

The Courtauld Institute of Art

Institutional audit

February 2011

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Courtauld Institute of Art (the Courtauld; the Institute) from 14 to 18 February 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 Courtauld offers on behalf of the University of London.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

- confidence can be placed in the soundness of the Institute's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards
- confidence can be placed in the soundness of the Institute's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

It is clear that many enhancement activities are taking place across the Institute. The audit team would therefore wish to encourage the Institute to pull its many strands of good practice together to support the development of a more systematic approach to the management of quality enhancement.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Overall, the audit found that the Institute's policies and procedures for the management of its research degree provision were sound and met the expectations of the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*.

Published information

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

- the broad benefits of the virtual learning environment in providing a single source of information for staff and students, thus supporting effective engagement with the academic activity of the institution, including teaching (paragraphs 7 and 84)
- the advantage to students of studying in an environment characterised by a pervasive culture of research (paragraph 60)
- the contribution of the Department of Public Programmes and the Gallery to outreach and widening participation work (paragraph 72)
- the structured approach to the continuous professional development of the teaching assistants (paragraph 81)
- the establishment of productive associations with other institutions, which provides complementary access to facilities that enhance the students' learning experience (paragraphs 87 and 88).

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- the Research Forum, which offers a focus and support for a range of research activities from which students at all levels of study benefit (paragraph 100)
- the role of the teaching assistants in supporting small-group teaching (paragraph 115).

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the Institute to:

- report formally to individual external examiners on action taken in response to matters raised in their reports (paragraph 26)
- define, implement consistently, and communicate clearly to staff and students the policies and procedures relating to plagiarism and extenuating circumstances (paragraph 33)
- formalise the management of the collaborative arrangement for the provision of language teaching (paragraph 98)
- resolve its position on whether postgraduate research students should have second supervisors (paragraph 108)

It would be desirable for the Institute to:

- review the effectiveness of its communication with students about policies, procedures and action taken in response to matters raised through feedback and consultation processes (paragraph 52)
- establish a systematic approach to the gathering and use of a pertinent range of management information in its quality assurance and enhancement processes (paragraph 37)
- consider how it might promote and support effective student representation and involvement in decision-making by all student constituencies, including the potential benefits of providing formal training for representatives (paragraph 56)
- consider whether there might be advantage in use of independent chairs of examiners and mock vivas in the assessment, and preparation for assessment, of postgraduate research students (paragraph 121)
- develop a purposeful approach to Personal Development Planning for all students (paragraphs 77 and 116)
- share external examiner reports with student representatives in accordance with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, phase two outcomes*, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45) (paragraph 128) .

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The Courtauld was founded as a Senate Institute of the University of London in 1932 and became a self-governing college responsible for its own governance, academic programmes and financial viability in 2002. Students of the Institute are awarded degrees of the University of London. The Institute's mission is to be 'a world-class centre of intellectual enquiry in the fields of the history, conservation and curatorship of art and architecture'.

2 In the academic year 2010-11 the Courtauld had 419 full-time equivalent (FTE) students made up of: 171 undergraduate and graduate diploma students; 174 taught postgraduate students; and 74 research students, with a further 40 research students who were writing up. Approximately 36 per cent (152 FTEs) were international students and 67 per cent (282 FTEs) mature students. There has been an increase in student numbers of 11 per cent or 42.1 FTEs since 2005 when there were 376.9 FTEs. The Courtauld plans to 'achieve modest, steady expansion' in the next few years, through the MA in History of Art and a move into areas of Asian art.

3 In November 2010 there were 120 staff made up of 42 academic staff and 78 administrative/other staff. 70 per cent were full-time staff and 30 per cent part-time. There were also 26 visiting lecturers, employed on a casual basis.

The information base for the audit

3 The Institute provided the audit team with a Briefing Paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The Briefing Paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the institution's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. The team had hard copy of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper; in addition, the team also had access to the institution's intranet; the audit team is grateful for the effective, clear and accessible provision of links to the sources of evidence on the institution's intranet and web pages.

4 The Students' Union produced a student written submission setting out the students' views on the accuracy of the information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management. The audit team is grateful to the students for their participation in the audit process.

5 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous Institutional audit in 2005
- the report on the mid-cycle follow-up to the previous Institutional audit
- the report of the special review of research degree programmes (2006)
- the institution's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

6 The Institute was last audited in 2005 and was subject to a mid-cycle follow-up in 2008. The Institute's briefing paper provided detailed descriptions of actions taken in response to the findings of the audit. It is clear that the Institute has given careful consideration to the previous audit report.

7 One of the most notable changes for students since the last audit has been the introduction of a virtual learning environment (VLE) in the academic year 2010-11. The VLE has provided students and staff with a single reference point for information. The audit team found that the VLE had already made a significant contribution to student learning opportunities.

8 Another significant change has been the introduction of a revised management structure. The most significant modifications included changes to the roles and responsibilities of some posts and the creation of a 'Director of Resources' position.

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

9 As a College of the University of London, the Courtauld Institute of Art is authorised to award degrees of the University and is subject to the Ordinances and Statutes of the University. Academic provision is structured into courses within programmes; the Institute does not have a credit framework.

10 The Institute's Governing Body assumes overall responsibility for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, delegating responsibility to the Academic Board and its relevant sub-committees. The Institute's Quality Assurance Framework states that all educational provision at the institution is the ultimate responsibility of the Academic Board as the senior academic policy committee. All academic staff are members of the Board. The Academic Board delegates operational authority to the Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC). The Committee oversees consideration of new programmes and amendments to existing programmes before they are recommended to the Academic Board. It also confirms prior to approval that new courses and amendments to courses are consistent with programme aims and learning outcomes. The TLC responds to reports on student feedback, organises periodic (quinquennial) programme reviews, and co-ordinates the Annual Monitoring of Programmes exercise. The Institute's quality assurance activity is managed at institutional level by the Dean and Deputy Director and the Academic Registrar.

11 Within the area of History of Art there are period sections that are semi-formal groupings of academic staff who perform a variety of administrative and organisational roles and provide a community for postgraduate students. The sections serve as an interface between individual members of faculty and formal committees and provide research communities for postgraduate students. The section structure is used as the basis for ensuring broad chronological representation both in committees and working groups, and in the balance of teaching.

12 The Institute's programmes comprise courses that extend the breadth of study available, being based on the specialist research interests of the academic staff who deliver them. The process for course approvals is described in the Institute's Quality Assurance Framework. Courses are initially discussed in the period sections where draft documentation is prepared before being scrutinised by TLC and subsequently approved by the Academic Board. In practice, course approvals begin with an informal discussion within period sections of initial draft course outlines before they are discussed with heads of programmes and the Academic Registrar. The audit team saw examples of the course approvals system and was confident that the process maintained the academic standards and quality of programmes while engaging students in learning that is at the forefront of current research and scholarly activity in the subject areas.

13 There has only been one new programme developed in the last ten years: the MA in Curating the Art Museum. Procedures for the development of new programmes take account of the guidance in the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*.

14 The Quality Assurance Framework describes the process of annual monitoring as a 'check on the academic standards of programmes of study and their resources' and is based on information collated by heads of programme from student feedback and external examiner reports. This information is compiled into a report that is discussed at programme boards before being considered at the TLC.

15 Periodic review of programmes is designed to ensure that the aims, objectives and learning outcomes are being met, in addition to academic standards being maintained. The

process is conducted entirely by external academic experts who are appointed by the TLC. The reviewers are provided with a range of information about the operation of the programme, supported by a report from the Dean and Deputy Director. The reviewers complete a report for the Institute that is scrutinised, and recommendations are discussed and acted upon.

16 The audit found that the Institute had an appropriate framework for the secure management of academic standards and quality. It is clear that actions are taken in response to issues identified through quality assurance mechanisms but the audit found that the associated accounts of decisions and action planning were not always sufficiently detailed to provide a secure record of discussions, designation of responsibilities and subsequent confirmation of completion of the required actions. The Institute will wish to review its approach in this area.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

17 The Institute's approach to the assurance of academic quality and standards for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes is set out in its Quality Assurance Framework (2009). The Institute identifies a number of key mechanisms for the institutional management of standards. These include engagement with the Academic Infrastructure, external examiners' reports, internal quality assurance procedures such as periodic reviews (conducted by external experts), annual monitoring, and module evaluation.

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

18 Arrangements for programme approval, monitoring and review are to be found in the Institute's Quality Assurance Framework. Procedures for the development of new programmes or for the fundamental restructuring of existing ones are designed to be consistent with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*, in particular the section relating to programme design, approval, monitoring and review. There is external consultation to ensure that the programme is calibrated at the appropriate standard. There is full Academic Board oversight of the process. From its scrutiny of the documentation for the MA in Curating the Art Museum, approved for the academic year 2008-09, the audit team was able to confirm that the process operated in accordance with the stated requirements.

19 The conduct of annual monitoring is outlined in the Quality Assurance Framework which specifies the information to be collected and analysed for each programme, including cohort analysis, student feedback and external examiner reports. The detailed requirements for the conduct of the process are not stated. The main component of annual monitoring is extensive reflection on external examiner reports, which is consistent with the emphasis placed on externality by the Institute in its management of academic standards. The consideration of the external examiner reports is termed the 'post-mortem' meeting and the outcomes are received by the Academic Board. The 'post-mortem' report is accompanied by an annual monitoring report on data and a summary of student evaluations, which are generic documents covering all of the Institute's taught programmes. While there are no formal action plans, there is evidence that action is taken; but there is no documented timetable for action and no clear identification of who will take matters further. There are also no formal records of actions having been completed. As the process develops the Institute will wish to give consideration to more systematic recording of, and feedback on, actions taken.

20 An annual approval process allows new courses to be introduced and existing courses to be revised. This course approval system is outlined in the Handbook for Teaching Staff, 2010-11 and is designed to be used for changes that do not affect the integrity of the validated programme. It involves period sections, the heads of programmes, the Academic Board and the Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC). The Academic Registrar also considers the proposals. Final approval for courses rests with the Academic Board. Substantial changes require the explicit approval of the Academic Board. In addition to any discussion with external examiners about the modification of courses and programmes, externality is also secured through the membership of external academic staff at the TLC and the Academic Board. From its scrutiny of documentation and discussion with staff, the audit team was able to confirm that procedures for course approval and programme modification were consistent with the maintenance of academic standards.

21 The Academic Board has responsibility for quinquennial periodic programme reviews, which are overseen by the TLC. There is a detailed specification for the process in the Quality Assurance Framework: areas specified and relevant to the management of academic standards include admissions; assessment, and external examiner reports. Each review is conducted by a panel of two external academic reviewers, nominated by programme teams and appointed following discussion with the staff. There are safeguards to protect against conflicts of interest. In terms of academic standards, the review process offers an opportunity to assess whether each programme meets its stated aims and intended learning outcomes and whether assessment remains appropriate. The process is also a means whereby significant changes to the programme can be made. Reviewers comment both on issues that need consideration and on the strengths of the programme.

22 The draft report is circulated to staff and the final version is based on the feedback and suggestions made by members of staff. The reports are considered by the TLC and submitted to the Academic Board. Scrutiny of review reports and the relevant committee minutes established that procedures for periodic programme approval were consistent with effective management of academic standards and met the expectations of the *Code of practice*.

External examiners

23 The Institute sees external examiners as playing a crucial role in the safeguarding of academic standards. External examining procedures take due account of the relevant guidance in the *Code of practice*. Rules and procedures for the appointment of external examiners, including clear criteria and advice on avoidance of conflicts of interest, details of external examiner duties and other supporting paperwork are available on the intranet. The External Examiner Handbook provides full details of the Institute's assessment and examination regulations.

24 The appointment of external examiners is overseen by the Academic Board. Initial appointments are for three years with provision for one year's extension subject to approval by the Academic Board, and there are restrictions on reappointment. The Institute reserves the right to terminate the appointment of an external examiner in the event of failure to carry out the duties specified in the External Examiner Handbook which is provided to all external examiners on appointment. The appointment letter provides further information on the assessment regime.

25 An annual report is required from each external examiner. The report is received by the Director and copied to senior staff of the institution. There is a reporting template seeking comment on, among other matters, the balance and content of the 'degree course in relation to stated course objectives', the administration of assessment, the examination process, and

the appropriateness of assessment. Some examiners are also asked to provide overview reports which might offer an overview of one programme or look at an area across programmes. The Institute asks external examiners to arbitrate when markers cannot agree, rather than using a third internal marker.

26 The views of the external examiners are synthesised into an 'Issues' paper prepared annually by senior officers of the Institute. Issues raised by external examiners are given full consideration by the Institute, being discussed in period sections as well as in committees. Formal responses to external examiners are through the 'post-mortem' report (paragraph 19), which is sent to them. While the 'post-mortem' report often indicates where and how issues will be considered or makes recommendations, external examiners do not formally receive information about these outcomes. External examiners are asked to comment in subsequent reports on whether suggestions made the previous year have been taken on board, and there is evidence from the examiners' reports that the Institute is responsive to their suggestions. Review of documentation by the audit team confirmed that all issues were considered, even if that consideration did not always result in change. The team considers it advisable that the Institute report formally to individual external examiners on action taken in response to matters raised in their reports.

27 The Institute believes that the recommendation and appointments process for external examiners is rigorous, and, on the basis of the evidence available to it, the audit team concurs with this view. The audit team was also able to confirm that the Institute has clear and robust processes for the operation of its external examiner procedures and that it makes effective use of appropriately independent external input in summative assessment.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

28 Responsibility for ensuring that the Institute's regulations and policies take account of the Academic Infrastructure lies with the Academic Board. The Quality Assurance Framework specifies the need to take account of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and subject benchmark statements. The audit team found that programmes were aligned with the FHEQ. All students are provided with a diploma supplement. The relevant subject benchmark statements are identified in definitive programme documents and in programme specifications. The guidance for the conduct of periodic review specifically asks reviewers to assess the programmes against the relevant subject benchmark statements.

29 Programme specifications are available for all programmes and there is a procedure to update these in the light of any developments. The up-to-date aims and intended learning outcomes of programmes are communicated clearly to students and routinely appear in module guides as well as in student handbooks. There are Intended learning outcomes for each level as well as for the programme as a whole. Intended learning outcomes are set out in easily accessible language.

30 From the evidence provided, the audit team confirmed that the guidance in the *Code of practice*, including that for external examining, that is relevant to the management of academic standards is integral to institutional practice. Overall, effective use is made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of the academic standards of its awards.

Assessment policies and regulations

31 The Academic Board has ultimate responsibility for policies and procedures for the examination and assessment of the academic performance of students. TLC has operational

responsibility both for regulations and for the assessment of programmes and courses, except where major policy issues are raised. Minutes of the Academic Board and the TLC demonstrate the proper exercise of these individual responsibilities.

32 There are clearly specified assessment principles, procedures and processes that are available on the website and are brought to the attention of all interested parties including staff, students and external examiners. Students are informed about the appeals and complaints policy and that suspected plagiarism 'may result in an allegation of cheating'.

33 The Institute's plagiarism regulations were recommended for approval by TLC in 2006, but the audit team did not find a record of formal approval by the Academic Board. The plagiarism regulations include a procedure for 'minor plagiarism' where the case is 'technically proven but unintentional and trivial'. In such instance a student must resubmit corrected work, for which only the pass mark may be awarded. Student handbooks seen by the audit team did not make reference to this provision. In discussion with staff and students and in documentation, the audit team found a general lack of clarity about procedures for consideration of mitigating circumstances. The audit team considers it advisable that the Institute define, implement consistently, and communicate clearly to staff and students the policies and procedures relating to plagiarism and extenuating circumstances.

34 There is evidence of timely and effective response to student concerns that the policy for extension to deadlines was not being implemented consistently, with the institution having strengthened the policy and disseminated it in student handbooks. There is plentiful evidence that the Academic Board uses its annual and periodic review processes to reflect fully on the impact of its assessment strategies.

35 From the evidence available to it, the audit team can confirm that the Institute's arrangements for the assessment of students make an effective contribution to the management of academic standards.

Management information - statistics

36 The December 2005 audit advised the Institute to provide an annual planning statement to set and monitor strategic and operational priorities and targets and suggested that it was desirable for the Institute to develop more formal procedures for using and evaluating management information. In response to these recommendations, the Institute has made structural changes to staffing in the Registry, appointing a Student Record System and Reporting Officer jointly with another institution, with the intention of creating the capacity to provide management information reports for the Senior Management Team (SMT) and the Academic Board, both on request and for specific strategic purposes.

37 The Institute now compiles a statistical paper, offering an overview of student numbers, a summary of achievement and results, and a summary of National Student Survey (NSS) results, as part of annual monitoring. This paper presents headline information, rather than seeking to use it as source of management information. The Institute is aware that there remains work to be undertaken in this area. While the audit team is sympathetic to the view that the student cohort is too small for some quantitative processes, it agrees with the Institute's own appraisal that there is scope for further development in this area in support of quality management. The current shortcoming does not represent a threat to academic standards but the audit team considers it desirable that the Institute establish a systematic approach to the gathering and use of a pertinent range of management information in its quality assurance and enhancement processes.

38 The Institute makes consistent use of external expert opinion in programme design, approval and review in relation to the management of academic standards. The Institute considers the use of external advice to be a strength of its management of its provision, a view endorsed by the audit team. There can be confidence in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

39 The academic committee structure of the Institute is designed to allow a close check on the quality of its provision within the context of external reference points such as the *Code of practice*, subject benchmark statements and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). Reference to the *Code of practice* in determining policy and practice is the responsibility of the Academic Registrar and the Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) which make recommendations to the Academic Board. There was evidence that the Institute ensures that staff are involved in discussion and that working groups, committees and departments make appropriate changes in line with revisions to the Academic Infrastructure. The recently revised sections of the *Code of practice* in respect of disabled students and career education, information, advice and guidance had been discussed by TLC. Further work was in progress at the time of the audit. Overall the audit team was satisfied that the Institute made systematic use of the academic infrastructure in its management of learning opportunities.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

40 The procedures for designing programmes and courses are set out in the Quality Assurance Framework (2009). There is a requirement for reference to relevant external benchmarks. Programmes must also meet the relevant University of London criteria for a degree. The process culminates in the production of a programme specification. These procedures are clearly communicated to staff in the Handbook for Teaching Staff.

41 New programme development is rare in the Institute with only one new programme, the MA in Curating the Art Museum, having been developed in the last ten years. The process followed for this development was thorough. By contrast there is frequent development of new courses within programmes which promotes the currency of the curriculum and maintains strong links to staff research interests. Period sections have an initial responsibility in regard to the management of courses to be offered on various programmes. The Dean also reviews the proposals to confirm the coherence of the overall structure and integrity of the programme; he also consults the Academic Registry to secure an appropriate range of courses across period sections. The Head of Libraries appraises the resources for the new course. The next stage is scrutiny by TLC and approval by the Academic Board. A course option booklet is made available to students and published at the beginning of the summer term, thus allowing plenty of time for students to choose the courses for the next academic session. The Institute allows some new course proposals outside the standard timescale which are approved through Chair's action by the Dean; heads of period sections and the Head of Libraries and of the Registry must first scrutinise and support the proposal.

42 There is demonstrable externality in programme approval and review procedures. The TLC has two external members with relevant academic expertise and experience of programme and course approval. The quinquennial programme review procedure is carried

out entirely by two independent external academic panellists who meet academic staff, support staff and students. There is appropriate guidance for reviewers to support the process and for staff on writing a self-assessment document. Review reports are produced to a standard template. The Students' Union and programme representatives prepare a review of the programme from the viewpoint of the students past and present.

43 There is evidence of institutional response to recommendations from external reviewers; for example a key recommendation from one review was that a virtual learning experience (VLE) system be acquired. Another recommendation was for improvements to the personal tutor system. Both of these areas have been acted upon conscientiously by the Institute. Major changes recommended for the second year of the BA programme were under discussion at the time of the audit with a view to their submission to the Academic Board for consideration and decision.

44 The Institute does not have a formal policy for the closure of programmes, and to date no programme at the institution has ever been closed. The briefing paper stated that the Academic Board would have to propose any closure to the Governing Board.

45 The audit team found that the approval, monitoring and review of programmes was satisfactory and that programmes were refreshed and remained current through course changes linked to staff research.

Management information - feedback from students

46 National Student Survey (NSS) results are analysed at TLC, Academic Board and in SMT meetings. The NSS results by criteria are presented in the annual monitoring report to the Academic Board with the comparison for the previous three years, which show a year-on-year overall improvement. The 2010 survey indicated a decline in student satisfaction in a number of categories although the Institute still performed above the average in the top quartile of UK higher education institutions; in response, the SMT established the Student Experience Group (SEG) to analyse the student view as a whole through consideration of NSS data and other forms of student feedback and to investigate practice elsewhere in the sector. The SEG is intended to be an active two-way communication collating all the data available and reporting to both the Academic Board and the SMT, offering a series of strategic recommendations. The student written submission (SWS) was positive in regard to the responsiveness of the SEG to date. Consideration is being given to making the SEG a permanent body as an aid to change and enhancement. At the time of the audit there had been only two meetings of the SEG but records of the meetings to date indicate irregular attendance by the academic staff members. The audit team would wish to encourage the Institute to ensure full participation by members of this working group in order to achieve the stated aims. At the time of the audit, it was too early to comment further on this new development which, in the view of the audit team, has the potential to make a contribution to the Institute's responsiveness to matters raised by the student body.

47 The Institute has a Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC), run by the Students' Union and chaired by its President. The Academic Registrar provides assistance in establishing sound record keeping and distribution of papers. The SSLC minutes will in future be available on the intranet. The SSLC is the main venue for discussion between the students and the Institute on matters of resources and student support. All students, including research students, and staff may attend. Specific staff are mandated to attend, and Students' Union members normally attend. Students who met the audit team at the briefing visit regarded the SSLC as an important forum for communication. The SSLC is considered by the Institute to be a routine committee, while the SEG will be more strategic.

48 The Institute obtains student feedback primarily at course level through a two-stage process. The first stage is mid-way through the courses and can be anonymous and provides informal feedback to the individual delivering the course. There is evidence that students find this to be a useful process. The second stage is a formal end-of-course evaluation questionnaire. A designated teacher from outside the course is allocated the responsibility for analysis of the results and produces a narrative report to a standard template. The report findings are discussed at programme boards and their minutes go to TLC and the SSLC. Any resultant recommendations go to the Academic Board for consideration and actions.

49 The SWS and students whom the audit team met were critical of the continuing changes to the feedback questionnaire, its length and format. Students are generally unaware of the importance that the Institute and academic staff accord to these questionnaires, although they are mentioned in the Student Handbook, as there is no formal feedback to students in regard to any changes made in response to their comments. The BA Programme Board 2010 has tasked the Academic Registrar with an action point to add a paragraph to the questionnaire ensuring students know that these are read and discussed at programme boards. There are exit interviews with the Director on completion of programmes, which are voluntary. In meeting the audit team, the Director indicated that the interviews were informal, had lost their original purpose and were under review.

50 There is normally a one-month handover period and an induction with staff for the Students' Union President but no other formal training of student representatives. The Institute relies heavily on the Students' Union President to communicate with the general student body on decisions taken at committees and informal meetings.

51 As the Institute is relatively small, the students have ready access to key staff and are listened to, and staff are open to student opinions. There is evidence that the Institute does respond to student feedback. Students are able to get issues onto committee agendas. Library opening hours were extended in response to student representations, but the students are concerned that this is only on a trial basis. Significant improvements have been made to IT support in response to the 2009-10 IT survey. Notwithstanding this evidence students are of the opinion that the Institute responds to small issues but that their opinion is more often ignored when high-level financial decisions are made.

52 The SWS praised the Institute for the open manner in which it is open to being critiqued; the audit team found that this openness was integral to the ethos of the Institute and was exploited to influence future improvements. Student feedback was instrumental in the evolution of the course on the History of Art and Theory of the Art Museum into the MA in Curating the Art Museum and the inclusion of internships. There is evidence of responsiveness to student views, but often the students are not systematically informed of the action taken. The audit team considers it desirable that the Institute review the effectiveness of its communication to students about policies, procedures and action taken in response to matters raised through feedback and consultation processes.

Role of students in quality assurance

53 The Institute relies heavily on one sabbatical post, that of Students' Union President. The President is a member of the Academic Board, TLC and the Admission and Widening Participation Committee. The President has induction and regular meetings with the Academic Registrar and is invited to attend SMT meetings once a year to discuss student issues. The Academic Board has two student representatives, the Students' Union President and one other, either postgraduate or undergraduate, depending on the status of the President. The Academic Affairs Officer is also a member of TLC. Students are

represented on programme boards. Programme boards chaired by the head of the programme have a specific remit to review feedback.

54 Students are involved in periodic review through meetings with the reviewers. In addition, for the undergraduate programme review, the Students' Union President and the Academic Affairs Officer consult current and former students and former Union officers, and review the NSS results for the previous five years to produce a report on student opinion in regard to the programme being reviewed.

55 Research students are members of the Postgraduate Advisory Group for the Research Forum which meets termly. The Group's remit is to comment constructively on the Research Forum programme and to suggest ways in which it might best reflect the needs and interests of the postgraduate body. An example of an action taken in response to the Group's work is the recent setting up of an event to discuss approaches to research-led teaching for pre-doctoral scholars.

56 The audit team found that students are represented on most of the institution's committees, with the exception of research committees. The audit team considers it desirable that the Institute consider how it might promote and support effective student representation and involvement in decision-making by all student constituencies, including the potential benefits of providing formal training for representatives.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

57 The Strategic Aims of the Institute make it a high priority to secure the Institute's international position as a research centre of the highest calibre. In meetings the audit team heard from students that this aim was carried through in an inclusive manner, and that teaching at undergraduate and postgraduate level was explicitly and manifestly informed by the research being carried out at the Institute. The structure of the BA enabled staff to propose and offer courses related to their research, particularly at years 2 and 3. In addition, teaching assistants who are usually postgraduate research students and who play an important part in seminar work at level 1 are encouraged to use examples drawn from their own and other current research in support for lectures.

58 The links between the Institute and the Gallery are significant in this context. The collection brings students into contact with primary source material in a way that encourages approaches characteristic of research at all levels of taught programmes. It also provides a context for specialist Master's programmes in conservation.

59 The collegial atmosphere of the Institute supports the links between research, scholarship and learning opportunities. Events in the Research Forum are advertised and open to all. The Forum is also the base for an initiative funded by the Mellon Foundation which aims to link teaching and current research. The initiative supports an eminent Visiting Professor, chosen for the way his or her research expands work already in progress at the Institute, and a Research Fellow. The Visiting Professor is required to teach a course within the MA programme. The Research Fellow supports that course but also teaches a course in the BA programme.

60 Overall the team judged that research at the Institute regularly refreshed and expanded learning opportunities for students and that the advantage to students of studying in an environment characterised by a pervasive culture of research was a feature of good practice.

Other modes of study

61 Programmes at the Institute are either full-time or part-time; there are no other modes of study.

Resources for learning

62 The procedure for allocating resources at the Institute is thorough and is linked to strategic planning. There is an annual process whereby heads of service departments review their previous budgets and needs and then discuss these with their line managers and the Head of Finance. The library and IT services undertake detailed surveys formally once a year; these surveys feed into decisions on resource matters.

63 Learning resources in general are the responsibility of the Dean, who makes proposals for the strategic balancing of these resource bids to the SMT. Decisions on the allocation of money to different learning resources are ultimately taken collectively by the Director and the SMT. There is also a procedure where additional money and/or moving costs between learning resources allows the development of a new resource, as was the case for the development of the VLE which was approved on the production of a business plan. New course development requires the Head of Libraries to ensure that there are adequate resources available before the TLC will recommend the course change to the Academic Board.

64 Information in regard to what is available in the various libraries and the Courtauld Gallery is included in the Handbook for Teaching Staff and the general section of the Student Handbook which, in addition, provides students with details of other resources available to them in London. Students whom the audit team met expressed the view that the content of the library was 'the best' and that there were good relationships that had been set up by the Institute with other London libraries. These relationships exemplify the establishment of productive associations with other institutions, which provides complementary access to facilities that enhance the students learning experience; this was regarded by the audit team to be a feature of good practice. The Institute has digitised the slide library so that 50,000 slides are available online. A lottery-funded project has been used to digitise the Courtauld Gallery's collection of paintings and drawings as well as 35,000 photographs of architecture and sculpture in the Conway library. Students whom the audit team met confirmed that they had full access to these resources. One of the reasons students choose to study at the Institute is the easy access to wonderful works of art: 'you can actually handle a Michelangelo'.

65 The SWS was critical of a number of operational issues in regard to the library, including availability of seating, number of key texts, opening hours, and outdated photocopying and IT facilities. The Institute is aware of these issues, and there has been a trial of extended library opening hours which, due to the expense involved, is being monitored for usage. IT support has increased memory and made other significant improvements in response to student feedback. The Institute is also considering the purchase of electronic texts to place on the VLE.

66 The audit team concluded that the Institute provides excellent resources for learning through strategic planning and productive associations with other Institutions.

Admissions policy

67 The Institute has a detailed Admissions Policy drafted to embody the principles outlined in the Schwartz Report. The Head of Admissions is a senior member of academic

staff and oversees the undergraduate admission process and chairs the Admissions and Widening Participation Committee (AWPC) which is a sub-committee of the Academic Board. Oversight of the admission policy and process is maintained by the Registry and the Academic Board. The Admission and Enrolment Supervisor is responsible for updating the Admissions Policy with the guidance of the Academic Registrar. The policy, including any changes, is approved by the AWPC and subsequently the Academic Board. The expertise in widening participation of one of the external members of the AWPC was used in 2009 at a staff away day, which led to a complete revision of the undergraduate admission process in order to promote fairness and accessibility. Applications for research degrees and the related admissions policy are considered by the Research Degrees Committee.

68 Staff training and support is provided to both academic and administrative staff involved with admissions. Staff attend external conferences and training days especially aimed at admissions professionals; intercollegiate meetings of University of London admissions professionals are attended by academic Registry staff. The Handbook for Teaching Staff has a section about admissions and approaches to widening participation. Language proficiency requirements are the same for International and European students in order to ensure equity of treatment.

69 A high standard is required for entry to all the Institute's programmes; competition is fierce, with approximately 360 applicants for the 50 places available on the BA. The audit team found that the procedure was complex but clearly set out in the admissions policy. It involves submission of a questionnaire and essay, and from this 120 candidates are shortlisted for interview. In order to ensure consistency two members of staff are involved in each interview. While this is a time-consuming process it is thorough and fair, and staff regard it as essential in ensuring a better insight into a student's potential. It also allows the academic staff to ensure that potential students are aware from the start that the programme of study will be demanding and rigorous. The interview is also used to ensure that successful applicants understand their value to the Institute and to foster collegiality. The AWPC discusses fully any changes to the interview process, and revised procedures are taken to the Academic Board for ratification. There is a similarly rigorous procedure for MA admissions which is overseen by the Head of the MA programme.

70 Students from the state sector are at some disadvantage in that history of art is not widely taught. In order to widen access the Institute has developed a Widening Participation Strategy, approved by the Academic Board in June 2008. The Institute undertakes outreach work through a series of Teachers' Gallery Events to raise state-sector awareness, and student ambassadors deliver outreach sessions in targeted areas. A Teachers' Forum, a group of ten state-school teachers, is part of the Courtauld's Teachers' Advisory Forum, which meets termly to discuss policy. In addition two students from each of these schools school serve on the Courtauld Youth Council. The Department of Public Programmes also runs activities that support outreach and widening participation. Students met by the audit team were very positive about the open days, interview days and public programmes. There is clear evidence from the minutes of the AWPC that it discusses fully entry requirements for the taught programmes, the BA interview process, English proficiency for overseas students, and the activities of the Department for Public Programmes.

71 The Access Agreement sets short and long-term milestones for the Institute using baseline data derived from the Higher Education Statistics Agency. The short-term milestone is 'to achieve a consistent increase in the number of students recruited from the state sector and low participation neighbourhoods'. The milestones are measured annually and monitored by AWPC.

72 The audit team regarded the Institute's admission procedure as being sound and thorough. The contribution of the Department of Public Programmes and the Gallery to

outreach and widening participation work is identified as a feature of good practice in the audit.

Student support

73 Student services, operated by the Registry, include counselling services; students were of the opinion they had good student support in these areas when they required it. The general sections of the students' handbooks provide the students with details of services available. The Institute is committed to maintaining a high standard of writing in all students' work, and two Royal Literary Funds Fellows (RLFF), as well as an Academic Support Officer (ASO), are available to provide help if required. A record and commentary on specific case studies is kept and reported on by the RLFF in regard to tutorials given. The ASO is available one day a week to help with study skills and to help those for whom English is a second language.

74 Students are provided with a clear and detailed induction pack in paper format that is also available on the VLE, which has greatly improved the accessibility of the information. The students' first week is dedicated to induction and includes organised social events. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students met by the team expressed their satisfaction with induction.

75 Students on the BA programme indicated clearly that personal tutor support was variable. The Institute responded by ensuring the names of tutors and tutees are in the programme handbook and on the VLE. The students met by the audit team regarded this as a marked improvement. Inconsistency of tutorial support has been remedied by the introduction of formal timetabled meetings with tutors. A Handbook for Personal Tutors has been developed which provides comprehensive and clear guidance to staff. The Institute has developed and is trialling the use of the personal tutor system in the third year of the BA to help improve the performance of students in their final year, utilising feedback from their second year assessed essays and examinations at the first tutorial of the year. The audit team was of the opinion that this approach had the potential to provide a clear means of enhancing student learning opportunities. Unfortunately not all the academic staff have complied with the trial, which the Institute recognises as preventing the analysis of its full impact. In general students are given written constructive feedback on assessments and can always go to academic staff for further detail. Work is returned to students within two weeks of submission.

76 The programme heads act as personal tutors for students on the smaller programmes. For the small groups within the MA in the History of Art, the course tutors are also the personal tutors, supported by the head of the programme. There is evidence that the MA students receive extensive feedback on their assessed essays. In addition the fact that the Institute is small allows easy access on an informal basis to most staff. The Handbook for Teaching Staff indicates that attendance is taken very seriously by the Institute, and members of staff are expected to report any absences to the personal tutors. There are clear procedures that the student must follow, and if a student misses more than 20 per cent of the course without good cause he/she may be excluded from examinations.

77 The procedure for personal development planning (PDP) is on a dedicated section of the website that provides advice, guidance and tools for analysis. The Institute is aware that student use is low as was confirmed by students whom the audit team met. The Institute intends to tackle this issue through the VLE and is considering a more interactive and user-friendly PDP resource through e-portfolio software. In reviewing strategic planning, the Institute is considering integrating PDP into the curriculum to improve careers advice and support. The audit team considers it desirable that the Institute develop a more purposeful

approach to PDP for all its students.

78 Since the previous audit the Institute has made significant improvements to support for students in regard to employability. Students can access the career service at another higher education institution which provides a dedicated career advice service for the Courtauld. The Institute runs several career forums with guest alumni speakers, which are well attended. The students whom the audit team met indicated that these forums were useful and that students were encouraged to network with alumni, which is a noteworthy feature of the Institute's careers support. There are various internship opportunities available to students. There are also opportunities to give Gallery talks for which training is provided. An action plan to coordinate employment support is currently being developed.

79 Small-group teaching by experts in their field, supported by teaching assistants, is regarded by the students as one of the major strengths of the Institute in support of learning. Enhancing small-group teaching was the topic covered in the 2010 staff development away day. The only areas where there is no small-group teaching are the first year of the BA and the Graduate Diploma discussion classes. The audit team was told by academic staff that serious consideration was being given to this issue, which is of long standing, as there are financial and organisational issues to be considered. The audit team would wish to encourage the Institute to try to resolve this issue to bring it in line with the rest of its specialist provision.

Staff support (including staff development)

80 The Institute aims to support staff across the lifetime of employment; the evidence available to the audit team indicated that it generally achieves this aim. Support is provided through a mix of bespoke arrangements, regular procedures and group events. Induction of new staff is a bespoke event but also draws on standard materials; for example, the Staff Handbook provides a wide range of information on structures and procedures. Here, as with the training of supervisors and postgraduate research students, the Institute has arrangements with other institutions that supplement its own resources. Thus the team heard that staff without experience of teaching are expected to complete a training course offered by another London higher education institution. Staff are subject to regular appraisal by their head of period section, with the results being reported to the Dean.

81 Postgraduate research students employed as teaching assistants play an important role in the BA and MA programmes. Once appointed, teaching assistants find guidance in the Staff Handbook, are required to attend an Induction event, and benefit from ongoing support from a mentor. The teaching assistants are then treated as full members of staff so far as involvement in Best Practice Lunches (paragraph 91) and other staff events is concerned. Teaching assistants whom the audit team met praised the support they received. The structured approach to the continuous professional development of the teaching assistants is identified in the audit as a feature of good practice.

82 There can be confidence in the soundness of the Institute's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

83 The Institute has not sought formally to define 'quality enhancement', but it is nonetheless clear that deliberate steps are made within the Institute to improve quality through a process of continual self-review. The Director and Senior Management Team (SMT) take a 'holistic view' of quality enhancement through regular strategic discussions. A

variety of formal procedures that broadly reflect the Institute's size, ethos and specialist focus exist in support of this.

84 A 'culture of change' intended to enhance the quality of provision and the student learning experience pervades the Institute. Examples include: the evolution of a new Strategic Plan which at the time of the audit visit was being developed under leadership of the Director; the recent establishment of the Student Experience Group (SEG); and the virtual learning environment (VLE). While each of these initiatives is in the early stages of development, in the view of the audit team all have the capacity to offer further scope for enhancement of provision and of the student experience.

85 The Institute sets much store by what it describes as its 'most significant enhancement principle', namely the extensive use of externality in a variety of forms. Relative to its size, the Institute engages the services of a large number of external examiners for its programmes – 10, for example, in the current academic year (2010-11). This is, in part, to ensure a high degree of specialisation in the assessment of students' work across the range of periods studied. The views of the external examiners are synthesised into an 'Issues' paper prepared on an annual basis by senior officers of the Institute. While it is clear from the 'Issues' paper itself and the narrative of the minuted discussion of its contents, that the Institute regards the comments of its external examiners as recommendations rather than directives, it is evident that the Institute takes the comments of its external examiners seriously and debates the issues raised. While the external examiner system serves as a mechanism for making general improvements in the operation of the assessment process, its value as a means of generating systematic enhancement of the programmes themselves appears relatively limited. This is compounded by the fact that the synthesised 'Issues' report prepared by senior staff mixes comments relating to undergraduate and postgraduate courses, thus hindering the process of gaining an overview of external examiners' views purely at the level of a single programme. The Institute may wish to reconsider the format of its internal summary report in light of the benefits that might be gained from a clearer separation by programme.

Periodic review

86 The Courtauld's approach to periodic review depends entirely on an external panel. It is clear from the detailed and comprehensive reports prepared by the reviewers and from the institution's response to them, that the Institute derives great benefit from periodic review in terms of its potential for enhancement. Among the key recommendations, highlighted as 'essential' were the acquisition of a VLE as a 'top priority'; consideration of a more user-friendly personal tutor system for students; and a reconsideration of the year 2 'Frameworks' course, with a further recommendation that a team-teaching approach might be adopted for this. In each of these three areas the Institute can be seen to have moved forward significantly in terms of enhancing the quality of its provision: for example, one student reported to the audit team that the VLE had made 'a massive difference' to the learning experience. That the VLE has been achieved so successfully within a relatively narrow time-frame is notable. Discussions with key staff indicated that the VLE would be further extended in order further to support the effective engagement of staff and students in the academic activities of the institution. Reconsideration of the year 2 'Frameworks' course formed the basis of a Best Practice Lunch (paragraph 92) at which plans for the reformulation of the style of delivery and the content were devised for implementation in September 2010. The personal tutorial system is discussed above (paragraphs 75 and 76).

Other external links/associations

87 Conscious of the dangers of insularity as a result of its size and specialist nature, the Institute has systematically cultivated a variety of other external links and associations. These linkages serve to widen the base of external reference points and broaden the circle of expertise on which the Institute is able to draw. Examples of this are the inclusion of external members on senior academic committees, and the establishment of International Advisory Boards to oversee and advise the work of the postgraduate conservation programmes in easel paintings and wall paintings. In this way, the Institute is able to benefit from the experience and expertise of leading figures in highly specialised fields of art conservation.

88 Another manifestation of the value gained from the formation of external links are the productive associations that have been established with other institutions, providing complementary access to facilities that enhance the students' learning experience. Examples include student access to the libraries of other institutions within the University of London, as well as access to the collections of the Warburg Institute, which the students whom the audit team met greatly valued. In addition, the access students have both to the main collections of the Courtauld Gallery and to those holdings not on public display, such as the print collection and other items held in storage, was held by the students to be an exciting and stimulating aspect of their study at the Institute.

89 The audit team regards the establishment of these broad and productive associations with other institutions and organisations, which provide, among other benefits, complementary access to facilities that enhance the students' learning experience, to be a feature of good practice.

Promoting best practice

90 Recent examples of enhancements brought about as a result of discussion at staff away days include a session styled Recruiting Staff and Students, held in May 2009 and led by external consultants. The day focused on the Institute's Diversity and Equal Opportunities policy as it applies to the recruitment process for both staff and students. Outcomes included the preparation of job descriptions and person specifications for all posts within the Institute, and significant changes to the undergraduate admissions processes in the interests of fairness and consistency of procedure. A further away day in May 2010, entitled Enhancing Small Group Teaching was similarly led by a group of facilitators, and set out to explore the aims, opportunities and challenges of small-group teaching. The event enabled the sharing of good practice, and led to a clarification of human resources policy in the area of teaching qualifications for new lecturers who, as a result, were strongly encouraged to undertake a certificated course in higher education teaching practice.

91 The Best Practice Lunches, many of which are attended by the Director, similarly serve to focus on specific issues that may lead to enhancements of provision and/or practice. The event held in November 2009, for example, was devoted to the issue of the content and delivery of the year 2 undergraduate 'Frameworks' course, as flagged up in the BA History of Art Periodic Review, completed earlier in that year. The outcome of the extensive discussions at this event led to key changes in the course, as recommended by the review panel, and which were implemented in the 2010-11 academic year. The event held in November 2010 focused on the issue of preparing bids for funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), with an intention that bidding success from this source would thereby improve.

92 The Best Practice Lunches were identified in a periodic review as an example of 'excellent practice'. Documentation for the lunches and that relating to the annual academic staff away day and feedback from staff demonstrate that these do indeed operate as effective forums for the focused discussion of specific issues, both academic and organisational, and serve as a mechanism for quality enhancement. Other initiatives designed to improve and enhance quality across the institution include the provision of funding for both group and individual staff development, based on needs identified through the well-established staff appraisal system. Staff whom the team met attested to the robustness of the appraisal system and to the availability of development funding for all categories of staff, including those on part-time or fractional contracts.

Other opportunities

93 In response to the results of the National Student Survey (NSS) published in 2010, a Student Experience Group (SEG) was established in order to develop greater institutional oversight of the student experience. The intention is that this group will make recommendations to the SMT in order to develop a more holistic approach to the student experience. Although initially established as a time-limited working group, the team was told by senior staff and others that it was likely that the SEG would continue in some form, and would provide an annual report to the SMT embracing a wide range of student support areas. Plans were already being advanced for a substantial student survey on the effectiveness of all support services. Due to the recent formation of this group, the audit team was unable to judge its effectiveness in terms of enhancing the student experience, but its potential to do so, and the commitment of those involved to make this work, was evident. The team would wish to encourage the senior management to continue its work with this group precisely in recognition of this potential.

Conclusion

94 From the evidence available and on the basis of discussions with staff and students, it is clear that many enhancement activities are taking place across the Institute. The audit team would therefore wish to encourage the Institute to pull its many strands of good practice in this area together by developing a more systematic approach to enhancing the quality of provision.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

95 The Institute has a very limited amount of collaborative provision, which takes the form of language teaching for first-year undergraduates delivered and assessed by another college of the University of London. The tuition offered is specifically designed for Courtauld students and, as such, focuses broadly on areas of immediate relevance to students of art history. Feedback on the provision is gained through the annual monitoring of courses.

96 The initial agreement establishing the arrangement to outsource language tuition was set up in 2005 for the academic year 2005-06, subject to renewal. It appears from the evidence available and from discussion with senior staff that no formal renewal of this agreement was enacted. In terms of overall management of the relationship, the audit team was told that an annual meeting takes place between the Dean and the Head of the Language Centre of the providing college.

97 Both in the student written submission (SWS) and in meetings, students expressed their satisfaction with the provision, albeit that they would like it extended into other years of their programme, and would like a broader range of languages to be available.

98 Although this collaborative arrangement was not explored in any further depth, the audit team has no reason to doubt the quality of the student experience or the standard of provision. Nonetheless, the team considers it advisable that the Institute formalise the management of the collaborative arrangement for the provision of language teaching.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Research culture

99 Applicants for postgraduate research degree study at the Courtauld are attracted by its reputation as a world leader in research in the history of art and architecture and museum and conservation studies; 54 per cent of research submitted for the Research Assessment Exercise 2008 by the Institute was rated 'world-leading'. The Institute benefits from recognition in the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Block Grant Partnership which funds an average of 22 students per year for five years from the academic year 2009-10. The integration of the Institute and the richness of the Courtauld Gallery collection creates opportunities for these and other students.

100 Successful bids to the Terra Foundation and the Mellon Foundation have enabled the creation of a Research Forum that provides a broad centre for research bringing together research students, research staff, and eminent visiting scholars. Postgraduate research students whom the audit team met were clear that they felt part of this research community. Their First Year Seminar and the seminar each must offer before submission of their thesis contribute to the Forum programme. They benefit through seminar series and presentations by visiting professors. Overall the audit team judged as a feature of good practice the Research Forum which offers a focus and support for a range of research activities.

Management and governance

101 There is clear evidence that the postgraduate research student provision is subject to generally effective academic governance and management. The Research Degrees Committee (RDC) has oversight of research programmes and reports to the Academic Board in parallel with the Research Committee whose remit is broader and more focused on staff research. Executive responsibility rests with the Head of Research who reports to the Director of the Institute; the Head of Research Degree programmes chairs the RDC and reports to the Dean and, in parallel, to the heads of taught programmes. He also takes executive action on behalf of the committee in matters relating to admissions and monitoring of progress.

102 The Institute awards degrees of the University of London. Delegation of powers in relation to postgraduate research degrees is taking place later than the similar process for undergraduate degrees. Thus, the University Regulation (dated 1 October 2010) currently states that colleges 'may make regulations for the degrees of...Master and Doctor of Philosophy'. The Institute has taken up this option and has developed Regulations of its own - largely following those of the University of London which they replace - which were approved by RDC in November 2010 and forwarded for ratification to the Academic Board. These regulations will come into force in the academic year 2011-12. The virtual learning environment (VLE) currently shows University of London regulations dated 2005, although the University's own website shows a more recent version dated 2009.

103 Day-to-day guidance on the operation of the programme for students and staff is set out in the Research Degrees Supplement to the Student Handbook which is revised annually and made available via the VLE. It includes the Institute's Code of Practice.

Selection, admission and induction of students

104 The Institute's processes for selection, admission and induction generally match the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*. Prospective postgraduate research students learn about the Institute through the Postgraduate Prospectus but also as much by personal contact with prospective supervisors. Students whom the audit team met confirmed that the initial information they had received was accurate. Clear standards for the programme in relation to academic qualifications and language proficiency are set and are on the public website. All students are initially registered for an MPhil, with the possibility of transfer to PhD after one year of full-time, or two years of part-time, study. The Institute has clearly defined the responsibilities of research students, including the requirement to attend induction, and their supervisors in the Research Handbook Supplement.

105 All applications for research study are scrutinised by the RDC, and the majority of applicants are interviewed, normally by two members of staff. The Institute's Admissions Policy requires that all those involved in admissions be formally trained, including all those involved in interviews and members of the RDC. Scrutiny of the papers of the RDC found conscientious and detailed review of applications which included consideration of the match of the proposed topic to the expertise of the proposed supervisor and also his or her workload. The Institute recognises that this process, dependent on committee dates, has a certain inflexibility and is considering how more rapid decisions might be made when necessary.

Supervision

106 There is evidence that supervision of postgraduate research students is well regulated and effective. The Research Handbook Supplement sets out requirements on frequency and regularity of supervision, the submission of written work, and the fact that a supervisor's responsibilities continue through sabbatical terms. The Handbook also establishes that the Chair of RDC is the first point of reference for problems.

107 RDC normally appoints a single supervisor at the registration stage, but, if the topic requires it, may appoint two co-supervisors to ensure that the requisite expertise is available to the student. At the upgrade point a 'second reader' is appointed; their duty is to work with the supervisor to provide an assessment of the student's work but not to provide supervision. Students whom the audit team met showed they had a clear understanding of the arrangements and expressed no dissatisfaction with them.

108 A new Supervision Policy was approved by RDC and endorsed by the Academic Board in March 2010. The Policy meets the minimum guidance set out in the QAA *Code of practice* but falls short of the indication in the precept that the main supervisor 'will normally be part of a supervisory team'. The Institute's new policy does refer to the appointment of a second supervisor 'where possible' but only for specific purposes. In one meeting the audit team heard that the Institute was moving towards a team approach to supervision, but senior management staff made no reference to this and stated that the reference to the appointment of a second supervisor where possible referred only to the second reader; this is contradictory since the Institute's own Code of Practice requires that there always be a second reader for the upgrade review. The audit team considers it advisable that the Institute resolve its position on whether postgraduate research students should have second supervisors.

109 The QAA Review of Research Programmes in 2006 suggested 'continuing work on the way the *Code of practice* is operating with respect to formalising training and support of less experienced supervisors'. The Institute has responded to this recommendation by a requirement in the Supervision Policy that those new to supervision undertake training. Through its meetings with staff the audit team confirmed that the Institute was providing effective training through an external course. The team also noted in this context a comment in the Institute's *Code of practice* touching on the discussion of second supervisors above: 'involvement with a supervisory team can provide valuable staff development and grounding in the skills required to become an effective research supervisor'. The audit team endorses this comment as an opportunity here to capitalise on the undoubted expertise in supervision in the Institute.

Progress and review arrangements

110 The Institute requires supervisors to monitor progress through regular supervision. This day-to-day monitoring sits within a framework of a more formal annual process which is managed by the Research Degrees Committee (RDC). Students initiate a report using a standard proforma, and their supervisor adds an assessment of progress (measured intellectually and against the completion date) and suggestions for further training. The resulting report is reviewed by the RDC. In theory, and in the majority of cases, the process works well, but the audit team's review of the Committee's work during 2008-10 also showed a number of occasions when paperwork was not available for the Committee. The situation was particularly bad in 2008 when the Committee itself noted the problem and asked for a review of the system, but this still remained an issue, in the team's view, in 2010. Subsequent RDC papers and minutes showed that students whose reports were missing had progressed, indicating that the cases had been followed up, but this was not systematically and formally recorded in the minutes of the subsequent meeting. The Institute will wish to ensure that progress reports are received in a timely way by the RDC in future.

111 The specification for first-year monitoring and the upgrade from MPhil to PhD is a rigorous procedure, following the annual monitoring process but requiring also formal submission of work to the Student Services section to a deadline, and review by the second reader. As before, on occasion paperwork was not submitted to time but generally the evidence is of rigorous review. The Institute has processes to manage occasions when students legitimately need to suspend registration. RDC papers show the Committee agreeing to deregister students where progress was not being made. There is provision in the regulations that students who fail upgrade twice should be automatically deregistered, and this has now been included in the new Regulations.

112 Notwithstanding issues of delayed paperwork noted above, the audit team judged the work of the RDC to be thorough and effective in annual monitoring and progress review.

Development of research and other skills

113 The Research Students Handbook Supplement details a wide range of training opportunities for training both at the Institute and through partnerships within the University of London. The majority of these opportunities are taken up on an individual basis, for example the development of language skills or specialist historical courses at the Institute of Historical Research. Students also have access to the University of London Research Skills Intercollegiate Network (ReSKIN) which provides generic training opportunities. There is also research development on a group basis through the First Year Seminar which runs over two terms and combines subject study with PhD writing workshops. The seminar is particularly relevant to the needs of students studying within the UK higher education context for the first

time. Development opportunities are available throughout a student's study period, for many culminating in the learning experience that comes from being required to give a paper to the Graduate Symposium in year 3. Students are asked to complete a 'personal evaluation' of training each year as part of the annual monitoring exercise.

114 Students whom the audit team met were generally satisfied with the training and skills development opportunities available to support their studies, although some concerns were expressed which the Institute may wish to consider. The orientation of the subject part of the First Year Seminar towards the modern period, which is the largest area of research degree study, disadvantages students working in other periods. There was also some dissatisfaction with experience of the ReSkIN programme, which may arise from the programme itself or from the fact that the Institute has not sufficiently integrated this provision into its offering.

115 The appointment of teaching assistants to support the teaching of some courses provides valuable training opportunities for students planning an academic career. On the evidence available the audit team judged the teaching assistants scheme to be effectively managed by the Institute. Opportunities are generally advertised. All those who are appointed must attend a training course which is also made available to anyone interested in working as a teaching assistant. Those persons appointed work closely with academic staff, and are provided with mentoring support. They also receive feedback from students through the annual monitoring process. The role of the teaching assistants in supporting small-group teaching is noted as a feature of good practice in the audit.

116 The audit found strong evidence of provision for the development of research skills and skills relating to the teaching of the history of art. The 2006 review of research degree programmes recommended continuing work to develop PDP systems and procedures to support research students in their wider skills development. The audit team found little evidence that the Institute was effectively developing PDP processes at undergraduate level, and it did not figure in research students' discussions with the team about training and development. In the view of the team research students who plan a career outside teaching, research or museum and gallery work are potentially disadvantaged as compared to those who do plan such a career. The team therefore recommends as desirable that the Institute develop a purposeful approach to PDP for all students.

Feedback mechanisms

117 The Institute seeks feedback from research students in two main ways. First students are asked specifically in the Annual Monitoring Form if they wish to comment on their supervision. Where students are unhappy with that supervision they may be reluctant to use this route given that the supervisor concerned has then to sign off satisfactory progress. This possibility is met by a clear statement in the Research Student Handbook that a student should contact the Records and Assessment Supervisor and the Chair of the RDC.

118 A second route for feedback is the Postgraduate Advisory Group, relatively recently introduced as part of the Research Forum. The Group meets each term to advise the Research Forum on issues relating to its activities which are of concern and interest to the postgraduate community of the Institute. A review of the minutes of this group by the audit team indicated that it provides a very useful arena for discussion between staff and students. Research students may also attend the Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) discussed in paragraph 47.

119 The Institute does not provide research students with any specific formal route for feedback through the committee structure, except through the provision for Students' Union

representation on Academic Board. There are no student members of the Research Committee or the Research Degrees Committee (RDC), and papers for both committees are restricted and not available on the Institute's intranet. The Institute considers that the remit of these committees justifies these restrictions; it appears that the Institute has not considered how it might manage this situation so as to bring the research committees into line with other committees and gain the advantage of contributions from student members.

Assessment

The situation concerning the regulatory framework for research degrees at the Institute is described above. Until September 2011 the Institute will propose examiners for research degrees to a University of London panel but in the new framework the Institute will take responsibility for the examination arrangements. An Annex to the new Institute Regulations sets out appropriate instructions in the matter. The new Regulations are effective in setting out requirements for theses, the process of submission and the conduct of examinations.

120 Two examiners are appointed. The Regulations specify appropriate criteria for the appointment of examiners in terms of expertise and experience. They also specify - in line with previous University of London practice - that the Institute intends to continue to follow the practice of appointing both from outside the Institute; one will usually be from another part of the University of London, the other from beyond the University. The Institute is able to engage highly qualified external examiners and the system is beneficial to students in that they can feel that their work has been subject to scrutiny by the most expert authorities.

121 Overall the audit team was satisfied that processes were in place to assure academic standards in the assessment of postgraduate research students, in accordance with the guidance in the *QAA Code of practice*. However the audit team saw no evidence that the Institute was considering the broader issues mentioned in the commentary to the precepts, particularly those that have the potential to be beneficial to students' experience in the run-up to the examination and the examination itself. A mock viva is suggested as valuable to support a student in the preparation for what can be a challenging event, and the appointment of independent, non-examining chairs can potentially help to ensure consistency between different vivas and in providing an additional viewpoint if the conduct of the viva should become the subject of a student appeal. The fact that both examiners are normally from outside the Institute makes discussion of the latter practice particularly relevant. The audit team therefore recommends as desirable that the Institute consider whether there might be advantage in use of independent chairs of examiners and mock vivas in the assessment, and preparation for assessment, of postgraduate research students.

122 The Institute is aware of the value of wider discussions through a procedure whereby the Registry prepares an annual report for presentation to the November meeting of the RDC showing the outcomes of all PhD vivas in the previous twelve-month period and identifying any issues for broader consideration. The minutes of the meeting of November 2010 show that a report was submitted but do not record any issues or other commentary.

Representations, complaints and appeals

123 Complaints from research students follow the same process published on the VLE as for students on taught programmes. Like the Regulations for research degree programmes, procedures for appeal by candidates against the outcome of examination were the responsibility of the University of London, but the Institute has taken advantage of the clause in the University Regulations that allows it to establish its own procedures. The Institute's procedures are published on the VLE. The grounds for appeal as published are

fully effective and agreed by the RDC and the Academic Board in July and November 2009 respectively. There is an issue in that the RDC made a further recommendation in November 2009, modifying the grounds for appeal, but at the time of the audit this had not yet been put to Academic Board; the Institute will wish to regularise this situation.

Conclusion

124 The handling of the approval of the Appeals Procedure in RDC and Academic Board, the failure to provide all data on student progress at RDC and to record follow-up, the lack of a statement for students explaining the changes as the Institute takes over responsibility for these programmes from the University of London, and the presence of out-of-date University of London regulations on the Institute's website contribute to the team's advice that the Institute review its recording of decisions and associated actions. These issues do not, however, counter the clear evidence of high quality research being pursued through the Institute's research degrees provision and the confidence that the audit team has in the management of standards and in the quality of learning opportunities in postgraduate research programmes at the Institute. The audit found that the Institute's management of its research degree programmes meets the expectations of the *Code of practice: Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 7: Published information

125 The Institute operates at 'top-down' approach defining responsibilities for the maintenance of the website. Although overall responsibility sits with the Dean, department heads are responsible for the departmental content and the strategic use of their sections of the website.

126 Students are issued with a student handbook at the start of the academic year, with further information accessible via the virtual learning environment (VLE). The student handbook contains information about the Institute, programmes of study and assessment regulations. The audit team reviewed prospectuses, student handbooks and the Institute's website. There was evidence that the majority of information provided to students was comprehensive, however closer scrutiny of programme information identified discrepancies in the accuracy of information; for example, programme specifications seen by the team had not been revised since 2005.

127 In meetings with the audit team, students confirmed that the publicity material and prospectuses, including materials for international applicants, both printed and on the Institute's website, gave an accurate account of the institution that reflected their experience since arrival as students.

128 Only a small proportion of students met by the audit team stated that they had seen the reports of external examiners. The audit team recommends as desirable that the Institute share external examiner reports with student representatives in accordance with the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, phase two outcomes*, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45).

129 The audit team found that, overall, reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information the Institute publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the academic standards of its awards offered to home and international students.

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