University College London

March 2009

Annex to the report

Contents

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.

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.

Institutional arrangements for 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 met fully 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 of good practice:

- the quality, clarity and accessibility of published guidance for staff and students (paragraphs 29, 35, 54, 88, 96, 138, 156, 194, 201 and 215)

- the Internal Quality Review process, especially its capacity to capture aspects of good practice for institution-wide dissemination (paragraphs 51, 115 and 172)

- the Transitions programme that supports the transition of first-year undergraduate students into higher education (paragraph 157)

- the institution's use of interactive electronic logs to record and monitor both staff training and research student training and progress (paragraphs 167 and 197).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- 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 84, 98, and 203)

- 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 84, 99, 163, 174 and 206).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   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.

2   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.

3   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 United Kingdom (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 (see paragraphs 179-188).

4   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. 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.

The information base for the audit

5   UCL provided the audit team with a Briefing Paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The index to 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 a hard copy of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper; in addition, the team had access to the institution's intranet and departmental intranets.

6   The Students' Union (UCLU) produced a student written submission (SWS), which set out the students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management.

7   In addition, the audit team had access to:

●   the report of the previous Institutional audit (March 2005)

●   the report of QAA's Major review of healthcare programmes, 2005

●   the report of QAA's Review of postgraduate research programmes (2006).

●   reports produced by other relevant bodies (in particular, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies)

●   UCL's internal documents

●   the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

8   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'.

9   The features of good practice identified were UCL's integrated international strategy; its innovative and considered approach to developing, and the strategic approach to implementing the equality action plan; the induction, mentoring and development of the teaching skills of new members of staff; and 'the close coordination of tutorial and supervisory support and student advisory and counselling services, in which the Dean of Students plays a key role'.

10   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'. UCL interpreted this recommendation as meaning 'as expeditiously as possible, consistent with getting it right', and to achieve this it was regarded by the Quality Management and Enhancement Committee (QMEC) as essential 'to ensure the process was seen as credible by the academic community'. A process of consultation took place under the aegis of QMEC's Quality Strategy Review Group (QSRG). A new annual monitoring template was developed in an incremental way and then piloted in a number of departments in 2006-07. A notable feature aimed at reducing the workload on departments was the provision by Registry of key student statistical data. Progress in the pilot exercise was notified to QMEC and Academic Committee (AC) in late 2006, and the new annual monitoring process was formally introduced from session 2007-08. A full evaluation report was submitted by QMEC to AC in October 2008, which confirmed that there had been full participation by departments and faculties, with the process being viewed as basically sound, but with the need for further refinements that were introduced for 2008-09. The audit team's reading of a sample of annual monitoring reports, and its noting of the institution's intention to introduce an additional augmented annual monitoring process, led it to conclude that the recommendation had received a full response.

11   The second recommendation suggested that UCL might complement its intention of reviewing the quality and accuracy of programme specifications by a system designed to identify best practice and convince departmental-level academic staff of programme specifications' potential to enhance the student learning experience. A Working Group of QMEC was set up to review UCL's policy and procedures in relation to the preparation of programme specifications. This group reported to QMEC in March 2007, reaffirming UCL's position that programme specifications were not primarily intended to be a source of information for students and other stakeholders and that relevant information should be provided in more accessible formats. It resolved that a programme specification should continue to be an integral part of UCL's

programme approval process; the Programme Institution Questionnaire (PIQ) should continue to include the programme specification template, and a review of programme specifications should be incorporated into the regularised annual monitoring and augmented annual monitoring processes.

12   The 2005 audit's third recommendation referred to the desirability of UCL ensuring that in future all external examiners be advised in a timely manner of the formal response to their reports. Acting upon this recommendation, the UCL Board of Examiners (UCLBE) reminded faculties that all chairs of boards of examiners' annual reports should be sent to the external examiner in a timely fashion. UCLBE also requested that all faculties provide their summary spreadsheets of external examiners' comments and responses made by the chair of the board of examiners in their annual report to UCLBE more rapidly in future. The current deadlines for faculty reports are the autumn term meeting of UCLBE for undergraduate examiners' reports and the spring term meeting for postgraduate ones. These deadlines are claimed to enable UCLBE to be much more dynamic in its considerations and in reporting on issues to AC. This seemed a reasonable response to the team.

13   The fourth recommendation referred to the desirability of UCL ensuring that the student representation and feedback systems operate effectively throughout the institution. There have been three major reviews by QMEC of UCL's student representation and feedback systems since the 2005 audit, comprising: Working Group on Student Feedback (session 2005-06); Working Group on Student Support Feedback (session 2006-07); Working Group on Student Feedback Provision (session 2006-07). These working groups produced a number of recommendations designed to improve effectiveness in the areas of student representation, student evaluation questionnaires, feedback on UCL central services and various external surveys such as the National Student Survey and the International Student Barometer. A Senior Teaching Fellow was appointed to the Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CALT) to enhance processes of feedback to students on formative assessment by organising workshops for staff to explore feedback in different ways. The audit team formed the view, from its scrutiny of relevant minutes, and associated annexes of QMEC and AC, that UCL had responded particularly effectively to this recommendation (see paragraphs 116-131).

14   The fifth recommendation expressed the desirability of UCL's taking optimal advantage of the strategic benefits in information management and communication afforded by its new record system. The Briefing Paper gave an extensive account of the consideration given to replacing the former in-house system in favour of a commercial system. The PORTICO programme was introduced in four distinct phases starting from August 2003. For example, in 2006-07, the new system was utilised for the capture, recording and reporting of student information, and a significant number of new processes were scheduled for delivery, including examination timetabling and administration of assessment and awards. The Briefing Paper commented that the expansion of the demands made on PORTICO had raised a number of problems, not least those identified in a number of external examiners' reports for the session 2006-07. The Briefing Paper conceded that insufficient resources had been devoted to the development and implementation of PORTICO and additional resources had subsequently been assigned. In addition, a revised structure was introduced for oversight of the PORTICO project. The SWS reported that, from the student user viewpoint, the PORTICO service had been radically improved. The audit team learnt from its discussions with postgraduate supervisors that the system provided ready information about individual student progress. The team also noted that external examiners had recorded improvement in the functioning of PORTICO in the 2007-08 session but that some issues remained to be resolved.

15   The final recommendation related to the desirability of reviewing 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 (PGTAs) was introduced in October 2006 setting out policy on, inter alia, the selection, training and monitoring of PGTAs.

More recently, in response to the 2007 UCL 'White Paper', guidance on the provision of teaching opportunities for postgraduate research students and early career research staff, endorsed by AC in March 2008, had been circulated to all departments. From meeting students, the audit team learnt of the training provided to postgraduate research students and graduate teaching assistants. The team was also informed that no student is allowed to undertake even modest levels of teaching of undergraduates without appropriate training.

16   From its extensive analysis of documents made available, 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.

17   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.

18   The Briefing Paper listed seven significant developments since the 2005 audit, of which the most significant in the life of UCL 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 operationalise its powers.

19   Other significant developments have been the implementation of a harmonised scheme of undergraduate awards 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; the major review of the structures and processes of QMEC by the QSRG; the merger of the former Fees Committee and Academic Council's Programme Development Executive Sub-Committee to form a new Programme Planning and Development Executive Sub-Committee to ensure that the financial and academic aspects of proposals for new programmes are considered together, and to provide a greater strategic oversight of processes for setting fees and assessing the financial viability of existing programmes; the major restructuring of the Faculty of Biomedical Sciences (formerly the Faculty of Clinical Sciences) and the Faculty of Life Sciences, which together form the 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 (see paragraphs 185-187). Also of note has been the strategic document Modernising UCL, UCL Council's 2007 White Paper which built on a previous UCL Council White Paper published in 2004. The later document proposed a programme of extensive modernisation and simplification across UCL and looks towards further groupings of faculties into larger units. The audit team also regarded the development of the role of deans as being significant; they had acquired budgetary responsibility and viewed themselves as acting collectively rather than in competition, working together as part of the Provost's Senior Management Team (SMT) (see paragraph 28).

Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and learning opportunities

20   Council, the governing body of UCL, includes a majority of appointed lay members, supplemented by a number of elected members of UCL staff. The Provost is an ex officio member of Council, as are the two student members. Council oversees the overall strategic direction and sound 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. The Provost's SMT has wide-ranging executive responsibilities.

21   Academic Board is a large body comprising the institution's Professoriate, a proportion of non-professorial academic staff, and all senior academic staff with executive roles. AB principally retains a high level strategic view for itself, delegating leadership and management of 'all academic matters and questions affecting the educational policy of UCL, the organisation of teaching, examining, research' to AC in respect of teaching and examining) and the Research Strategy Committee (RSC, in respect of research).

22   Inter alia, AC 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'. It is chaired by the Vice-Provost (Academic and International), and includes the Provost, the deans of faculties, both Deans of Students (Academic and Welfare), faculty tutors, the Head of the Graduate School, two sabbatical officers of UCLU, and a range of senior administrative officers.

23   Below AC, UCL'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 AC. Each pyramid has its own particular focus of activity. Matters that cross the various committee boundaries are integrated and managed by cross-committee membership, by deliberation at AC, and, at institutional level, within the broad executive remit of SMT. The audit team initially found the multiplicity of committees and the matrix of pyramids and executive functions to be confusing. However, throughout the course of the audit, the team developed the view that, while the number of deliberative engagements and interactions brings complexity, it also culminates in a well-defined annual academic calendar, which considers matters with rigour, leads to a self-confident approach to institutional academic reflection, and also provides short routes to staff in leadership roles who are able to take executive action at most levels once agreement has been achieved.

24   Principal among the underpinning of pyramids is the link to departments through the faculty and department teaching committees (FTCs and DTCs respectively), all of which operate in accordance with core terms of reference disseminated by AC. FTCs and DTCs have wide academic and student membership and, in addition to their responsibilities with regard to teaching and learning, they assume significant responsibilities within UCL's processes for annual monitoring and periodic review of taught programmes, for consideration of the Internal Quality Review (IQR) of departments, and for considering matters raised by departmental staff-student consultative committees. One particular feature of note is that in addition to normal reporting mechanisms, FTCs submit the minutes of their meetings to the AC officers, who subsequently produce an annual consolidated report for AC which summarises the main emerging themes. That report is also disseminated back to FTCs to identify both common and differing practices, and also to form a central plank in the UCL's approach to enhancement. FTCs may, if they wish, report to their respective faculty boards, but their principal reporting lines are directly to AC or to its various subcommittees, thus shortening communication channels.

25   The day-to-day academic business of UCL is operated by a cluster of executive subcommittees of AC. These include the Graduate Education Executive Sub-Committee, the Programme Planning and Development Executive Sub-Committee, the Executive Sub-Committee on Innovations in Learning, Teaching and Assessment and subcommittees responsible for teaching space and physical resources, amongst others. The Undergraduate Education Executive Sub-Committee (UEESC) has conducted little business during the last two years, its work having being subsumed within that of other subcommittees, and its future is currently under review.

26   Also reporting to AC 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 the UCL Board of Examiners, which makes the final recommendations for awards by UCL; QMEC, which is responsible for operating most of the UCL's quality management processes; the Joint Staff Student Committee, responsible for considering matters of concern and interest to

students across UCL and, in particular, considers the results of both internal and external surveys of students; the Committee for the Recruitment and Admission of Students, which formulates and monitors the implementation of policy in this area; and other committees that consider equal opportunities, student welfare, residential accommodation and careers.

27   According to its Briefing Paper, UCL attempts to 'strike an appropriate balance between trust and accountability, with processes which seek to delineate clearly the respective responsibilities of staff and bodies at institutional-, faculty- and departmental-level', and to operate quality management and enhancement processes that 'are based on peer review by fellow academic staff who are active in research and teaching'. The audit team was able to confirm, through its scrutiny of the evidence provided, that UCL's assertion that 'there is active involvement of academic staff at all levels in QME [quality management and enhancement] operations at department, faculty and institutional levels' was true.

28   The audit team was able to scrutinise records of committee operations, and explore the involvement of UCL's deliberative framework in the development and implementation of major academic change (see sections 2 and 3 in particular for further detail). The 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 matrix 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.

29   Central to UCL's framework for the management of standards and quality is the detailed advice and guidance in the Academic Manual which is available electronically, both internally and externally. The manual provides a thorough explanation of all processes and procedures. The audit team noted the clarity and value of this document which sets a high standard for information published within the institution.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

30   As relevant context, UCL states that its 'academic standards and the quality of its educational provision depend principally on the quality of the staff' who design and deliver programmes and 'on the ability, potential and achievement of the students who pursue those programmes'. UCL expects its quality management and enhancement processes to be fit for purpose; efficient; proportionate; integrated; devolved as close as possible to programme-level staff; able to balance trust and accountability; robust with beneficial flexibility, and to be subject to external evaluation, guidance, review and monitoring. The audit team, through its consideration of the documentation provided to it, and by discussion with staff and students, explored how the processes described and the pyramidal structure of institution-level committees reporting to AC and the link between committees at departmental, faculty and institution levels, described elsewhere in this annex (paragraphs 23-24), supported academic standards in such a context.

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

31   As noted in paragraph 19, in 2006 a new Programme Planning and Development Executive Sub-committee (PPDExSCo) was established 'in order to ensure that the financial and academic aspects of proposals for new programmes of study are considered together and to provide a greater strategic oversight of our processes for setting fees and assessing the financial viability of existing programmes of study'. As a subcommittee of AC with delegated powers, PPDExSCo has oversight of the strategy and policy relating to programme planning and of the operation and the recommendations made by the Programme and Course Approval Steering Group (PCASG).

32   In addition to the description of the approval process given in the Briefing Paper and the guidance proposers are given with respect to programme design and structure in the Academic Manual, the audit team was provided with a documentary trail relating to the approval of new programmes and the necessary schedule to be followed. From this, the team was able to confirm the operation and effectiveness of the process. The process is initiated via completion of a Programme Institution Questionnaire (PIQ) form by the proposers, subject to alignment of the initiative with departmental strategic priorities and plans. The PIQ requires the presentation of a full range of standards related information that includes the structure of the programme, entrance requirements, method of study, credit rating (in ECTS), total student learning time, and contact hours. The proposed scheme of award and associated degree regulations must also be provided, together with how the proposal articulates with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and relevant subject benchmark statements.

33   The PIQ also requires the presentation of a programme specification which is subject to institutional guidance that follows general sector expectations in respect of the use made of both internal and external reference points (see paragraphs 68-77). The institution provides comprehensive guidance on the requirements for programme specifications, including worked examples using the approved template and links to external sites relating to the FHEQ and benchmark statements. The PIQs seen by the audit team were considered by them to contain a full range of quality, standards and programme information and the confirmations necessary for the PCASG, itself made up of appropriately independent individuals, to assess the academic and financial viability of the proposal. The PIQ prompts proposers to consider the full range of external reference points and record the endorsements required from specified sources such as Planning, Finance, Information Services, the library, the Disability Co-ordinator and the Education Liaison section in relation to recruitment and admissions. The programme specification illustrated the links between the teaching and learning strategies adopted and assessment, thus indicating how students are able to demonstrate their learning through their assessment.

34   The PIQs and programme specifications seen by the audit team illustrated that they had been subject to the scrutiny of an external expert who advised, as required, on whether the programme is at an appropriate level for the award; on the appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes; the balance of assessment; the defined pathways available, and on the appropriateness of the scheme of award in general. UCL's Briefing Paper indicated that the role of the external scrutineer is crucial to ensuring standards with respect to their comparability with the sector. From the completed PIQs reviewed in detail by the audit team, it was clear that the report presented by the external scrutineer allowed them to fulfil fully that role.

35   Proposers and all other parties to the design and approval of new programmes are fully informed and assisted in their tasks and duties via the Programme Design and Management section of the Academic Manual, with the necessary pro-formas and guidance for those involved in approval at departmental and faculty levels being available on the Registry site.

36   The documentary trail provided also illustrated the consideration of proposals as they progress at departmental, faculty and institutional levels, through the departmental teaching committee (DTC), faculty teaching committee (FTC), PCASG and PPDExSCo respectively. In each case, the audit team found consideration to be appropriately rigorous, to add progressive value and to illustrate the opportunity the process allowed for constructive dialogue, including aspects of the input from the external scrutineer, and for beneficial amendment to take place. The documentation seen by the team also illustrated the link between academic and resource planning, which was stimulated by the nature of the approval process and particularly by the construction of the PIQ form.

37   Following approval by the prescribed process, programmes are not subject to formal periodic re-approval (revalidation). Periodic re-approval, after having been debated by QMEC, was considered by UCL not to add value in the protection of both quality and standards.

38   The audit team was of the view that the programme approval process in place and in operation in UCL, as illustrated by the comprehensive information provided to it, 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.

39   The extant process of annual course monitoring was the subject of a recommendation in the 2005 audit report which required annual monitoring to be 'regularised' as 'expeditiously as possible'. The actions taken by the institution in response are covered in detail in paragraph 10. Thus, a new process was piloted in 2006-07, rolled out in 2007-08, and was in place at the time of the audit. The audit team was confident from the assurances provided that engagement in the process from all departments was a feature of the 2007-08 exercise and of that ongoing in the subsequent session. In addition to the description provided in the Briefing Paper, UCL provided the team with illustrations of the reports (from module level upwards) produced and by committees' consideration of reports arising from the annual monitoring process.

40   The annual monitoring process is fully supported by guidance, timetables (undergraduate and taught postgraduate) and report templates (at course unit, head of programme, head of department and faculty levels), completed examples of which were all available to the audit team. The annual monitoring process guidance also refers staff to the available supporting student statistical data set and the expectations for its use in the process.

41   From its consideration of the annual monitoring reports at programme, departmental and faculty levels, the audit team formed the view that the reports were of a high standard and, in their detail, illustrated the care taken in addressing the stated purposes of the process. Although, as stated in its Briefing Paper, UCL considers that the ongoing monitoring and review of award standards is effected primarily via the examination process, nevertheless, in ensuring that departments consider and respond to issues raised by external examiners, the annual monitoring process also plays its part in providing evidence for this assurance. The documentation available to the team confirmed the view expressed by staff that consideration of such annual monitoring reports and those of the chairs of the boards of examiners (see paragraphs 90-91), together with the consideration of the student-related data set, made a tangible contribution to the oversight of the maintenance of award standards at departmental, faculty and institutional levels.

42   Through the progressive consideration of the annual monitoring process and outcomes at programme, departmental, faculty and QMEC levels, the Academic Committee receives useful reports and analyses of the annual monitoring of programmes that contribute to its cumulative oversight of the maintenance of award standards. In addition, the audit team also became aware that a range of improvements is being made to annual monitoring which are intended to strengthen the scrutiny of annual monitoring reports by departmental committees of significance to students (for example DTC and DSSCC) and the value of briefings to those who support the process. Therefore, although the Briefing Paper expressed the view that the current annual monitoring process was 'in its infancy', the progressive reviews of its operation and the modifications introduced progressively by the Quality Management and Enhancement Committee (QMEC) make it an improved instrument that contributes to the security of award standards and the institutional oversight thereof.

43   In its Briefing Paper, UCL describes its previously unsatisfactory experience of engagement with the periodic review of programmes (Quinquennial Programme Review (QPR)) which had operated from 1995. Throughout its revision of the annual monitoring process, UCL remained committed to the retention of a periodic review element within its quality management and enhancement processes, and has now defined an Augmented Annual Monitoring (AAM) process which will, every fifth year, allow programmes to be re-evaluated in the light of the previous four years of annual monitoring and provide a potentially more efficient replacement for QPR.

44   As AAM was being introduced during 2008-09, the audit team was unable to view outputs from the process and was only able to comment on UCL's plans in this regard. The AAM process and guidance is set out comprehensively in the relevant sections of the Academic Manual. Simply stated, AAM will 'enable UCL to undertake a broader review of the continuing validity and relevance of programmes offered'. Drawing on the evidence provided by the four previous annual monitoring reports, and the views of an external scrutineer, the process intends inter alia to 'ensure that programmes continue to meet the academic standards set both by UCL and the external environment' including 'the QAA and the various professional and statutory bodies'.

45   A full schedule of those departments to be involved in AAM in the period 2008-09 to 2012-13 has been published in a document which maps not only the year-long stages of the process, but also links that to the stages of the Internal Quality Review (IQR) which, for each department, is undertaken in the subsequent year. The schedule indicates that the initial step of AAM is the publication of the relevant statistical information relevant to each AAM on the Academic Services website. AAM will rely on the same, but longitudinal, data set in relation to student statistics, as provided by Registry for annual monitoring. An additional early step will be the involvement of the external scrutineer.

46   Although yet to be fully implemented, a key documentary output from AAM will be an amplified programme director's/programme organiser's report, the institutional evaluation of which will draw on evidence provided by the previous four annual monitoring reports, including the reports of the Chair of the Board of Examiners. The template for this report includes the need to review and analyse changes in any relevant external reference points; data relating to student progression and achievement; responses over the five-year period to issues raised in external examiners' reports; the longitudinal student statistical data and the outcomes and responses to any professional accreditation exercises. The external scrutineer's report will provide standards related evidence, including evaluations of the academic standards of the programme, how standards and students' achievement of them are measured and the extent to which attention is paid to external reference points. The audit team felt that AAM has the potential to become an essential programme focused component of the portfolio of quality management and enhancement processes that UCL will rely upon increasingly in future, to demonstrate its firm oversight of award standards and maintain its alignment with the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*.

47   As stated in UCL's Academic Manual and the explanatory note provided to the audit team, IQR is designed to review a department's operations in relation to the policy and good practice which appears in UCL's Academic Manual and in its Guidelines for Good Practice, referred to as the 'Gold Book'. Since these reference points include some of UCL's key information concerning the assessment of students, examinations and assessment, including the monitoring and review of these process, IQR was considered by the team for its potential to provide the opportunity for a further demonstration of the security of the institution's award standards. In this regard, the Briefing Paper indicates that a key element of the process is to ensure that departments consider and respond to issues raised by external examiners (see also paragraph 63). From the extensive documentation available describing the IQR process in two departments, the team was able to confirm this focus and appreciate the depth and range of the considerations making up IQR.

48   The comprehensive self-evaluation IQR statements seen by the audit team, which are modelled on the Gold Book structure, contained a variety of areas of relevance both to standards and learning opportunities, which were supported by the large amounts of background information provided to the IQR teams appointed to evaluate the submissions. Such information included a student statistical data set of relevance to the evaluation and achievement of award standards which covered entry qualifications, gender breakdowns, student progression and achievement and exit qualifications on a longitudinal basis. The team found that the self-

evaluations seen evinced positive engagement with the analysis of student performance and the comments made by external examiners. The documentation considered by the team also illustrated the constructively critical nature of the IQR review teams' reports and the pathway of their consideration through the standing IQR Panel, which sees all such reports and evaluates the departmental actions against the recommendations they contain, one and two years after the publication of the relevant report.

49   IQR review teams are made up so that members of staff do not review within their own faculties and each team includes a reviewer from outside UCL. These external members are drawn from across the sector and are senior academic or administrative staff with learning and teaching and quality assurance roles. As such, both internal and external members of review teams bring comparisons of practice from their own experiences and offer valuable comments on the process itself, the performance of departments and to suggest well founded potential improvements to both. As IQR covers all academic activity, including postgraduate research programmes, IQR review panels include a member of the Graduate Education Executive Sub-Committee (GEESC).

50   The standing IQR Panel, which operates under the aegis of QMEC, has a primary role to scrutinise and respond as appropriate to IQR reports and follow-up action plans from both academic departments and non-academic units. It also draws up and disseminates annual summaries of good practice and key recommendations for improvement arising from IQR. Such annual reports are considered by AC and shared with FTCs for consideration using a specified checklist issued to FTC secretaries. The summaries are also circulated each year to heads of department, heads of corporate support services and the Head of the Graduate School. The material arising from IQRs undertaken since 2003-04 is also published on an annual basis on the Academic Services website.

51   From its consideration of the extensive documentation available to it relating to the IQR process and the use made of its outputs at all levels in the institution, the audit team was able to agree with the Briefing Paper that the process was illustrative of a culture of self-reflection and supportive continuous improvement based on the identification of good practice, and its effective dissemination, across the institution. It was also able to conclude that the considerations underpinning IQR, although not focusing in detail on programmes and their content, as such, were able to make a further significant contribution to the information supporting the security of its award standards available to UCL.

52   Given the key purposes of IQR, the audit team accepted that the documentation surrounding the process does not emphasise the *Code of practice* explicitly. For annual monitoring the team found that the reference to the *Code of practice* was more explicit, as it was for the newly instituted AAM. For programme approval, the PIQ clearly articulates with the *Code of practice*. From its review of the documentation, guidance and outcomes of its annual monitoring, IQR and prospective AAM processes, the team found that UCL meets the aspirations of the *Code of practice, Section 7*, and has processes in place at programme and institutional level that help ensure that award standards are established, maintained and secured effectively.

53   UCL states clearly its view that it has in place clear structures and processes for setting, monitoring and securing its award standards and, where appropriate, these include evaluation and review by experts external to UCL. It also indicates that it monitors and responds to national and international developments which impact on standards related issues (for example, the Academic Infrastructure, and national and European considerations with respect to credit and classification systems). From reviewing the processes for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes in UCL, and their strong and clear links with the external examiner system in place (see following section), the audit team found ample evidence that the institution's claims were fully sustainable.

External examiners

54   The roles and responsibilities of external examiners are set out in the regulations which are interspersed with detailed guidance in order to assist examiners in the exercise of their duties. Clear, comprehensive information relevant to external examiners of taught and research awards is readily available via the UCL Registry website which links directly to the regulations, and also to guidance for chairs of boards of examiners.

55   Structurally, the regulations require that for each taught programme or, in the case of combined studies degrees, a group of programmes leading to an award, there shall be a board of examiners. These boards generally operate at departmental level and are required to report to either an undergraduate or postgraduate faculty board of examiners (FBE), which in turn is required to report to the overarching UCL Board of Examiners (UCLBE). The regulations define the membership and the responsibilities of boards at each of the three levels, and the requirements for external examiners at each programme board of examiners in order that all provision shall be subject to their scrutiny. The terms of appointment specified in the regulations ensure that appropriate examiners in both internal and external roles are appointed and, significantly, chairs of boards of examiners are required to notify their faculty of the date of meetings that arrangements can be made for the faculty tutor or his/her nominee to be present.

56   The regulations set out the requirement that all assessments leading to the award of a UCL degree are subject to scrutiny by at least one external examiner whose essential role is to ensure that the standard of the programme of study is appropriate for the award, and to certify that the assessment carried out for the award is of a kind and at a level suitable for the qualification to be awarded, and consistent with equivalent awards of other UK universities. Depending on the size of the module, external examiners see all, or a representative sample of the scripts and are able to moderate the marking of the internal examiners if necessary (but not to act as a second-marker).

57   From the small range of board minutes seen by the audit team, it was possible to confirm the attendance of the relevant faculty representative and to note the influence of the representative on the procedures adopted by the board, with a view to promoting consistency across the faculty and to disseminate good practice.

58   The regulations set out in detail the conditions of appointment and responsibilities of external examiners for taught programmes. These require that chairs of boards of examiners submit nominations for approval first to FBE and then to UCLBE through a process administered by Registry. The conditions for appointment, including the four-year term, were considered by the audit team to be appropriate for the engagement of competent and independent external examiners, with useful guidance being offered to chairs of boards in support of the process. UCL does not provide a centralised induction programme for external examiners but many departments offer local induction through on-site briefing and discussion.

59   From the evidence available to it, the audit team found that the procedures for the appointment of external examiners were clear and comprehensive, and their implementation has the capacity to ensure the appointment of appropriately qualified and suitable examiners.

60   Each external examiner is required to complete the standard institutional report form and submit this via Registry on an annual basis. The report form invites external examiners to comment on the balance and content of the programme; the coherence of the programme; the candidates' performance; the appropriateness of methods of assessment, and their balance and the quality of assessment. They are also required to confirm whether awards are consistent with national standards, taking into account subject benchmark statements, the FHEQ and the *Guidelines for preparing programme specifications*. The report form also requires examiners to confirm their consideration of draft examination papers and confirm attendance, as required, at the board where final awards are determined. From the examples of completed report forms

seen by the audit team it was confirmed that examiners engaged fully and authoritatively with the demands and rigours of the reporting mechanism.

61   The report form also contains a section for a senior Registry person to make a recommendation with respect to the personnel to whom it should be forwarded, which may include the Chair of UCLBE on matters of immediate institutional concern. This offers the opportunity for the chair to indicate what action, if any, should be taken with respect to the matters, including referral to UCLBE in full and/or the AC. The examples seen by the audit team also confirmed that matters for attention at departmental and faculty levels are appended to the report form prior to its despatch to the relevant departmental and faculty personnel (see paragraph 63).

62   The audit team formed the view that the reporting mechanism available to, and fully utilised by, external examiners allowed them to provide an independent and constructive view of the standards of awards offered by the institution, and to do so in the context of the relevant external reference points.

63   The train of events involved in the cycle of consideration of external examiners' reports at each level in the organisation, and the formulation and approval of responses on the reports to the examiners themselves, are set out as an appendix to the regulations in the form of guidance to the chair of the board of examiners, who is not only central to the cycle but who is also required to provide an annual report on the examination process (including responses to external examiners' comments) to the FBEs. The audit team was provided with a documentary trail that illustrated each stage of this cycle of consideration which satisfied the team fully that the process was not only thorough but transparent. From its consideration of the responses to external examiners' reports available to it, the team was also able to confirm full engagement from boards in the formulation of responses to comments made and issues raised by examiners, and that such responses were issued in a timely fashion (see paragraph 12).

64   From the extensive departmental and faculty reports on external examiner activity available to it, UCLBE submits standard annual reports (one for undergraduate, one for postgraduate taught programmes) to AC on issues raised in external examiners' reports, which, following discussion, are disseminated to departments and faculties. UCL submits an annual report to the University of London in respect of issues raised by external examiners.

65   In July 2008, QMEC considered the matter of sharing external examiners' reports with students and, in consultation with UCLBE, agreed that the summary reports prepared by chairs of boards of examiners (see paragraph 92), as part of annual monitoring (see paragraphs 39-42) would be made available to students through the relevant DSSCC's involvement in the annual monitoring process. It was anticipated that this process would be instigated by departments in the 2008-09 session and, given the time frame of the current audit, the audit team was not surprised to hear from students that they were yet to see this provision in action. However, some students confirmed that they had seen such reports as part of their involvement in IQR. The team encourages UCL to share with students full external examiners' reports, with personal data anonymised as necessary, at the earliest opportunity.

66   From the documentation available to it, the audit team was able to confirm that the report to the faculty board of examiners made by each board of examiners is sent to the relevant external examiner. The external examiner report form also prompts the examiner into commenting on whether previous comments/suggestions have been considered. The sample of completed forms seen by the team tended to confirm that examiners responded positively to this prompt thus, in turn, suggesting that responses from the boards had been received.

67   From its consideration of the regulatory and operational documentation available to it, the audit team was able to determine that the arrangements for external examining at UCL meet fully the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*. In relation to assuring academic standards of programmes and awards, the team found the external examining procedures and practice in place in UCL contribute effectively and fully to the confirmation of the standards of its awards.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

68   In its Briefing Paper, UCL suggests that elements of the Academic Infrastructure are embedded within UCL structures and operations. From the previous sections of this report (see paragraphs 46, 52 and 67) it is clear that this is particularly well illustrated in its quality management and enhancement processes, including the establishment, monitoring and review of academic standards, and external examining.

69   In relation to the *Code of practice*, QMEC has formal responsibility for oversight, with one of its terms of reference being 'To co-ordinate the development and monitor the implementation of UCL processes relating to the QAA's Academic Infrastructure, including the *Code of Practice* for *the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education*, the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications*, Subject Benchmark Statements and Programme Specifications'. Administrative or other officers of the committee are required to inform QMEC of any changes that may require attention, both at QAA consultation or publication stage.

70   The minutes of QMEC offer a range of evidential examples of this responsibility being exercised by the Committee. For example, the Committee receives reports on the progress and completion of the annual review of institutional alignment with the *Code of practice*. The resultant annually revised schedule of how UCL practice accords with the precepts of the *Code of practice* is published on the Academic Services web pages. As indicated in its Briefing Paper, alignment is demonstrated with the majority of the precepts. Of the two (in section 10) where UCL identifies minor deficiencies, both are under review with entirely appropriate developments in train (also see paragraph 187).

71   The records of QMEC also illustrate that it maintains an overview of the FHEQ and the revisions that from time to time are made to it. For example, QMEC at its meeting of October 2008 noted the response that had been made on its behalf to QAA with respect to the revision of the FHEQ (QAA CL04/08), with the response being published internally.

72   UCL indicates that all of its qualifications have been mapped onto the levels of the FHEQ, as evinced by the publication (with very few exceptions) of all its programmes specifications, which are referenced to the FHEQ, on the Academic Services website. Together with the programme approval procedures in place and their articulation with the FHEQ, the audit team formed the view that in this case, the external reference point was also embedded in the processes and practice of the institution and that, as such, it contributed to the consistent definition of its awards.

73   QMEC keeps revisions made to subject benchmark statements under review and invites departments to comment on revised benchmarks published by QAA before formulating an institutional response. QMEC minutes show recent, timely, examples of receipt, consideration, consultation and response to revised subject benchmark statements in a number of subject areas. Academic Services also provide online advice on the use of benchmark statements and provides a direct web link to the relevant section of QAA's website.

74   As noted in paragraph 11, programme specifications were the subject of a recommendation from the previous audit report of 2005. Since the report of the working group established to review policy in this area, QMEC has received regular reports on the implementation of the group's recommendations. Programme specifications are published on UCL's central Academic Services website to provide a single point of access for internal and

external readers, and facilitate Academic Service's role in supporting (on behalf of QMEC) the coordination of the annual monitoring process and central monitoring of programme specifications across UCL. As indicated in paragraph 34, it was clear to the audit team that programme specifications are integral to the programme approval process. Programme specifications are considered regularly in programme monitoring and review.

75   At the time of the audit, responsibility for liaison with PSRBs and for overseeing arrangements for accreditation activity rested with the department concerned. Although PSRB outcomes are part of the information considered in IQR, for the future, the reporting mechanism for accreditation activity and outcomes will be AAM. Although UCL maintains and monitors a schedule of accredited programmes and accreditation events, during its review of the first year of regularised annual monitoring, QMEC highlighted the lack of institutional overview of accreditation by PSRBs, including a systematic approach to the outcomes from such activity, and set up a working group to consider the matter further, which was expected to report to QMEC in April 2009. The schedule of programmes involved in accreditation shows that 33 different PSRBs are involved, with relevant programmes being situated across seven of UCL's faculties. The expected improvement in institutional oversight of the process and its outcomes would, in the audit team's view, provide a further mechanism allowing insight into the overall quality and standards of its provision and provide a further source of potential good practice to be shared across the institution.

76   A working group considering issues arising from Burgess, Bologna and other issues relating to use of credit, and the length of the UCL learning year has been addressing additional issues from the external context. Importantly, one of the issues AC asked the group to scope was the 'principles on which UCL bases its guarantees about the standard, quality and rigour of its undergraduate programmes especially within the context of the comparability of its awards with other UK and European HEIs [higher education institutions]'. The working group recommendations were approved by AC in July 2008, and a detailed implementation plan was being drawn up to put them into effect. Of further significance is that, in Oct 2007, AC approved an updated Bologna strategy. As part of its commitment to maintaining progress in this area, UCL already defines its programmes using a single ECTS definition of credit, which is the basis for the regulatory descriptions provided to students.

77   From its analysis of the use made by the institution of relevant external reference points, the audit team formed the view that UCL was making comprehensive and transparent use of the range of reference points available to it. The team was able to concur with the UCL's stated view that the use of such reference points were embedded in its structures, processes and practices, and considered that their use made an effective contribution to the management of standards.

Assessment policies and regulations

78   The Executive Sub-Committee on Innovations in Learning, Teaching and Assessment (ESCILTA) plays a key role in the development of innovations and the fostering of good practice in the area of learning, teaching and assessment. Oversight of the administration of assessment procedures rests with UCLBE, which is the forum for all aspects of exam policy and practice and the implementation of the assessment strategy determined by AC. Both committees, through their reporting to AC ensure that the latter has information available to it in order for it to maintain its oversight of assessment and standards and that faculties and departments are kept informed of necessary changes.

79   As part of its Academic Manual, UCL publishes an institutional Assessment Strategy (approved by AC in 2004), which is intended to provide a general framework for a broad set of academic goals to be realised by departments in establishing, implementing and reviewing the assessment procedures they apply to their own programmes. Departments are not required to have their own assessment strategies. However, teaching, learning and assessment philosophy forms part of their discipline-level learning and teaching strategies (DLTSs) (see paragraphs 83 and 109).

80   The Assessment Strategy was due for review by UCLBE in 2008-09. This will be undertaken alongside a parallel review by ESCILTA of the progress made in implementing its previous recommendations in the area, as approved by AC in March 2006.

81   The institutional Assessment Strategy has a number of basic aims, including 'to recognise and enhance students' learning, capabilities and skills; to ensure that assessment processes appropriately support the diversity of UCL educational and certificational aims and to recognise the diversity of UCL's students, their backgrounds and their learning styles; to assure the highest quality in the awards made by UCL; to ensure an effective and efficient integration of assessment practices into wider activities across UCL; to ensure that outcomes are monitored by sex, ethnic origin, disability status, and educational background in order that any unintended discriminatory consequences can be addressed'.

82   A further key document describing UCL's approach to the management and assessment of academic standards is the Institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy (ILTS). This is complemented by DLTSs, which are formulated at departmental and/or faculty level. UCL states in its Briefing Paper 'Given the critical part that assessment plays in supporting effective learning and teaching and in sustaining quality and excellence, UCL seeks to ensure that assessment responds to the varied and changing learning needs of our students and to any changes in the expectations of professional bodies and employers'. This view also introduces UCL's commitment to innovation and a consistent approach to assessment across the disciplines and that appropriate staff training and support for the development and use of new assessment methods is made available.

83   In this context, UCL has in the last five years addressed a range of issues relating to this commitment. Thus, from its origin in the Working Group on Examinations and Assessment Policy and more recently the UCLBE, an harmonised scheme of award has been introduced. In June 2004, the scheme was approved by AC, which subsequently determined that a comprehensive post-implementation review of its introduction and impact would take place in session 2009-10. This scheme, which covers all students entering undergraduate degree programmes from the 2005-06 session, sets out the agreed common principles for the construction of programmes of units that lead to awards. UCL did not pursue the definition of a unified single degree classification, but moved to the current position of harmonisation to ensure faculty and cognate disciplinary needs could be accommodated. However, any deviations from the scheme require approval by AC and consistency within faculty areas.

84   The Academic Regulations for Students, in addition to covering the overarching regulations which encompass the scheme, also provide in full the variations to the regulations by faculty. A review of these variations by the audit team indicated them to be relatively modest in number, reasonable and justified in the context of the particular circumstances they are designed to address. UCLBE minutes indicate its role in the ongoing monitoring of the implementation of the harmonized scheme and for making the necessary refinements for approval by AC. At the time of the audit a number of issues had arisen for consideration by UCLBE, from sources such as IQR and annual monitoring. These included inconsistencies in the penalties applied for the late submission of coursework and adherence to word limits, the treatment of candidates at classification borderlines, the use of mark capping in one department. Although, much progress has been achieved with respect to harmonisation, these examples illustrate the continued need for UCLBE and AC to address such matters decisively and in a timely fashion.

85   In addition to the above, ESCILTA has also undertaken (in 2004-05) a review of assessment approaches, procedures and methodologies in parallel with the working group on the Examinations and Assessment Policy. The ESCILTA review resulted in a number of recommendations for further action by departments, CALT and Registry. Significant progress has taken place on these and the current key assessment policies and procedures are now set out clearly for students in Academic Regulations for Students (Blue Book), which include the Academic Regulations for Taught Master's Programmes, Sections 1, 2 and 3, and the Regulations and Procedures for Research Degrees (known as the 'Grey Book').

86   The audit team found that, in general, UCL has in place rules and regulations relating to student progression and the qualification for awards that are clear and provide for the rigorous and appropriate treatment of students across the institution. Overall, the regulations covering assessment and awards are clearly and comprehensively framed, with the concept of agreed schemes of award at faculty level being based on approved opt out rather than discretionary opt in.

87   Staff of UCL have a wide range of regulatory and practice-related information and guidance readily available to them. Such sources include a teaching and learning website, with access to the UCL Assessment Strategy, the UCL Guidelines for Good Practice in Feedback and Assessment, and the recommendations of the UCL ESCILTA Working Group on Assessment Methodologies. There is also a Moodle site accessible from the teaching and learning site that includes advice on assessment and feedback, assessment methods, assessment for learning, and using feedback to enhance student learning.

88   The audit team was therefore satisfied that the relevant policies are clear and are brought to the attention of the relevant parties through a number and variety of means. It was also of the view that the available information on assessment and the regulatory framework enables students to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes defined for their programmes, and demonstrates how assessment criteria, grading schemes and moderation are used in marking.

89   UCL sets out its comprehensive requirements and full guidance in relation to its boards of examiners in Regulation for Boards of Examiners Taught Programmes. The formal responsibility for the assessment of students on taught programmes rests with the board of examiners concerned at departmental/discipline level. The board system is a pyramidal three-tier structure: a board for each programme of study, including a faculty representative in its membership; a faculty board of examiners (normally chaired by the dean), which is made up of the chairs of programme boards of examiners, and the UCLBE at institutional level, the core members of whom chair faculty boards of examiners.

90   Chairs of boards of examiners report annually to the chair of the relevant faculty board of examiners on the examination process for the session, including a response to any significant points raised by external examiners. These reports allow faculty boards of examiners to check on implementation of curriculum developments and enhancements considered by the board. The report is sent to the external examiner (see paragraph 66). The faculty representative on each board of examiners is required to report to the faculty level on the conduct of the board and any other matters of relevance.

91   Chairs of faculty boards of examiners submit annual reports to UCLBE, which allows the committee to identify any issues with generic implications across disciplinary areas, or across UCL as a whole. This includes both good practice and matters in need of improvement. Significant policy issues arising from this progressive reporting are forwarded by UCLBE to AC for further consideration.

92   In relation to awards, boards of examiners submit recommendations for confirmation to the faculty board of examiners which then, subject to verification through PORTICO, prepares final pass lists for signature by the Chair of UCLBE, who in effect confirms the awards on behalf of AC.

93   The audit team, from its scrutiny of the records of the UCLBE, was able to conclude that UCLBE's considerations were full, conscientious, helpful and, through the pyramidal reporting mechanisms, able to make a serious contribution to the security of standards. In addition, it was able to identify and debate a range of issues of institutional significance arising from the cross-institutional information available to it. Many of these issues centred on the demonstrable and ongoing concern that UCLBE gave to the issue of consistency across provision, for example in the use of oral examinations. The consideration of matters arising from external examiners' reports was also a feature of the committee's activities together with a strong emphasis on the monitoring of the ongoing implementation of the harmonised scheme of award. The latter

included the comparison of the available student performance data covering periods before and after the implementation of the harmonised scheme.

94   Significantly, in recent discussions of the role of PORTICO in assisting boards of examiners, UCLBE noted that the system, because of its rules base derived from the harmonised scheme of award, was able to calculate a suggested classification for each student based on marks achieved and the precise scheme of award in place. The committee determined, as a further contribution to the consistency of approach to awards UCL is pursuing, that in future 'justification for not using the suggested auto-classification should be recorded in PORTICO and in the minutes of the Board of Examiners for report to the faculty board of examiners and UCLBE'.

95   The UCLBE record demonstrated how the committee entered into discussions with deans and others in order to achieve a continuing beneficial implementation of the harmonised scheme of award and of the provisions arising therefrom.

96   From its consideration of the relevant regulations, the documentation available, including the minutes of boards at each level, and its discussions with staff, the audit team was able to conclude that the specification and constitution, remit and procedures for the operation of examination boards are clear and comprehensive and there are mechanisms in place to ensure that the requirements are implemented effectively and consistently across the institution, with effective reporting and monitoring in place to ensure institutional oversight.

97   In the Examination and Assessment section of its Academic Manual, UCL provides a wide range of information and guidance relevant to the conduct of assessment and related matters. This, in turn, is supplemented by definitions, good practice and further advice contained in the Gold Book, which uses the formal regulations and published guidelines as a starting point.

98   In their discussions with the audit team, students were in general able to confirm that they were well informed of what was required of them in order to address the requirements of assessment and examination, and were generally informed appropriately about the criteria applied to the marking of their work. However, they were aware of certain variations in the way different departments dealt with certain operational aspects of their assessment experience including the potentially variable quality and timeliness of the feedback they received. These in general matched with considerations currently in train within UCL's deliberative mechanisms, which although receiving attention through debate across the institution, were as yet to impact on the direct experience of students. Thus, although on issues like the penalties imposed for the late submission of course work assessments, UCL was fully aware and debating the matter, with for example consistency emerging within one faculty, the resolution of the issue with respect to arriving at a consistent policy across the institution remained, at the time of the audit, unresolved. In the light of previous progress on harmonisation, and in order to consolidate further the equivalence of the student learning experience, the team advises that UCL maintain its momentum towards achieving the institutional coherence on regulatory and academic processes identified by its own committees (see paragraphs 84 and 200).

99   The audit team formed the overall view that UCL had addressed and continued to address matters relevant to the regulation and conduct of assessment and examinations. Through its actions in the last five years, particularly in relation to the implementation of the harmonised scheme of award, major progress has been made in ensuring the consistency of approach used across the institution, and that it is continuing to pursue the twin goals of further harmonisation and simplification of practice. However, there is a range of practical issues, the knowledge of which is known to the institution from the operation of its committees and processes, where full alignment with UCL's policies remains to be achieved. Continued vigilance will be needed to ensure that early alignment is achieved by all academic units. The audit team therefore 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 84, 163, 174 and 206).

Management information - statistics

100   In its Briefing Paper, UCL indicates that core student statistical information, for use by departments in the preparation of their annual monitoring reports, is now provided centrally (by Registry). The audit team was able to confirm this and, through examining the outputs from the processes available to it, confirm the beneficial use of the data in the annual monitoring process. These data include applications, offers, acceptances and intake, profile of entry qualifications, profiles of gender, profiles of age, progression and achievement, classifications by year based on modules, classification of degrees for final-year students, first destinations. Similar data relevant to the whole period covered was also confirmed to be available for the IQR process, where its use was also considered to be of benefit to the process and the quality of the outcomes it produces. It was clear to the team from its discussions with staff that significant improvements in the quality and availability of such data has taken place since 2005, as indicated in the Briefing Paper (see paragraph 14).

101   The growing range of data relevant to students, such as progression and completion, are becoming a key information resource for a variety of departmental and institutional purposes and is now being stored centrally on the Academic Services website, thus improving access for staff and, where appropriate, for students. The growth of the databases, and the circulation of relevant data sets to departments, suggests that the AAM process is being supported by data for all years of its coverage.

102   In addition to their provision for departmental use, relevant data sets are also provided to, for example IQR teams, together with data on total departmental student numbers by programme of study, fee status, and mode of study, profile of intake by region of domicile and ethnicity. Annual student statistics are prepared and distributed to heads of department and deans to assist them in their academic and resource planning, and a range of committees and groups receives appropriate data sets to assist them in the pursuit of their terms of reference. For example, GEESC receives data, which allows it to monitors submission rates, pass, referral withdrawal, failure rates, complaints and appeals, with the relevant Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data also being reported. Such data is circulated to Heads of Department, FTGs and DTGs (through the Graduate School) in order to raise awareness of issues such as the need for timely postgraduate research submissions.

103   From consideration of DLTSs it was possible for the audit team to view the impact of data provision on future plans. For example, student equality monitoring data, which is also presented annually to the Committee for Equal Opportunities, is used to consider imbalances or under-representation of particular groups within the departmental student population.

104   The audit team, from its consideration of the information available to it, found that statistical reporting was used effectively and consistently across the institution to inform programme monitoring and review. It was able to conclude that UCL uses statistical reporting to inform the development and implementation of strategy and policy relating to the management of academic standards.

105   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 policies 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

106   In its Briefing Paper, UCL identified a range of documents that it considers key in describing its approach to managing its learning environment and learning opportunities. These documents include the Institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy (ILTS), discipline-level learning and teaching strategies (DLTSs), the Library Strategy (2005-2010), the Information Strategy and the Strategy for Human Resources (2005-2010).

107   The audit team found that the ILTS, in common with the other major strategies, is designed to contribute to the achievement of UCL's corporate objectives and to be consistent with these other strategies. The strategy highlights the key aspects of the institution's Corporate Planning statement and was seen by the team to be a point of reference for major academic themes running through UCL's learning and teaching activities. For example, the Library Strategy takes as its starting point the ILTS and other related sources of student-centred institutional objectives.

108   DLTSs are reviewed every three years by the Executive Sub-Committee on Innovations in Learning, Teaching and Assessment (ESCILTA), which now gives more comprehensive guidance on preparation of DLTSs using an institutional template. ESCILTA undertook a full review of all DLTSs in Jan 2008, which identified institutional trends that were referred to AC with an identification of investment needs. Since Oct 2008, DLTSs have been available to all on UCL's intranet. The review of DLTSs was informing the review of the ILTS taking place at the time of the audit.

109   The audit team formed the view that the ILTS was well embedded in the academic culture of the institution and was recognised in the way DLTSs addressed broadly the same range of learning and teaching priorities and the contribution it made to the maintenance and development of the learning environment for students. The team also recognised the role ESCILTA continued to play in the identification of opportunities for improvement in the learning environment and the positive response it usually received from the Academic Committee (AC), the faculties, their deans, the departments and the Corporate Support Services.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

110   As described above (in paragraphs 68-77), the quality management and enhancement processes of UCL are confluent with the *Code of practice* and other relevant external reference points and involve appropriate levels of expert external input. In addition, the audit team found that external examiners, through their use of the report form and their opportunity to comment at boards of examiners, can also be considered to be making a significant contribution to the ongoing quality of the delivery of programmes and the learning environment provided by UCL.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

111   As indicated above (in paragraphs 32-34), the Programme Institution Questionnaire (PIQ) is central to new programme considerations. As a key part of this consideration the scrutiny of the proposals given by the Finance Division, Library Services, Information Systems and the Disability Co-ordinator appeared to the audit team to contribute to the assurance that the learning resources necessary for the programme would be available at institutional level with those at faculty and departmental level being part of the endorsement given at such levels. That the student experience of learning would be assured forms part of the considerations of the Programme and Course Approval Steering Group (PCASG). The adequacy of learning opportunities and the academic resources that underpin them is also addressed and assured by the external scrutineer.

112   As programmes mature, defined procedures of approval covering both substantial modifications and more minor changes focus on the learning opportunities they offer. For substantial modifications, proposers must produce evidence of departmental and faculty approvals and of external consideration (usually by the relevant external examiner). They are required to complete a Programme Amendment Questionnaire (PAQ) that describes the nature

of the proposed changes and their impact on students and their learning. The PAQ goes first to the secretary of PCASG for scrutiny, then to Registry's Director of Student Administration for review and for a recommendation, with final approval requiring recommendations from the Chair of PCASG, and final consideration by the Chair of Programme Planning and Development Executive Sub-committee (PPDExSCo). PCASG receives an annual report of approved PAQs. The audit team felt that this process was rigorous and designed to protect the academic integrity of programmes and to safeguard the learning opportunities and experience of students. Minor changes are handled by correspondence between the proposer and the Director of Student Administration, with changes then uploaded to PORTICO.

113   The interests of students are similarly protected by the procedures for the closure of programmes that are applied when programmes became non-viable because of falling recruitment. This procedure requires action from deans in response to the statistical data on programmes supplied to them. Deans are required to report to PPDExSCo to make appropriate arrangements for any programme withdrawal. In other cases, where programmes may be thought to be failing, the Provost is able to set up an AC review panel to investigate the available evidence, including student views, and to make appropriate recommendations to AC. The audit team found the provisions and practice of such reviews entirely satisfactory in the small number of instances for which they may be required.

114   The annual monitoring, Augmented Annual Monitoring and IQR processes described above (paragraphs 39-53) are designed not only to assure the standards of awards but also to assure the quality of provision, including the continuing access of students to appropriate learning resources. The documentation they generate, and the consideration given to it, provide assurance that any deficiencies in learning opportunities that may be identified by the processes and/or students are considered conscientiously and responded to wherever practicable. Thus the audit team found the view expressed in the Briefing Paper that 'The regularised [Annual Monitoring] process provides the framework with which the monitoring and review of the content and delivery of individual programmes takes place' was tenable.

115   Similarly, although IQR does not review programme content, 'the quality of a department's management of its programmes and their constituent courses, of its learning resources, of its staff development arrangements and of its students' educational experience' are central considerations. The process also offers departments the opportunity to raise wider institutional issues, such as those relating to estates, or the quality of centrally provided facilities and services, thus potentially contributing to the maintenance and improvement of the learning environment and its support of learning opportunities. The audit team was able to concur with the view expressed by UCL in its Briefing Paper that 'IQR enables a periodic review of programme management and delivery and the quality of the student experience at departmental level'.

Management information - feedback from students

116   The Academic Manual covers the institutional expectations in the area of student feedback. In addition to general considerations, it addresses in detail student questionnaires, departmental staff-student consultative committees, and student representation on UCL's standing committees and subcommittees. The audit team noted that the section of the Academic Manual relating to questionnaires is advisory, recognising that the responsibility for implementing an appropriate student questionnaire format and mechanisms for the analysis of data must rest with individual departments. However, the good practice advice that the manual contains is appropriate and supplemented by that included in the Gold Book.

117   Good practice in this area is clear and in the context of the expectation that programme questionnaires, which concentrate on the effectiveness of the teaching on the course/programme from the perspective of the student, will be distributed once per year. The expectations are therefore clearly communicated to staff. That such opportunities were available to students was endorsed by all the representative student groups seen by the audit team. However, the

information arising from actions taken as a result of their expression of views was less clear to the students interviewed by the team.

118   Postgraduate research students give feedback on their experience every two years by online questionnaire. The results of the survey are considered by the Graduate Education Executive Sub-Committee (GEESC). The results of the latest survey, which was initiated in the summer of 2008, will be published early in 2009 but were not available at the time of the audit.

119   From its consideration of the quality management and enhancement process documentation available to it, arising at course unit level and passing up through reporting, the audit team was able to discern the use to which students' questionnaire feedback was put during the monitoring and review of programmes. The team was also able to confirm, from the views expressed by students, and from their consideration of departmental, faculty and institutional documentation, that the view expressed by UCL in its Briefing Paper that 'we have a range of systems in place to solicit their views and opinions on their academic and overall experience of being at UCL eg evaluation questionnaires, Departmental Staff Student Consultative Committees (DSSCCs), student representatives on departmental, faculty and institution-level committees' had substance.

120   In addition to expressing their views on their academic and learning experience, students also have the opportunity to comment on the facilities and services offered by central service areas through the Internal Quality Review (IQR) process. These areas additionally evaluate student views via surveys administered annually and through representatives on relevant committees, including staff-student consultative committees.

121   UCL also addresses the outcomes of external surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS) and the International Student Barometer and undertakes comparisons with comparator institutions. Such data and analysis is provided to both Council and the Joint Staff-Student Committee (JSSC). Digests of the relevant data are provided to faculties in order that departments may consider them in the context of the data arising from the operation of UCL's quality processes.

122   The self-evaluation statement of the IQR process is expected to address student feedback. The IQR process includes interviews with students, including those who are representatives on departmental teaching committees (DTCs) and DSSCC. Annual monitoring also expects student feedback to be addressed. The process whereby DTCs and faculty teaching committees (FTCs) receive and consider student feedback from their student members is also a contributory mechanism that allows the institution to maintain an oversight of the input being made by students. AC gets an annual report on FTC proceedings, which notes major issues and themes arising in the minutes of FTC including those arising or re-enforced through student input (see paragraph 24).

123   The audit team also noted the role of JSSC in the receipt and consideration of matters of interest or concern to students and the help it has given in the further development of feedback mechanisms, initiated by the work of the relevant working groups on aspects of student feedback set up by the institution in the period 2005 to 2007. JSSC receives and monitors the minutes of DSSCCs, which further inform its annual report to AC. As part of this activity, JSSC monitors the frequency of DSSCC meetings and how their operations align with the published guidelines and writes to those not in alignment.

124   The audit team, from its consideration of the above, came to the view that UCL had in place effective means to inform itself of the views of students and that, not only does it have an overview of alignment with its requirements, but can also demonstrate the value it places on the views of students and 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, as noted above in paragraph 117.

Role of students in quality assurance

125   From its discussions with undergraduate and postgraduate students and with staff at all levels, the audit team came to the conclusion that the institution has a culture of engagement with student opinion. UCL involves its students in the work of its committees at departmental, faculty and institutional level in its quality assurance processes, such as IQR, and in working groups set up to investigate specific issues. At departmental and faculty levels there are elected student representatives including both undergraduates and postgraduates. At institutional level, representation is mainly through engagement of the sabbatical officers of UCL's Union. A full list of student representatives is maintained in the online Academic Manual and there is a section in the Gold Book on student input and feedback.

126   At the institutional level, student feedback and representation are considered through the committee system (especially AC, the Quality Management and Enhancement Committee (QMEC), and JSSC). A key committee for the review and development of UCL's student feedback and representation structures and processes is QMEC, which is where the outputs from the working groups on student representation (see paragraph 13) have been considered. Students believe that UCL is taking on messages from this work, although the outcomes are taking some time to implement. The audit team observed a number of examples where student representation and feedback had led to institutional-level action including the appointment of a Teaching Fellow in the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (CALT) to work with departments on student feedback and the piloting of a new tutoring system.

127   At departmental and faculty level, representation is initiated by departments with variable success. Elections take place according to departmental practice and may be held at different times of the year. The students who spoke to the audit team felt that this variability in timing contributed to a high number of vacancies on committees. The variability of representation by departments is a concern of the Students' Union, which is working towards a more unified system. UCL operates a system of Student Academic Representatives (StARs) at undergraduate level. These representatives are offered training through the Students' Union. Postgraduate students are represented through departmental and faculty committees but are not part of the StARs system. The team identified that there was some room for improvement in representation at faculty level through the institution ensuring that vacancies are filled, and in representation by students on postgraduate taught programmes.

128   The audit team found that the system of student representation was brought to the attention of students in a variety of ways, including through handbooks, websites, induction and via the UCL Union. Training of representatives is provided by the Students' Union and is advertised directly by the Union and is also mentioned in student handbooks and the StARs' newsletter, which is available online. The Students' Union leads the induction of sabbatical officers for the following year.

129   Staff-student committees operate at departmental and institutional levels and, where appropriate, at programme or faculty levels. The Academic Manual clearly sets out the composition, terms of reference and frequency of meetings of DSSCCs. Minutes must be sent to key officers such as the Dean of Students (Welfare), to the parent committee (JSSC) and the Departmental Teaching Committee, and be publicised within the Department. JSSC, chaired by the Dean of Students (Welfare), is a pivotal committee, as it receives departmental staff-student consultative committees 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 IQR process. DTCs and FTCs have student members and have an effective process to consider student feedback on their agendas. Postgraduate research students confirmed that they have membership of certain institutional committees, including GEESC and JSSC, as well as DSSCCs.

130   Students' Union representatives reported good communications with senior members of UCL staff and described it as constructive liaison. Sabbatical officers meet with the Provost twice per term and also have issues-based meetings. While recognising that the Provost is very busy, student representatives reported that he is responsive to email communication and the officers reported a productive relationship.

131   The audit team found evidence that the institution took seriously its involvement of students in ensuring the quality of the learning opportunities. The provision of learning resources was also informed by student feedback questionnaires and student representatives sat on the learning resource committees such as the library committees. Overall, the team found that UCL has effective arrangements for student involvement, including in its quality management processes.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

132   UCL is a research-intensive institution that values and promotes links between research and teaching. Learning takes place in an intensive research environment, which the institution says is reflected in the Departmental Teaching and Learning Strategies. Underpinning UCL's expectations of its staff in terms of research, teaching, and enabling knowledge transfer is the document, Excellence and the UCL Community: a Shared Endeavour. These expectations are reinforced by other means such as employment contracts, probation and promotion processes and staff review.

133   The audit team heard that all members of academic staff are expected to teach as well as undertake research, and that the policy on professorial reviews 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 auditors found this to be something valued by the students they met, who saw access to cutting-edge research as a key part of their experience at UCL. The team formed the view that this is a strength of the institution.

134   The link between research and teaching can also be found in the institutional strategies such as the Research Strategy, the Human Resources Strategy, and the Institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy. 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 staff in the development of the Institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy through mechanisms such as 'Town Meetings' (informal themed staff meetings), which complement the formal deliberative structures. The institution also makes use of staff research and scholarship in programme design and this was evident in the programme specifications and PIQs. The audit team found that the scale and quality of research at UCL positively influenced the learning opportunities provided for its students.

Other modes of study

135   The principal 'other mode of study' provided at UCL is through the use of its virtual learning environment (VLE). The institution has been supporting both WebCT and Moodle environments and is in the process of harmonisation across the institution and migrating all materials to Moodle. The Briefing Paper, written in December 2008, states that, at that time, there were over 1,280 courses on Moodle and 150 on WebCT. Additional resource in the form of technical support has been provided to complete this work. Staff and students are supported in developing their skills in the use of the VLE and UCL provides 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. This support was valued highly by the staff and students who met the audit team.

136   UCL acknowledged in its Briefing Paper that it needed to do further work around the area of e-learning and its strategic position is described in its Library Strategy 2005 to 2010 and the E-Learning Strategic Statement 2005 to 2010. As part of this work, it is in the process of undertaking a benchmarking project with the University of Sydney to compare positions and to identify good practice and areas for improvement.

137   The development of e-learning activity is overseen by ESCILTA, which has responsibility for monitoring the implementation of e-learning using a set of key performance indicators. The Director of the Information Services Division is responsible to the Vice Provost (Academic and International) for the development of the E-Learning Strategic Statement 2005 to 2010. This document contains both an implementation plan and a risk assessment.

138   UCL has a relatively small number of students who undertake study away from the campus for a substantial part of their programme, which includes placement students in chemical engineering and medical students who choose to undertake an elective abroad. These students are supported by a variety of resources and, in the case of the medical students, a comprehensive and user-friendly website containing a number of downloadable factsheets. 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 audit team saw excellent support materials for the Study Abroad students in the form of a handbook and a website. Comprehensive and clearly written information is also provided in the Academic Manual. 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.

Resources for learning

139   UCL aims to provide a level of learning resources commensurate with its position as a leading research-intensive institution. The institution's library services are spread over 17 sites. There is a pyramidal committee structure with library committees occurring at departmental, faculty and institutional level. The Director of Library Services is a member of senior committees including AC, the Research Strategy Committee and Information Strategy Committee. Library Services has produced 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. Implementation of the strategy is overseen by the Library's Operational Planning Team and is monitored by the Library Committee, which has a core membership that includes the Vice Provost (Academic and International), the deans and student representatives.

140   See paragraphs 111-115 for an account of the role played by UCL's approval and monitoring processes in ensuring the initial and ongoing adequacy of learning resources.

141   There are well-established mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on the management of Library Services. The Director makes three evaluative reports each year to the Library Committee. 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 UCL Union officers, and at DSSCC meetings. In addition, departments liaise with the library via subject librarians. The library is currently working to develop key performance indicators on effectiveness which are to be externally benchmarked. The audit team found that these processes work effectively and was satisfied that the institution was providing a responsive service.

142   Library Services has an annual budget but can gain additional resources for specific additional projects, where a need has been identified. The audit team was informed that an example of additional resources being granted was for the recent extension of the library opening hours. At the time of the audit, UCL had recently agreed through its Estates Management Committee to pursue a programme of refurbishment of the main library.

143   Information technology is managed by the Information Services Division (ISD), which is funded centrally annually but, as in the case the library, can gain additional funding for specific projects. The Director submits regular reports on the work of the Division to AC. ISD 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 VLE. The service has a dedicated team, the Learning Technologies Support Service (LTSS), which provides support, advice and training in the use of e-learning. Members of staff from the LTSS attend national workshops to benchmark the quality of its work and they produce an annual report on their activities.

144   Student feedback is evaluated on an annual basis. Members of staff have access to a survey analysis tool called Opinio to gather student opinion, and to personal response systems to gather feedback in lectures. Key performance indicators are used to monitor the effectiveness of ISD operations.

145   The students who met with the audit team 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 team formed the view that the provision of library and information technology services was good and provision was being reviewed regularly and systematically to ensure that the learning resources kept pace with new approaches and patterns of study. The team felt that the institutional arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of learning resources are effective.

Admissions policy

146   UCL does not operate a unified Admissions Policy, rather admissions are dealt with in a number of strategy documents that include the International Strategy, the Widening Participation Strategy, and the International Student Recruitment Strategic Marketing Plan 2008 to 2012. However, the key principles that 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 in a Town Meeting. The audit team heard from staff how this process was effective in drawing attention to major changes and gave an example of how the process disseminated information with respect to changes in the Home Office arrangements for international students. Guidance on the admissions processes is accessible to all staff and departments in the online Academic Manual, which is regularly updated.

147   At institutional level, the Committee for the Recruitment and Admission of Students (CRAS), which reports to Academic Committee, is the main body with responsibility for admissions processes. Its membership includes an external lay member and student representation. UCL has a minimum intake grade threshold based on entry qualifications and 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 was informed that, where practicable, all UK-domiciled undergraduate applicants are interviewed and that UCL feels that this is a strength of its admissions process. Exceptions to this practice are only allowed with the prior agreement of the Dean of Students (Academic). Students and staff explained that interviewing even occurred in the case of international students, who are interviewed using telephone or other means if they are not available in the UK. 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.

148   Two subcommittees report to CRAS, the Widening Participation Sub-Committee and a recently formed Undergraduate Selection Sub-Committee. This new subcommittee has been set up on the advice of a Selection Review to oversee the implementation of changes in selection methods.

149   The admissions process is underpinned by management information. The audit team was of the opinion that the use of PORTICO allows effective two-way communication of information between departments and faculties. Staff confirmed to the team that all staff involved in using the PORTICO system are provided with training in its use. Admissions data is monitored by CRAS, which gets student number, applications and acceptance data. Data is also monitored by the Widening Participation Sub-Committee, which considers access data and disseminates it to departments. There is also an Admission Requirements Panel which reviews the suitability of qualifications for admission to programmes.

150   Admissions activity takes place within faculty offices and, in departments, it is overseen by relevant managers. At undergraduate level, admissions tutors submit recommendations to faculty tutors and offers are made by the faculty office. At postgraduate level, admissions tutors' recommendations are submitted to the Admissions Office. UCL has an Undergraduate Admissions Requirements Guide to help academic departments evaluate qualifications. Exceptional entry must be approved by the Dean of Students (Academic). Evidence to assess the effectiveness of the processes is outcomes based and service standards for the processing of applications exist at undergraduate and postgraduate level and are understood by the staff operating the processes. UCL also uses International Student Barometer data to monitor admissions effectiveness. 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.

151   Admissions policies are reviewed by the Dean of Students (Academic) and the Director of Educational Liaison annually against precepts of the Code of Practice. Members of staff from UCL are active in external fora that consider and discuss higher education admissions policy and practice, for example the UCAS/Department for Children, Schools and Families Curriculum Development Group and the Russell Group Widening Participation Group. UCL also works closely with local schools and colleges including running conferences and it has formed a 'Partnership for Excellence' with a local college.

152   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 that the admissions processes and their implementation have been designed to promote this. The team believes that UCL is effective in ensuring the consistent implementation of its admissions policy.

Student support

153   Student Support at UCL is split into academic support and welfare/pastoral support, which are overseen by the Dean of Students (Academic) and the Dean of Students (Welfare) respectively. The Dean of Students (Academic) is a new post, which superseded the post of Senior Tutor in January 2009 and now complements the Dean of Students (Welfare) post. The institution hopes that this realignment of the two posts will bring clarity to the academic and pastoral support services available. 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, although finding space to do so is a challenge, and is in the process of developing a virtual student services hub to improve students' access to the services. The audit team felt that this new arrangement, with the two Deans of Students, has the potential to strengthen the support for students, although it was too early to assess its impact at the time of the audit.

154   The management of student support services is also distributed. For example, Disability Services report to the Academic Registrar, Counselling Services to the Dean of Students (Welfare) and Careers to the Vice Provost (Academic and International). This distributed system 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 (DSSCC and JSSC) and the IQR process. Good practice is captured and featured in the Gold

Book, which gives guidance at departmental, faculty and institutional level that aims to enhance the students' experience of academic and pastoral support.

155   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 undertook a review of its provision and AC has implemented a pilot personal tutoring system in a small number of departments. The scheme includes a higher frequency of meetings, provision of pastoral care, and key skills provision. UCL has developed a Key Skills Handbook to support this work and the audit team heard from students that they valued this development. The publication 'A Personal Tutor's Guide' has been factually updated and is available as a download from the CALT website.

156   The audit team saw a range of materials that UCL has 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 the UCL website, which signposts students to the support available. Once again the quality of the support materials provided in hard copy and on the web is of a very high standard.

157   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. The audit team formed the opinion that the Transitions programme had been well designed and was being implemented with careful oversight. Students can gain access to Transitions materials before they start their course. They are surveyed before they start at UCL in order that the institution can gain an understanding of their expectations and can then be appropriately supported through their first year. The Transitions website contains clearly written and useful materials for new students and their mentors and this is complemented by a discussion forum on Moodle and a monthly newsletter. Over half of the departments were taking part in the Transitions programme at the time of the audit and the institution intends to roll it out universally in 2009-10. The team identified the Transitions programme that supports the transition of first-year undergraduate students in higher education as a feature of good practice.

158   The audit team heard that UCL has identified careers and employability as an area to develop. While good quality careers advice is available to all students through the UCL 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, which underpins the institution's work on personal tutoring, and exemplifies UCL's approach to personal development planning.

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

160   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 though the development of a virtual hub which it hopes will help students identify the services they needs through even clearer signposting. There was evidence that academic staff considered that they had a role in ensuring students felt supported in terms of their programmes and that there were well developed links with central support and specialist referral services.

Staff support (including staff development)

161   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 practices are available in the Gold Book. Human resource processes take account of the different categories of staff employed by the institution. There is an HR Policy Committee which takes an overview of UCL's Human Resources Strategy and equality monitoring activity.

162   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 and established members of senior staff provide support for less experienced colleagues.

163   UCL has operated a peer observation of teaching process since the mid-1990s and the current system has been in place since its approval by QMEC in 2004. It is a developmental process that uses formative feedback. Training is provided by CALT and departments are required to keep a record of trained observers. It is a confidential process and the feedback given should be motivational rather than judgemental. Records kept by departments consist of names of the observed and observer, programme of study, date and location of observation, and type of teaching session. DTCs should receive an annual summary of the process which is then forwarded to the FTC which is responsible for following up issues including non-compliance. A statement on peer observation is included in the FTC proceedings which are sent to AC. Although UCL has a policy on peer observation of teaching, departments are able to produce their own guidelines, which should be referenced in the department and faculty learning and teaching strategies. However, the audit team found 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 174).

164   UCL is trying to ensure biennial appraisal, during which process, the balance between research and teaching is considered. A record of appraisal is maintained centrally and academic managers get updates on the timetable of appraisals. During the appraisal process, a needs analysis is undertaken to identify staff training requirements and this is formally recorded. The overall process is monitored through an appraisal monitoring report, which is considered by the Human Resources Policy Committee.

165   There are clear guidelines published to advise staff on the institutional processes for promotion. Staff can gain promotion to a chair on the basis of research or on outstanding teaching including a strong element of innovation. UCL operates a pay banding system for professors. Teaching excellence is a key element of progression up the pay banding and all members of academic staff are expected to teach in order to progress. Professors cannot get up to the top pay band without strength in teaching or knowledge transfer.

166   Staff development is provided by the Organisational and Staff Development Team together with CALT. Courses are advertised on the website. CALT provides a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, which is accredited by the Higher Education Academy and is mandatory for new staff without teaching experience. This forms part of the MA Education, progression to which is voluntary.

167   UCL maintains electronic systems to record training for members of staff and postgraduate students. Records are updated automatically when 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 prescribed

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 to provide information to institutional managers for review and appraisal activities. The audit team identified the use of the electronic logs as a feature of good practice (see paragraph 197).

168   UCL has a range of other mechanisms to support staff and acknowledge performance including the Provost's Awards for Teaching scheme; a Work/life Balance Policy; an Employee Assistance programme, and sabbatical leave. The audit team identified a number of measures employed by UCL to review staff support structures including through IQR processes and by instruments such as the 'Have Your Say' online survey.

169   The processes put in place by UCL to support and develop academic staff engaged in teaching and the supervision of research students were found to be effective by the audit team. Information provided by Human Resources was clear and members of staff were signposted to where they could find further guidance. Overall, the team was of the opinion that UCL has effective and appropriate arrangements for the support and development of its members of staff in relation to those engaged in teaching and supervising research students.

170   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 UCL'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

171   UCL's approach to managing quality enhancement is that quality assurance and quality enhancement are two aspects of the same process, that 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, according to the Briefing Paper, by the process of Internal Quality Review (IQR). IQR 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. As noted in paragraphs 48-52, the audit team found that the submission of the IQR report to faculty teaching committees (FCTs) 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.

172   Of particular significance in the audit team's view is the role of the IQR Panel of the Quality Management and Enhancement Committee (QMEC). This panel considers the IQR 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 IQR, and emanating from it, together with the Annual IQR Panel Report to QMEC, the audit team concluded that IQR acted as an effective means of achieving quality enhancement in a thoroughly systematic way. The team judged the IQR process, especially its capacity to capture aspects of good practice for institution-wide dissemination, to be a feature of good practice.

173   The annual monitoring process is said in the Briefing Paper to have been 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. Academic Committee maintains oversight through QMEC. The requirement that the summary report produced by the departmental head or chair of the departmental teaching committee (DTC) is discussed by the DTC, is said 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 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 (see paragraphs 39-42).

174   As noted in paragraph 163, 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, which is intended to enhance teaching quality through formative and summative feedback. The audit team's discussions with academic staff indicated that peer observation was practised and found to be of benefit in enhancing an individual's teaching skills and proficiency. The team noted that QMEC had recorded that monitoring of peer observation had taken place in 2007-08 in only six FTCs. QMEC responded by resolving that those FTCs that had not reported on peer observation be identified and asked to confirm that 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.

175   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 produced for UCL Board of Examiners (UCLBE), the audit team noted two examples of where enhancement at the institutional level had either occurred, or had the potential do to so. First, criticism of the operation of PORTICO by a number of external examiners in the Academic Session 2006-07 had resulted in the provision of additional resources to develop it, which led to appreciable improvement in 2007-08. Secondly, an external examiner recommended the devising of a set of guideline penalties for the submission of late work where there was considerable variation across the institution. This recommendation was receiving consideration from UCLBE at the time of the audit. While this relates to the audit team's recommendation in paragraph 99, the team concluded that UCL's oversight of external examiners' reports enables it to identify key issues, which therefore contributes to its approach to enhancement.

176   The Briefing Paper cites a number of committees as having a key role in identifying opportunities for, and means of effecting, enhancement. These comprise Academic Committee, the ESCILTA, QMEC, UCLBE, working together with the Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CALT). The Briefing Paper continues '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'. IQR and annual monitoring, together with DLTS, are cited as demonstrating this approach in action. The audit team agreed that IQR and annual monitoring, as operated under the aegis of QMEC, together with the deliberations of UCLBE 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.

177   Examples of institutionally inspired enhancement activities quoted are 'seedcorn' project funding allocated by ESCILTA to support innovations in learning, teaching and assessment; the biennial UCL Teaching and Learning Conference for 'sharing experiences and approaches', and the annual summaries of recommendations and good practice arising from the previous year's round of IQRs which are circulated to all departments.

178   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

179   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. UCL does not engage in franchising programmes for delivery by partners, accreditation of partners for the development and delivery of programmes, or the validation of partners' provision for the award of a UCL degree. Typically, UCL operates partnerships, both in the UK and overseas, 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.

180   UCL follows the advice given in the *Code of practice* regarding the approval of collaborative partnerships, and employs a two-stage process. First, potential partners are approved as institutions with which UCL would have a common or complementary strategic vision and positioning. Secondly, the programmes to be delivered are subsequently considered separately in line with the UCL's normal approval procedures. The audit team also learnt that in the case of partnerships for programmes leading to the award of research degrees, a separate agreement would be negotiated for each student. Proposals for partnerships are considered firstly by faculty boards, thus ensuring that the faculty is able to commit the appropriate resource to maintaining the relationship. The Vice Provost (Academic and International) may then take action (delegated from Academic Board (AB)) to approve the relationship. If the proposed partner is from overseas, then the International Strategy Group is required to advise the Vice Provost before final agreement is given. All partnerships are formally reported to AB. A formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is required to be signed by both parties to define the boundaries of the relationship and the various responsibilities within it. The team saw examples of such MoUs, and noted that they were routinely periodically reviewed and resigned.

181   The audit team was able to scrutinise in detail papers concerned with the approval, operation and review of two collaborative partnerships, one of which included both taught and research degree programmes. It was able to observe in this latter case how academics engaged in the programme were formally appointed to the staff of both institutions. The host department in UCL operated the standard quality management processes scrupulously: programme specifications for the taught courses were full, detailed and available on the UCL website; detailed and helpful student handbooks were available for both taught and research students; annual monitoring was considered as a part of the department's normal annual monitoring processes; full staff-student consultative committees were held, and the reports considered both within annual monitoring, and by the relevant teaching committees within the department; the external examiners had clearly engaged fully with their programmes, and the programme team had considered the comments with care, responding accordingly. The team noted that, in some cases, despite the small numbers of students on the programme, the departmental curriculum board had reviewed the curriculum annually, and was taking care to ensure that the programme remained relevant and appropriate for the student cohort.

182   The other partnership studied by the audit team was a taught postgraduate programme delivered in an Erasmus Mundus partnership with several European universities, and within which students studied at a number of the institutions concerned. The team found that, despite the intricacies of working within such a network, UCL had taken care in the approval process to scrutinise the detailed curriculum delivered in each partner institution, and it noted examples where the curriculum had been altered to meet the requirements of UCL. Thus, while the delivery and assessment of such modules remained with the partner, UCL was assuring standards by careful scrutiny at the approval stage, and was taking similar care to reflect upon student performance in all modules during annual monitoring.

183   The Briefing Paper noted that UCL applied its standard processes for the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative programmes and that external examiners are appointed in the usual manner for such provision. Through its meetings and its consideration of committee papers and other documentation, the audit team was able to confirm that this was indeed the case.

184   As noted above (paragraphs 1 and 18) UCL is a member of the Federal University of London, although, having now obtained its own degree awarding powers, it has taken the decision to award its own degrees rather than those of the University of London. UCL is currently working with its partner Colleges within the Federal University to establish arrangements to generate appropriate formal partnerships where bipartite relationships are possible, and to identify lead institutions and partner agreements for existing University of London awards, where intercollegiate teaching has been the norm. UCL has recently only contributed to a limited number of such arrangements, and proposals have already been considered by AB. The audit team was reassured from its meetings that UCL intends to apply its current rigorous approach to such newly defined arrangements.

185   While UCL already has long-standing international collaborative partnerships, it had not at the time of the audit established any permanent overseas branch campuses. It has recognised the commitment and burden related to such developments, but also acknowledges in its International Strategy that significant benefits might accrue from the establishment of a limited number of international campuses. Consequently, it has been actively investigating several such opportunities and, at the time of the audit, was taking a limited number of proposals forward.

186   At the invitation of, and in partnership with, the Government of South Australia, UCL will be establishing a School of Energy and Resources in Adelaide. Among several other activities, all congruent with UCL's mission and strategy, the School will deliver an industry-focused master's programme, doctoral training and research in energy and resources. The master's programme will commence in 2010. The audit team learned that detailed and careful consideration of matters of finance, estates, learning resources, student administration, programme development, and quality assurance had taken place, and that all UCL's formal approval processes would operate as usual. A joint Project Board between UCL and the Government of South Australia had been established to oversee this particular project, applying UCL's risk assessment procedures to the developments, and soliciting best practice from other parts of the sector where such developments had already occurred. Regular reports have been made to Academic Committee, AB, Finance Committee and Council. The team found clear evidence that UCL is taking care to establish this new venture without compromising the standards of its academic provision.

187   The audit team noted that UCL had chosen to follow the advice given in the *Code of practice, Section 2* with a single exception, namely it does not formally make publicly available 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.

188   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

189   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.

190   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 193), and what is expected of the research students themselves. The Graduate School, which has separate representation on relevant key committees, works closely with the Registry, which is responsible for administering the publication of regulations, admissions, student records, management information, examination arrangements, and provision of advice. An advantage of the Graduate School was stated in the Briefing Paper to be the promotion of consistency in relation to the standard of UCL's research degree programmes and the quality of the student experience across the institution.

191   The Graduate Education Executive Sub-Committee (GEESC) has responsibility for defining, approving and reviewing policies, procedures and regulations in relation to research degree programmes. To discharge its functions, GEESC receives annual reports on the work of the Graduate School; research degree submission rates; Pass, referral, withdrawal and Fail rates; completion rates; Senior Tutor (henceforth Dean of Students (Academic)) referrals; Complaints and Appeals, and reports (termly) on Suspensions of the Regulations. GEESC's membership includes all faculty graduate tutors, the Dean of Students, the Academic Registrar and student representatives.

192   At faculty level, there is a faculty graduate tutor (FGT) and either a single faculty teaching committee (FTC), which includes the FGT, or a separate graduate teaching committee chaired by the FGT.

193   At departmental level, each department has a departmental graduate tutor (DGT), and most departments have a departmental graduate teaching committee, (DGTC) which reviews all matters relating to research degree programmes. The DGT is a key figure as regards informing supervisors about the support provided centrally, which includes special needs of international and part-time students; Counselling Service; Student Disability Services; Equal Opportunity Policy; resources for students in financial hardship; careers information and advice; facilities offered by the UCL Union, the University of London, and the UCL Graduate School. From its discussions with postgraduate research students, departmental and faculty graduate tutors, and the Chair of GEESC and the Graduate School, together with its reading of the minutes of meetings of GEESC and the Graduate School Report, the audit team concluded that the committee structure and the arrangements for overseeing the supervision and progress of research students were appropriate.

194   Information is delivered principally via the web. The Code of Practice and handbooks are 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's reading of the UCL Graduate School Code of Practice led it to conclude that it provided a short but very clear exposition of the structures, processes and regulations relevant to a research student, a conclusion contributing towards the feature of good practice identified by the team.

195   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.

196   Management information, such as submission rates, is submitted to GEESC. HESA annually produces research degree completion rates, which are reported to GEESC and included in the Graduate School Annual Report. Qualification rates are high, with a qualifying rate for home and EU students of 83 per cent against a benchmark of 79 per cent; for overseas students the qualifying rate is 73 per cent against a benchmark of 76 per cent. UCL sees a need to improve on these figures and a closer monitoring by GEESC was instituted from February 2005.

197   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 QAA Review of research degree programmes in 2006. 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 for students and staff to maintain an accurate picture of progress both in research and training, which had been generally well-received by staff and students. The team concluded that the institution's use of interactive electronic logs to record and monitor both staff training and research student training and progress was a feature of good practice (see also paragraph 167).

198   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, noting in particular, the frequent email contact with UCL before registration, and a 'postgraduate conference' in one department, where second-year research students presented their work to newly-registered students.

199   Regulations regarding the supervisory process are set out in the Grey Book. All students have a Supervisory Panel comprising at least a Principal Supervisor and Subsidiary Supervisor. Student progress is monitored by the DGT and FGT. The DGT 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.

200   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 DGT. The transfer must be recommended by the supervisory team and approved by the DGT. The audit team learnt 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 by GEESC. The team viewed this as an example of where the process of harmonisation of practice across the institution needed to be consolidated.

201   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.

202   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.

203   Mechanisms for student feedback include representation of postgraduate research students on UCL committees and on departmental staff-student consultative committees, minutes of which are published; a member of the Postgraduate Association (PGA) of the Students' Union plus the Medical and Postgraduates Sabbatical Officer of the Students' Union are members of GEESC; a biennial anonymous questionnaire engaging 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 the feedback from principal and subsidiary supervisors; overall research environment, and overall student experience. Plans are afoot for additional means of gaining feedback (exit questionnaires). The team learned from its discussions with Students' Union representatives that the Union has found it difficult to engage successfully with the postgraduate research student community, a problem possibly linked to the non-campus nature of UCL and the concomitant travelling. This lack of engagement of research students with the PGA was amply confirmed by those students met by the team. 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.

204   Assessment of research students' theses is made by two examiners, an external examiner and an examiner internal to UCL to ensure consistency. Nomination of examiners is made by the relevant FGT and referred to the Chair of GEESC or his nominee for approval, with Registry performing a check on the eligibility of nominees. The faculty and institutional-level scrutiny of proposed examiners for research candidates was also considered by the audit team to ensure the appointment of well qualified and independent persons to the role. 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 the Grey Book. The regulations, as set out in the Grey Book, and practices were judged by the audit team to be rigorous. PhD external examiners' reports are sent to the student's supervisor, Head of Department and Dean of Faculty and are monitored by the Director of Student Administration in Registry. Particular issues raised by examiners may be brought to the attention of the Head of the Graduate School as chair of GEESC, who determines the action to be taken.

205   Students who have a complaint are encouraged to resolve the matter informally in the first instance. Where progress cannot be made, UCL has a well-established grievance procedure featuring an initial scrutiny by the Academic Registrar and the Chair of the Student Grievance Panel (normally the Head of the Graduate School) to decide whether there is a case to answer. If not, the student is informed of the reasons for this decision and can appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education. If the case proceeds, a panel is set up to hear it comprising the head of the Graduate School (Chair) an FGT chosen from a faculty other than that of the student, and a student representative from UCL Union. Once the case has been considered by the panel, and if the student is still not satisfied, there is provision for a Grievance Appeals Panel, members of which are independent and drawn from a list approved by UCL's Council on an annual basis. No students met by the audit team had experience of the system, but student representatives did believe the system to be fair. The team agreed with this view.

206   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 PORTICO. 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.

207   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 fully met 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

208   The Briefing Paper stated that 'UCL is committed to open access to information for all who require it'. It also stated that the information should 'be accessible to those who need it, both within UCL and beyond', that 'clear mechanisms should be in place for monitoring the quality of information', and that 'information should be fit for its purposes in terms of accuracy, timeliness, consistency and completeness'. The audit team learned that UCL feels committed to an underpinning 'access to high-quality corporate information, systems and services', and believes that wherever possible the principal sources of definitive information within and about UCL will be electronic in form.

209   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 intranet, where a large body of the institution's publications and regulations are available, and also, by request, to specific exemplar material on departmental intranets.

210   UCL defines in some 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 both within the sampling trails, and with other reading on the intranet, and was thereby able to confirm that the material made available to students met both 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 was accurate and comprehensive.

211   The audit team read that the Academic Services department is responsible, on behalf of the Quality Management and Enhancement Committee, for ensuring that UCL meets the public information requirements placed on higher education institutions in HEFCE'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 all publicly available through UCL's internet sites. Of particular note, UCL's decision to provide public access to the Academic Manual has eased the burden on the institution considerably. Many of HEFCE's requirements are met in this way.

212   Procedures for the formal publication of material are well-documented, both in general terms, and with more specific detail in the case of material for prospective students. The processes clearly define those responsible for auditing and approving the accuracy of both institution and programme-specific information, as well as what those responsibilities entail.

213   Programme-specific electronic information for prospective students was accurate and presented in a user-friendly, interactive form. Both programme specifications and web-based information made it clear when programmes had a relationship or recognition with a professional or statutory body, or was delivered in partnership with another organisation. Material regarding programmes delivered in collaboration with other organisations was published under the auspices of UCL, and hence had been subject to UCL's own internal approval processes.

214   The student written submission (SWS) stated that, overall, students were pleased with their experiences regarding information published about both the institution and their courses. The SWS did identify some isolated areas where experience did not meet student expectations, and the audit team found that UCL was already exploring these issues with students through the various deliberative committees. Students who met the audit team largely confirmed this view of information provided both before and during their course of study. Postgraduate research students reported that they were particularly well informed via the range of information they received, both from the Graduate School and their departments.

215   On the basis of information gained from meetings with students, the SWS, and the published information read, the audit team concluded that students were generally satisfied with information they received from UCL. The audit found that, overall, 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. The team found the quality, clarity and accessibility of published guidance for staff and students to be a feature of good practice.