written annual report, normally on a Queen Mary-designed template. These reports are received centrally by ARCS and passed to schools for action, with any areas of concern highlighted. Issues requiring immediate attention are prioritised for the attention of the Vice Principal (Teaching and Learning), who receives all reports. ARCS compiles an annual summary report covering both good practice and issues raised in external examiner reports. This report is considered by Senate and also forwarded to the University of London.

34   Within schools, chairs of examination boards are responsible for making a written response to external examiners on their reports. The audit team was able to confirm that, in general, this requirement was conscientiously met, although responses were not always timely. External examiner reports are a major source of evidence informing Annual Programme Review and they are made available to students through student-staff liaison committees (see paragraph 66).

35   From its reading of documentation, the audit team found that external examiners overwhelmingly judged the structure of academic programmes to be appropriate, the standards reached by students to be comparable with those at other UK institutions and assessment methods to be suitable for the published learning outcomes. Nevertheless, the team noted, in the context of award classification procedures, that external examiners

had commented on the variable use of discretion in borderline cases, and that a task and finish group was currently reviewing policy in this area (see paragraphs 41 to 42).

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

36   Queen Mary states that it engages fully with all elements of the Academic Infrastructure and that its Quality Assurance Handbook has been developed within the context of the external academic environment. From September 2010, Senate has delegated responsibility for monitoring the institution's continued engagement with the Academic Infrastructure to the Academic Secretary. Previously this had been the responsibility of the Quality Enhancement Committee, the minutes of which indicated that it had discharged this duty conscientiously. Responsibility for fulfilling the requirements of relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies rests with each school. Reports on accreditation visits are submitted with the Annual Programme Review report to the Academic Registry and Council Secretariat, which maintains a record of accrediting bodies and holds a central file of their reports (see paragraph 57).

37   All awards offered by Queen Mary are designed to fit within its Academic Credit Framework, which indicates how much learning is expected to be undertaken for the main qualifications referenced in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). This credit framework informs curriculum design and the way in which the institution understands and expresses academic standards. Its use is reflected in assessment regulations (see paragraph 39) and the framework permits conversion of credits into the European Credit Transfer Scheme. In formulating learning outcomes, staff must pay due regard to relevant subject benchmark statements and professional body requirements and to the FHEQ for the appropriate level. In its approval and review processes, the institution assures itself that these alignments are in place and up to date.

38   The audit team sampled programme specifications and noted that these mostly made explicit reference to relevant subject benchmark statements. The team's inspection of student handbooks showed that these indicated, albeit not universally and sometimes in rather general terms, how learning outcomes relate to a range of assessment tasks designed to enable students to demonstrate their achievement of such outcomes.

Assessment policies and regulations

39   Senate has overall responsibility for assessment policies and academic regulations, which are explained in three key documents: the Academic Regulations, the Assessment Guide and the Academic Credit Framework. These documents are reviewed annually and updated as appropriate. In addition, there is a Code of Practice on Assessment and Feedback, focusing on the pedagogical aspects of assessment practice and feedback to students, which closely follows the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), published by QAA.

40   The Assessment Guide, which is referenced to the Academic Regulations, provides detailed information, mainly for academic staff, about assessment policy, marking criteria, the operation of examination boards, progression, reassessment, extenuating circumstances and student failure. The guide clarifies that students must receive formal notification of the assessment requirements for each module at the beginning of each year. Students are directed to the Academic Regulations from more accessible documents, such as the Student Guide (see paragraph 126), but are also informed that, in cases of inconsistency, the regulations always take precedence over any information contained in handbooks provided by schools.

41   The audit team saw examples of careful consideration having been given to issues relating to the organisation and conduct of assessment, through the work of the former Examinations and Assessment Committee, whose remit extended to the oversight of examination boards. The team tracked one such issue, the use of discretion by examination boards in borderline cases of award classification, which was being taken forward by a task and finish group. The issue had initially been raised by external examiners in terms of both the scope for discretion and the inconsistency of practice across disciplines. The students' written submission drew attention to the same issue, advocating implementation of a 'centralised policy…to ensure consistency'.

42   The audit team learnt that, based on a report from the task and finish group, Senate had agreed to a narrower mark range within which examination boards may use discretion. However, it became clear to the team that examination boards would still be free to apply discretion within a still narrower range if they so chose, leading to the same issue of inconsistency between boards as before. The team noted that the task and finish group had reached the conclusion that the use of discretion 'at the levels and within the boundaries' currently deployed by some examination boards was indicative of a need for schools to address their marking practices. While appreciating that using the full mark range was sometimes considered to be more difficult in some subjects than in others, the team could not see the grounds for different subjects to adopt different discretionary ranges. The team considers it **advisable** for the institution to revise its guidance to examination boards on their scope for discretion in deciding the degree classification of students so as to ensure that the lower limit of the mark range within which discretion may be exercised is uniformly applied.

43   On a separate but related issue, Queen Mary is currently reviewing its policy on extenuating circumstances, having identified considerable variability of practice, which could have affected assessment outcomes over several years. In an interim report to Senate, the task and finish group looking at the issue has advised that the consideration of extenuating circumstances should be retained within schools, with central monitoring. While acknowledging that the final report from this group was due in December 2010, the audit team was also aware that the issue had been a point of discussion over the last three years. Therefore, the team considers it **advisable** for the institution to bring to a conclusion its debate on the process for handling extenuating circumstances in the context of decisions on assessment and the granting of awards, and to implement a consistent approach across the institution based on clear and equitable criteria.

44   The audit team considered that the lack of relevant policy documents, or their availability only in draft form when students registered for new programmes and modules, represented a risk to the institution, particularly where they related to areas such as assessment. Many key policy documents were, at the time of the audit, still being updated in the light of organisational changes. In the case of the issue of discretion, while the team understood that the rules for application of discretion were themselves not part of the Academic Regulations, they were a related assessment policy, published in the companion Assessment Guide. Accordingly, the team considers it **advisable** for the institution to ensure the timely production and appropriate dissemination of regulatory or policy documentation, including the timely notification to users of changes as and when they are made.

Management information - statistics

45   Statistical information forms an important element in Annual Programme Review. Data at school level on enrolment, levels of attainment on entry, progression rates, final awards, post-graduation destinations and appeals are all considered. The relevant statistics are supplied centrally and the school adds a critical commentary, which is considered at

faculty and institutional levels and, where appropriate, feeds into the school's action plan for the following year. The audit team noted variability in the extent and usefulness of the critical commentaries and in the consistency with which schools made use of the statistics provided. Moreover, data held by schools did not always accord with that maintained centrally, leading to queries about the basis of calculations and the way statistics were presented.

46   Partly to address such problems, Queen Mary is in the process of introducing a new student information system. The first stage of its implementation, operative since late 2008, covers admissions and online postgraduate applications. The second stage, due for implementation during the present academic year, will involve assessment, progression and awards, and introduce online module registration. The new system will involve a single entry of data into one database, facilitating greater consistency across schools and faculties. It will also allow greater direct access to centrally-held information by students and staff. The audit team particularly noted the extensive consultations which were taking place at all levels of the institution during the development and implementation of the new system.

47   While it was too early to evaluate the operational effectiveness of the student information system, the successful implementation of its first phase gave the audit team confidence that the later stages of the project would be implemented with equal success and that, once fully in place, the new system would greatly improve the provision of statistical management information throughout the institution. The emphasis placed on making use of such information was evident from the pilot of Planning and Accountability Review run in early 2010, such as in the discussions it had prompted about student progression.

48   Providing a current example of the use of statistical information is the annual report on student academic appeal cases, which is to be retained as one of the standard monitoring reports to Senate. This has focused attention at Queen Mary on the increase in the number of appeal cases since 2006-07 and has enabled it to monitor trends and evaluate the effectiveness of institutional responses.

Overall conclusion

49   The judgement reached by the audit team is that **confidence** can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its provision. This confidence is based on the team's understanding of the rationale for the changes to the academic management structure being introduced and on the evidence it found of effective management under the previous structure.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

50   There was ample evidence of the institution's responsiveness to changes in the Academic Infrastructure in the work of the former Quality Enhancement Committee. In terms of learning opportunities, the revised sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), published by QAA, on disabled students and career education were both considered by the Committee in the last academic year. Also considered was QAA's evaluation of the Academic Infrastructure as a whole, which was issued as a precursor to its future development.

51   As mentioned in paragraphs 36 to 37, staff developing new modules and programmes are expressly required to take into account relevant aspects of the Academic

Infrastructure and other external reference points. It was apparent from the latest version of the Quality Assurance Handbook that the Statement of Queen Mary Graduate Attributes was being adopted as an internal reference point for taught provision, with a view to enhancing the curriculum (see paragraph 68).

52   The audit team noted that the role played by the Academic Registry and Council Secretariat in monitoring institutional procedures for consistency with the *Code of practice* was already well established. Therefore, it had no reason to expect that the new structure (which designates responsibility for engagement with the Academic Infrastructure to the Academic Secretary) would adversely impact on the use made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

53   The procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review are outlined above in relation to academic standards (see paragraphs 20 to 27), but they also deal with the learning opportunities for students. For instance, at the initial planning stage, there is a clear emphasis on the need for schools to set the staffing, space and resource demands of any new programme or module in the context of the resource requirements and viability of existing programmes. The intention is that the newly-established Planning and Accountability Review will normally give the go-ahead for new programme developments; however, those introduced via any other route must be accompanied by formal confirmation of the availability of resources at both faculty and institutional levels.

54   There was evidence of careful consideration having been given by the Programmes Committee (now superseded by the Programme and Module Approval Board) to both outline and detailed proposals, submitted under the institution's two-stage approval process. With regard to issues directly related to the student learning experience, the Committee looked closely at approaches to teaching and learning and the incorporation into the curriculum of employability and entrepreneurship skills.

55   As evidenced by the sampling trails, there was a clear focus in Annual Programme Review on monitoring the student learning experience. The review reports submitted by schools contained information on average contact hours per module, commented on whether the amount of direct teaching was sufficient and, in some cases, identified concerns associated with student attendance levels. They also drew attention to innovations in teaching and learning, often relating to experimentation with new technologies and the effective use of online learning in programme delivery. In this regard, the audit team noted the support and guidance for schools provided through the e-learning unit of the Learning Institute and also that a task and finish group had been recently established to oversee an expansion in the delivery of e-learning (see paragraph 77).

56   As part of Annual Programme Review, schools are asked to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of programme management, including the steps taken to ensure the effective management of joint honours programmes (see paragraph 83). They are also asked to comment on feedback from various sources, such as student module evaluations (see paragraph 62), external examiner reports and reports on accreditation by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Schools are encouraged to be forward looking, through the preparation of an action plan, in addition to a separate action plan specifically responding to National Student Survey (NSS) results (see paragraph 61).

57   The audit team noted that the reporting process elicited examples of good practice identified by external examiners, but where accreditation was concerned, there was merely a request to update the status of programmes and append any recent reports. The team could

not find documentary evidence that these reports were considered as a matter of routine at institutional level. In meetings, staff accepted that there was scope for improvement in the mechanisms for considering such reports beyond the level of the school, conceding that Queen Mary was missing opportunities to learn from and implement good practice. The team considers it **desirable** for the institution to ensure that its monitoring mechanisms at both faculty and institutional levels involve consideration of reports from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

58   Queen Mary regards Internal Review (see paragraph 27) as a core process for assuring the quality of the student learning experience. While tailored to local circumstances, the process appeared to be operated consistently across the institution, as indicated by the sampling trails and the recent review of the collaborative provision with Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications (see paragraph 104). Meriting particular mention, in the audit team's view, is the direct involvement of students in Internal Review, not only as members of review panels, but also, under the new structure, in the process for follow-up action. Thus the 12-month progress report prepared by the school for consideration by Senate is accompanied by a submission from students of the school outlining any residual areas of concern they may have.

59   The audit team concluded that Queen Mary's processes for programme approval, monitoring and review, which are characterised by a high degree of self-reflection and a rigorous approach to follow-up action, made an effective contribution to maintaining the quality of learning opportunities for students.

Management information - feedback from students

60   Queen Mary gathers feedback from its students through a variety of means, including module evaluation surveys, specifically designed surveys and the NSS. In order to turn this feedback into useful management information on the student learning experience, Queen Mary is increasingly looking to introduce institution-wide systems for data collection and analysis, and for responding to survey results. However, as indicated in the Briefing Paper, progress to date has been rather mixed.

61   The institution takes a coordinated approach to the NSS, drawing on its relationship with the Queen Mary Students' Union to generate a good response rate from students. NSS results are first considered at institutional level before being distributed to schools, which respond through annual action plans. Queen Mary attributes several recent policy initiatives to information gleaned from the NSS, such as the Code of Practice on Assessment and Feedback (see paragraph 39) the Student Support Strategy (see paragraph 82), and the creation of the Student Experience Investment Fund (see paragraph 94). In that sense, it regards the NSS as having informed its approach to quality enhancement.

62   However, the introduction of an institution-wide module feedback survey for use across schools has been much less smooth. Following an unsuccessful pilot of an online system in 2009 and an external review of the various systems used by schools, the precise wording of the survey questions was still under consultation at the time of the audit. Meetings with staff confirmed to the audit team that there was a general lack of clarity both about the form the institution-wide survey would take and the timescale for its implementation. Nevertheless, through the sampling trails, the team saw evidence of a systematic approach to paper-based module evaluation being taken within individual schools. It also noted a degree of frustration in some cases that an online system had so far failed to effect improvements on administratively time-consuming paper-based systems. Student-staff consultative committees, operating at school level, provide a further opportunity

for obtaining students' views, although they are geared to encouraging a broader student involvement in quality assurance (see paragraph 66).

Role of students in quality assurance

63   Given the reduction in the number of formal committees under the new structure, the students' written submission raised concerns about the future nature and extent of student representation on high-level policy and decision-making bodies. As the new structure is being implemented, the situation is becoming clearer and students continue to have membership of the reduced number of institution-wide committees with responsibilities for quality assurance, as well as membership of both vice principals' advisory groups.

64   The audit team noted that several of the new task and finish groups lacked student representation. This seemed to the team to bear out the concerns expressed in the students' written submission about the potential for less formal structures to bypass student input to policy formulation in areas relating to learning and teaching. Queen Mary may wish to consider this point further.

65   Students have a role in quality assurance in other ways, such as through membership of Internal Review panels and through participation in annual open meetings, faculty forums and away days. In meetings, the audit team confirmed that both staff and students valued the informal communication channels available to them. The team noted the institution's timely and comprehensive response to the recommendations made in the students' written submission.

66   Students are represented at school level by course representatives on student-staff liaison committees, which meet each semester. A new agenda template schedules discussion of external examiner reports, module evaluation, NSS results and Annual Programme Reviews. There is an annual summary of the activity of student-staff consultative committees (prepared by the Academic Registry and Council Secretariat), which, under the new structure, will be considered by Senate. The audit team considered this summary to be a thorough overview and a systematic means of identifying institution-wide issues. At faculty level, under the new structure, course representatives will have the opportunity to raise issues and set the agenda of a course representatives forum, also meeting each semester.

67   Training for student representatives is coordinated by the Queen Mary Students' Union, which provides a comprehensive guide and training session. The audit team heard from both students and staff that there was a strong relationship between Queen Mary Students' Union and the institution. Indeed, Queen Mary has recently provided funding assistance (through its Student Experience Investment Fund) for a post of Course Representative Coordinator, whose role includes strengthening the course representative system and encouraging closer links with annual monitoring processes.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

68   According to the Briefing Paper, Queen Mary engages its undergraduate students with research and inquiry by providing them with a curriculum that allows them to learn about current research in their discipline, develop research skills, and undertake research projects. The development of 'research capacities' is identified as one of the key themes in the recently published statement of Queen Mary Graduate Attributes, which is to be used as a reference point for curriculum development to explicate the links between staff research and scholarship and students' learning opportunities.

69   New academic staff are encouraged to consider the relationship between research and teaching, with modules on research-led teaching included as part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (see paragraph 86). In most schools, the research interests of staff inform curriculum development, increasingly so where postgraduate taught programmes are concerned. The audit team was given illustrative material on the management of research-led teaching.

70   Most undergraduate students undertake a research project or dissertation in their final year. Students confirmed to the audit team that they valued exposure to 'top researchers' in their discipline and appreciated the way in which they were given access to relevant and recent staff research. The team saw several examples of innovative projects aimed at engaging students in the research being conducted within their schools and developing their research skills. It concluded that the integration of research with teaching was embedded in the culture of the institution and that students benefited from this in their programmes of study and through the wider opportunities available to them.

Other modes of study - placement, work-based and e-learning

71   Queen Mary has a small amount of postgraduate provision that is delivered by distance learning and this is covered by mainstream quality assurance processes. There are no special procedures for assuring the quality of study materials, but, with the object of informing programme proposals, guidance notes on various distance-learning models have recently been issued in draft. These cover pedagogical issues, delivery options and quality assurance considerations. Given the limited scale of distance-learning provision, the audit team considered this level of attention to be both satisfactory and proportionate.

72   With regard to students' learning in the workplace, clinical experience is an important part of medical and dentistry training. Students are supported by a comprehensive set of handbooks and there is a detailed monitoring system in place. Queen Mary takes seriously students' views on their clinical experience, as was evident from the NSS action plan for medicine and confirmed by both students and staff in audit meetings.

73   Queen Mary is looking to increase the number of students in other disciplines who have the opportunity to undertake placement learning as an integral part of their programme, although its inclusion in the curriculum is currently limited and mainly concentrated in work or study placements abroad for language students. Comprehensive information about placements is given in school handbooks. There are also guidelines for employers, whose views are sought on student performance in the workplace, though they are not directly involved in the assessment process.

Resources for learning

74   Queen Mary has in place a comprehensive set of strategies guiding its priorities for resources provision. It has made significant investment in its estate, library and information technology infrastructure, as well as in new learning technologies. Under the new structure, the responsibilities of the Information Services Board and its subgroups for overseeing the implementation of strategy have passed to relevant executives assisted by project working groups. The timely setting of budgets and allocation of resources to support the learning opportunities of students is facilitated by Planning and Accountability Review (see paragraph 26), which draws on academic planning and financial management information.

75   There are libraries on the main campuses and the institution funds access and borrowing rights for students at the University of London Library. Students indicated their general satisfaction with library provision in both their written submission and meetings with the audit team, reinforcing NSS results.

76   In addition to the NSS, student feedback on learning resources is collected in a number of ways, for example through Annual Programme Review and student-staff liaison committees, including the annual summary of their activities (see paragraph 66). The professional services run focus groups and surveys, while students can provide feedback at any time via the online 'Voice' survey. Queen Mary has been responsive to student feedback on learning resources, as illustrated by the increase in opening hours and space for group work at the Mile End campus library.

77   The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy envisages that all taught programmes will have a substantial e-learning component. The audit team noted from its meetings with students that, although there were variations between schools in the amount of e-learning available, the students were generally positive about the e-learning provided. From the number of innovative developments underway, many of them managed by the e-learning unit of the Learning Institute, the team considers that Queen Mary is well positioned to achieve its strategic objective with regard to the extension of e-learning.

Admissions policy

78   Queen Mary aims, by 2015, to be in the top 10 per cent of UK universities in terms of the entry qualifications of its students and has already seen an increase in the average tariff points of entrants. An Admissions and Teaching Resources Planning Group agrees admissions targets, approves changes to entry tariffs and monitors the operation of the admissions process. Relevant information on the entry requirements for individual programmes and tuition fees is communicated to prospective students through Queen Mary's prospectus and web pages (see paragraph 124).

79   The principles and procedures for admissions are set out in the institution's Admissions Policy. Admissions are based on academic merit and evidence of potential in the chosen discipline. The Admissions Policy was among the documents still in draft form at the start of the academic year, with several revisions awaiting approval, a fact which lends support to the earlier recommendation concerning the timely production and appropriate dissemination of policy documentation (see paragraph 44).

80   Schools develop their own admissions criteria for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes within the institution's overall policy, but all decisions are channelled through a central Admissions and Recruitment Office, which is responsible for checking policy compliance and making offers and rejections. The Admissions and Recruitment Office provides regular training sessions for all staff involved in the admissions process. The small number of applications for accreditation of prior learning or admission with advanced standing are dealt with on a case-by-case basis by school staff, with advice from the Admissions and Recruitment Office.

81   Queen Mary has a range of centrally-managed widening-participation initiatives which are complemented by outreach work undertaken by schools. The audit team particularly noted the institution's innovative approach in combining research-related activities with outreach work, for example through 'the Centre of the Cell' and 'Computer Science for Fun' projects. In the latter case there has been comprehensive analysis and evaluation of the project, followed by efforts to disseminate these findings across the higher education sector. The team identifies as a feature of **good practice** the extensive

development of outreach work by schools, which contributes to the institution's widening participation strategy.

Student support

82   Queen Mary provides a comprehensive range of student support services and its approach is articulated through the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2010-15, and previously through the Student Support Strategy 2008-10, whose object was to introduce institution-wide standards of academic advice and support.

83   Academic support is provided through a network of academic advisers, operating at school level. The audit team noted some variability of practice in the support for students registered on joint honours programmes. In particular, some schools had appointed advisers with a specific remit to provide targeted and appropriate advice for joint honours students, while others had not. This was borne out in the students' written submission which pointed to problems relating to option choices and timetabling clashes, which it put down to poor communication between schools. Although in meetings students were generally complimentary about the academic adviser system, the difficulties affecting joint honours students caused by schools not working together is an issue that Queen Mary may wish to address.

84   The institution has placed particular emphasis on developing students' writing skills through the 'Thinking Writing' project and the creation of the Student Writing Working Group in January 2009. The latter has made recommendations that will help students to acquire the skills to communicate clearly, which is a key theme of the Statement of Queen Mary Graduate Attributes.

85   Another strategic focus is support for students' employability and Queen Mary has the specific objective of being in the top 10 per cent of universities by 2015 in terms of the proportion of its graduates obtaining graduate-level employment. The Careers Service, as part of the University of London Careers Group, has achieved the matrix quality standard for information, advice and guidance services. It provides an extensive range of publications, online materials and tools, practical skills-training involving interviews and preparing curriculum vitae, and information on opportunities for internships. These services seemed to be well regarded by students, as was confirmed by those whom the audit team met. The Drapers' Skills Award is also available as an extra-curricular course, aimed at preparing students for the challenges they face in making the transition to work. In the schools of Law and Business Management, there are specific initiatives encouraging students to undertake pro bono work on local community projects. The team identifies as a feature of **good practice** the opportunities the institution makes available to students for enhancing their employment prospects.

Staff support (including staff development)

86   Staff recruitment is the responsibility of Human Resources, a professional service department. All staff involved in the appointments process must undergo training, so that they are familiar with relevant policies, such as the equality and diversity policy. Newly appointed teaching staff are required to attain professional accreditation from the Higher Education Academy, either through completion of a recognised qualification or through direct application to the Academy for fellowship on the basis of experience. This requirement is now applied rigorously, monitored through the probationary period, and reviewed before posts are confirmed. Queen Mary offers a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice leading to a recognised teaching qualification, together with an alternative programme for staff with lesser teaching commitments, such as those in clinical disciplines. Both

programmes, which are open to existing staff as well as new appointments, are organised through the Learning Institute (see paragraph 89). The audit team saw the records kept of staff taking teaching qualifications.

87   Training of part-time teachers, including graduate teaching assistants, is managed at school level, and the variations in approach by different schools are acknowledged in the Briefing Paper. There is, for example, a pilot training programme for graduate teaching assistants operating in two schools. The audit team understood that it was Queen Mary's policy that all postgraduate research students with teaching or related duties must first receive training. However, the universal application of this policy in practice was not confirmed in the student meeting and the team could not see from documentation what steps the institution was taking to check that its policy was being applied. The team considers it **desirable** for the institution to establish a mechanism which ensures that any research student undertaking teaching, assessment or similar duties has received appropriate training.

88   A common appraisal scheme for all staff has been implemented throughout the institution. Appraisers must undertake training before conducting any appraisal meetings. The current target for annual appraisal is set at 95 per cent of staff in any one year and again rigorous monitoring is in place. Records of appraisal meetings, agreed between appraiser and appraisee, are passed to heads of school so that resources for development needs can be considered. The audit team noted that graduate teaching assistants were subject to a 'light-touch' version of the appraisal process, but that variations in its application across schools meant that some assistants were appraised and others were not. This is an area of inconsistency that Queen Mary may wish to address.

89   At institutional level, staff development is organised through the recently revamped Learning Institute, bringing together a range of services to support staff and students in their teaching, learning and research activities and to assist them in taking forward the employability and entrepreneurship agenda. The Institute offers programmes, courses, workshops and networking opportunities, which it publicises in an annual handbook and on its web pages. It also manages project funding, specifically the Student Experience Investment Fund and a staff professional development fund. The audit team identifies as a feature of **good practice** the coordinated support for teaching, learning and enhancement projects, provided through the Learning Institute (see also paragraph 97).

90   Further support for staff is provided through peer-based schemes, including mentoring of staff during their probationary period and peer observation of teaching. There were mixed views about the operation of the mentoring system, which the audit team understood to be under review. In the case of peer observation of teaching, there was evidently considerable variation in its operation, with some schools using it as a developmental mechanism and others taking a more formal approach, for example by attending classes without notice. Again the team understood that the scheme was under review and that a revised policy in the form of an institution-wide Code of Practice was in draft. The team saw this as another example of an area where important policy revisions were awaiting approval, which lends support to the earlier recommendation concerning the timely production and appropriate dissemination of policy documentation (see paragraph 44).

Overall conclusion

91   The judgement reached by the audit team is that **confidence** can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. This confidence is based on the

team's understanding of the rationale for the changes to the academic management structure being introduced and on the evidence it found of effective management under the previous structure.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

92   Queen Mary's approach to improving teaching quality and the quality of the student learning experience relies on achieving the measurable objectives set out in its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2010-15. In support of these objectives it continues to invest in enhancement projects, which are managed at institutional level primarily through the Learning Institute.

93   The delivery of programmes is the responsibility of schools and faculties. The process of Planning and Accountability Review reinforces the link between making plans for the delivery of a high quality student learning experience (in line with the institution's strategic goals) and the scrutiny of the quality of teaching and learning. The Statement of Queen Mary Graduate Attributes is an important reference point in this regard. The availability of good quality management information is a necessary element of the process and improvements to institution-wide systems are a current priority, reflecting the perceived need for greater coordination across schools in the use of management information (see paragraphs 46 and 62).

94   Previous enhancement projects have been subject to thorough evaluation, for example the impact on the institution of resources derived from the HEFCE Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund was evaluated by commissioning a report from an external expert in educational development. In 2009, when external funding from HEFCE for enhancement initiatives was coming to an end, Queen Mary launched its own Student Experience Investment Fund, open to bids for project finance from schools, professional services and the Queen Mary Students' Union.

95   The audit team noted that the bidding process had encouraged the development of a good range of project proposals, some benefiting from mentoring support from experienced educational project leaders, and that Queen Mary intended to assess the impact of the first phase of projects in order to direct project funds for the future. In addition, there is a small grants scheme, also open to competitive bidding, to fund projects aimed at improving the student learning experience through curriculum developments aligned to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy.

96   One of the institution's key performance indicators for improving teaching quality is to increase year-on-year the number of staff who are national teaching fellows, an area in which it has already performed well. Queen Mary seeks to use these staff to promote teaching excellence, although in meetings staff admitted that there were difficulties in consistently securing the input of this 'elite' pool of staff in institution-wide initiatives. Queen Mary also rewards staff through schemes of its own that recognise innovative projects and outstanding teaching, notably the Drapers' Prizes and Drapers' Awards for Excellence in Teaching. Examples of good practice based on the work of winners of these prizes and awards are publicised in the Learning Institute's regular bulletin. In another initiative, Queen Mary has developed a set of teaching quality indicators, which provide an objective basis for staff promotion decisions that are founded on teaching performance as distinct from research performance.

97   As outlined in paragraph 89, the Learning Institute provides coordinated support for teaching, learning and enhancement projects. It plays an important role in disseminating good practice through its bulletins, good practice guides, seminars and the annual Learning

and Teaching Forum. It also organises the public Drapers' Lectures, which focus each year on national issues in higher education and attract high-profile speakers.
In addition, the Learning Institute, in conjunction with the Queen Mary Students' Union, organises an annual student experience seminar, providing a forum for students to make presentations to a variety of staff about their experiences of the quality of teaching and services offered, as well as a mechanism for them to make recommendations for improvements. The audit team heard from both staff and students several examples of initiatives that had been fast-tracked by the institution as a result of listening to students (through this and other forums) and taking on board their priorities for enhancing the student experience.

98   In the audit team's view, the institution's approach to improving teaching quality and the quality of the student learning experience is now firmly rooted in institutional strategy and supported through the resourcing of special projects, managed primarily at institutional level. The approach is characterised by schemes that give recognition to staff who are outstanding teachers or are involved in innovative projects, and by demonstrable efforts to engage with students' views on enhancing their learning experience.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

99   The strategic management of collaborative provision is divided between the Vice Principal (Teaching and Learning), who deals with UK partnerships, and the Vice Principal (International and Research), who deals with overseas partnerships. Queen Mary is planning an expansion of collaborative provision, in particular where jointly developed taught programmes have the potential to develop into strong research partnerships.

100   As mentioned in paragraph 4, Queen Mary's most significant partnership, involving almost 2,000 undergraduate students, is with Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications (BUPT). It concerns the joint delivery of taught degrees at BUPT leading to awards of both institutions. Other partnerships are mainly with a range of higher education institutions in London (including some within the University of London), as well as one partnership with a local further education college. In addition, Queen Mary has articulation agreements through which it admits students onto its programmes, allowing them to carry forward credit from their previous institution. There are also partnership arrangements associated with joint research student supervision, student exchanges or study abroad, and clinical or professional placements.

101   The procedures associated with the various types of partnership provision defined by Queen Mary are contained within a single framework document. This highlights key points on the development of each type of provision and gives an overview of the relevant approval process. The document also sets out the principles governing the institution's approach to collaborative provision, which are consonant with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), published by QAA. Queen Mary, in accordance with the *Code of practice*, publishes a register of its collaborative provision.

102   The approval of a new partnership entails securing strategic approval on the basis of a business case and risk assessment. Once this has been achieved, the processes of approving the partner (institutional approval) and approving any collaborative programmes to be offered through the partnership (academic approval) may be instigated. These processes may occur in tandem, although they are kept suitably separate. Institutional approval decisions (taken by the Senior Executive Group) are based on consideration of a due diligence report, a detailed business plan, a draft memorandum of agreement and, if a visit to the partner is undertaken, a report from the visiting panel. The academic approval

process for collaborative programmes mirrors that for on-campus provision (see paragraphs 20 and 53).

103   Collaborative programmes are managed in accordance with the appropriate memorandum of agreement. Broadly, mainstream processes are applied, including those for external examining, annual and internal review of programmes, student feedback, student support and staff support (with some variations depending on the nature and size of the provision). For instance, programmes offered jointly with BUPT are subject to separate review and reporting, while those offered with other University of London institutions follow the academic management arrangements of the lead institution. The audit team considered that Queen Mary's procedural documentation provided clear guidance for the development and management of its collaborative provision.

104   The first Internal Review of the programmes at BUPT took place in October 2010. From the review documentation, the audit team noted two particular features of the collaboration: the appointment of external examiners by both institutions (exceptionally so in the case of BUPT, since there is no external examiner system operating in China) and the accreditation of the programmes by the relevant UK professional body, the Institution of Engineering and Technology. Student surveys, external examiner reports and the 2009 accreditation report all pointed to a well-managed programme, with dedicated academic and pastoral support for students and support for teaching staff from the Learning Institute at Queen Mary. While acknowledging that the students' written submission had highlighted an issue relating to a formative assessment mechanism for first-year students, the team also understood that the recommendations in the submission were being addressed promptly (see paragraph 65). The team identifies as a feature of **good practice** the academic and support infrastructure, the policies, and the staff commitment which sustain the collaboration with BUPT.

105   There are currently 25 research students with joint supervision arrangements, spread across a number of institutions, some overseas. All such students have a Queen Mary supervisor and are subject to Queen Mary academic regulations. Staff explained that visits were made to the partner institution to ensure the suitability of the research environment. The audit team was told that supervisors made regular visits to students, who in turn were required to visit their supervisors at Queen Mary, and that these face-to-face meetings were supplemented by frequent contact through email and telephone, or video links. However, there were no written guidelines that would serve to formalise minimum entitlements to student support. The team considers it **desirable** for the institution to develop guidance for staff in their support and progress-monitoring of research students studying off-campus, drawing on existing good practice.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Institutional arrangements and the research environment

106   Queen Mary has over 1,200 research students, including 140 part-time students, with all faculties actively engaged in research. The institution's strong showing in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise recognised the quality of its research activity, also providing an external indicator of the existence of a conducive environment within which students could work. One of the targets of the Strategic Plan, 2010-15, is to double PhD registrations by the end of the period, with Queen Mary seeking to assist this expansion by providing studentships and opportunities for on-campus employment for research students.

107   The main procedural documents which frame the institution's arrangements for research students are the Academic Regulations for Research Studies Programmes and an internal Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes; both were revised for 2009-10. The Code of Practice defines a suitable research environment as having at least five research-active staff and a critical mass of research students. Staff clarified to the audit team that each school can determine what constitutes a critical mass, so there is some variation across the institution.

108   From September 2010, under the new structure, the Research Degrees Examination and Awards Board, reporting to Senate, is responsible for ensuring that relevant regulations and standards are applied consistently across the institution. At senior executive level, the Vice Principal (Research and International Affairs) is responsible for the quality of the research student experience. As mentioned in paragraph 15, support is provided by an advisory group whose members include each faculty's dean for research. The research experience of students in each faculty is monitored by the faculty executive through the dean for research who chairs a faculty-based research advisory group. At school level, these responsibilities are picked up by a director of research, who sits on the dean's advisory group. The responsibilities of this role are detailed in the Code of Practice, together with those of research supervisors and research students. The Research Degrees Office (within the Academic Registry and Council Secretariat) deals with all research student-related administration.

Selection, admission, induction and supervision of research students

109   Research student admissions are governed by the institution's Admissions Policy (see paragraph 79), within which schools develop their own admissions criteria. Decisions on research student admissions are made by at least two research-active staff, who are given training and written guidance. At the point of acceptance, the relevant head of school takes on responsibility for ensuring that sufficient learning resources will be in place to support students throughout their period of study.

110   On entry, research students receive a school-based handbook and an induction programme, provided at both school and institutional levels. The induction schedules seen by the audit team contained, among other items, briefings on research ethics, developmental needs, student support services and an introduction to the Queen Mary Students' Union. Students confirmed to the team from their experience of induction that it was a thorough and useful process.

111   Schools are responsible for establishing suitable supervision arrangements. Each student is assigned a principal supervisor, who must be a member of Queen Mary staff, as well as a secondary supervisor or adviser. Both must be research-active and together they form the core of a supervisory team, which may be supplemented by post-doctoral research staff, or through external research collaboration. The audit team understood that arrangements would necessarily differ according to students' research area, but was nevertheless unable to verify through meetings that all research students had, as a minimum, two supervisors. The team accepted that the secondary supervisor could, from the student perspective, appear to be a more background role, but encourages Queen Mary to ensure that its expectations for supervision arrangements (as set out in its Code of Practice) are being consistently met across schools.

112   There are limits placed on the number of students a supervisor may supervise - a maximum of eight, with six being the norm. Those new to the role undertake compulsory

training, which is organised by the Learning Institute and takes account of their discipline area. Staff commented positively on the relevance of the training they had received.

Progress and review arrangements

113   Supervisors are responsible for regular informal reviews of student progress, and for informing the student if progress is not satisfactory. They report formally on progress at least annually to the school director of research, and, under the new structure, via a series of upward reports, through the faculty, to the Vice Principal's advisory group and the Research Degrees Examination and Awards Board. The latter is responsible for monitoring submission, progression and completion rates, reporting annually to Senate on these parameters.

114   As of September 2010, students register directly for the qualification they aim to achieve, reversing the previous policy whereby students aiming for PhD initially registered for MPhil and later upgraded to PhD, subject to a satisfactory progress review. At the time of the audit, the most suitable timing for such reviews was still being debated, now that the trigger point of transfer of registration was no longer relevant. The audit team became aware in discussions with staff that considerable variation was permitted in the way review arrangements were conducted by schools and would encourage the institution to finalise its policy and make clear its expectations to all parties involved. The team noted from its meeting with students that their experience of progress review, albeit under previous arrangements, had been satisfactory and that they were provided with written confirmation of what had been agreed.

Development of research and other skills

115   Students' training needs are identified at the initial meeting with their supervisor and drawn up into a training plan, which is monitored through subsequent meetings. Students are able to access training in research methods and other generic skills from their school, from Queen Mary's wider research community and from the Learning Institute, which offers a specific development programme for research students. This includes training for teaching and related duties (see paragraph 87). Students select courses and workshops in consultation with their supervisors.

116   The 2008-09 report on the activity of the precursor to the Learning Institute (Education and Staff Development) indicated that over three-quarters of research students had taken part in the development programme, with awareness of the programme among students being widespread. This was borne out by research students whom the audit team met, who had found the courses they had taken to be very helpful.

Feedback arrangements

117   Research students have representation on student-staff consultative committees and, under the new structure, will be invited to faculty forums and may attend the advisory group of the Vice Principal (Research and International Affairs) for relevant agenda items. Nevertheless, the supervisor/student relationship meant that most students (as confirmed in meetings with the audit team) preferred to discuss any issues they had with their supervisor or supervisory team in the first instance.

118   Research student opinion is canvassed through internal surveys on specific aspects of their experience. For example, the examination process was the subject of a survey in September 2010. Queen Mary also participates in the national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, run by the Higher Education Academy, although its response rate for

the 2009 survey was only 30 per cent, just above the average for participating institutions. The results of such surveys continue to be considered at faculty and institutional level: under the new structure, by faculty deans for research and the Vice Principal's advisory group.

Assessment of research students

119   Responsibility for the appointment of internal and external examiners for research degrees rests with the Research Degrees Examination and Awards Board, established in 2009; formerly, responsibility lay with individual schools. Normally there is a panel comprising two examiners, one internal to either Queen Mary or another University of London institution and the other external to the University of London. There is provision for an independent chair, who takes no part in the decision as to whether the standards of the award have been met, and also for the supervisor to be in attendance at the oral examination.

120   There are clear criteria for appointment to the role of external examiner and protocols for the conduct of examinations, set out in the Academic Regulations. Students are also issued with separate guidance on the assessment process (Research Degrees Examination Procedure), and confirmed to the audit team that they were well informed of the relevant processes prior to submitting their theses.

Representation, complaints and appeals arrangements for research students

121   In 2008, Queen Mary took over responsibility for the administration of research student appeals from the University of London. Queen Mary uses common regulations for appeals against examination board/panel decisions across all its taught and research degrees. These also cover appeals against progress review decisions. There is currently a separate complaints procedure exclusively for research students, introduced in 2009, which sets out the procedure and possible outcomes. However, this is to be subsumed within a standard complaints procedure covering all Queen Mary programmes.

122   The students' written submission pointed to specific issues concerning research student appeals and complaints that had arisen through the independent advice service of Queen Mary Students' Union, which deals with individual cases. The audit team noted Queen Mary's acknowledgement in its Briefing Paper that it was in the process of ensuring alignment of the complaints procedure for research students with the revised academic regulations. In the team's view, this was an area where any ambiguity for students was to be avoided, which lends support to the earlier recommendation concerning the timely production and appropriate dissemination of policy documentation (see paragraph 44).

Overall conclusion

123   In the audit team's view, institutional arrangements for research students are providing an appropriate research environment and student experience. However, there have been recent revisions to both organisational and procedural arrangements with which the updating of documentation has not fully kept pace.

Section 7: Published information

124   Queen Mary publishes a comprehensive range of materials in both printed and electronic format for prospective and current students, as well as other interested parties. Institutional material, such as prospectuses and corporate web pages, is produced centrally and checked for accuracy with schools and professional services. A sample of material reviewed by the audit team indicated that this process was working well and had resulted in good quality and accurate corporate publications.

125   Schools and professional services are responsible for their own locally-produced materials. The audit team randomly selected a sample of courses and cross-checked information from web pages, prospectuses and programme specifications, in most cases finding this to be consistent and up to date. However, the team did find a reference on a school web page to 'a very successful audit…just conducted' by the QAA; it soon became clear that this related to the 2004 Institutional audit and that the web page had not been updated in nearly 18 months. This suggested to the team that closer attention was needed at institutional level in overseeing materials produced by schools.

126   The students' written submission indicated that the information students received about their programmes before enrolment was comprehensive and accorded with their experience on arrival. However, opinions were more mixed about the accuracy of student handbooks, particularly with regard to how reliably the information presented on option choices was reflected in timetables. In meetings with the audit team, students confirmed that they received the Student Guide (an institution-level publication) and it was clear that the students knew how to access key documents, such as regulations, including appeals regulations, and complaints procedures. At the time of the audit a number of regulatory and policy documents were either in draft form or in need of updating, a point that is reflected in a related recommendation (see paragraph 44).

127   Queen Mary meets national expectations for public information on teaching quality (as set out in the *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes, HEFCE 06/45*). The prescribed statistics, National Student Survey results and links to QAA reports may be accessed by the public from the Unistats website, which also contains the required commentary on graduate employability. In terms of the items relating to the quality and standards of programmes, these are mostly available on the Queen Mary website, although some, such as programme approval and internal review reports and the results of internal student surveys, are available only on request. Queen Mary has adopted a publication scheme which follows the model scheme for higher education institutions, approved by the Information Commissioner. This describes the categories and types of information available to members of the public under the *Freedom of Information Act 2000*.

128   In the audit team's view, the institution has systems in place to ensure that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy of the information it publishes about the standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. It meets the current national expectations for public information on teaching quality.