



QAA



Institutional audit

University College London

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Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes
- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research

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

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

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students
- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences
- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (*Handbook for institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland 2006* - Annexes B and C refer).

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited University College London (UCL) from 9 to 13 March 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that UCL offers.

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

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

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of UCL 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
- 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 audit found that UCL's strategic approach to enhancement is bound up in its approach to quality assurance and, while not explicit, has significantly influenced UCL's structures and processes. This strategy contributes to an institutional culture of enhancement.

Postgraduate research students

The audit found that the arrangements for postgraduate research students at UCL were, in general, of a high order. The audit team concluded that the arrangements for postgraduate research students, including those for support, supervision and assessment, were rigorous and effective and fully 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*.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

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

- the quality, clarity and accessibility of published guidance for staff and students
- the Internal Quality Review process, especially its capacity to capture aspects of good practice for institution-wide dissemination

- the Transitions programme that supports the transition of first-year undergraduate students into higher education
- the institution's use of interactive electronic logs to record and monitor both staff training and research student training and progress.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises that:

- in the light of previous progress on harmonisation, and in order to consolidate further the equivalence of the student learning experience, UCL should maintain its momentum towards achieving the institutional coherence on regulatory and academic processes identified by its own committees
- where an institutional position has been reached on the harmonisation and simplification of regulatory and academic processes, UCL should seek to achieve full and timely departmental engagement and alignment.

Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by UCL 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*
- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

The audit found that UCL 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 University College London (UCL) was undertaken during the week commencing 9 March 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on UCL's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Professor Tony Cryer, Dr Ros Foskett, Professor Terry Kemp and Professor Ian Robinson, auditors, and Dr Ellie Clewlow, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor Paul Luker, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 UCL, founded in 1826, was the first higher education institution in England to admit students regardless of race or religion, and subsequently became the first to admit women on equal terms with men. In August 2005, the Privy Council approved the formal recommendation that UCL be granted degree awarding powers. UCL exercised these powers in 2006, although, with the agreement of the (former) University of London Council, UCL remains a College of the University of London.

4 UCL's mission statement notes that UCL is 'a world-class centre of research and teaching, dedicated to developing and disseminating original knowledge to benefit the world of the future'. UCL has earned outstanding results in all research assessment exercises. UCL made 49 submissions to the 67 Units of Assessment in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise.

5 At the time of the audit, UCL employed approximately 8,000 staff. In 2007-08, approximately 12,000 undergraduate, 5,000 postgraduate taught and 3,000 postgraduate research students were studying at UCL; 33 per cent of UCL's students are drawn from over 130 countries outside the UK. This profile, together with an initiative on global citizenship, would help support UCL's claim to be 'London's Global University'. UCL has a range of collaborative arrangements with a number of partners in the UK and abroad. However, the scale of such provision is small, relative to the size of the institution. UCL has not traditionally engaged in any franchise, validation or accreditation activity.

6 UCL, which is led by a President and Provost, is organised on a pyramidal structure that comprises 53 departments which are organised into eight faculties: Arts and Humanities; Biomedical Sciences; Built Environment; Engineering Sciences; Law; Life Sciences; Mathematical and Physical Sciences; and Social and Historical Sciences. At the time of the audit, a strategic grouping of faculties into schools had been introduced in order to facilitate greater interdisciplinary interaction in research and teaching.

7 The previous audit of UCL took place in March 2005 and was combined with QAA's scrutiny of the institution's successful application for degree awarding powers. The audit report identified four features of good practice and made six recommendations for action, one of which was deemed to be 'advisable' and the rest 'desirable'.

8 The advisable recommendation concerned the need for UCL to 'complete the regularisation of annual monitoring as expeditiously as possible, ensuring that it was implemented in a systematic and consistent way, and that procedures be in place to identify and act upon any consistent themes which emerge'. A process of consultation took place before a new annual monitoring template was incrementally developed and then piloted in a number of departments in 2006-07. The new annual monitoring process was formally introduced from session 2007-08.

9 The second recommendation suggested that UCL might complement its intention of reviewing the quality and accuracy of programme specifications. In response, a review of UCL's policy and procedures reaffirmed UCL's position that programme specifications were not primarily intended to be a source of information for students, but that a programme specification should

continue to be an integral part of UCL's programme approval and monitoring processes (see paragraph 25). The third recommendation was that UCL ensures that all external examiners be advised in a timely manner of the formal response to its reports. This was addressed by the UCL Board of Examiners (see paragraph 33).

10 The fourth recommendation was that UCL ensures that the student representation and feedback systems operate effectively throughout the institution. Three major reviews by special working groups of UCL's student representation and feedback systems were undertaken following the 2005 audit (see paragraphs 43-50). The fifth recommendation expressed the desirability of UCL taking optimal advantage of the strategic benefits in information management and communication afforded by its new student record system. UCL allocated additional resources to address identified problems (see paragraph 38).

11 The final recommendation encouraged a review of the Postgraduate Teaching Assistant Scheme and monitoring more closely the use of part-time and hourly-paid staff, in order to identify and disseminate good practice in training and mentoring. In response, a revised policy on Postgraduate Graduate Teaching Assistants was introduced in October 2006 setting out policy on the selection, training and monitoring of postgraduate graduate teaching assistants. (see paragraph 101).

12 From its extensive analysis of documents made available to it, the audit team concluded that UCL's responses to the set of recommendations made in the 2005 audit had been well considered and responded to appropriately.

13 The 2006 Review of research degree programmes made no recommendations to UCL but drew attention to two examples of good practice, namely: (1) the development of the Research Student Log in both electronic and paper formats for monitoring the progress of research students; (2) the well-established skills development courses offered by the Graduate School to research degree programme students since 1993; UCL's collaboration with partner institutions; and the planned creation of a suite of web-based generic skills training courses. The audit team concurred with these conclusions (see section 6 of this report).

14 The most significant development for UCL after the last audit was its decision to exercise its own degree awarding powers following the approval by the Privy Council in August 2005. In December 2006, the University of London Council agreed that UCL could exercise its degree awarding powers while remaining a College of the University. UCL has had to undertake a series of actions to put its powers into operation.

15 Other significant developments have been the implementation of a harmonised scheme of award across the institution (which led subsequently to a broader harmonisation of the student experience); the development of a common timetable to facilitate the development of interdisciplinary programmes; a major review of the structures and processes for quality management and enhancement; the major restructuring of the Faculty of Biomedical Sciences and the Faculty of Life Sciences, which together form UCL School of Life and Medical Sciences; the launch of UCL's Global Citizenship initiative, and a review and updating of UCL's International Strategy, leading to partnerships with overseas institutions. Also of note in the audit team's view was the strategic document, Modernising UCL, UCL Council's 2007 White Paper, which proposed a programme of extensive modernisation and simplification across UCL and looked towards further groupings of faculties into larger units. The team also regarded the development of the role of deans as being significant (see paragraph 23).

16 Council, the governing body of UCL, oversees the overall strategic direction and management and administration of the property and finances of the institution. Academic Board oversees and advises Council on the conduct of UCL's academic affairs. Academic Board is a large body, which comprises the institution's Professoriate, a proportion of non-professorial academic staff, and all senior academic staff with executive roles. It retains a high level strategic view of academic matters but delegates leadership and management of 'all academic matters and

questions affecting the educational policy of the institution, the organisation of teaching, examining, research' to Academic Committee (in respect of teaching and examining) and the Research Strategy Committee (in respect of research). The Provost's Senior Management Team has wide-ranging executive responsibilities.

17 Academic Committee, chaired by the Vice-Provost (Academic and International), is charged to 'determine and develop UCL policies and procedures in respect of quality management, quality review and quality enhancement; and to maintain an overview of UCL's academic quality assurance operations generally in relation both to the student experience and to staff development'. Its membership includes senior academic staff, faculty tutors, representative sabbatical officers of UCL's Union, and senior administrative officers.

18 Below the level of Academic Committee, the institution's framework for managing academic standards and quality is based upon a number of committee pyramids, each based in academic departments and units and reporting, at their summit, to Academic Committee. Each pyramid has its own particular focus of activity. The audit team developed the view that, while the number of deliberative committees and their various interactions seems complex, it also brings a structure which considers matters with rigour, leads to a self-confident approach to institutional academic reflection, and also provides routes to staff who are able to take executive action as necessary.

19 Principal among the deliberative committees are the faculty and department teaching committees, all of which have wide academic and student membership and which, in addition to their responsibilities with regard to teaching and learning, assume significant responsibilities for annual monitoring and periodic review of taught programmes, for consideration of the Internal Quality Review of departments, and for considering matters raised by departmental staff-student consultative committees.

20 The day-to-day academic business of UCL is operated by a cluster of executive subcommittees of Academic Committee, which includes the Graduate Education Executive Sub-Committee and the Programme Planning and Development Executive Sub-Committee. Also reporting to Academic Committee is a further cluster of deliberative committees, a number of which have faculty and departmental committees with a similar remit reporting into them. These include, amongst others: the UCL Board of Examiners, which makes the final recommendations for academic awards; Quality Management and Enhancement Committee, responsible for operating most of the UCL's quality management processes; the Joint Staff Student Committee, which considers matters of concern and interest to students across UCL, in particular the results of both internal and external surveys of students; and the Committee for the Recruitment and Admission of Students, which formulates and monitors the implementation of policy in this area.

21 Central to the Institution's framework for the management of standards and quality is the detailed advice and guidance in the Academic Manual. This document is available electronically both internally and externally, and provides a thorough explanation of all the necessary routines and processes. The audit team noted the clarity and value of the information contained therein, acknowledging that it sets a high standard of published information within the institution.

22 According to its Briefing Paper, UCL attempts to 'strike an appropriate balance between trust and accountability, with processes which are based on peer review by fellow academic staff, who are active in research and teaching'. The audit team was able to confirm that there is active involvement of academic staff at all levels in academic quality management operations at department, faculty and institutional levels.

23 The audit team came to the view that the role of the executive deans of faculty who sit at the nodes in the matrix between the deliberative committee structures and the executive management structures of UCL, is central to the smooth running of the institution's quality management processes. The team concluded that UCL's structure of deliberative committees and executive management is effective in the assurance of academic standards and the management of the quality of the learning opportunities of its students.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

24 Within the context of the pyramidal academic committee structure (see paragraph 18) operating in UCL, the audit team was able to explore fully the contribution its quality management and enhancement processes make to the assurance of the standards of the institution's awards. It found that the processes operated in a coherent and concerted way and provided, or had the future capacity to provide, clear evidence of the high level of performance achieved by students in relation to the defined standards operated by the institution.

25 A highly structured process for the approval of new programmes is in place, which, through a staged process of consideration at departmental, administrative, faculty and institutional levels, subjects new programme proposals to thorough scrutiny. The full range of external reference points, as defined in the Academic Infrastructure, is taken into account. The approval process, in common with other quality management processes in the institution, is clearly laid out in the Academic Manual, where it is supported by guidance and the necessary templates. The key proposal document, the Programme Institution Questionnaire, provides the opportunity for proposers to explain fully the formal curricular and regulatory aspects of the case, and to provide a programme specification that describes the link between student learning opportunities and their assessment. This documentation is also subject to independent external scrutiny and comment by competent experts external to UCL.

26 From the examples seen by the audit team, it was clear that programme approval documentation contained a full range of quality, standards and programme related information for an effective assessment of the academic and financial viability of proposals. This assessment is made by suitably qualified and independent groups at each level in the pyramidal structure, with the added confidence given by having external input. The documentation illustrated that considerations at each stage were rigorous, added value progressively and illustrated the opportunity the processes offered for constructive dialogue among peers. The team was of the view that the programme approval process in place and in operation in UCL was able to ensure that the standards of awards were established at this stage, and that these standards were set at levels at least commensurate with the expectations of all relevant reference points.

27 UCL has in place a process for the annual monitoring of programmes, which has been subject to revision in the recent past and rolled out for implementation in all discipline areas from session 2007-08 (see paragraph 8). The process is fully supported by guidance, timetables and report templates for use at course unit, head of programme, head of department and faculty levels. Staff at each level in the process are supported by the availability of a comprehensive student statistical data set, which adds significantly to the effectiveness of the process. The completed report templates seen by the audit team were of a high standard and illustrated the integration of the consideration of external examiner comments into the overall monitoring activity. The consideration of the progressive monitoring reports prepared at departmental, faculty and institutional level, and those produced by chairs of the relevant boards of examiners together with institutional consideration of student related data sets, makes a significant and tangible contribution to the maintenance of award standards at departmental, faculty and institutional level.

28 Following a previously unsatisfactory experience with a scheme for the periodic review of programmes, UCL has reconfirmed its commitment to the need for such a process by the introduction from the 2008-09 session of Augmented Annual Monitoring, which will operate at departmental level every fifth year.

29 The initial step of the Augmented Annual Monitoring process, for those departments involved in the 2008-09 session, had been taken at the time of the audit with the publication of the relevant, longitudinal, student statistical information that underpins the process. External scrutiny will be a feature of Augmented Annual Monitoring and, although no outcome documentation from the process was available to the audit team at the time of the audit,

the team felt that, as an essentially programme focused process, UCL will rely increasingly on it in the future in order to further demonstrate its firm oversight of award standards and maintain its alignment with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA.

30 In addition to the Annual, and Augmented Annual Monitoring of programmes, UCL reviews the operations of departments every five years. The documentation relating to this process of Internal Quality Review is modelled on published good practice information and includes student statistical information that allows evaluation of departmental alignment with institutional objectives and legislative requirements. The audit team found that the process demonstrated critical self-awareness at departmental, faculty and institution levels, and demonstrated positive engagement with the analysis of student performance and the comments of external examiners. The outcomes of Internal Quality Review, and the external input to them, were subject to rigorous consideration by the institution and used to encourage improvement and to identify good practice which was disseminated across the institution efficiently and effectively. Indeed the team concluded that the Internal Quality Review process, especially its capacity to capture aspects of good practice for institution-wide dissemination, is a feature of good practice (also see paragraph 78).

31 The quality of the institutional guidance available to staff on the approval, monitoring and review of programmes and related processes was one of the contributory factors in the identification by the audit team of the more general feature of good practice exhibited during the audit relating to the quality, clarity and accessibility of published guidance for staff and students.

32 UCL sets out the roles and responsibilities of its external examiners clearly and fully and the audit team found that all its programmes were subject to the relevant scrutiny. External examiners sit as members of programme-level Boards of Examiners, which in turn report to faculty boards and ultimately the UCL board of examiners, within a rigorous and comprehensive framework of accountability. The team found that conditions for appointment were appropriate for the engagement of competent and independent external examiners and that local support was given to help induct new examiners to their role.

33 External examiners' reports are defined by an institutional template, which allows examiners to comment fully on the standards of awards and the performance of students in relation to these standards. The audit team was also able to confirm that external examiners' reports were subject to careful scrutiny at a variety of levels in the institution and that examiners received appropriate responses to their comments in an, overall, timely manner. The comments of all external examiners are reviewed and analysed at institutional level and, in addition to oversight from the Academic Committee, form a significant source of noteworthy practice, which is integrated with that arising from other sources and disseminated widely across the institution.

34 In relation to the operation of its external examiner system and the other aspects of the assessment of students, the audit team found UCL to be conscientious in its alignment with the *Code of practice, The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*, the expectations of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, the Bologna process and other relevant external reference points. UCL also has in place appropriate mechanisms that enable it to remain responsive to changes in such reference points and to ensure that its programme specifications remain up to date in this regard. At the time of the audit, UCL was, however, still considering the extent to which institutional oversight of the relationship between discipline areas and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies might be extended.

35 UCL has, over recent years, developed, maintained and promoted a wide range of assessment-related policy, regulatory and practical matters. Many of these are covered by an Assessment Strategy and relate to the institutional approach described in its Learning and Teaching Strategy, which the audit team found to be reflected in the discipline-level learning

and teaching strategies and UCL's critical evaluation and review of them. Key among these developments has been the introduction of a harmonised scheme of undergraduate awards which, for students entering from the 2005-06 session, sets out the agreed common principles for the construction of programmes of units that lead to awards, from which institution-level approval must be sought for any regulatory or other deviation.

36 Major progress has been made in the harmonisation of processes across UCL (for example, the undergraduate harmonised scheme of award), although, as the records of sources such as Internal Quality Review and annual monitoring confirm, more needs to be done. Like UCL itself, the audit team identified a number of areas of inconsistency in policy and practice across departments, such as the variability in quality and timeliness of assessment feedback to students. Although subject to ongoing debate in a variety of fora, the team considered it advisable that, in the light of previous progress on harmonisation, and in order to consolidate further the equivalence of the student learning experience, UCL should maintain its momentum towards achieving the institutional coherence on regulatory and academic processes identified by its own committees (see, for example, paragraph 99). Even where academic processes have been harmonised, the team found examples where not all departments were aligned, a matter well known to UCL through the operation of its quality management processes. Consequently, the team also advises that, where an institutional position has been reached on the harmonisation and simplification of regulatory and academic processes, UCL should seek to achieve full and timely departmental engagement and alignment (see paragraphs 72, 80 and 104, for example).

37 Notwithstanding the above, the audit team found that, in general, UCL has in place rules and regulations relating to student progression, assessment and awards that are clear and provide for the appropriate treatment of students across the institution. This situation is enhanced by the significant progress that has been made in the provision of student performance data to boards of examiners in support of their considerations. The guidance supporting this overall framework of assessment also contributes to the feature of good practice identified by the team relating to the quality, clarity and accessibility of published guidance for staff and students.

38 From its detailed consideration of the management information available in support of UCL's quality management and enhancement processes, the audit team found that UCL now had a student information management system in place that is of significant value to staff and students who are gaining confidence in the accuracy of the data it contains. In addition, the system provides for a range of data analyses for use at institutional level in its ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of its policies, planning processes and actions.

39 Overall, the audit found that UCL's management of academic standards is robust and operating as intended. The consistent application of the institution's regulations and associated guidance reflect consideration of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure. There is effective use of external input in approval and review processes and effective use of management information in the establishment and maintenance of the academic standards of awards. There is also strong and scrupulous use of external examiners in the summative assessment of provision. All of these features support a judgement of confidence in the soundness of UCL's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

40 UCL's approach to the management of learning opportunities is defined in a range of linked strategies, all of which articulate with the key overarching strategic aims of the institution. They include the Institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy, discipline-level learning and teaching strategies, the Library Strategy, the Information Strategy and the Strategy for Human Resources. The strategies are subject to regular review and revision. The Institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy was found to be particularly well embedded in the academic culture of the institution.

41 For new programmes, the consideration of the Programme Institution Questionnaire includes scrutiny by the Library Services, Information Systems and the Disability Co-ordinator, which, together with the academic scrutiny by the external expert and an internal approval group, ensures that appropriate resources are in place to support the proposed learning. As programmes mature, the learning opportunities they offer are protected by defined procedures of approval covering both substantial modifications and more minor changes. The interests of students are similarly protected by the procedures for the closure of programmes that are applied when programmes become non-viable because of falling recruitment.

42 The monitoring and review processes are designed and operate to assure the quality of provision and department's management of it, including the continuing access of students to appropriate learning resources.

43 The audit team found that students have ample opportunity to make their views known on the quality of their learning experience and the resources that support it, at programme, departmental, faculty and institutional levels, through a variety of mechanisms. This includes questionnaires, membership of departmental staff-student consultative committees, and student representation on UCL's standing committees and sub-committees. The guidance on these processes provided for both staff and students, which takes account of good practice identified through the institution's quality management and enhancement procedures, is both comprehensive and helpful. Students endorsed fully the value of these opportunities but were less positive about the extent to which the actions taken in response to their views are signalled.

44 The audit team was able to identify the contribution student feedback made to the quality management and enhancement procedures operating in the institution, and the conscientious manner in which this was addressed at all levels. The outcomes of external surveys of student views, such as the National Student Survey, are also considered by UCL, particularly in the context of the Joint Staff-Student Committee, where students have a direct route into the deliberative structures of the institution.

45 The audit team came to the view that UCL has in place effective means to inform itself of the views of students and demonstrates the value it places on the views of students through the actions it seeks to take in the light of such views. However, the feedback to students on such actions is not always fully effective.

46 At the institutional level, student feedback and representation are considered through the committee system, especially in Academic Committee, the Joint Staff-Student Committee and the Quality Management and Enhancement Committee. The latter committee is pivotal in the review and development of UCL's student feedback and representation structures and processes. The audit team observed a number of occasions where student feedback had led to institutional-level action, for example in the piloting of a new personal tutoring system.

47 At departmental and faculty level, representation is initiated by departments. UCL operates a system of student academic representatives at undergraduate level, and postgraduate students are represented through departmental and faculty committees. Representation is brought to the attention of students in a variety of ways and training, provided by the Students' Union, is advertised widely. The audit team identified that there was some room for improvement in representation through filling vacancies at faculty level and improving representation by postgraduate students on taught programmes.

48 Staff-student committees operate at departmental and institutional levels and, where appropriate, at programme or faculty levels. Minutes of these committees are circulated widely. The Joint Staff-Student Committee, chaired by the Dean of Students (Welfare), is a pivotal committee, as it receives departmental staff-student consultative committees's minutes and the outcomes from major student surveys. Departments must reflect on student representation and feedback in their self-evaluative statement and student panels are interviewed as part of the Internal Quality Review process.

49 Students' Union representatives reported good communications with senior members of UCL staff and described the relationship as constructive. Sabbatical officers meet with the Provost twice per term, have issues-based meetings and have access via email.

50 The audit team found that UCL has a culture of engagement with student opinion and involves its students in committee work at departmental, faculty and institutional level, in its quality assurance processes and in working groups set up to investigate specific issues. The team concluded that UCL has effective arrangements for student involvement in its quality management processes.

51 UCL is a research intensive institution that values and promotes links between research and teaching. Learning takes place in an intensive research environment, which is reflected in its teaching and learning strategies and its policy statements. All members of academic staff are expected to teach as well as undertake research, and the promotion policy is explicit that the highest grades are only open to staff who teach to a high standard. The strong link that UCL has between teaching and research is considered by the institution to be a defining characteristic of what it offers to students. The audit team found this to be something valued by the students they met, who saw access to cutting-edge research as a key part of their higher education experience. The team found this to be a strength of the institution.

52 The link between research and teaching can also be found in institutional strategies. Research is routinely embedded into programmes through, for example, cutting-edge content, dissertations in undergraduate degrees, research projects in master's degrees and contributions to teaching by research leaders. UCL involves academic members of staff in the development of the Institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy through mechanisms such as Town Meetings, which complement the formal deliberative structures. The institution also makes use of staff research and scholarship in programme design. Overall, the audit team observed effective institutional arrangements for monitoring links between research and learning opportunities for students.

53 A relatively small number of UCL students undertake study away from the campus for a substantial part of their programme. All students studying away from the campus are well supported by resources such as website materials and handbooks. There is also a small Study Abroad programme which is supported by a team of staff in the International Office. The support provided by this team for students prior to, during and after their time abroad was praised both by members of staff and students. The overall quality of support materials for these modes of study was of a uniformly high standard and this forms part of the evidence for the feature of good practice relating to the quality, clarity and accessibility of published guidance for staff and students.

54 UCL aims to provide a level of learning resources commensurate with its position as a leading research-intensive institution. Library Services are fully integrated into the committee structure with library committees occurring at departmental, faculty and institutional level. The Director of Library Services is a member of key senior committees. There is a Library Strategy, which identifies 10 key programme areas for development in the period 2005 to 2010, including Learning and Teaching Support; Widening access and Participation, and Supporting the Student Experience.

55 There are well established mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on the management of Library Services. Faculty and departmental library committees are required to monitor the effectiveness of Library Services. The library regularly seeks feedback from students on its services via annual questionnaires, meetings with Students' Union officers, and at departmental staff student committee meetings. In addition, departments liaise with the library via subject librarians.

56 Information technology is managed by the Information Services Division, which is funded centrally but, as in the case of the library, can gain additional funding for specific projects. The Information Services Division coordinates the development and implementation of the information strategy and has a wide brief encompassing support for research, administration, management information, the information technology network, cluster rooms, audio-visual aids,

website management and training. It also has responsibility for the virtual learning environment which supports a large number of courses. The Information Services Division has a dedicated team, the Learning Technologies Support Service, which provides support, advice and training in the use of e-learning. Staff and students are supported in developing their skills in the use of the virtual learning environment through a number of routes for training and development in information technology, including a drop-in Open Learning Centre, online courses and surgeries for postgraduate students. Student feedback is evaluated annually and key performance indicators are used to monitor the effectiveness of information technology provision.

57 Students were generally satisfied with the level and quality of resources that the institution provided, although there were some concerns about the pressure on learning space. However, overall, the audit team formed the view that the provision of library and information technology services was good and that the provision was being reviewed regularly and systematically to ensure that the learning resources kept pace with new approaches and patterns of study. The team found the institutional arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of learning resources to be effective.

58 UCL does not operate a unified admissions policy, rather admissions are dealt with in a number of strategy documents. However, the key principles which underpin admissions in the institution are spelled out and are understood clearly by members of staff who operate the processes. Any changes in the admissions processes are communicated to staff through emails, and in the case of major changes, members of staff are brought together from across the institution. Guidance on the admissions processes is accessible to all members of staff and departments in the online Academic Manual, which is updated regularly. The admissions process is underpinned by appropriate management information.

59 UCL has a minimum intake grade threshold based on entry qualifications. Safeguards have been put in place to ensure that no lower offers are made, although the audit team heard that there was limited flexibility for potential undergraduate students who have not achieved their precise offer conditions but have achieved equivalent grades. The team learned that, where practicable, all UK-domiciled undergraduate applicants are interviewed and that UCL feels that this is a strength of its admissions process. Interviewing all potential students represents a considerable input of resource into the admissions process and demonstrates the commitment UCL has to attracting high-calibre students.

60 Evidence to assess the effectiveness of the processes is outcomes based. Service standards for the processing of applications exist at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and are understood by the staff operating the processes. The review of recruitment and admissions is part of the annual monitoring process, and all departments and faculties must evaluate their performance through this mechanism.

61 Overall, the audit team found that UCL demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that it maintains a consistent and responsive admissions system. Members of staff are aware of the importance to UCL of attracting and recruiting high ability students and the admissions processes and their implementation have been designed to make this a reality. The team found that UCL is effective in ensuring the consistent implementation of its admissions policy.

62 There is a broad range of student services to support students and the management of these is distributed throughout the institution. UCL is working to bring these together and is in the process of developing a virtual student services hub to improve students' access to the services.

63 The management of student support services is also distributed and is brought together through the committee structure. The students' experience of the support services is reported through the Student Welfare Co-ordinating Committee, the staff-student committees and the Internal Quality Review process. Good practice is captured and is disseminated through the 'Gold Book', which gives guidance at departmental, faculty and institutional level that aims to enhance the students' experience of academic and pastoral support.

64 Students are provided with a personal tutor, whose work is overseen by a departmental tutor, who then reports to the faculty tutor. This system is overseen by the Dean of Students (Welfare). The experience of students in terms of personal tutoring was reported as variable and the audit team heard accounts of patchy and inconsistent provision between departments. Through its own recognition of these weaknesses in the existing system of personal tutoring, UCL has undertaken a review of its provision and has implemented a pilot personal tutoring system in a small number of departments. The scheme includes a higher frequency of tutorial meetings, provision of pastoral care and key skills. UCL has developed a Key Skills Handbook to support this work and the team heard from students that they valued this development.

65 The audit team saw a range of materials that has been produced to provide information to students, including handbooks, manuals, websites for each of the services and factsheets. One of the main ways for students to gain access to the wide range of support services available to them is via UCL's website, which signposts students to the support available. Once again the quality of the support materials provided in written form and on the web is of a very high standard.

66 UCL provides student induction in the first week, which is preceded by an international students' induction for those coming to the UK to study. Over and above induction, UCL had identified that there was a particular need to focus resource on supporting students in their transition on entry to the institution. Through the Transitions programme, students are provided with access to web-based materials, training, mentoring by experienced students, information sessions and key skills workshops. Over half of the departments are now taking part in the Transitions programme and the institution intends to roll it out universally in 2009-10. The audit team identified the Transitions programme that supports the transition of first-year undergraduate students into higher education as a feature of good practice.

67 The audit team heard that UCL had identified careers and employability as an area to develop. While good quality careers advice is available to all students through the Careers Service, the institution wishes to embed employability and careers advice further into departments, as it recognises that careers education delivered in departments can be variable. This is seen as part of the key skills development that underpins the institution's work on personal tutoring.

68 UCL has well established and clearly documented procedures for disciplinary action and complaints. The audit team heard that students considered that the arrangements were comprehensive and fair but that they took a long time to work through.

69 Overall, the audit team concluded that UCL provides students with a comprehensive support service which meets the needs of the different constituencies. The institution is working towards bringing these services together through the development of a virtual hub, which it hopes will help students identify the services they need through even clearer signposting. There was evidence that academic staff considered they had a role in ensuring students felt supported in terms of their programmes and there were well developed links with central support and specialist referral services.

70 The audit team found evidence to support UCL's own view that it 'has a comprehensive framework for the support, recognition and development of its staff'. Its policies and practices are described clearly on the Human Resources website. UCL has policies that cover induction, probation, appraisal, staff review, development and promotion, and examples of good practice are available in the Gold Book. Human resource processes take account of the different categories of staff employed by the institution.

71 Staff induction is supported at institutional level by an online programme that is available for members of staff to work through at their own pace and which is maintained as a reference for staff at a later point. New members of staff are supported through a probationary period and are allocated a mentor from their own discipline. The audit team heard that members of staff feel that there is a culture of mutual support in the institution, wherein established members of senior staff provide support for less experienced colleagues.

72 UCL has operated peer observation of teaching, as a developmental process, since the mid-1990s and the current system has been in place since 2004. Training is provided and departments are required to keep a record of trained observers. It is a confidential process and the feedback given is motivational rather than judgemental. Departments produce their own guidelines on peer observation of teaching consistent with institutional policy. The audit team found, however, that the adherence to institutional policy on peer observation of teaching by departments is not universal. UCL is aware of this and is working to improve the take-up and reporting mechanisms (see paragraph 80).

73 There are clear guidelines published to advise members of staff on the institutional processes for promotion. Promotion to a chair is possible on the basis of research or on outstanding teaching including a strong element of innovation. Teaching excellence is a key element of progression and all members of academic staff are expected to teach in order to progress.

74 Staff development is provided by the Organisational and Staff Development Team together with the Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching. UCL provides a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, accredited by the Higher Education Academy, which is mandatory for new staff without teaching experience.

75 UCL maintains electronic systems to record training for members of staff and postgraduate students. Records are updated automatically each time a training event is attended. Heads of Department are able to access the electronic records for staff in their disciplines and monitor the uptake of training. Members of staff are expected to undertake a minimum number of development and training events each year. The training record is used proactively by human resources to flag up to members of the institution relevant training events and provide information to managers for review and appraisal activities. The audit team identified the institution's use of interactive electronic logs to record and monitor both staff training and research student training and progress as a feature of good practice (see paragraph 96).

76 The audit team found that UCL's systems for the management of learning opportunities were broad in scope, fit for purpose and operating as intended. UCL engages well with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. There is an extensive framework for student participation in quality assurance. UCL is a research-intensive institution that maintains links between research, scholarly activity and the curriculum. Resource allocation procedures are effective, as are the institution's arrangements for student support. Students are well provided with resources for learning, and there are effective arrangements for staff development and support. These features support a judgement of confidence in the soundness of UCL's current and likely future management of learning opportunities.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

77 The approach taken by UCL to managing quality enhancement is that quality assurance and quality enhancement are two aspects of the same process; they are inseparable, and both must be embedded not only in the institutional structures and processes but also within the institutional culture. This philosophy is exemplified by the process of Internal Quality Review, which is said to enable issues to be explored across a broad range using peer review by fellow academics drawn mostly from key institutional-level committees, thus facilitating a two-way exchange of viewpoints. The submission of review reports to faculty teaching committees affords the exposure of outcomes (recommendations and good practice) at faculty level, while the participation of academics from sister institutions allows UCL to learn of good practice elsewhere.

78 Of particular significance, in the audit team's view, is the role of the Internal Quality Review Panel of the Quality Management and Enhancement Committee. This panel considers the report resulting from a review and also considers the follow-up action taken by the department concerned after one year, in discussion with the relevant head of department. The panel then also compiles an annual overview report summarising good practice identified during its

deliberations and recommendations made to departments surveyed during that year, which is disseminated widely. From its scrutiny of examples of documentation utilised in, and emanating from, Internal Quality Review, the team concluded that the process acted as an effective means of achieving quality enhancement in a thoroughly systematic way and its operation should be judged to be a feature of good practice (see paragraph 30).

79 The annual monitoring process (see paragraph 27) was designed to encourage reflection on practice, identification of opportunities for enhancement, and sharing of good practice at all levels of the institution, starting from the course unit level up to Academic Committee. The requirement that the departmental summary report be discussed by the Departmental Teaching Committee is intended to ensure discussion by staff and student representatives of department-wide issues. Submission of the annual monitoring reports for scrutiny at faculty teaching committees ensures faculty-level awareness of issues raised in the reports. From the audit team's scrutiny of a number of annual monitoring reports, it concluded that annual monitoring had developed into an effective process, not only in maintaining quality and standards, but also in achieving enhancement.

80 UCL has operated peer observation of teaching since the mid-1990's. Peer observation of teaching is regarded as a purely developmental process, unconnected with performance appraisal, that is intended to enhance teaching quality through formative and summative feedback. Academic staff indicated to the audit team that peer observation was practised and found to be of benefit in enhancing an individual's teaching skills and proficiency. The team noted that Quality Management and Enhancement Committee had recorded that monitoring of peer observation had taken place in 2007-08 in only six faculty teaching committees. The Quality Management and Enhancement Committee responded by resolving that those faculty teaching committees that had not reported on peer observation be identified and asked to confirm they had received the necessary assurance from departments that it had taken place. The team saw this as an example of the institution's capacity to identify and respond to issues relating to enhancement.

81 In addition to their key role in assuring standards, external examiners are seen as having a role in enhancing ways in which the academic provision can be improved. From its reading of two sets of summaries of external examiners' reports, the audit team noted examples of where enhancement at the institutional level had either occurred, or had the potential so to do. The team concluded that UCL's oversight of external examiners' reports enables it to identify key issues, which therefore contributes to its strategy for enhancement.

82 UCL has identified a number of committees as having a key role in identifying opportunities for, and means of effecting, enhancement. It has also stated that 'most real enhancement activity takes place at [departmental and programme] level and it cannot be imposed or dictated in a top-down manner by institutional level bodies'. The challenge for UCL is articulated as being 'how to provide a facilitative environment within which enhancement can take place at local level and how to ensure that we have effective institutional mechanisms for capturing local good practice and disseminating this more widely across UCL'. Internal Quality Review and annual monitoring, together with departmental learning and teaching strategies, are cited as demonstrating this approach in action. The audit team agreed that Internal Quality Review and annual monitoring, together with the deliberations over the summarising report of issues raised by external examiners, provide an interlocking matrix of reflection that promotes quality enhancement. This supports the view that the enhancement strategy at UCL at institutional level is implicit rather than explicit.

83 It was evident to the audit team that UCL's strategic approach to enhancement is bound up in its approach to quality assurance and, while not explicit, has significantly influenced UCL's structures and processes. This strategy contributes to an institutional culture of enhancement.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

84 UCL has only a small number of partner institutions with which it works in the joint delivery of taught programmes, or in the joint support and supervision of research degrees. It does not engage in franchising programmes for delivery by partners or the validation of partners' provision for the award of a UCL degree. Typically, UCL operates partnerships in which each partner brings an active contribution to the development and delivery of the provision. Examples would include research collaborations, student exchange agreements and intercollegiate teaching within the University of London.

85 The audit team was able to scrutinise in detail papers concerned with the approval, operation and review of two collaborative partnerships. The host department in UCL operated the standard quality management processes scrupulously. The annual monitoring reports were considered by the relevant teaching committees within the department. Also, external examiners had clearly engaged fully with their programmes, and the programme team had considered their comments with care, responding accordingly.

86 As noted in paragraphs 3 and 14, UCL is a member of the Federal University of London but, having now obtained its own degree awarding powers, awards its own degrees rather than those of the University of London. UCL is currently working with other Colleges of the University to establish formal partnerships to continue the delivery of existing University of London awards, where intercollegiate teaching has been the norm. The audit team was reassured that UCL intends to apply its current rigorous approach to such newly-defined arrangements.

87 The audit team noted that UCL had chosen to follow the advice given in the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* with a single exception, namely it does not formally make public a register of its collaborative academic partnerships. The team did, however, find in its scrutiny of publicity material that all collaborative programmes were clearly promoted as such.

88 The audit team came to the conclusion that UCL rigorously applied its normal quality management processes to its limited number of collaborative partnerships. Each collaborative partner and programme had been subject to detailed scrutiny, signed agreements were in place, and annual monitoring and periodic review processes were clearly operating as intended.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

89 The quality of the research environment available to postgraduate research students is evinced by the consistently very high performance in the Research Assessment Exercise, confirmed most recently in the publication of the outcomes of the 2008 Exercise.

90 The Graduate School is responsible for all regulatory matters and quality assurance issues relating to postgraduate research students, in particular compliance with the *Code of practice, Section 1*. UCL's Graduate School Code of Practice maps onto the *Code of practice* and complements the 'Grey Book', UCL's formal Regulations and Procedures for Research Degrees. The Graduate School Code of Practice is updated annually and is designed to help research students by setting out good practice and what students can expect of their principal and subsidiary supervisors and departmental graduate tutors (see paragraph 92), and what is expected of the research students themselves.

91 The Graduate Education Executive Sub-Committee has responsibility for defining, approving and reviewing policies, procedures and regulations in relation to research degree programmes. To discharge these functions, it receives annual reports, such as that on the work of the Graduate School, together with relevant management information. The Sub-Committee's membership includes all faculty graduate tutors (see next paragraph), the deans of students, the Academic Registrar and student representatives.

92 At faculty level, there is a faculty graduate tutor, and either a single faculty teaching committee, which includes the faculty graduate tutor, or a separate graduate teaching committee, chaired by the faculty graduate tutor. At departmental level, each department has a departmental graduate tutor, and most departments have a departmental graduate teaching committee, which reviews all matters relating to research degree programmes. The departmental graduate tutor is a key figure as regards informing supervisors about the support provided centrally. The team concluded that the committee structure and the arrangements for overseeing the supervision and progress of research students were wholly appropriate.

93 Information is delivered principally via the web. The Code of Practice and handbooks is also available in hard copy. Research students met by the audit team expressed general satisfaction with the quality and accuracy of the information they had received. The team found that the Graduate School Code of Practice for Research 2007-08 provided a short but very clear exposition of the structures, processes and regulations relevant to a research student.

94 Students registering since 2007-08 have done so for a UCL rather than a University of London research degree. The Head of the Graduate School remains a member of the University of London Research Degrees Committee.

95 The Higher Education Statistics Agency produces research degree completion rates annually, which are reported and included in the Graduate School Annual Report. Qualification rates are high for home and European Union students; for overseas students the qualifying rate is somewhat lower, such that UCL has identified a need to improve on all completion rates.

96 The online Research Student Log is a web-based tool for students to document their progress and skills development training. It was noted as a feature of good practice in the 2006 Review of research degree programmes. Although its use is mandatory, take-up in some departments has been described as variable. Nonetheless, all students met by the audit team had engaged with the Log and found it to be a useful tool. Supervisors met by the team indicated that the Log enabled them to track the participation of students in training events or in writing up accounts of the outcomes of supervisions. All members of the supervisory team are required to sign off the Log at six-monthly intervals. Notwithstanding the element of variability associated with utilisation of the Student Log, the team judged it to be an effective means of students and staff maintaining an accurate picture of progress both in research and training, and to be a feature of good practice which had been generally well-received by staff and students (see paragraph 75).

97 Admission is based on the candidate's ability to meet requirements of the programme. The process is handled by the Admissions Office in Registry. Two members of staff are involved in decisions. The admissions process is consistent with the precepts of the *Code of practice*. The Graduate School provides induction sessions for new research students, which are supplemented by departmental sessions and an orientation programme for international students. Separate sessions are provided on using the Research Student Log and the Skills Development Programme. Students met by the audit team spoke positively about their experiences of admission and induction.

98 Regulations regarding the supervisory process are set out in the Grey Book. All students have a Supervisory Panel including at least a Principal Supervisor and Subsidiary Supervisor. Student progress is monitored by the graduate tutors at department and faculty levels. The Departmental Graduate Tutor is charged with solving supervisor-student relations problems. There is a three-part training programme for research supervisors, comprising a mandatory briefing session and a one-day workshop for new supervisors and lunchtime workshops for more experienced supervisors. Recently appointed staff met by the audit team spoke highly of the quality of the one-day course.

99 Most students register initially for MPhil, proceeding to PhD registration by an upgrade process, which should take place not before the end of the first year for full-time students but before 21 months after initial registration. The student's upgrading proposal is considered by an upgrade meeting attended by the Supervisory Panel, the student and the Departmental Graduate

Tutor. The transfer must be recommended by the supervisory team and approved by the Departmental Graduate Tutor. The audit team learned that, whereas the general practice at UCL is for the recommendation for upgrading not to involve the Principal Supervisor, there remains one faculty where this is not the case. The team was informed that this issue is under active consideration. The team viewed this as an example of where the process of harmonisation of practice across the institution needed to be consolidated.

100 The Skills Development Programme offered by the Graduate School was regarded as good practice in the 2006 QAA Review of research degree programmes. It appeared to the audit team to be 'available' rather than mandatory, with a degree of non-participation, except for Research Council-funded students for whom it is mandatory. The various components of the programme are clearly described in the 'Art of Research' handbook, which provides a further example of the general quality, clarity and accessibility of published guidance to students noted by the team.

101 It was confirmed to the audit team that all postgraduate research students assigned to undertake any teaching were required to attend training sessions before commencing teaching.

102 Mechanisms for student feedback include representation of postgraduate research students on UCL committees and on departmental staff-student consultative committees. A member of the Postgraduate Association of the Students' Union plus the Medical and Postgraduates Sabbatical Officer of the Students' Union are members of the Graduate Education Executive Sub-Committee. Also, a biennial anonymous questionnaire engages a majority of postgraduate research students. The audit team's reading of the UCL Graduate School Research Student Survey, July 2008, indicated high levels of satisfaction with feedback from Principal and Subsidiary Supervisors, the overall research environment, and the overall student experience. The team learned from its discussions with Students' Union representatives that they have found it difficult to engage successfully with the postgraduate research student community. It appeared to the team that students found sufficient support from their supervisory team and the Departmental Graduate Tutor, and believed the possibility of raising issues through postgraduate student representation on departmental committees to be adequate, and saw no need to look elsewhere. Students did, however, value the opportunities offered by the Graduate School in training and careers advice.

103 Assessment of research students' theses is made by two examiners, an external examiner and an examiner internal to UCL to ensure consistency. Examiners are required to write independent reports prior to the viva and a joint report after the examination, giving the reasons on which the decision is based. The available recommendations for examiners are listed in MPhil and PhD regulations. The regulations, as set out in the Grey Book, and practices were judged by the audit team to be rigorous.

104 The evaluation by UCL of its arrangements for postgraduate research students is reasonably frank in outlining where practice deviates to some degree from what is laid down, for example: on the extent of usage of the Research Student Log; the training of supervisors before they undertake supervision; and residual deficiencies in the student record system. While the audit team approves of the frankness of this evaluation, it would urge the institution to consolidate further its progress on harmonisation of the student experience.

105 In summary, the audit team concluded that the arrangements for postgraduate research students at UCL were, in general, of a high order, particularly as regards the provision of an outstanding research environment, clear information to students and supervisors, the development of the interactive Research Student Log, and a mature programme of skills training. The evidence considered by the team led it to conclude that the arrangements for postgraduate research students, including those for support, supervision and assessment, were rigorous and effective and met fully the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. The team did, however, identify the need for UCL to harmonise the upgrading progress for MPhil to PhD and to achieve the full engagement of students and staff with the excellent Research Student Log.

Section 7: Published information

106 The audit team had access to a wide range of information published by UCL. This included prospectuses, student handbooks and programme handbooks. The team was provided with access to UCL's website and staff and student intranets, where a large body of the institution's publications and regulations are available, and also to specific departmental intranets.

107 UCL defines in detail the minimum set of information that departments must make available to students. The audit team was able to scrutinise a number of student and programme handbooks and was able to confirm that the material made available to students both met UCL's requirements, and was appropriate and accurate. UCL's entry on the Unistats website was similarly detailed. The team concluded that the published information is accurate and comprehensive.

108 The Academic Services Department is responsible for ensuring that UCL meets the public information requirements placed on higher education institutions in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's circular 06/45, *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*. In the course of its reading, the audit team was able to confirm that the required information was publicly available all through UCL's internet sites.

109 Procedures for the formal publication of material are well-documented. The processes clearly define those responsible for auditing and approving the accuracy of both institution and programme-specific information.

110 The student written submission and students who met the audit team confirmed that, overall, students were pleased with their experiences regarding information published about both the institution and their courses.

111 The audit team found the quality, clarity and accessibility of published guidance for staff and students to be a feature of good practice. The team concluded that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that UCL 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

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

- the quality, clarity and accessibility of published guidance for staff and students (paragraphs 21, 31, 37, 43, 53, 65, 93, 100 and 111)
- the Internal Quality Review process, especially its capacity to capture aspects of good practice for institution-wide dissemination (paragraphs 30 and 78)
- the Transitions programme that supports the transition of first-year undergraduate students into higher education (paragraph 66)
- the institution's use of interactive electronic logs to record and monitor both staff training and research student training and progress (paragraphs 75 and 96).

Recommendations for action

113 The audit team recommends that UCL consider further action in some areas.

The team advises that:

- in the light of previous progress on harmonisation, and in order to consolidate further the equivalence of the student learning experience, UCL should maintain its momentum towards achieving the institutional coherence on regulatory and academic processes identified by its own committees (paragraphs 36 and 99)
- where an institutional position has been reached on the harmonisation and simplification of regulatory and academic processes, UCL should seek to achieve full and timely departmental engagement and alignment (paragraphs 36, 72, 80 and 104).

Appendix

University College London's response to the Institutional audit report

UCL warmly welcomes the audit report and the judgement that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness our current and likely future management of the academic standards of our awards and of the management of the learning opportunities that we make available to our students.

We are pleased that the audit team has highlighted a number of points of good practice in its report, as well as other strengths of our approach to assuring and enhancing the quality of our provision, in particular the strong link between research and teaching at UCL.

The process of preparing for the audit provided us with a useful opportunity to reflect on our own structures and processes for quality management and enhancement. The two recommendations in the audit team's report will assist us as we continue to harmonise, simplify, and ensure full engagement with, those structures and processes. Academic Committee has established a working group to consider the audit report in detail and to consider the action that UCL should take in response to the audit team's specific recommendations and other points arising from the report. The working group will be submitting a report and implementation plan to Academic Committee at its first meeting in the autumn term 2009.

Finally, we would like to thank the audit team for the care that they have taken in preparing their report, as well as for the critical yet constructive and courteous way in which they conducted the audit.

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