



# **Institutional audit**

**Heythrop College, University of London**

**March 2011**

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## Preface

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

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

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

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

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner
- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications
- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews and on feedback from stakeholders.

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

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

## Institutional audit: report

- 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 Heythrop College (the College) from February 28 to March 4 2011 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 College offers on behalf of the University of London.

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

- **confidence** can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers on behalf of the University of London
- **confidence** can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The College has adopted a systematic approach to the enhancement of the quality of students' learning opportunities across all levels of the institution.

### Postgraduate research students

The audit team found that the College's arrangements for its postgraduate research students met 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*, and were operating as intended.

### Published information

The audit team found that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information the College 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 of good practice:

- extensive use of externality in the management and development of College processes (paragraph 15)
- innovation in teaching, learning and assessment contained in the Foundation Degree in Pastoral Mission (paragraph 43)
- the level of academic and pastoral support for students (paragraph 51)
- the incorporation of visiting lecturers and tutorial assistants as full members of the College community (paragraph 52)
- regular and organised events that embrace externality to allow good practice to be highlighted and disseminated (paragraph 55).

## Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- ensure the current timetables for the implementation of the levelisation project and periodic reviews are achieved (paragraphs 21 and 30)
- ensure that no current student is disadvantaged by the implementation of the new degree classification system and that any future significant changes to academic regulations are carefully scheduled (paragraph 31).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- routinely share external examiner reports with student representatives (paragraph 35)
- ensure revisions to the *Code of practice* are routinely and systematically considered through the College's deliberative structures (paragraph 38)
- reflect upon the planned formal processes for capturing the views and involvement of students in programme development to ensure they are fit for purpose (paragraph 40).

## Reference points

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

- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

The audit team found that the College took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

## Report

1 An Institutional audit of Heythrop College (the College) was undertaken during the week commencing 28 February 2011. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the College's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers on behalf of the University of London and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Dr R Davison, Mr I Delworth, Dr A Hind, Prof H Mckenzie, and Dr F Thompson as auditors, and Mrs A Jones as audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr A Biscoe, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

### Section 1: Introduction and background

3 Heythrop College describes itself as 'a place where there is inquiry into truth through the study of philosophy and theology'. The College offers University of London degrees in theology, philosophy and, more recently, combined degrees in these subjects with psychology, and as such has one of the largest numbers of students studying philosophy and theology in one institution in the UK.

4 In 2009-10 the 460 undergraduate students were predominantly full-time school-leavers. The 335 postgraduates were mostly mature students who study part-time in the evening, 40 per cent of whom already have another qualification at master's level. There were 35 research degree students. The College has around 100 full and part-time academic staff undertaking teaching, research and knowledge transfer/outreach activities.

5 The College has recently grown its taught portfolio at bachelor's and master's level. In an effort to widen participation the College approved its first Foundation Degree in Pastoral Mission which commenced in September 2009 and a BA in Abrahamic Religions in 2007. The latter programme reflects the College's commitment to interfaith relations and recruits from a wide ethnic and faith community base.

6 The Mission of the College is:

- to serve society through philosophy and theology
- to offer its students an education marked by intelligence, scholarship and generosity of spirit
- to foster interfaith dialogue
- to be a resource for the Christian faith community
- to provide leadership in Catholic thought.

7 In response to the findings of the 2005 Institutional audit an action plan was drawn up which has been monitored by the Learning and Teaching Committee. The audit team recognised that much work had been undertaken in recent years, building on the findings of the previous audit and that the good practice relating to external examiners' reports and change management was continuing. As a developmental process, the identification of staff development needs is now predominantly managed through individual staff development reviews.

8 The majority of the recommendations in the 2005 report have been effectively considered and addressed. A number remain 'open' with ongoing actions and these are referred to later in this report. The audit team considered that the College's engagement with the recommendations was initially slow, but that recent senior staff appointments had led to considerable attention being given to, effectively, addressing the issues raised.



9 During the period since the last audit there have been a number of significant developments. In 2008, as a consequence of the University's decision to end its federal philosophy provision at undergraduate and postgraduate level, the BA Philosophy was brought within the College examination system. This development prompted the development of the Credit and Assessment Framework as a cross-college framework.

10 The College has established three academic departments - Pastoral and Social Studies, Philosophy, and Theology - with heads of department who are responsible for staff management and staff resources for teaching and research activities, and for providing support for research students. From 2011-12, programmes will become a departmental responsibility with modules allocated to a home programme. Following a strategic review, centres and institutes, responsible for leading staff research in specific topics and also knowledge transfer activity, are now embedded in departments.

11 In 2009 the College's site was purchased by the Society of Jesus on a 70 year lease. This has enabled the College to take over responsibility for managing the site and planning future developments and has led to an enhancement to facilities, including the increase in audio visual technology, redecoration and reconfiguration of some teaching rooms, plus consideration of long-term opportunities to develop the site. There have been a number of other important developments relevant to the management of academic standards and quality and these are considered in more detail below.

12 Following revision of the University of London Ordinances in 2008 the College assumed responsibility for the management of the academic standards as well as the quality of learning opportunities of its awards. To assure the University of London of the quality and standards of provision, the College submits to it an annual report. The audit team found this to be a reflective and open account of the work of the College. Academic Board is the main body responsible for the academic work of the College. It is assisted in this role by two sub-committees: the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Research Committee. The newly created Staff Student Liaison Committee provides a forum for the exchange of information and for students to raise points for consideration.

13 Key mechanisms for setting and maintaining academic standards include programme approval, monitoring and review processes, use of external examiners, external consultants and other external reference points, such as the Academic Infrastructure, and the use of management data to monitor performance, for example, progression and achievement. These are described in the comprehensive Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook.

14 In February 2010 a periodic review was halted when the panel concluded that the review procedures lacked clarity. The College responded by initiating a full review of its programme approval, monitoring and review processes against the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. The review was conducted by an external consultant. The report of the review, which was made available to the audit team, resulted in a revision of procedures for monitoring and review. The revised processes are considered below.

15 The College has made extensive and effective use of external input into both the design and review of its processes for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Staff external to the College have been involved in thematic audits, are members of key committees, have produced reports analysing National Student Survey results and other specially commissioned reports, plus contributed to staff

development sessions. The team considered this extensive use of externality in the management and development of College processes to be a feature of good practice.

## **Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards**

16 The College's programme approval, monitoring and review processes consider both the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Programme approval is a three stage process. Reports of recent approval events show clear evidence that consideration had been given to the provision of learning resources, including staff resources, library facilities, IT facilities and the quality of student handbooks. Conditions were set at the approval events and fulfilment of these was tracked by the Learning and Teaching Committee. The team concluded that the approval process was robust and fit for purpose.

17 Central to the current process of annual monitoring are the teachers' meetings for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, which serve as a forum for discussion for all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The meetings, to which all academic staff are invited, have a wide-ranging agenda. As part of annual monitoring all module evaluations are now considered by the module tutor who produces an overview report (see paragraph 40). The College is currently consulting on future use of these evaluations. It indicated that use of evaluations will be strengthened through a revised annual monitoring process which was piloted in 2010-11 and includes commentary by the programme convenor on student feedback through module evaluation questionnaires. The team welcomed the use now made of module evaluation data, and encourages the College in its review of the administration of the process to consider introducing a method by which analysis and summary of module evaluations are independent of the module teacher.

18 During 2010-11 the College was piloting the revised annual monitoring method with one programme, while all other programmes used the 'old' method. The revised method, which will be implemented in full from 2011-12, is a programme-based method, requiring each programme, or cluster of related programmes, to produce an evaluation of the operation of the programme during the previous year, drawing upon student feedback, progression data and commentary from external examiners. The audit team considered the format and headings of the template to be appropriate and that the pilot report was a thorough and comprehensive document and will better enable the College to monitor the academic health of its programmes.

19 The College's periodic review process is designed to ascertain whether or not programmes are continuing to meet University of London and College requirements and that they continue to support students to meet the programme learning outcomes. The process also seeks assurance that programmes meet the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure, including *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and programme specifications. In 2010, as part of a wider review, the periodic review process was redesigned.

20 The 'old' style review reports provided evidence of input from the student body and recent graduates, and involved external subject specialists. Previous external examiners' reports were included in the documentation requirements, along with statistics on progression and achievement. The documentation supporting reviews considered the adequacy of the learning resources available. The process was fit for the purpose of securing academic standards and assuring the quality of provision. The panel of the one periodic review using the revised process included external membership and Students'

Union representation. The outcome of the review was presented to the Learning and Teaching Committee. The audit team considered the revised process to be rigorous and appropriate.

21 Periodic review is scheduled every five years, with the schedule being managed by the Learning and Teaching Committee, who also receives the reports resulting from the reviews. The audit team noted that previous schedules of periodic review had been subject to slippage. The team advises the College to ensure that the current timetable for periodic review is achieved.

22 The College acknowledged the need for a more comprehensive and analytic approach to the use of data in managing quality and standards. With the newly revised annual monitoring process, it is anticipated that standard sets of data on progression and achievement will be available for 2011-12. Classification data is available, allowing comparisons over a five-year period for both the entire College population and for each department.

23 The extent to which the Academic Infrastructure is embedded into College processes and procedures is monitored by the Learning and Teaching Committee. The College's academic regulations, the standards of research degrees, the approval and review processes, the Credit and Assessment Framework and the external examiner's report pro forma are all referenced to the FHEQ. Subject benchmark statements are used in programme approval and review.

24 One of the main mechanisms that the College uses to assure standards is the external examiner system. Central oversight is maintained by the Learning and Teaching Committee where all nominations require endorsement. Central administrative staff maintain records of external examiner appointments as well as details of College staff who themselves are external examiners. This enables the College to guard against reciprocity.

25 External examiners are appointed to programmes for postgraduate provision; for undergraduate provision external examiners may be appointed to a programme or a cluster of related modules. In either case the main purpose of external examiners is to ensure that standards are set and maintained at an appropriate level.

26 Two summaries of external examiners' reports, one for undergraduate and one for postgraduate provision, are prepared annually for consideration by the Learning and Teaching Committee, where action plans to address issues are prepared. The audit team viewed these reports and action plans as being thorough and useful documents.

27 The College's Handbook for External and Intercollegiate Examiners, which is in accord with the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*, sets out the role, duties and appointment of external examiners. External examiners are additionally supported by induction and a dedicated area on the College's virtual learning environment, HELIOS.

28 From the evidence available to it the audit team concluded that the College makes strong and scrupulous use of independent external examiners in the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

29 The College's approach to assessment has been revised in light of the Thematic Audit of Assessment. The recommendations of the Audit led to an action plan. The recommendations of the Audit included the introduction, in September 2010, of a Credit and Assessment Framework, incorporating a levelisation project. The levelisation project relates to a 2005 Institutional audit report recommendation that the College review

achievement of students who were jointly taught in level 5/6 modules in order to ensure that the College's approach aligned with standard sector practice on progression and achievement. The College explained that the main purpose of the levelisation project therefore is to ensure clear differentiation of learning outcomes and assessment criteria between modules at levels 5 and 6. This will end the current practice whereby some modules at these levels have the same learning outcomes and a common assessment.

30 Differentiation of levels 5 and 6 would apply to students from 2011-12 and significant preparatory work had already been undertaken, including some staff development sessions and completion of work on the level 4 modules. Staff and students were fully conversant with the project and its implications. However, work of a crucial nature for the project which could have the potential to put academic standards at risk was still outstanding. Indeed, some further scheduled staff development sessions had yet to take place, and there were no examples of modules where differentiation had been completed. Given the pivotal nature of the work for the assurance of academic standards, the team advises the College to ensure that the current timetable for the implementation of the levelisation project is achieved.

31 The College recognises that the current method of calculating degree classifications is no longer fit for purpose under its new Credit and Assessment Framework. The College's intention is that a new classification method will apply to students currently in their first year of study. The College intends to inform current students of the new method by a variety of means, including writing to each affected student. Given the potential for such an initiative to put academic standards at risk, the team advises the College to ensure that no current student is disadvantaged by the implementation of the new degree classification system and that any future significant changes to academic regulations are carefully scheduled.

32 The remit and conduct of boards of examiners are currently following protocols developed by the University of London. At the time of the audit, all undergraduate work was considered in one board of examiners to which all academic staff are invited. The format and membership of this board of examiners are currently under review, with the College likely to move to a more programme-based series of assessment boards with a more focused membership.

33 Each external examiner submits an annual report commenting upon academic standards and comparability thereof, including reference to the FHEQ, fairness of assessment and decision making, the ability of assessment to distinguish different levels of attainment, clarity of assessment criteria and marking schemes, conduct of the board of examiners, general comments on learning and teaching, strengths, weaknesses and areas for enhancement. College-level issues are identified and action prompted by central quality assurance staff, with programme and module level issues being addressed by relevant academic staff.

34 Assessment results are considered at either the undergraduate or postgraduate board of examiners where external examiners are present. Currently student achievement for all undergraduate programmes is considered at one board of examiners, held in the summer term, to which all external examiners are invited. Staff reported that this arrangement had become unwieldy due to the growth in student numbers and the number of programmes that are now taught. Senior staff stated that the College would be moving to hold boards of examiners centred on a cluster of programmes or a subject area.

35 The audit team learnt that the student body did not have access to the full external examiner reports, although summaries were available to student representatives by dint of

their membership of the Learning and Teaching Committee. The team consider it as desirable that the College routinely shares the full external examiner reports with students.

36 All coursework is submitted electronically. In addition, attendance is monitored. The College uses these sources of data to help identify those students who are in need of extra support.

37 Overall, the audit team found that confidence could reasonably be placed in the soundness of the College's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

### **Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities**

38 The Learning and Teaching Committee has responsibility for ensuring that the College's systems for quality assurance and enhancement are aligned with the Academic Infrastructure, including the *Code of practice*. The audit team noted that when the College reviewed its processes it did so with appropriate reference to the *Code*. However, it was less clear how the College uses its deliberative structures, and in particular senior committees, to routinely review its processes for alignment when sections of the *Code of practice* are revised. Transparent engagement with the *Code of practice* between reviews was not evident, and the audit team concluded that it was desirable that the College ensure revisions to the *Code of practice* are routinely and systematically considered through the College's deliberative structures.

39 Since 2010 the College has funded a full-time paid sabbatical post of President of the Heythrop Students' Union. The President is a member of major College committees and works closely with College senior management on a formal and informal basis. The College's 'Making yourself heard' publication informs students about their opportunities for both representation and for providing feedback at the programme and College level. While extensive representation opportunities are available to students, recent changes to the College's governance mean that this publication needs updating.

40 In 2010 the College introduced programme level representatives who are members of the college-wide undergraduate Staff Student Liaison Committee. Although the role of the network of programme representatives has yet to be fully defined, the creation of the role has generally been welcomed by students. The audit team also heard that postgraduate students were supportive of the more informal arrangements in place for themselves, as part-time study made attendance at meetings difficult. The Students' Union is responsible for recruiting and training student representatives, in conjunction with senior staff. Uncertainty on detailed arrangements for programme level representation, along with concerns in relation to the transparent scrutiny of module evaluation questionnaire feedback, led the team to consider it desirable that the College reflect upon the planned formal processes for capturing the views and involvement of students in programme development to ensure they are fit for purpose.

41 Student representatives are involved in a number of other quality assurance processes including periodic review panels and are full members of recent Themed Audits on Admissions and Assessment. The student written submission concluded that the main message it wanted to convey was that as a small institution the College is a 'unique community, dedicated to solving problems, mainly philosophical, but happily also administrative!' The audit team consistently heard this message when talking to students it met, noting that while there are formal mechanisms for capturing the student voice these

were less often used than the informal mechanisms that were in abundance and helped shaped the culture of the College.

42 Programme approval and review arrangements consider the extent to which research or scholarly activity enhances the curriculum. Students and staff were clear about the ways in which staff research activity shapes the curriculum at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels and of the ways in which discussion with students, in turn, can influence the research of staff.

43 The work-based Foundation Degree in Pastoral Mission is a partnership with the Archdiocese of Westminster. Students are sponsored by their parish to undertake the programme within a tripartite arrangement between the College, diocese and parish. Students on the programme reported that the programme was well organised to support their parish-based learning, with excellent levels of support and effective liaison between the parish-based mentor and College personal tutor. Assessments were considered to link well with their practice within the parish. Within the context of a College which has identified the need to diversify in this regard, the team considered the innovation in teaching, learning and assessment contained in the Foundation Degree in Pastoral Mission to be a feature of good practice.

44 Students have access to both the College library collection and that of the University of London's Senate House library, which is considered a considerable asset by staff and students. The most recent National Student Survey results indicate that student satisfaction with library resources is in line with philosophy and theology subject sector results.

45 The Library Committee is a committee of Academic Board, chaired by a member of the College's academic staff with undergraduate and postgraduate student representation. A strategic review report on library provision was considered by the Board of Governors in November 2009. A number of items were contingent on available finances and the implementation of the campus development plan.

46 Information Services Management is overseen by the Director of Administration. In November 2008, a strategic review of information services was undertaken, and included input from students and external representatives, with a view to ensuring that the service continued to support the College's students and staff during a period of growth in student enrolments within a limited resource base. The report informed the basis of an IT plan.

47 The provision of accurate information through digital media is considered by the College to be of increasing importance. The student written submission identified communication as the most significant issue of concern for students. HELIOS, the College's virtual learning environment, is seen as a key medium for communication for staff and students, and an increasingly important part of the delivery of administrative information to staff and students, for the provision of learning resources, as well as the mechanism for assessment submission, tracking of submission and marks return, online marking and feedback, as well as for making appointments for tutorials. This provision is considered particularly important in light of the significant proportion of part-time staff and students. The online submission of assessments also facilitates the use of plagiarism detection software. The audit team also learnt of the College's approach to encouraging staff and external examiners to make use of the virtual learning environment. Students indicated that, whilst there were variable levels of use of HELIOS by staff, usage and functionality was continually improving, and that this was particularly helpful for part-time students. The team considered that the recent development of the virtual learning environment as a focus for communication, assessment administration and support for learning has enhanced the College's management of learning opportunities.

48 The Admissions Policy is overseen by the Learning and Teaching Committee. Admissions tutors are supported in their role through a comprehensive handbook which covers the key aspects of admissions arrangements related to, for example, admissions considerations when dealing with applicants with disabilities, health concerns and from overseas. The audit team heard from staff and students that the admissions process is well understood and its implementation effective. A Thematic Audit of Admissions, which included external members and student representation, reported in February 2010.

49 One of the recommendations of the thematic audit prompted the College to review the first year student experience. Working closely with the Heythrop Students' Union, the College has developed a programme of induction and ongoing study skills support to facilitate students' transition to higher education. Students who had experienced the Heythrop Scholar Programme were very positive about it. It is envisaged that the Programme will be the main vehicle for personal development planning, by integrating this with employability skills and opportunities such as volunteering and placements, as well as careers advice.

50 The College offers a range of support to enable undergraduate and postgraduate students to reach their full potential at each stage of their academic career. The support available is detailed in the respective student handbooks. The Student Services Centre aims to provide a one-stop shop for advice and guidance for all students. One differentiating aspect of the College's arrangements are the regular one-to-one tutorials for students, as a means to augment the written feedback on assessments. These were greatly valued by students.

51 The role of the personal tutor is set out in the comprehensive Personal Tutor Handbook and in the Undergraduate Student Handbook. Personal tutors are required to meet their students in groups and one-to-one at regular intervals. Full-time students spoke very highly of the personal tutorial system. Students on the Foundation Degree indicated that the combined support from module and personal tutors and their mentors was exceptional. Student support has been enhanced recently through increased counselling provision, supported by a new Mental Health Policy. The audit team concluded that the level of academic and pastoral support available to students was a feature of good practice.

52 An important feature of the College is the composition of its staff base and the ratio of full-time staff to visiting lecturers and tutorial assistants. In order to better support the significant contributions that are made by the visiting lecturers and tutorial assistants they have a representative on the Learning and Teaching Committee. Their work is also supported by twice-yearly Tutorial Assistant/Visiting Lecturer Forum meetings, which provide a forum for peer support, two-way communication of arrangements and associated issues arising. The audit team considered the efforts to incorporate visiting lecturers and tutorial assistants as full members of the College community to be a feature of good practice.

53 The College benefits from some staff being made available to the College by their religious orders for teaching or other purposes. All such staff are appropriately qualified to teach in higher education, and most have experience of teaching elsewhere at this level in the UK or in Europe. By providing perspectives from a number of orders and faith groups, staff with a religious focus enhance the richness of the College's learning experience. Following the Institutional audit of 2005, the College has developed a universal approach to the recruitment, selection and appointment of different types of staff.

54 Staff development needs are identified primarily through annual individual staff development reviews for all academic staff on a contract of 0.5 full-time equivalence or greater. The scheme is one that considers the training needs of the individual. Outcomes from reviews are reported by the head of department to the Academic

Management Team. The Director of Learning and Teaching and Director of Research lead staff development planning in support of their respective areas of responsibility.

55 Pedagogy lunches have been established with the intention of enabling all staff, including visiting lecturers and tutorial assistants, to discuss teaching and learning developments. The lunches are scheduled opportunities which, along with undergraduate and postgraduate teachers' meetings, provide a collegial forum for discussing issues, sharing good practice (both internal and external) and debating proposed College developments. The schedule for the lunchtime events in 2010-11 presented a range of activities, including specific sessions to support the successful completion of the levelisation project. As well as internal speakers, the schedule included a range of external speakers such as input from the Higher Education Academy subject centre. Other opportunities for staff briefing and consultation include termly open staff meetings. A Principal's Prize was introduced in 2010, using the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme criteria, with a view to enable staff to develop an aspect of learning and teaching and share those developments with colleagues during a pedagogy lunch. Feedback from staff was very positive and the audit team considered that the range of opportunities available for staff to engage with each other within the context of planned internal strategic activities was a feature of good practice.

56 Overall the audit team concluded 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.

## **Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement**

57 The College has adopted the QAA's definition of enhancement as 'the process of taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities'. Enhancement has become a more explicit and formalised process for the College in recent years, led mainly by the Learning and Teaching Committee.

58 The College has given consideration to making enhancement activities more explicit and centrally led and made significant progress, including the appointment of role holders with specific responsibility for quality enhancement. As well as formal processes for enhancement, the institution facilitates an informal approach reflecting its comparative size and accessibility of staff across all levels. The team recognised the priority that was given by staff to seeking to improve the student experience and of the collaborative nature of the relationship with the Students' Union.

59 Central to the College's approach to the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities has been the introduction of themed audits. Building on the methodology of the strategic reviews of IT provision and the Library, two audits were undertaken in 2009-10. The College regards the Themed Audit process as valuable as it enables themes and issues to be considered at a strategic level with external advice and guidance and this was evident to the audit team. For example, the Themed Audit of Admissions resulted in the development of the Heythrop Scholar Programme (see paragraph 49).

60 Pedagogy lunches are another vehicle for enhancement opportunities to be identified or progressed (see paragraph 55). The College's carefully planned development of its virtual learning environment has led to significant changes in the presentation of information and the support of learning, teaching, assessment (including an area for external examiners) and research. This is an evolving process both in terms of the transition from paper-based to electronic information and assignment submission and staff engagement.



61 The audit team found extensive evidence of the College taking deliberate steps at an institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities and the student experience.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

62 At the time of the audit, the College did not have any collaborative arrangements for the delivery of higher education programmes.

## **Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students**

63 The College maps its research degree regulations against the requirements of the University's Ordinances, regulations and procedures as well as the *Code of practice, Section 1*. In recent years the University of London has progressively devolved the administration of its research degrees to the constituent colleges. For the College this devolution began in mid 2008 when it approved processes ratified by the University that enabled it to administer the selection of externals for examination of its own students. In late 2010 the College approved new regulations for the degrees of MPhil and PhD enabling it to assume full administrative responsibility for its research degree students. Each summer the College returns an annual report to assure the University that it is discharging its duties with regard to research degrees. The team found the annual reports covering 2008-09 and 2009-10 to be thorough and reflective analyses of the College's research activities.

64 Overall responsibility for research within the College lies with Academic Board, which delegates oversight of the development and implementation of the Research Strategy and policy and procedures to its Research Committee. The Research Committee has a Research Degrees Sub-Committee that is responsible for overseeing the College's research degree students. The Director of Research, a post created in 2008, is responsible for the development of the research environment and the supporting infrastructure, and chairs the Sub-Committee.

65 At the time of audit the College had 35 postgraduate research students and five research centres and institutes integrated into its three departments. Staff believed that the close relationships they were able to form across these departments and centres were a positive feature. As such, research active staff and research students felt well supported within the College. Overall, the team formed the view that the College had developed an increasingly well-managed and prospering research environment that actively supported the work of both staff and students.

66 Research degree applicants may be recommended for interview, asked to revise their proposals or provide more information on their applications, or be advised that their application is not successful. Those who are asked to refine their applications prior to interview have the opportunity to meet with their prospective supervisor twice, which the audit team considered was a particularly supportive aspect of the process. A written interview report and recommendation are considered by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee. Application data is compiled and monitored annually by the Research Committee. Overall the selection, admissions and induction processes are effective in introducing students to all aspects of research at the College.

67 Details on the roles and responsibilities of supervisors are laid down in the College's Code of Practice. A student is allocated two supervisors upon registration and the College's Code states that a more experienced supervisor may act as a mentor to the other

supervisor. It was evident that the supervisory system was effective. However, the College had not yet formalised a selection criteria for supervisors either singly or as a team. Consequently, the selection of a student's supervisory team was in effect an informal process, and it was acknowledged by senior staff that it would be useful for the College's Code of Practice to state criteria for the selection of supervisors.

68 The processes for monitoring and supporting students are detailed in the Supervisors' Handbook and re-registration for the next year of study is conditional on there being a satisfactory annual review. The Research Degrees Sub-Committee is thorough in its consideration and approval of progress and review arrangements.

69 The Research Committee monitors the training events offered to research students who wish to take on tutorial assistant or lecturing roles. Students who take on such responsibilities within the College can also receive mentoring support from their supervisors. Those who teach or tutor at the College are invited to relevant staff training opportunities that take place during the year. The audit team concluded that adequate training and support is available for research students who teach on College programmes.

70 Postgraduate students have opted not to establish an equivalent to the undergraduate Staff Student Liaison Committee. However, the Research Degree Convenor holds termly consultation events with research degree students, and it was clear that staff and students valued the utility of such informal feedback methods.

71 The College's Research Code includes a complaints procedure that is available to students and to staff, and the Research Committee has a role in considering any generic issues raised in a complaint. The team found no evidence of recent complaints from research students.

72 Overall the audit team found that the College's arrangements for its postgraduate research students met the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and were operating as intended.

## **Section 7: Published information**

73 The College publishes a large range of information in both hard copy, and either on its website or virtual learning environment, the latter of which is playing an increasingly important role in information provision. Production is centralised in terms of the prospectus, programme leaflets, programme and module specifications, and student and module handbooks. The accuracy of information is checked by staff within the College administration, who liaise with academic colleagues on matters relating to modules and programmes.

74 There is a range of checks and balances in place to ensure accuracy of published material, with the prospectus in particular subject to final sign off by the Principal. The College's external website includes committee pages where agenda and minutes can be easily accessed and are, generally, up to date.

75 Students advised the audit team that the information they received was accurate and, generally, comprehensive. The team noted, and this was confirmed by students and staff, that module descriptors were provided as a baseline content for each module on HELIOS and that these were accurate and useful.

76 The audit team found that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information the College 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:

- extensive use of externality in the management and development of College processes
- innovation in teaching, learning and assessment contained in the Foundation Degree in Pastoral Mission
- the level of academic and pastoral support for students
- the incorporation of visiting lecturers and tutorial assistants as full members of the College community
- regular and organised events that embrace externality to allow good practice to be highlighted and disseminated.

### **Recommendations for action**

78 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- ensure the current timetables for the implementation of the levelisation project and periodic reviews are achieved
- ensure that no current student is disadvantaged by the implementation of the new degree classification system and that any future significant changes to academic regulations are carefully scheduled.

79 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- routinely share external examiner reports with student representatives
- ensure revisions to the *Code of practice* are routinely and systematically considered through the College's deliberative structures
- reflect upon the planned formal processes for capturing the views and involvement of students in programme development to ensure they are fit for purpose.

## **Appendix**

### **Heythrop College, University of London's response to the Institutional audit report**

Heythrop College, University of London welcomed the opportunity to engage with the Institutional audit team during its visit to discuss procedures and approaches to quality assurance and enhancement from the perspective of a small and specialist institution.

The College welcomes the positive outcomes of the Institutional audit. We value the confirmation that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the College's present and likely future management of both the academic standards of its awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to its students.

The College is pleased to note the areas of good practice that the audit team identified, especially in relation to our inclusive approach to staff, the strong focus on student support and our firm commitment to engaging with external good practice. The considerable progress we have made in developing the environment and support systems for research students was also commended and we are pleased that this area of work has been recognised.

We note that the team's 'advisable' and 'desirable' recommendations relate to areas that the College had already identified as requiring further development. We welcome the recommendations which support our ongoing developments.

The College has implemented an action plan, in consultation with the Heythrop College Students' Union, to address the audit outcomes and to continue with the good practice noted in the report. This is being overseen by the Learning and Teaching Committee which will report periodically on progress to the Academic Board.

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