QAA

Institutional audit

Leeds Metropolitan University

MAY 2009

Preface

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

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

Institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. It forms part of the Quality Assurance Framework established in 2002 following revisions to the United Kingdom's approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aim of the revised Institutional audit process is to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges of higher education in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of:

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner

- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications

- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and feedback from stakeholders.

Institutional audit results in judgements about the institutions being reviewed. Judgements are made about:

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

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

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

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

If the audit includes the institution's collaborative provision the judgements and comments also apply unless the audit team considers that any of its judgements or comments in respect of the collaborative provision differ from those in respect of the institution's 'home' provision. Any such differences will be reflected in the form of words used to express a judgement or comment on the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

The reports of quality audits have to be useful to several audiences. The revised Institutional audit process makes a clear distinction between that part of the reporting process aimed at an external audience and that aimed at the institution. There are three elements to the reporting:

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students

- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences

- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website.

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Leeds Metropolitan University (the University) from 18 to 22 May 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the University and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision.

In Institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example a degree). It should be at a similar level across the United Kingdom (UK). The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for the students.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

- 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.

As the University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision these judgements do not apply to that provision.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit team found extensive evidence of the University seeking to pursue an enhancement agenda at an institutional level, taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of learning opportunities and the student experience. The team noted the University's aspiration to monitor and evaluate systematically the success of its various initiatives and would encourage it in meeting those intentions.

Postgraduate research students

In general, the University's arrangements for its postgraduate research students meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA, and in the main are operating as intended.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

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

- the considered steps being taken to focus on assessment for learning across the University

- the work being undertaken by the University to guard against plagiarism

- the strategic use of student liaison officers to enhance significantly the learning experience for students.

Recommendations for action

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

The team considers it essential for the University to:

- ensure that the recommendation made in the previous audit report, that periodic review be undertaken at regular intervals and that there should be a contribution from external peers that is always critical and robust, is addressed fully; and ensure that the overriding responsibility for the procedure, nature and timing of the periodic review process is determined by Academic Board or an appropriate subcommittee.

The team advises the University to:

- review the designation of responsibility for the approval, modification and review of programmes and for the management of research student awards to secure more effective University oversight of quality management

- review and revise the academic regulations and associated procedures so as to ensure that they are clear, unambiguous and accessible to staff and students

- revise its procedures for the approval and amendment of courses and schemes to ensure that the integrity of awards is safeguarded

- ensure appropriate oversight so that the academic regulations and associated procedures are implemented consistently and accountably throughout the University

- ensure the robust and consistent use of appropriate data in the periodic review process and consider whether this process should routinely involve engagement with students

- develop clear procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of joint awards

- develop systems and procedures for course approval and periodic review so that the University can assure itself of consistent engagement with the elements of the Academic Infrastructure across the full range of provision.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- continue to ensure that the annual monitoring process provides a rigorous consideration of and reporting on all courses, in line with the expectations of the *Code of practice*

- review its procedures for approval and review of distance learning and for modules adopting a more blended-learning approach in the light of the *Code of practice*

- review the effectiveness of the various internal audit processes and how they work together to ensure that their outcomes contribute in an integrated way to the management of academic standards, quality and enhancement

- ensure that external examiner reports are shared with students in accordance with the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, Phase two outcomes, October 2006* (HEFCE 06/45)

- review the effectiveness of its processes to manage student representation

- ensure that its expectation, that all research students who undertake teaching and assessment receive appropriate prior training, is met consistently.

Reference points

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

- the *Code of practice*

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

- subject benchmark statements

- programme specifications.

The audit found that the University took due account of the *Code of practice* in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students, but made a recommendation in relation to the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements and programme specifications.

Report

1   An Institutional audit of Leeds Metropolitan University was undertaken during the week commencing 18 to 22 May 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2   The audit team was Professor R Allen, Dr M Atlay, Professor M Davies, Dr A Mackenzie auditors, and Mrs S Applegarth, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mrs E Harries Jenkins, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   Leeds Metropolitan University came into existence formally in 1992, but its roots extend considerably further back, to the Leeds Polytechnic founded in 1970 and to the Leeds Mechanics Institute founded in 1824. The University is currently organised as six faculties: the Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education; Arts and Society; Business and Law; Health; Innovation North; and the Leslie Silver International Faculty. The University has just under 28,000 students studying for credit-bearing awards on campus, including over 4,000 studying at postgraduate level on taught and research programmes. In 2007-08, 8 per cent of new entrants were from overseas. Students are based on two campuses: at Headingley and an expanding site in the Civic Quarter, in central Leeds. It has recently developed and consolidated a Regional University Network of 24 partner further education colleges based largely in the local region but with some further afield. The University's extensive range of collaborative provision in the UK and overseas is subject to separate collaborative provision audit in 2010.

4   The overall mission of the University is set out for students, staff and the public in a 'Vision and Character' statement which states that 'Leeds Metropolitan University is striving to become a world-class regional university, with world-wide horizons, using all our talents to the full'.

5   The previous Institutional audit in 2004 found that broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The report highlighted a number of areas of good practice relating to staff development and the student experience. The report also identified a number of recommendations which the University has addressed mostly, but not entirely, through a series of action plans (see paragraph 20 onwards).

6   Since the previous audit the University has developed in a number of ways including: the introduction of a greater focus on learning and teaching and on the student experience; establishing the Directorates of Student Centred Change Management and of Assessment, Learning and Teaching; and modifying the faculty structure from seven faculties to six. The organisation of service units has also changed so that in some cases a unit became responsible to deans of faculty rather than to the head of institution. More recently the University has carried out a curriculum review which led to the withdrawal of a number of courses where there was little demand from students. At the time of the audit the University was led by an acting Chief Executive pending the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor.

7   The audit was based on a Briefing Paper provided by the University supported by documentary evidence; the University provided the audit team with further access to a range of documentation. The audit also drew on a student written submission, the findings of which were based on information from a sample of 997 students drawn from across the University who responded to a survey.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

8   The University manages the assurance of standards and quality through systems of governance, management roles and academic regulations. These have the potential to be effective and rigorous and in many respects the audit team found them to be so, with no evidence that awards are being made inappropriately. However, it also found there were weaknesses in the systems which, taken together, created a higher than acceptable degree of risk.

9   The University Academic Board is the senior committee for academic affairs; it discharges some responsibilities directly but delegates others to subcommittees, including the Academic Committee, and its three subcommittees: the Research Committee, the Research Ethics Committee and External Examiners Committee. A comparable structure is found in the faculties where there are faculty boards, faculty academic committees and faculty research committees. There is thus scope for policy matters to be referred up or down the University's deliberative structures and the audit team saw evidence of this taking place. The team was concerned, however, about the variable provision of minutes to higher level committees at both faculty and institutional level, as well as a level of detail in some documentation and minutes that was inadequate to record detailed discussion regarding the outcomes of key quality assurance procedures, and thus to assure the University that such procedures were making an effective contribution to quality assurance.

10   The head of the institution has the overall responsibility for quality assurance in the University and is supported by six pro-vice-chancellors each having a specific portfolio including Assessment, Learning and Teaching; University Research; Public Relations Studies; Postgraduate Studies; Marketing and Business Strategy. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor Registrar and Secretary heads the Registrar and Secretary's Office which has significant administrative responsibilities for quality assurance. Much responsibility, however, is delegated to the deans of the six faculties who, for example, play a large part in the approval and review systems that sustain academic standards and quality. Deans are able to determine significant parts of the approval process itself and sign off awards without the approval of senior University bodies. The audit team also noted, with concern, evidence of inconsistent application of process between faculties particularly in programme approval, monitoring and review.

11   The University has an extensive set of regulations which are set out in academic principles and regulations, the research regulations, and the student regulations. These are available to staff either directly and as part of a quality manual website where they are augmented by a set of academic procedures and specific operational related guidance. From its review of these regulations and associated procedures the audit team concluded that the format of the regulations and the language used, was over complex. There were also inconsistencies, and in some instances contradictions, in content between the documents, and the documents were, in these respects, not fit for purpose or accessible for staff. The audit team recommends that the University reviews and revises the academic regulations and associated procedures so as to ensure that they are clear unambiguous and accessible to staff and students.

12   The University uses a process of approval, based upon a system of peer review, for all schemes, an overall framework for academic provision in a particular subject area, or courses leading to an award. The responsibility for this process is delegated to faculties and the principles are set out in the academic regulations and amplified in supporting documentation. Approval is a two-stage process involving strategic planning approval and academic approval.

13   Strategic planning approval determines whether a course proposal is consistent with the 'Vision and Character' of the University, feasible, financially viable and congruent with existing University provision. The University has two procedures for academic approval. The main one is that normally applied for new courses and involves appropriate externality. However, where only new modules are being proposed, and these represent no more than 30 per cent of the credit points required for the award then the University considers this to be a relatively minor

amendment, and the approval procedure is largely internal, that is, with more limited externality. The audit concluded that the University's definition of what constituted relatively minor amendments could lead to the approval of substantially new awards through a process with limited externality and independent oversight. In particular, such lack of oversight could lead to limited assurance of the continuing coherence and integrity of programmes. Accordingly, the team advises the University to review its regulations to ensure that the integrity of its awards is always safeguarded and that the approval of new courses involves robust external scrutiny.

14   The University's academic regulations state that the approval panel has delegated powers of approval from Academic Board. The full report of the approval panel is not received by the University's Academic Committee but is received by the faculty academic committees who have a monitoring role.

15   The Academic Committee receives an annual review of approval activity. This report is largely descriptive, focusing on the management of the process. The continuous audit report (see paragraph 24) on approval events concluded that there was scope to enhance the annual reporting of approval and review events, and revised guidance was subsequently issued. The audit team noted some detailed annual reporting but also reports where, for example, the precise nature of new courses and modules being approved was unclear and encourages the University to continue to improve its reporting procedures. From its review of the reports, the audit concluded that the University might further strengthen its oversight of the outcomes of approval by continuing its work to ensure that the annual review process provides a rigorous consideration of and reporting on all courses, in line with the expectations of the *Code of practice*.

16   Minor modifications to schemes or courses are approved by the head of school or senior academic manager appointed by the dean of faculty and reported to the faculty academic committee. The audit team found inconsistencies in the operation of this system and considered that the University could strengthen further its processes to ensure that there was effective monitoring of minor changes.

17   The University is developing the use of its virtual learning environment to support greater blended and distance learning. Institutional systems for the quality assurance of these changes have yet to be established fully and the audit team recommends as desirable that the University reviews its procedures for approval and review of distance learning and for modules adopting a more blended-learning approach in the light of the *Code of practice*.

18   The University has an annual process (annual review) whereby students and staff can provide feedback on performance and academic provision in order to ensure that programmes remain current; to evaluate student achievement and the effectiveness of the curriculum and assessment practices; and to ensure appropriate external involvement and responses to issues of quality, standards and enhancement. The annual review process has recently been reviewed and amended in order to better enable this feedback by staff and students to take place and be acted upon within the academic year under review. Following the 2007-08 annual review cycle, the University recognised that there was evidence of inconsistent practice and that further development work was required to fully embed the revised process to ensure maximum enhancement opportunities are identified and acted upon. The audit team concurred with the University's assessment that the new process has the potential to provide timely and useful information on the health of the University's provision and will need time to become fully embedded in practice. The team recommends that the University continues its work to ensure that the annual review process provides a rigorous consideration of, and reporting on, all courses in line with the expectations of the *Code of practice* and as identified by its own review.

19   The process for periodic review mirrors that of academic approval and has the purpose of ensuring that a scheme or course remains academically valid. The previous audit team, for the 2004 report, encouraged the University to bring its academic regulations into line with its statements of practice and had concluded that insufficient formal means existed to enable the

University to be confident that the contribution of external peers in periodic review was always impartial, critical and robust.

20   The current audit explored the University's approach to periodic review and considered that the University had not responded effectively to the concerns raised in the previous audit report. It found inconsistencies between the statements in the academic regulations, the reporting to Academic Committee and actual practice. Under the academic regulations, faculty deans have ultimate responsibility for deciding when a course should undergo review and this process is monitored by the Registrar and Secretary's Office. The list of courses and their scheduled review dates provided to the audit team by the Registrar and Secretary's Office was not comprehensive and showed several courses that had been in operation for longer than five years with no scheduled date for review. The audit team concluded that, from the information available, the Registrar and Secretary's Office was not in a position to monitor the periodic review cycle effectively.

21   The University's academic regulations state that a periodic review may take a number of forms analogous to academic approval (see below). The periodic review procedures do not require a detailed critical review of the provision. The audit team identified rigorous processes for review involving independent chairs, external panel members, discussions with students and scrutiny of data in some, but not all, faculties. However, the team considered that the University should review its academic regulations and procedures to ensure that there is always robust use of data as part of the periodic review process.

22   The audit team saw an example in one faculty of an instance where periodic review of courses takes place under procedures analogous to those used for the approval of new courses where there is no more than a 30 per cent change in modules. External involvement in this process is through written correspondence from 'critical readers'. Some critical reader comments seen by the team contained limited critical engagement with the course or its experience of operation. The audit concluded that the contribution of external peers to the University's periodic review processes, while working effectively in some areas was not always critical and robust; and that lack of critical external engagement in periodic review of programmes where there has been up to 30 per cent change in modules was presently putting standards at risk.

23   The University offers a range of joint awards arising from combinations in schemes within or across faculties. The audit team heard of differing ways in which such awards could be approved either through the separate faculty level approval of each element or through an event held under the auspices of the designated lead faculty. The team concluded that the University should develop clear procedures for the quality assurance and enhancement of joint awards.

24   The University has developed a series of audit processes which supplement the processes of approval, monitoring and review. Academic audit comprises continuous audit (the collection, monitoring and evaluation of routinely produced evidence) and annual audit (the audit of specific issues or themes). Quality enhancement audit reviews documentation relating to a particular area of the student experience to identify good practice. The University Academic Committee has overall responsibility for these audits and also receives regular reports from faculties; these are designed to enhance communication and facilitate the Academic Committee's quality enhancement role. The audit team was provided with a diagram which described the links between these processes, but remained uncertain as to how the various audits formed an integrated process which could deliver clear prioritised outcomes. The team considered it desirable that the University reviews the effectiveness of the various internal audit processes and how they work together to ensure that their outcomes contribute in an integrated way to the management of academic standards, quality and enhancement.

25   The Academic Committee has delegated authority from the Academic Board for the appointment, renewal and removal of external examiners who are appointed to all award-bearing higher education courses. An External Examiners Sub-Committee supports the Academic Committee in its fulfilment of this responsibility. External examiners are required to report in

writing annually. Course leaders are responsible for ensuring that the comments and recommendations contained in the report are considered, actions are taken and formally recorded, and external examiners are notified. Further consideration of the responses to external examiners is undertaken by scheme/course teams through the annual review process.

26   From its review of the evidence and its discussions with staff and students, the audit concluded that the University had in place effective means for the appointment and support of external examiners and was using their feedback effectively to monitor and enhance its provision. The University stated that it facilitates sharing external examiners' reports with student representatives; however, there was limited evidence that all student representatives were seeing external examiners reports in line with the requirements of the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework*, Phase two outcomes, October 2006/45 and the audit recommended that the University considers strengthening its procedures in this regard.

27   All courses are expected to maintain programme and module specifications and the annual monitoring and review processes ensure that the documentation remains current. Programme specifications are not written for students but for the approval process and are considered to be key definitive documents. At the time of the audit the University had launched an online repository for programme and module specifications, although the audit team were not clear hows this would be made useful for staff and students (see paragraph 63). While some programme specifications showed detailed course structures including core and elective modules, in other areas programme specifications covered a scheme and contained no detailed requirements for the subsumed awards. The team concluded that, without detailed course structures, including a list of the relevant modules, approval panels could not assure the University that course teams were fully meeting the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure by providing a programme specification that was 'a concise description of the intended learning outcomes of an HE programme, and the means by which the outcomes are achieved and demonstrated'.

28   In its guidance on approval events, reference is made to the need for courses to demonstrate alignment with subject benchmark statements, published by QAA, any public, statutory or regulatory body requirements and the University's Taxonomy of Assessment Domains which is aligned with the FHEQ. Although programme specifications identify the relevant subject benchmark, the evidence available to the audit team showed no consistent detailed mapping of course provision against subject benchmarks and the reports of annual and periodic review made limited reference to subject benchmarks or mapping. From its discussions and consideration of approval and review documentation, the team considered that the University could not be assured that the Academic Infrastructure was always being used as an effective reference point. Accordingly, it advises the University of the need to develop its systems and procedures for course approval and review so that it can assure itself that the elements of the Academic Infrastructure are consistently engaged with across the full range of provision.

29   The University's assessment principles, regulations and procedures are set out in the academic principles and regulations and had been revised to respond to the issues raised in the previous audit regarding student progression. The audit team found that the University had appropriate assessment policies in place and had responded effectively to the concerns raised in the previous audit relating to students' tactical avoidance of challenging modules. The audit team also noted increased emphasis on assessment practices which support student learning (see paragraph 54).

30   The University's academic regulations set out the constitution, remit and procedures for the operation of examination committees and boards of examiners. The regulations state that the chair of the board of examiners should be 'a member of the academic staff of the University with seniority and experience of Boards of Examiners' and that normally this would be 'the Head of School or Senior Academic Manager nominated by the Dean'. The audit team raised concerns about the possible independence of the chair in this process. However, discussions revealed that it was University practice to appoint chairs independent of the school or subject area under

consideration. The team concluded that the University's Academic Regulations should be revised to reflect current practice.

31   The University's assessment learning and teaching strategy focuses, among other issues, on the importance of students receiving formative feedback on assessed work within three weeks of submission. The University's academic regulations set a target of four weeks for return. While setting a more ambitious target than that in the regulations potentially advantages students, the audit team formed the view that the University might wish to consider whether its academic regulations and assessment learning and teaching targets should be brought into line in order to send a clear and unambiguous message about its expectations.

32   The University has engaged actively in addressing the issue of plagiarism. It provides students with a comprehensive guide: the 'Little Book of Plagiarism' which was commended universally by staff and students that the audit team met. Following a pilot process, the University had recently instigated unfair practice boards as a way of managing cheating, plagiarism and other forms of unfair practice. Unfair practice boards determine penalties on a consistent basis and refer cases of procedural or other deficiencies back to faculties. The audit team considered these boards potentially as a feature of good practice but, given their recent introduction, was not able to consider their impact. A minor change had been made to the regulations to accommodate the boards but it appeared to the team that this was now in conflict with other aspects of the academic regulations. The audit concluded that the University should revise its regulations to ensure that they are clear and unambiguous on this matter. Notwithstanding the need for clarification, the team considered that the work being undertaken by the University to guard against plagiarism was a feature of good practice.

33   Management information is produced to support the review of specific aspects of the University's performance at course, faculty and institutional levels and its use to support academic development and decision making is being extended. The lack of a requirement for management information to be part of the periodic review process has been noted earlier. In annual review, course teams indicated some issues with the quality of data the University provided. The audit team noted that the University was aware of this issue and concluded that the University was working to improve the consistency, accurateness and usefulness of the way its management information supported core processes. The team encourages the University to continue to monitor its work in this area.

34   From its considerations of the University's policies and procedures for the institutional management of its awards and their application across the University, the audit team concluded that limited confidence could be placed in the soundness of the current and likely future management of academic standards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

35   The alignment of the University's academic regulations and accompanying procedures with the *Code of practice* is undertaken by the Registrar and Secretary's Office and reported to the Academic Committee. While it was noted above that the University's use of external reference points in its management of academic standards needs to be strengthened, the audit team formed the view that there was generally appropriate, use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in the management of learning opportunities.

36   The University's planning process includes consideration of the resources required to provide effective learning resources to students. The audit concluded that the strategic planning approval process (see paragraph 13) was effective in ensuring that appropriate resources were considered prior to approval.

37   The University considers that the academic regulations provide clear guidance on the expectations regarding programme development. The academic regulations allow faculties to convene an advisory group to support the development of new programmes, although at the time of the audit there had been no such advisory group in operation during the previous two years. The University may wish to consider whether the inclusion of this provision within the regulations is helpful in ensuring that they are clear and unambiguous.

38   The University is seeking to create a culture that demonstrates the value of, and encourages, feedback from students. This includes a public feedback document entitled 'You Said - We Did' which is intended to demonstrate to students how their feedback is shaping the decisions made by the University.

39   The University acknowledges that it has not done well in the National Student Survey in recent years and has established a steering group to consider how improvements might be addressed. The audit team saw clear evidence of the systematic manner in which the University was seeking to utilise the evidence from the survey to improve the learning experience of students.

40   In 2007-08 a new process for delivering module evaluations was introduced across the University. These evaluations are subsequently used in the annual review process (see paragraph 18). The audit team found considerable inconsistency in the way in which module feedback was gathered, used and reported on across the University. It was apparent that the University was already aware of this issue and that actions were underway to improve the systematic use of module evaluation data. The team encourages the University to continue its work to improve the effectiveness of this process.

41   The annual review process incorporates the opportunity for student representation. There is also an expectation that faculties will convene either student fora or focus groups as an additional opportunity to receive feedback from students as part of the new annual monitoring process. The audit team found that good engagement was in place with students in some areas of the University, but further work was required to embed this level of engagement with students in all courses.

42   The University's documentation was not consistent regarding student representation as part of the periodic review of a programme. This is not a requirement of the University's academic regulations and is a matter that is left to the discretion of deans of faculty. Given the emphasis being placed by the University on the student experience and the expectations of the *Code of practice*, the audit team formed the view that the University should consider revising its periodic review procedures to ensure that the student voice is always considered as part of periodic reviews. Student liaison officers are employed in some areas of the University. They receive informal feedback from students and run focus groups. From its discussion with students and liaison officers, and from a review of the course documentation, the team concluded that the targeted use of these officers was having a positive effect on student engagement and that the feedback gathered was being used to enhance the learning experience of students.

43   Overall, the team concluded that, generally, the University was making a systematic effort to engage students and to use their feedback to improve the quality of learning opportunities.

44   The University provides opportunities for student input into the management of standards and quality by offering membership to representatives of the Students' Union across the formal senior-level committee structures, including the Board of Governors and Academic Board. This is supplemented with regular informal dialogue between the Students' Union Executive and senior University management. Student representation on scheme and course level bodies, including annual review processes, are governed by the student representation regulations. However, it is clear from the University's own analysis, as well as that provided by the student written submission, that there is considerable variation among faculties with the degree of compliance to these regulations. Further, students were critical of the steps being taken by the University to

appoint student representatives in a timely manner and to notify the Students' Union so that appropriate training and support could be provided. The audit team considers that it is desirable that the institution reviews the effectiveness of its processes to manage student representation.

45   The University's research strategy includes within it an intention to develop a linkage between research and other scholarly activity and learning and teaching, although this only appears to be directed explicitly at postgraduate students. The University's review processes do not embed a focus on the linkage between teaching and research. In contrast, the audit team saw clear evidence of research in the area of learning and teaching feeding directly into the assessment learning and teaching strategy through the activities of the assessment learning and teaching directorate and also being disseminated. The team considers it likely that students are benefiting from the research strengths of staff, but that these benefits are not transparently and consistently captured nor enhanced by the existing review mechanisms. The University may wish to consider ways of more clearly linking research activities with the learning opportunities of students, particularly those on taught programmes.

46   The University declares that it is 'committed to the development of flexible modes of study, to move towards an objective of allowing students to study at the pace, place and mode of study of their preference'. One significant development has been the approval of a small number of accelerated, two year, undergraduate programmes. The oversight of this development has involved a broad consideration of the incorporation of such programmes into the University's calendar.

47   There are just over 500 students on distance-learning programmes (excluding those delivered through collaborative provision), spread over 50 programmes. The audit team saw evidence that the distance-learning element was specified at the point of programme approval within the University. However, there is no system in place for mapping against the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* nor any published set of University expectations mirroring the *Code* for such programmes. The audit team considers it desirable for the University to review its procedures for approval and review of distance learning and for modules adopting a more blended-learning approach in the light of the *Code of practice*.

48   The University places significant value in the education and training of students through placement activity. There are clear policies in place regarding the oversight of learning opportunities for students on placements and for support around placement activity. The audit team saw evidence of some robust implementation of these policies.

49   The University's libraries and information technology provision operate from within the Faculty of Information and Technology. The quality of the library and IT service is overseen by the Libraries and Learning Innovation Team. Student satisfaction with both library resources and IT provision in the 2008 National Student Survey was slightly above the national average. The student written submission reported a general satisfaction with library resources although student views of IT resources were mixed, with the institutional virtual learning environment being more positively rated than other aspects of provision. There is a well publicised set of minimum expectations for the institutional virtual learning environment to ensure staff engagement and a commonality of student experience. This is supported by an extensive programme of staff development opportunities. Students reported mixed views of the value of the virtual learning environment, reflecting differing subject discipline practices, but the student written submission indicated a general level of satisfaction. Overall, the audit team considered the provision of learning resources to be satisfactory.

50   The University's admissions policy was revised in December 2008, and places emphasis on transparency, fairness and consistency and makes prominent reference to the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*. Training is compulsory for all those directly involved in admissions, and is supported by regular meetings of an admission tutors' network. The admissions policy applies to all students, irrespective of mode of study or level of award. Students met by the audit team

were satisfied with the admissions experience they had received. The team considers the admissions procedures to be appropriate and robustly implemented.

51   Academic student support is provided via the faculties through a variety of different mechanisms. The student written submission indicated some dissatisfaction with the variability in the current personal tutor arrangements. The audit team noted that some revisions to personal tutor arrangements were underway. Comprehensive non-academic student services are provided by the Services to Students team and accessed through 'Helpzones', which have access points at four locations across the University and via a comprehensive website. All undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses are supported by course handbooks, following a University template. These are generally comprehensive but do not contain programme specifications. At the time of the audit, the majority of, although not all, programme specifications were available on a specific part of the University's website, but these were not linked or referenced in any external webpage or publication which a student or potential applicant might find.

52   Human resources policy and procedures have been recently revised, and consolidated into a single set of regulations uniformly covering all staff. The University introduced a new, compulsory, performance and development review scheme in September 2008, with a primary aim of offering a consistent framework to focus performance on the achievement of objectives in the University's 'Attitude Character and Talents' framework, which underpin the University's Vision and Character statement. Employee engagement with institutional policies and processes is gained via trades unions and through a programme of focus groups and online polls, titled 'Leeds Met Listens'. The outcomes of this process are reported to the Employment and Staffing Committee and the action plans and feedback are posted online. The audit team saw evidence of an extensive programme of staff development opportunities in place to support the assessment learning and teaching strategy, supplemented by a comprehensive assessment learning and teaching website with a range of staff development resources.

53   The team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely management of the quality of learning opportunities.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

54   The University aims to make enhancement a core aspect of learning and teaching. Since the last audit in 2004 a Pro-Vice-Chancellor portfolio in assessment, learning and teaching has been created. The assessment, learning and teaching strategy is now in its second iteration and other initiatives which the University has taken with a view to supporting quality enhancement demonstrate its deliberate and systematic approach to enhancement. Of particular note is the shift from a learning, teaching and assessment strategy to an assessment, learning and teaching strategy indicating the intention to focus on assessment practices which support student learning. Through the creation of a website carrying a range of resources, and networks of associate deans and teaching fellows, the University is pressing this agenda hard. Also significant is the creation of a directorate of student-centred change which has successfully introduced a freshers' festival; an internationalisation strategy designed to enhance both the curriculum and students' wider experience; the introduction of quality enhancement audits; a systematic strategy for the use of peer observation in teaching; and annual staff development festivals. All of the above have made a significant contribution to the enhancement in the University in supporting both students and staff.

55   Annual review and periodic review processes also have an enhancement dimension and the audit team saw some evidence of consideration of issues relating to the enhancement of teaching and learning. The team formed the view that the processes have the potential to contribute effectively to enhancement but were patchy in their implementation.

56   The audit team found extensive evidence of the University seeking to pursue an enhancement agenda at an institutional level and to a lesser extent at faculty level, although initiatives to encourage greater engagement at faculty level were being implemented. Although

there was clear evidence of the institution taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of learning opportunities and the student experience, there was little evidence of the University monitoring the impact or evaluating the success of these initiatives systematically to date. Where data was gathered it focused on whether planned action had been completed rather than evaluating outcomes. The University indicated that it planned to act in this area through its recently introduced system of quality enhancement audits. The team encourages the University in its aspiration to conduct a systematic review of enhancement activities.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

57   The University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision in 2010.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

58   Oversight of postgraduate research student activity is maintained by Research Sub-committee and Research Ethics Sub-Committee. The Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education is designated as the lead faculty for research and hosts the University Research Office, which supports staff in research activities. Research awards coordinators have responsibility for managing research students within cognate areas.

59   Responsibility for the support, administration and delivery of research degree programmes lies in the faculties, and each has a research student-focused committee, whose name is not yet standardised across the University, and a research ethics committee, mirroring the university-level structure. The audit team noted some discrepancy in the regulations, for example, reference was made to the Faculty Research (Awards) Sub-Committee as 'the sole body empowered to recommend the conferment of a research award of the University', although this committee was now obsolete. The team considered that this could give rise to confusion and contributed to its recommendation that the University revise the academic regulations and associated procedures so as to ensure that they are clear, unambiguous and accessible to staff and students.

60   Similarly, there was a lack of clarity between the terms of reference of the University Research Sub-Committee and the research degree regulations regarding which individual or group formally awards research degrees. This lack of clarity contributed to the audit team's recommendation that the University should review where the responsibility lies for decisions taken in respect of programme approval, periodic review of programmes and the management of research student awards.

61   Proposals to study for research degrees are considered by the relevant research awards coordinator who makes arrangements for supervision. The formal registration of students is finalised through a 'Confirmation of Registration' event where a review panel considers the proposal and interviews the student. The audit team noted variation in practice regarding the confirmation process and although the team saw some evidence that the University was aware of the issue, it recommends that the University reviews where the responsibility lies for decisions taken in respect of the management of research student awards and that the University revises the academic regulations and associated procedures so that they are clear, unambiguous and accessible to staff and students.

62   Information to support research students is provided in faculty-specific research student handbooks, issued prior to induction. The audit team noted a strong linkage between the regulations and the content of the handbooks and formed the view that, in general, the handbooks were informative and fit for purpose.

63   The progress of full-time students is monitored monthly, and part-time students bi-monthly. Annual monitoring for all students is achieved through the completion of report forms, which the audit team regarded as fulfilling their stated role. The audit team heard that information from completed annual reports contributes to the relevant research awards co-ordinator's annual report to the research student-focused faculty-level committee. In its

Briefing Paper the University stated that such 'annual reports are produced by all Research Awards Co-ordinators and these are submitted to the Faculty Research Committee'. However, the University's regulations indicate that such 'reports will be considered by the Faculty Research (Awards) sub-committee'. The team considered that this discrepancy may have led, in all but one faculty, to the lack of any annual reporting since at least mid-2007. The team formed the opinion that the absence of process reporting was a risk to maintaining adequate oversight of research degree activity and recommends as advisable that the University ensures that the academic regulations and the associated procedures are implemented consistently and accountably throughout the University.

64   The staff and student Research Development programme addresses the training needs of both students and supervisors. For staff new to supervision some elements of the programme are mandatory. Each faculty produces a research supervisors handbook designed to provide research degree supervisors with an overview of information useful to the supervising process. Through a scrutiny of the training materials and documents issued to research supervisors the audit team formed the view that the University was preparing its staff well for the supervision of research students.

65   The Research Training programme for students is compulsory, unless students can demonstrate equivalent learning. As part of their training, students produce a learning action plan, which can be completed by participating in various in-house and external training programmes and events. Students must submit a portfolio of evidence of having met the action plan before examination for the research award. A 'Research Training Programme Student and Supervisor Handbook' is produced by the University research office and the audit team viewed the handbook as comprehensive and containing much relevant and clear material to support students. The team also noted that the Research Training programme presented a varied diet of transferable skills, ensuring that the training opportunities suggested in the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, are available to all postgraduate research students.

66   Some research students have the opportunity to provide or support teaching and assessment at the University. Although there is an expectation that students undertake formal training provided by the University in learning, teaching and assessment, such training is not mandatory. The audit team therefore considered it desirable for the University to ensure that its expectation that all research students who undertake teaching and assessment receive appropriate prior training is met consistently.

67   Research students can give their views to the University through the annual report form and through forums at University and faculty levels. Faculty-level forums meet twice per year and the audit team noted lively discussion with, in the main, appropriate action planning and closure. Research students the team met valued the university-wide research student forum, and in its Briefing Paper the University described the forum as 'a good source of feedback to the University on the practical aspects of regulatory provision'. While the team agreed with this statement it also considered that the scope for such feedback was limited because the forum had only met twice since January 2008. Research student representatives have voiced concern that the training they receive is not suitable for their role and the University will want to address this issue quickly to enhance the efficiency of the operation of the student representative system.

68   The audit team found that the University publishes clear criteria for the assessment of research degrees, which are shared with students via their handbook. The team considered that the processes for the examination of research degrees were appropriate.

69   Data on research student achievement is provided by faculties to the Registrar and Secretary's Office, which collates the data into a single report considered by the Research Sub-Committee. The audit team viewed the report as valuable in maintaining oversight of the University's research student population and noted appropriate discussion of its contents at Research Sub-Committee.

70   The audit team agreed that, in the main, the University's regulations meet the expectations of the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, broadly endorsing the findings of QAA's 2006 Review of postgraduate research degree programmes against the precepts in section one of the *Code of practice*. However, the team did identify several examples where the practice of research degree provision and management seemed to be inconsistent with the University's stated policies and procedures. These inconsistencies contribute variously to the team's recommendations to the University.

Section 7: Published information

71   The University makes a wide range of information available to prospective students, current students and other stakeholders through its websites and in printed form. The audit team concurred with the view of the students that the information was, in the main, accurate and accessible.

72   At the time of the audit, the University was in the process of making its programme specifications available to students online, although the audit team noted that other materials issued to students and prospective students did not contain links to the programme specifications and thus the programme specifications were not available to their target audience, as identified by the University. The team also noted that the language used in programme specifications was often of a technical nature that students might find difficult to understand. The team therefore encourages the University to follow through with its intention of making new programme specifications available to, and readily understandable by, their target audience.

73   In its Briefing Paper the University indicated that 'all course handbooks are publicly available through the RSO website.' The audit team, however, noted that a minority of programmes was not represented. The team found a good coverage of themes in the handbooks, with generally accurate and useful information. The team was informed that general and assessment regulations, including complaints and appeals, are communicated to students via web links in the course handbooks, but noted that the URLs used were, in the majority of cases, inaccurate and so the regulations were not available to some students via this route. The University will want to ensure that its electronic repository of course handbooks is complete and that URLs in handbooks are accurate, enabling students to access information without delay.

74   During the audit visit the audit team was told that the method for determining the final degree classification of students was communicated to students via their course handbooks and through a web link in a letter issued on enrolment. The team considered it likely that a web link may become inaccurate over the typical period of degree registration and could find no evidence of relevant information in the course handbooks it sampled, or a mechanism to update students of changes to the link. The team concluded that the University will want to communicate its method of determining final degree classification to students both effectively and in a timely manner.

75   Although University staff met by the audit team indicated that the reports of external examiners are shared with students across all faculties through the annual monitoring process, the team could find only limited evidence to support this as a routine occurrence. As a result the team considered it desirable that the University ensures that external examiner reports are shared with students in accordance with the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, Phase two outcomes*, October (HEFCE 06/45).

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

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the considered steps being taken to focus on assessment for learning across the University (paragraphs 29, 54)

- the work being undertaken by the University to guard against plagiarism (paragraph 32)

- the strategic use of student liaison officers to enhance significantly the learning experience for students (paragraph 42).

Recommendations for action

78   Recommendations for action that is essential:

- ensure that the recommendation made in the previous audit report, that periodic review be undertaken at regular intervals and that there should be a contribution from external peers that is always critical and robust, is addressed fully; and ensure that the overriding responsibility for the procedure, nature and timing of the periodic review process is determined by Academic Board or an appropriate subcommittee (paragraphs 20, 22).

79   Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- review the designation of responsibility for the approval, modification and review of programmes and for the management of research student awards to secure more effective University oversight of quality management (paragraphs 10, 13, 20, 60, 61)

- review and revise the academic regulations and associated procedures so as to ensure that they are clear, unambiguous and accessible to staff and students (paragraphs 11, 13, 30, 31, 37, 59, 61)

- revise its procedures for the approval and amendment of courses and schemes to ensure that the integrity of awards is safeguarded (paragraph 13)

- ensure appropriate oversight so that the academic regulations and associated procedures are implemented consistently and accountably throughout the University (paragraphs 16, 63)

- ensure the robust and consistent use of appropriate data in the periodic review process and consider whether this process should routinely involve engagement with students (paragraphs 21, 42)

- develop clear procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of joint awards (paragraph 23)

- develop systems and procedures for course approval and periodic review so that the University can assure itself of consistent engagement with the elements of the Academic Infrastructure across the full range of provision (paragraphs 27, 28).

80   Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- continue the work of the University to ensure that the annual review process provides a rigorous consideration of and reporting on all courses, in line with the expectations of the *Code of practice* (paragraphs 15, 18)

- review its procedures for approval and review of distance learning and for modules adopting a more blended-learning approach in the light of the *Code of practice* (paragraphs 17, 47)

- review the effectiveness of the various internal audit processes and how they work together to ensure that their outcomes contribute in an integrated way to the management of academic standards, quality and enhancement (paragraph 24)

- ensure that external examiners' reports are shared with students in accordance with the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, Phase two outcomes*, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45) (paragraphs 26, 75)

- review the effectiveness of its processes to manage student representation (paragraph 44)

- ensure that the University's expectation that all research students who undertake teaching and assessment receive appropriate prior training is met consistently (paragraph 66).

Appendix

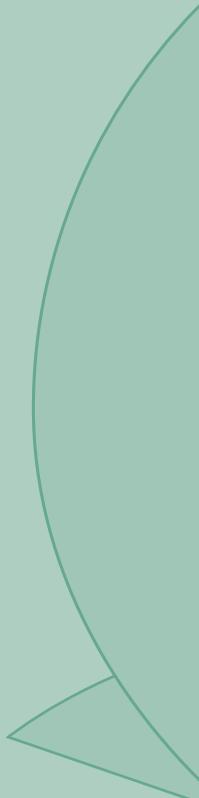**Leeds Metropolitan University's response to the Institutional audit report**

The University is very disappointed with the judgement of limited confidence for Institutional Management of Academic Standards. Taken as a whole, we believe that the University has in place thorough and effective systems and processes for the oversight and management of academic standards. However, we acknowledge weaknesses in a small number of specific areas and consequently recognise that the report is accurate in describing its findings; we therefore accept the recommendations as constructive.

The University's arrangements to develop assessment for learning have been identified as an area of good practice. Much work has been, and continues to be, put into enhancing student performance and achievement. It is particularly pleasing to have this commended by the QAA. Staff and Governors are committed to providing students of Leeds Metropolitan University with a high quality learning and teaching experience and will, in responding positively to this audit outcome, work to ensure that this commitment is maintained and enhanced in the future.

The report acknowledges that we have devoted a great deal of effort to improving systems and processes for the Institutional Management of Academic Standards and we have made further progress since the QAA Audit in May 2009. In particular, the University has revised its regulations on course approval, monitoring and review, and has commenced a thorough programme of related staff development. Changes to the Academic Board and its Committee structure to enhance institutional oversight have been approved. The Academic Board has also received and reviewed the schedule of course approval and review activity for each Faculty.

The University recruited well in 2007/08 and 2008/09 and early indications are that this trend continues in 2009/10. The University's RAE outcomes in 2008/09 were positive, with a number of areas showing significantly improved scores. In September, the University welcomed Business & Law and Art & Design students into new learning and teaching accommodation. New teaching facilities will come on stream in 2010 with the opening of the Carnegie Pavilion.

We believe we are now in a strong position to consolidate on those developments and, importantly, to focus on achieving further success in the future through continued enhancement of the student experience.