QAA

City University London

December 2008

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited City University London (the University) from 8 to 12 December 2008 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its provision

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit found the University's commitment to quality enhancement evident in a number of activities; it found also that these activities would benefit from greater coordination and that there is, in particular, scope for the more effective dissemination of good practice.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit found the supervision and support arrangements for postgraduate research students at City University London are satisfactory and meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*.

Published information

The audit found that reliance can largely be placed on the accuracy of the information the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards, but that some aspects of version control and accuracy would benefit from management attention.

Features of good practice

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

- the innovative use of educational balance sheets to assist the University's educational planning and as an aid to communication with members of the University Council (paragraph 47)

- the recent emphasis on constructive dialogue with students, as exemplified in the strengthening of student representation on the Student Affairs Committee (paragraph 61)

- the contribution made by the school-based educational development associates to institution-wide developments in support of good academic practice (paragraph 78)

- the quality management processes for validated provision, with particular reference to the use of external advisers and the annual meetings with students (paragraph 95).

Recommendations for action

The audit team considers it would be advisable for the University to:

- ensure that feedback to students on their assessed work is consistently timely and effective in supporting learning (paragraph 57).

It would be desirable for the University:

- consistently to analyse and use management information to inform decision-making and action-planning in its institutional-level academic deliberative structures (paragraphs 51, 72)

- systematically to disseminate the lessons and good practice identified through its quality management processes (paragraph 85)

- to continue to move towards convergence of its collaborative provision processes for validation and partnership (paragraph 98)

- to satisfy itself that all published information, including that which is online, is accurate, accessible and current (paragraph 115).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   City University London (the University) was founded in 1894 as the Northampton Institute, and awarded University status (with full degree awarding powers) in 1966. In 1995 St Bartholomew's College of Nursing and Midwifery and Charterhouse College of Radiography merged with the University and in 2001 the University incorporated the Inns of Court School of Law.

2   The University is closely linked to the City of London: its Chancellor is the Lord Mayor and its degree ceremonies are held in the Guildhall. The University brands itself 'the university for business and the professions', a focus reflected in almost all its core activities: for example its current Strategic Plan identifies leading London in education, research and knowledge transfer for business and the professions as a key institutional goal; more than two-thirds of its programmes are subject to accreditation by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs); and a large proportion of students have work placements in professional or other occupational settings.

3   The University is based on six main, and a number of smaller, sites. In academic year 2006-07, it had 12,861 full-time equivalent students, of whom 84 per cent were full-time and 64 per cent undergraduate, and 706 research students. Its academic staff complement was 780, with larger numbers of support and visiting staff.

4   The University undertakes a limited amount of collaborative provision: this mainly involves validation, which is managed centrally (and involves around 2,000 students); it also has a number of partnership arrangements that include joint and franchised activity, and which are managed at school level.

The information base for the audit

5   The University provided a Briefing Paper and supporting documentation. The index to the Briefing Paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the University's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of awards and the quality of its educational provision. The audit team also had access to the report of the previous Institutional audit (December 2004) and the Review of research degree programmes (July 2006), and was provided with hard copies of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper and other documentation requested in the course of the audit; the key materials were also made available on CD-ROM. The City University Students' Union produced a written submission, setting out students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, their experience as learners and their role in quality management. The team thanks the Students' Union for its submission, to which members made repeated reference in the course of their enquiries.

Developments since the previous audit

6   The University's previous Institutional audit, in December 2004, resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in its current and likely future capacity to manage the quality of its academic programmes and the standards of its awards. The audit report noted the following areas of good practice:

- the institutional framework for the assurance of quality and standards, which defines central control and the devolution of authority and responsibility, and includes appropriate checks and balances

- the proactive use of externality in the enhancement of the student experience, and of the quality of the provision

- the work of the Educational Development Centre, which provides wide-ranging support for the enhancement of academic practice in the promotion of learning, and which draws on expertise from across the institution

- the clear and comprehensive guidance provided to students through the Research Studies Handbook and website

- the engagement and participation of the University, through its schools and services, in local community activities, in support of its widening participation plans

- the strategic approach to, and effective management of, collaborative provision which are governed by well-documented, clear and comprehensive procedures.

7   The University was advised to:

- review the consistency of communication with students, especially the timeliness and quality of feedback on assessment, and responses to student feedback and representations

- ensure that the provisions of the Human Resources Strategy, particularly those for staff development and support, are applied consistently to all visiting staff.

8   It was considered desirable for the University to:

- continue to strengthen student representation, with particular reference to arrangements in the Department of Continuing Education.

9   So far as the first advisable and the desirable recommendations are concerned, the audit team was satisfied, from both documentation and meetings, that the University had made efforts, particularly since the arrival of the new Vice-Chancellor in academic year 2007-08, to improve communication with students and student representation: it had established a student affairs committee; increased committee representation; scheduled (in partnership with the Students' Union) training and support for representatives; and improved feedback processes. The University acknowledged in its Briefing Paper that both the timeliness and the quality of feedback to students on assessment remain areas for development (see also paragraph 57 of this report), and described a number of actions in hand to address them. In particular, 'build[ing] upon the way in which the quality of feedback to students is managed' had been identified as the first priority for school associate deans (learning and teaching) in the present academic year.

10   The University stated that the Staff Development Unit was addressing the second recommendation (the availability of support for visiting lecturers) by working with schools, to ensure that providing appropriate support for visiting lecturers forms part of institutional strategy and that they have an entitlement to staff development opportunities.

11   Significant developments since the previous audit include making permanent the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) post (see paragraph 13); establishing the Academic Development Unit (ADU) (see paragraph 19); the Review of Corporate Governance and Senate;

the introduction of the Annual Report on Quality and Standards (ARQS), (designed to consolidate reflection on the framework for managing the quality of learning opportunities and identify areas for development); the new Learning and Teaching Strategy; the opening of the Student Centre (providing a comprehensive range of support facilities); the establishment of the Learning Development Centre (providing an integrated support service for staff in curriculum development, design and delivery); the Classroom Experience Initiative (involving a cost of £1.4m to install leading-edge teaching podia facilities in 85 teaching rooms and appoint staff for training and maintenance purposes); the implementation of an institution-wide online system to enhance the management of programme information; and the completion of a review of assessment policy and regulations. The University has also had several engagements with QAA, the reports of which have been predominantly positive, and, where recommendations have been made, the University has generally acted upon them.

The University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

12   The University's approach to the management of academic quality is based on the interaction of institution-wide structures and procedures, many of them recent or recently revised, with school-level arrangements. The principal reference points are the Academic Handbook, the Research Studies Handbook and the Validation and Institutional Partnerships Handbook.

13   As Chief Executive Officer, the Vice-Chancellor draws his authority from the University Council. He is supported by three deputy vice-chancellors, one of whom, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), has delegated executive responsibility for policy developments supporting academic standards and the quality of educational provision; the post was made permanent in August 2008. The Chief Operating Officer is head of administration and there are seven deans of school (to be reduced to five on the introduction of a conjoint dean system): together these individuals constitute the Executive Committee, an advisory body to the Vice-Chancellor whose terms of reference include proposing to the Council any substantial institutional restructurings and ensuring a proper balance between institutional and school-level activities. Two additional personnel, who do not sit on the Executive Committee but have the title dean, are the Dean of Students (whose remit includes quality enhancement, appeals, complaints and disciplinary matters for students on collaborative as well as internal programmes) and the Dean of Validation; both report to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education).

14   As the University's governing body, the Council delegates authority for academic matters to Senate and for governance issues to its Audit and Risk Committee, Remuneration and Corporate Governance Committee and Nominations Committee. Senate membership includes, in addition to the Vice-Chancellor as Chair, the deputy vice-chancellors; the chairs of the Academic Practice, Programmes and Standards Committee (APPSC), the Student Affairs Committee, Validation and Institutional Partnerships Committee and Research Committee; Students' Union representatives; and elected members of staff.

15   The University has seven academic schools, each currently headed by a dean responsible for ensuring academic standards, for which operational responsibility is normally devolved to an associate dean learning and teaching. The existence of strong, diverse schools operating within what the Vice-Chancellor, reflecting the range of professional and business qualifications awarded, termed a 'plural university' is central to institutional procedures and culture.

16   In addition, each school has a board of studies responsible for academic quality and standards, reporting to Senate and normally chaired by the dean. Boards have specified subcommittees, which, with the exception of validation and partnerships, largely (some variability being permitted) mirror Senate committees.

17   The Executive Committee exercises strategic oversight of collaborative provision, the guiding principle of which is that the quality and academic standards of such provision must at least match those of internal programmes. Accordingly, external examining arrangements replicate internal ones, as do annual programme evaluations and periodic programme reviews. At the time of the audit, all credit and award-bearing partnerships had recently been subjected to a viability and reputational value review, though its outcome was not yet known.

18   Academic oversight of all research degree provision has recently been transferred to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education), although educational issues involving consideration of the wider research framework require him to work collaboratively with his counterpart with responsibility for research and international affairs.

19   The Academic Development Unit was founded in April 2008, with a particular remit for policy development and implementation; the enhancement of student learning; supporting new educational developments; and disseminating the institutional framework for managing academic standards. It provides a range of policy advice and administrative support to Senate and its committees; a member is also assigned to each school to provide advice and support on educational developments and the implementation of policy and procedures. The Head of the Unit reports to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education).

20   At the time of the audit, many components of the University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities were recent or new, and the audit team was therefore unable to gauge their operational effectiveness. Nevertheless, meetings with staff and documentary study led the team to conclude that the changes had been carefully considered and effectively communicated. The University will doubtless ensure, at this time of considerable change, the continuing appropriateness of its oversight of both schools and collaborative provision.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of academic standards

21   For the sake of convenience, all aspects of programme approval, monitoring and review are described in this section.

22   The University stated in its Briefing Paper that the key components of its framework for managing academic standards are programme approval, annual programme evaluation, periodic programme review and internal academic audit.

23   Programme approval is a two-stage process, although both stages may be considered simultaneously if the documentation is complete. Activities with the potential to be developed into academic programmes are first identified at school level, where boards of studies are responsible for ensuring that proposals are complete (and meet the expectations of all relevant external reference points) and necessary resources available. When signed off by the board of studies, proposals become subject to the institutional Stage 1 procedure, where they are scrutinised by academic leads (senior staff with a cross-school brief) appointed on behalf of the Academic Practice, Programmes and Standards Committee (APPSC) and reported to the school board of studies concerned and the Executive Committee. Detailed consideration occurs at Stage 2, which is conducted by a panel appointed by APPSC, with an independent internal chair, two internal reviewers and a minimum of one external subject expert.

24   The audit team confirms that the relevant documentation appears appropriate and comprehensive, and that the approvals studied in the course of the audit followed institutional procedures: Stage 2 scrutiny in particular was found to involve extensive and fruitful debate. The team noted that the procedures are regularly reviewed and appropriately disseminated, and that the Annual Report on Quality and Standards (ARQS) appears effective in identifying activities

where further support is necessary: such activities have in the past included linking learning outcomes to assessment methods and developing master's-level programmes. The team also learnt that a review of approval procedures is planned for the current academic year, with the dual aims of ensuring a broader commitment to programme flexibility 'to meet the changing needs of the sectors in which we operate' and reflecting more closely the priorities of the new Strategic Plan. Overall, the team considered programme approval procedures thorough, appropriate and reflective.

25   Annual programme evaluation provides an opportunity to reflect on effectiveness, including the extent to which students have met intended learning outcomes and whether appropriate standards have been set. The process operates mainly at school level, and includes consideration of external examiners' reports; student feedback; admission data; and issues the school considers may require institutional-level attention. After detailed school-level consideration the Academic Development Unit (ADU), in liaison with the school, produces a summary report for the attention of the University APPSC. The audit team noted that the most recent report stated that whereas in some instances issues raised had already been taken forward by relevant providers, in others the process would be facilitated by improved communication. It also noted that the format of the process has recently been changed to permit a more effective articulation of common themes, to support school-level action planning and to improve the timeliness of submission.

26   The audit team studied a number of annual programme evaluation reports, all of which work with a basic template requiring information on a range of student and other relevant data. Although much of this is useful and necessary, the template does not require the compilation of statistical information on the results of student feedback. Overall, the team concluded that the system is appropriate and rigorous, since it requires schools to reflect on the currency and validity of programme learning outcomes; the effectiveness of both learning resources and student support; the currency and validity of programme learning outcomes; the effectiveness of learning resources and student support; and on the extent of student engagement with programmes via formal feedback and otherwise. Nevertheless, the potential also exists for the University to make better use of the management information contained in these reports, both to aid constructive reflection and to support future programme development; it may wish to reconsider aspects of the process with this in mind.

27   Periodic programme review operates on a five or six-year cycle. It aims to ensure programme validity, relevance and consonance with institutional strategy; promote development and critical reflection; and enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities. It involves a self-evaluation document; annual programme evaluation reports and other relevant documentation; evidence of the effectiveness of assessment strategies and student involvement; and the views of external examiners, external bodies, alumni and alumnae, and employers. Review panels include an independent internal reviewer and an external academic expert; there is also provision for the inclusion of a clinical or professional expert.

28   Panels' enquiries are extensive, and must include a meeting with students (student views also form a required element of the report). Reports are presented to the school APPSC, which monitors completion of any conditions and/or recommendations, reporting directly on progress to the school board of studies concerned, and thence to the University APPSC. On the basis of its study of periodic review documentation from undergraduate programmes in one school and from a master's programme in another, the audit team confirms that procedures were followed, that the reports made detailed, relevant and constructive comments, that the reports were discussed at both school and institutional level and that the required response and action plan were submitted and followed through.

29   The University recently completed an assessment of periodic programme review, which itself included external membership, both to ensure alignment with the new Learning and Teaching Strategy and to place increased emphasis on quality enhancement. It plans, in the light of this review, to make the process more strategic and forward-looking, to make more use of

external and student input, and to align the procedure more closely with institutional planning. The audit team both noted and encourages the University's willingness to engage in constructive reflection on this important process.

30   Internal academic audit is a process by which, in a devolved quality management framework, the University assures itself of the consistency and effectiveness of schools' implementation of institutional strategy and academic policy. With the Academic Governance Committee, ADU manages, and the Audit and Risk Committee oversees, this process. On the basis of its scrutiny of both internal audits carried out since an updated procedure was introduced in early 2008, the audit team confirms that the process is rigorous, and enables the University to assure itself of the school-level delivery of institutional strategy and policy.

31   Overall, the audit team confirms the thoroughness of the University's approval and review process, and its engagement with the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. Nevertheless, the team also noted the view expressed in two schools that the collective demands of the process, particularly given the number of recent procedural changes, are very considerable. No doubt the University will wish, in monitoring the revised process, to bear in mind the cumulative impact of all aspects of the process on different levels of academic and administrative staff.

External examiners

32   The University stated in its Briefing Paper that external examiners play a critical role in assuring the academic standards of its awards; the audit team confirms that their reports form an integral part of internal quality assurance and a public reference point on quality and standards. Each award-bearing programme has at least one external examiner, who may, where appropriate, be a suitably qualified industry professional: in such cases it falls to boards of study to confirm nominees' competence, particularly in relation to assuring academic standards.

33   The External Examiner's Handbook, which explains the system nationally as well as articulating the powers and duties of its own external examiners, is reviewed and revised annually. All external examiners receive a briefing pack on appointment, and those new to the role are invited to meet a member of ADU for a generic introduction. The audit team considers the Handbook, which includes web links to both national and local policy statements and procedures, helpful and comprehensive.

34   External examiners present their reports on a standard template that requires them to comment on published subject benchmarks; national qualification frameworks and institutional programme specifications; whether the standards set and achieved accord with similar-level programmes in the United Kingdom; whether assessment is sound and fairly conducted; and issues for further consideration and features of good practice.

35   External examiners' reports are received by ADU, which identifies instances of good practice and possible points for action, referring issues of particular concern to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) at an early stage. It then forwards the reports to schools, where detailed discussion takes place, initially with the programme director concerned and, more formally, at board of study level, prior to submitting responses and action plans to the University APPSC. The audit team notes that programme directors are responsible for ensuring that each external examiner receives a written response to his or her report, and that ADU monitors the execution of this duty.

36   The audit team, having reviewed a sample of external examiners' reports from each school, confirms that the process is conducted in accordance with institutional guidelines and that external examiners overwhelmingly judge the standards attained appropriate to the level of the award. The team particularly noted instances of the thorough evaluation of external examiners' reports by ADU and APPSC leading to the implementation of recommendations for policy development. Overall, the team concluded that the University's use of external examiners is

effective, and that the University's endeavours to develop a mechanism for acknowledging particularly strong reports are likely to contribute to the dissemination of good practice. Nevertheless, the University may, given precept 7 of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining* wish to consider systematising its procedures for inducting new external examiners; it will also, no doubt, continue to ensure that its use of external examiners as 'critical friends' in programme development in no way compromises their independence of judgement as examiners.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

37   The University stated in its Briefing Paper that its framework for supporting academic standards is informed by the *Code of practice* and the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The ADU is responsible for monitoring and advising on sector-wide developments related to the Academic Infrastructure and on other issues relating to quality and standards; the Programme Development Handbook contains generic guidelines about expectations for programmes at all levels, which broadly reflect the expectations of *Section 7* of the *Code of practice*; and APPSC, in the light of a review of the University's engagement with the *Code* during academic year 2007-08, confirmed that programme teams are required to consider national subject benchmarking statements in curriculum development. The audit team noted that programme specifications describe how the appropriate benchmark statements have been used.

38   Also in academic year 2007-08, the University introduced PRISM, a new system designed to manage all information on programme design and structure: this system, compliance with which is mandatory, is intended to facilitate the publication of all programme specifications (which are currently widely available, but until recently primarily as hard copy) on the institutional website. While the University acknowledged that considerable implementation difficulties had been encountered, senior staff informed the audit team that the work was virtually complete. The team, however, having inspected the website and considered the minutes of a number of meetings, formed the view that this was an optimistic assessment. The team anticipates that the University will wish to address any remaining issues speedily and at a senior level to ensure that students are given accurate and complete information about their programmes, and that learning outcomes are in all cases appropriately aligned with different assessment tasks.

39   The new Learning and Teaching Strategy requires all educational offerings to be compatible with relevant international structures and standards, including those laid down in the Bologna Process; and ADU confirmed that full implementation of the Diploma Supplement, as an accompaniment to the University's standard transcript, is scheduled for the current academic year.

40   The University's substantial involvement with professional body accreditation means that the quality of learning opportunities, which naturally has a direct bearing on students' success and employability, must be informed by external contributions. Accordingly, approval events for the many programmes accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRB) normally include members of relevant regulatory bodies. The University requires periodic programme review to address matters pertaining to professional body recognition and accreditation. The audit team scrutinised one review where the documentary evidence drew almost entirely upon material prepared for professional accreditation, and another which based its curriculum review upon the needs of the professional body. Nevertheless, whereas PSRB reports for validated provision are considered at the Validations and Partnerships Working Group, most such reports on internal provision are considered only at school level. While recognising that occasionally there may be good reasons for this, and noting in particular that the University has considered and rejected the idea of embedding PSRB recognition events more deeply in its annual quality processes, the team considers the University may wish to give further thought to whether greater central scrutiny of PSRB reports, especially when generic issues have been raised, would enhance its overall review process.

41   Overall, while noting the technical issues associated with PRISM, the audit team found that the University engages constructively with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points.

Assessment policies and regulations

42   Institutional assessment regulations are comprehensive, properly documented, and apply to collaborative as well as internal provision. Detailed regulations for specific programmes are widely available in both hard copy and electronic format, and students informed the audit team that they are aware of the criteria relevant to their programmes of study.

43   Senate has recently approved revised regulations to meet the demands of the new Assessment Policy. These revisions, which were proposed by a representative assessment group with student membership, aim for greater coherence and streamlining, not least in relation to the quality and timeliness of feedback on assessed work, an issue to which reference is made later (see paragraph 57). The audit team, having studied the work of the Assessment Group, found its analysis thorough and its recommendations clear and potentially beneficial.

44   By the time of the audit, the Assessment Group had been replaced by the Assessment Criteria and Feedback Practices Working Group, which has a developmental remit aligned to the Learning and Teaching Strategy. This Group's responsibilities include developing a common use of assessment criteria, enhancing their consistency and transparency with a view to increasing the support given to students when working on assignments, and analysing current approaches to providing student feedback across a range of assessment methods. The creation of the Working Group appears to the audit team a logical development of an already basically sound assessment structure.

45   The ADU plays a central role in supporting the implementation of the Assessment Policy, offering advice at school-level on the interpretation of regulations in particular cases (a member of the Unit attends all assessment boards) and advising APPSC of any problems or inconsistencies.

46   The audit team, having reviewed both the regulations and their implementation at school level, confirms that the University's assessment processes are explicit, valid and reliable. More generally, it considers institutional assessment policies and regulations effective in assuring the maintenance of academic standards.

Management information - statistics

47   The University has recently introduced a system of educational balance sheets, produced as reports to provide qualitative as well as quantitative data on the academic and financial health of different aspects of educational provision. Thus far, among other themes, the balance sheets have covered admissions, the implications of the National Student Survey (NSS) and undergraduate progression; they have also contributed to the development of the Strategic Plan. Data supporting the balance sheets is considered by both Council and Executive Committee, and the University, bearing in mind that most members of Council are familiar with numerical balance sheets, regards them as useful aids to Council's appreciation of aggregated data. The audit team examined a number of educational balance sheets and the manner in which they have been deployed, and considers their use, both in assisting educational planning and as an aid to communication with members of Council, a feature of good practice.

48   The Strategy and Planning Unit provides statistical and analytical information to support strategic development, management planning and decision-making across the University. The data collected is used in annual programme evaluation and for the compilation of educational balance sheets. The University stated in its Briefing Paper that it has pursued various initiatives to develop its capacity for producing and considering management information on student admission, progression and completion; most recently it has adopted a single data source, tracking students from admission to award. While drawing attention to a number of operational

changes made with the aim of enabling it to employ its database more reliably, the University acknowledged that the new methodology has provoked questions at school level about the accuracy and types of reports being generated, and that further consideration as to how the data might inform decision-making processes remains necessary.

49   The University stated that it has made significant progress in the use of statistical and other relevant management information, noting in particular improvements stemming from its review of annual programme evaluation and its more 'consolidated' approach to the NSS. It acknowledges, however, that further work is needed to develop a comprehensive institutional framework to guide the use of all available forms of management information, and in particular, to clarify the use of admission, progression and completion data from programme to institutional level. In agreeing that such work would be beneficial, the audit team also identified further areas where statistical information could have been compiled more systematically or used to better effect: in particular, although NSS results are considered centrally and will provide evidence supporting a new review of undergraduate education, such information does not feed routinely into discussions on feedback at school and programme levels.

50   In addition, external examiners have drawn attention to problems of information deployment at assessment boards. During the last two examination cycles, for example, one examiner commented that the board's business had been jeopardised because of the absence of a comprehensive analysis sheet for each student; another, working with a different school, expressed concerns about accuracy, and called for the introduction of more robust checking procedures prior to the board meeting.

51   From its analysis of documentation, the audit team concludes that a more strategic approach to the use of information would support the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and that the University could usefully update its management information strategy. The team therefore considers it would be desirable for the University consistently to analyse and use management information to inform decision-making and action-planning in its institutional-level academic deliberative structures. Overall, however, the team concludes that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

52   The University stated in its Briefing Paper that it considers the management of learning opportunities fundamental both to its Strategic Plan and to its revised Learning and Teaching Strategy, and that the establishment of the role of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the institution of the Academic Development Unit (ADU) and the Learning Development Centre collectively strengthen the institutional management of learning opportunities. It also explained that its 'plural' nature permits a heterogeneous student experience in different schools, subject to baseline requirements being met.

53   The University particularly identified the Annual Report on Quality and Standards (ARQS) as a significant feature of quality management and enhancement. The audit team confirms that this procedure has facilitated consideration of a number of activities, including personal tutoring, learning support resources, student support, and staff development and reward.

54   For ease of reference, the University's procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes have been described in the previous section, where the audit team, while drawing attention to the cumulative burden of the arrangements, particularly at school level, found the procedures thorough in design and appropriately implemented. Again, for ease of reference, the University's engagement with external reference points was considered in its

totality in the previous section, where it was confirmed that the University engages constructively with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points.

Management information - feedback from students

55   The University gathers formal data from students via module-level feedback, institutional surveys of identified groups and the National Student Survey (NSS). In the academic year 2006-07, it piloted the first stage of a revised framework for student feedback, which, while building on the systems already in place, aims to provide a common data set to aid institution-wide comparison of the student learning experience. The possibility of using a uniform set of questions was considered and rejected, and the framework adopted incorporates both standard questions and discipline-based questions designed by programme teams and approved by the dean. The school staff-student liaison committee (or its equivalent) and programme management team concerned consider the feedback, initiating an action plan to be implemented by the programme team and monitored by the dean.

56   In recognition of the value of the NSS, the University has instituted a mechanism to facilitate the consideration of its results. As with data deriving from institutional surveys, the Executive Committee initially receives NSS data alongside a preliminary analysis undertaken by ADU. The data is then passed to schools (where boards of studies are responsible for ensuring appropriate action) and thence to the Student Affairs Committee, which requires schools to report on the analyses of all feedback received, including how it has been responded to. This process, supplemented by a consolidated report of all schools' feedback gathering, facilitates the identification of themes arising, including those potentially requiring attention. The process ends with the Student Affairs Committee reporting to the Executive Committee and Senate, which signs off the process as a whole.

57   In exploring students' views of the University's responsiveness to issues raised, the audit team noted that the issue of the timeliness and effectiveness of feedback to students on assessed work, identified in the previous audit, remains unresolved. While students expressed variable degrees of concern about it (leading the team to conclude that the extent of the problem varies by discipline), for some, the issue is clearly significant; indeed the University itself has identified this topic as a priority action area in the current ARQS action plan. Given in particular that this issue was the subject of an 'advisable' recommendation in the last audit and is yet to be fully addressed, it is again considered advisable for the University to ensure that feedback to students on their assessed work is consistently timely and effective in supporting learning.

Role of students in quality assurance

58   In its Briefing Paper, the University identified student representation as a core feature of its committee structure, and the student written submission (SWS) reported an increasing focus on the student experience, filtering down from the Vice-Chancellor to academic schools and service departments.

59   At school level, staff-student liaison committees (or their equivalent) are the main vehicle for programme-level discussion of students' learning experience. The Briefing Paper drew attention to successful representative arrangements having been identified in ARQS; it stressed also ADU's work (in partnership with the Union) in training student representatives and subsequently supporting them by means which include liaison with schools, publishing a guide for student representatives, and establishing and maintaining a database of representatives.

60   A further development since the previous audit has been the establishment of the Student Affairs Committee. The audit team heard that this Committee, chaired by the Dean of Students and described as having 'teeth' in that it reports to the Executive Committee, Senate and Council, constitutes the main institution-level forum for monitoring students' views of their learning opportunities. Among the examples provided of such discussion leading to ameliorative action, was the University making 'every effort' to respond to concerns about the negative impact of

over-running building works. The team particularly noted the recent strengthening of the Committee's role and membership: its terms of reference now include monitoring the University's response to student feedback; its membership provides for stronger student representation; and a nominated member of Council is responsible for overseeing the institutional response to issues raised, as well as having a standing invitation to attend meetings. The team wholly accepts that students generally value the Committee.

61   Overall, the establishment and subsequent revision of the Student Affairs Committee have contributed to invigorating the University's dialogue with students and strengthening the student voice; the recent emphasis on constructive dialogue with students, as exemplified in the strengthening of student representation on the Student Affairs Committee, constitutes a feature of good practice.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

62   The University stated in its Briefing Paper that the Learning Development Centre, in providing an infrastructure and learning environment supporting and facilitating high-quality innovative education, is central to linking research and learning opportunities. The Centre works closely with schools, each of which has an e-learning champion, and with the Research Development Unit, with which it hosts events on education research. The University also drew attention to the strategic development of interdisciplinary activities, including the innovative Centre for Creative and Professional Practice, which involves staff in law, business, informatics and education.

63   At a more individual level, many members of academic staff are involved in external networks or organisations that contribute to the sharing of practice, or have made conference presentations on good academic practice; the audit team was also informed of school-level engagements to support research-informed teaching. For example, all schools now have an e-learning champion who works to share knowledge and advance practice. In one school, where it is considered appropriate to do so, this has led to the further development of podcasting, blogging and videoing lectures. Overall, the team found that the University is fully engaged both in research and the development of learning opportunities, and that it was able convincingly to demonstrate instances, including the Centre for Creative and Professional Practice, of its strength in the former supporting developments in the latter.

Other modes of study

64   A number of schools provide flexible learning opportunities. Programmes offered by this means include the MSc Clinical Optometry, MSc Food Policy, BSc Health Sciences, and MSc Geographic Information Systems. Such programmes are approved, managed, monitored and reviewed in the same way as mainstream provision, though the audit team noted that the quality of student support for distance learners has been raised as an issue in some schools. The team also noted that an internal review of engagement with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* demonstrated overall 'compliance', while highlighting some areas where the University intends to modify structures and procedures. The team confirms that the University's processes broadly reflect the *Code.*

65   The Learning Development Centre advises schools in the design of programmes in a variety of delivery modes, normally with the support of the school e-learning champion. This approach aims to help staff new to this area gain access to ideas and to encourage more experienced staff to offer seminars on their work. Developmental opportunities available for staff include an online tutoring course, advice on such matters as creating an online community and an annual e-learning champions showcase, which enables e-learning champions to disseminate their experiences and techniques to staff and guests.

66   The University's engagement with business and the professions often involves the integral use of placements, internships or work experience, and a large proportion of students accordingly gain experience of working in professional settings; these range from clinical environments to the surroundings of the Guardian Media Group. University policy and procedure on placements is supplemented by schools' more tailored arrangements. In one school, for example, all undergraduates on placement follow a professional body-approved career development scheme and are supported by work-based learning advisers from the school's Professional Liaison Unit. This support is important to ensure a high level of engagement in career planning and to demonstrate the achievement of workplace competencies against an industry framework. The audit team confirms that the University is alert to, and has considered, the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*.

Resources for learning

67   The University's dispersed physical character means that consistently providing leading-edge learning resources is difficult. The University did, however, provide examples of significant investment, in particular infrastructure projects funded under its 'Investment in Learning' banner (notably the Classroom Experience Initiative (see paragraph 11) and its review of the virtual learning environment (where it plans to migrate to a system better able to respond to learning and teaching needs). The audit team also found evidence of students from different schools being knowledgeable about the various initiatives and generally appreciative of recent investment.

68   Nevertheless, it is clear that some students consider that the University is currently some way short of achieving an equitable distribution of resources and access to them. The audit team also noted the view expressed in the SWS that student experiences are in good part site-dependent: for example, students on one site reported considerable disruption from overruns of building projects, while those on another reported dissatisfaction with library provision, timetabling and lecture cancellation. These students did, however, contextualise their comments by stressing that the considerable effort and commitment of teaching staff ensured that they had been able to continue their studies satisfactorily.

69   The audit team explored, with both staff of different levels of seniority and students, areas where criticism had been expressed in the SWS or on feedback forms. A number of areas related to aspects of library provision, including access to stock, opening hours, noise and the availability of study space. The University described how it had responded, confirming the team's view that it is a predominantly open and responsive institution, acknowledging, however, that some areas where criticism is voiced are not amenable to speedy or easy solutions. While accepting this point, the team more generally encourages the University to consider further its systems for ensuring equity of support and access to learning opportunities across all sites.

Admissions policy

70   The University's Admission Policy provides an overall statement of requirements, supplemented or interpreted for particular programmes as determined at approval. Admissions decisions are made in accordance with criteria provided in programme specifications; the audit team considers these criteria clear and comprehensive.

71   At the time of the audit, the University had just completed a review of admissions policies and procedures as part of a major review of undergraduate education. This had been undertaken partly to ensure that new forms of provision were being catered for and partly as a check on engagement with the *Code of practice*. The ADU had also recently initiated a central forum for communication with schools, to encourage discussion on good practice in this area.

72   The audit team explored the use to which the University puts statistical data on admissions as a means of reflecting upon and developing admissions policies. It noted that, while the educational balance sheets include a range of relevant statistical information, there was little evidence of such management information being used systematically or strategically by institutional-

level deliberative bodies. The team considers that greater analysis of such information in relation to admissions, for example in relation to equality monitoring, would further inform decision-making and action-planning in the academic deliberative structures. Again, the team recommends that it is desirable for the University consistently to analyse and use management information to inform decision-making and action-planning in its institutional-level academic deliberative structures.

Student support

73   The University's Student Support Strategy, which provides a framework for the organisation, management and development of both central and school-based support services, was under review at the time of the audit; the audit team was advised that one likely outcome of the review is that the Strategy will be embedded in the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

74   The University explained in its Briefing Paper that this latter Strategy, which commits it to developing an infrastructure and learning environment supporting and facilitating high-quality innovative education, is inextricably linked to the wider strategic environment, a reference to its commitment to engaging with business and the professions. The University, as a 'plural' institution, expects schools to develop action plans for their engagement with the Strategy in a manner reflective of their particular contributions, characteristics and networks.

75   The Student Centre was launched in 2007 as the hub for institution-wide student services, including accommodation, financial advice and international student support. It is also the base for the Learning Success Service, which operates a disability unit, dyslexia unit, student mental health and wellbeing facility and academic learning support unit. Student advisers function as gatekeepers to a variety of services, including the Library and Counselling Service; international student advisers support all aspects of the new and comprehensive Strategy for Internationalisation. The audit team also noted that further services are provided by the Students' Union, including a student representation and information centre, which offers independent advice on possible complaints or appeals.

76   The University's policy on personal tutoring for all undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, which it considers a core element in the support of student learning opportunities, was reviewed in academic year 2007-08. The review, complemented by a separate study conducted by the Students' Union, highlighted variability of practice and led to a wide-ranging debate about the future of the system. While consideration was given to its possible replacement by a specialist system, in the event the system was retained in strengthened form, with the provision of additional training and time allocation; at the time of the audit, an action plan for this was being developed. So, while unable to comment further at this point, the audit team does note both the University's responsiveness and the energy with which it has pursued the matter.

77   The professional focus of the University's programmes means that a strong element of personal development planning (PDP) is already present in many programmes. In addition, with a view to the future embedding of PDP in the curricula, the University has appointed a project board reporting to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education). Thus far the Board's work includes undertaking an audit of current practice and developing a technical support infrastructure.

78   The University has undertaken a programme of activities designed to enhance good academic practice. A member of each school's teaching staff has been identified as an education development associate, who, in conjunction with the Dean of Students and Learning Development Centre staff, is charged with supporting the further development of good academic practice. The associates were first appointed in 2006 as part of an institutional project to enhance good academic practice, by focusing on assessment design and the avoidance of academic misconduct. Their contribution has included instituting annual plagiarism awareness weeks, helping programme directors develop new learning activities and designing forms of assessment which minimise opportunities for academic misconduct. The associates meet termly to share

experience and contribute to policy and practice, and the University plans to extend their remit into developing assessment practices more generally. The audit team considers the contribution made by the school-based education development associates to institution-wide developments in support of good academic practice, a feature of good practice.

Staff support (including staff development)

79   The University stated in its Briefing Paper that staff development plays a significant role in supporting the links between research and scholarly activity on the one hand and learning opportunities on the other. A staff development policy has been in place since 2005, and a comprehensive staff handbook is widely available. Aided by a review led by two deputy vice-chancellors and the Director of Human Resources, and with a view to achieving an integrated approach to managing and developing human resources, the University has revised its arrangements for reward, appraisal and competence assessment; introduced a revised appraisal scheme; and begun to review its academic promotion, recruitment, leadership and management development procedures.

80   Induction of new teaching staff takes place mainly within schools; staff with a professional background are encouraged to maintain links with professional bodies and practice, as well as develop their understanding of higher education. Staff new to teaching are encouraged to avail themselves of some or all of the modules leading to the MA Academic Practice: this programme enables participants to develop teaching competencies, including the use of new technologies; locate their professional practice in the context of contemporary higher education policy; contribute to curriculum development in their discipline; and research one area of their practice. The audit team noted, however, that engagement with the programme is variable and that, while the present intake has increased, some schools continue to have low participation rates. Of those who do participate, the majority complete only the certificate.

81   The University's Teaching Observation Policy requires each school to establish an observation scheme, with the expectation that all probationary staff will take part. The audit team noted, particularly, the Cass Business School's approach. This utilises the results of the voluntary student feedback-on-lecturers system by strongly encouraging participation by lower scoring lecturers with a view to eradicating unhelpful aspects of their performance and identifying and developing their strengths. The team encourages the University to include consideration of this initiative as it reflects on and further develops the Policy. Overall, the team concludes that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the learning opportunities available to its students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Management information - quality enhancement

82   Senior institutional representatives informed the audit team that enhancing the student experience is everyone's responsibility, and that quality management processes constitute the framework within which staff discharge it. More formally, quality enhancement is a central theme of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, where it relates particularly to the structures for programme development; the coherence of institutional awards; alignment and benchmarking with market needs; links with professional practice; the utilisation of appropriate teaching, learning and assessment styles; and the existence of student appropriate feedback systems. In addition, the University has a good practice policy, which encourages the identification and dissemination of good practice and specifies possible means of doing so more effectively, and a learning and teaching awards scheme, which rewards staff for innovative approaches worthy of dissemination.

83   In similar vein, quality enhancement is embedded in the terms of reference of all main committees and structures: Senate 'maintain(s) and enhance(s) academic quality; the Academic Practice, Programmes and Standards Committee (APPSC) 'enhance(s) academic practice'; and the

Learning Development Centre is responsible for supporting the dissemination of good practice. At school level, boards of studies 'assure and enhance academic quality' and associate deans learning and teaching are charged, in conjunction with educational development associates, with supporting enhancement. Enhancement is also embedded in annual programme evaluation and periodic programme review.

Good practice

84   The audit team, both through documentary study and in meetings, identified instances of institutional quality procedures identifying areas where innovation and other good practice are proving beneficial to the academic community and, directly or indirectly, contributing to enhancing student learning opportunities. For example, annual programme evaluation reports have acted as a catalyst for the installation of an improved student management and record system; schools now appoint e-learning champions to support academic staff develop online learning materials; more extensive use is made of external (professional) advisory panels; improved measures to support the development of research student supervisors have been put in place; and students have been provided with better email facilities.

85   The University considers all indicators of academic quality in the Annual Report on Quality and Standards (ARQS) mainly through APPSC, which receives and considers summary analytic reports of the relevant data. In that they highlight areas where management attention could usefully be brought to bear to strengthen the student learning experience, these reports represent rich potential sources of enhancement. In its scrutiny of the minutes of APPSC meetings, however, the audit team formed the view that their brevity means that this richness is liable to be overlooked. While it is clear that the Committee has thoroughly discussed the reports and that the University has adopted a range of approaches to disseminating them, the University itself accepts that it could helpfully undertake further work in this area. The team shares this view, and considers it would be desirable for the University to disseminate systematically the lessons and good practice identified through its quality management processes.

86   The audit team also noted that student progression, retention and performance data are neither considered by APPSC nor included within the ARQS, but managed almost exclusively by schools. While initially concerned that this lack of institutional-level oversight would compromise the University's ability to evaluate the success of actions taken in response to the ARQS, the team learnt that the introduction of educational balance sheets now brings data of this kind to the attention of senior managers, and that such data is also considered during the annual planning round. The team is therefore satisfied that student performance receives an appropriate level of executive consideration, but suggests, nevertheless, that the University may find it helpful to reflect further on whether it its procedures would be enhanced were its deliberative committees also to consider this data.

87   Reference has already been made to the commissioning of cross-institutional thematic reviews such as that of personal tutoring (paragraph 76) and the major investment in the Classroom Experience Initiative (paragraph 11). The University has also initiated major reviews of both undergraduate and postgraduate education. These are charged with making recommendations about enhancements both at specific curriculum and more general educational levels. All these initiatives constitute deliberate institutional-level steps to enhance the quality of the student learning experience.

88   Overall, the audit team concludes that the University has robust quality management processes, which routinely consider the enhancement of learning opportunities: enhancement is truly an embedded agenda within its deliberative structure. But while the outputs of these processes are rich in material that might be used beneficially in areas other than those from which they emerged, the processes focus more on addressing and closing down issues of concern than on the coordination and dissemination of good practice to other potentially interested parties. The consequence is that there are instances of good practice being identified but not

then put to good use: the University is encouraged to consider how best to remedy this situation. The team found the University's commitment to quality enhancement evident in a number of activities; it found also that these activities would benefit from greater coordination, and that there is, in particular, scope for the more effective dissemination of good practice.

Section 5 Collaborative arrangements

89   The University explained in its Briefing Paper that it currently operates two types of collaborative provision: validation (managed centrally), and partnerships, (normally managed at school level but on the basis of standard internal quality assurance mechanisms). Validation involves eight partner organisations, with around 2,000 students, reading for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in approximately equal measure. Students receive a City University degree but programmes are normally written and delivered by staff of the validated institution. Partnerships, which involve some 600 students, consist of joint programmes, franchises and articulated arrangements across a wide range and level of courses from certificate to doctoral level. Other than in the case of joint programmes, which are designed collaboratively, partnership programmes are designed by the University and lead to a City University award or credits contributing to one.

90   In the interests of clarity, in this report the phrase 'partner institutions' covers all aspects of collaborative provision; partnerships in the University's sense are described as 'non-validation partnerships'.

91   The University has a preference for selecting partner organisations that reflect its institutional goals; it is accordingly particularly attracted to working with London-based institutions and/or those with a business or professional orientation. The audit team noted the University's creative initiatives in the pursuit of its goals: first, one major and complex programme provides students with the opportunity of gaining a dual or triple award with flexible delivery at four different European sites; secondly, an Erasmus Mundus programme (Journalism and Media within Globalisation) leads to a dual award with delivery at three different European locations; and thirdly, for London-based students specialising in the performing arts there exist opportunities to pursue practice-based research leading to doctorates at prestigious specialist partner institutions. One external examiner described this partnership as 'a model of enlightened collaboration between the University and the conservatoires'.

92   The Validation and Institutional Partnerships Handbook, which the audit team considers exemplary, sets out the Validation Policy in detail. Senate approval is required for all new collaborative arrangements; a meticulous two-stage approval process and comprehensive exit procedure are in place; the University has a right to participate in relevant staff appointments; and it exercises careful scrutiny of curricula vitae. A detailed memorandum of agreement, signed on behalf of each institution, specifies clearly the academic, organisational and administrative requirements of partner institutions, including staff-student liaison; staff development; learning and teaching; disseminating good practice; learning resources; quality assurance; professional body requirements; publicity and marketing materials; student representation and involvement in quality processes; and, if applicable, ethical issues.

93   The University has recently reviewed all collaborative credit and award-bearing partnerships to assess financial viability and reputational value in order to decide between continuation and termination. Responsibility for academic leadership in validation activity lies with the Dean of Validation, who reports to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) and is advised by the Validation and Institutional Partnerships Committee. At programme level, this responsibility now rests with a link tutor reporting to the appropriate dean of school: the University considers this recent initiative strengthens previous practice. Course boards, chaired by a senior member of University staff (an ex-officio member of the Committee), meet termly; are responsible for overseeing quality, standards and programme development; and comprise members of University and validated

institution staff, and a University-appointed external adviser, who will be eminent (and in some cases pre-eminent) in his or her field. The audit team notes the exceptional contributions to the conduct of business that are made on occasion by the external advisers.

94   In addition to operating normal feedback procedures, the University holds an annual meeting with students at each partner institution to discuss their experiences and enable them to draw matters of concern to them to the University's attention. Reports from these meetings serve as a basis for discussion with the institution.

95   On the basis of documentary study and meetings, the audit team concluded that, by benchmarking programmes in the manner in which they do, external advisers add value in terms of both quality management and quality enhancement. They also concluded that the annual meetings with students have demonstrably improved the quality of learning opportunities in some programmes. Accordingly, the quality management processes for validated provision, with particular reference to the use of external advisers and the annual meetings with students are considered a feature of good practice.

96   While the University identifies the *Code of practice* as its main external reference point, many validated programmes are recognised and accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. The audit team identified a number of areas where institutional relationships with such bodies have increased students' learning opportunities, not least in relation to the professional value of their education.

97   In its Briefing Paper, the University stated that its collaborative provision arrangements are 'equitable' to those for internal programmes (a reference to the fact that they are not necessarily 'equal', because they are strengthened where necessary to reflect potentially higher risks). The audit team confirms, on the basis of its enquiries, that this statement is justified, and endorses the positive statements made by previous QAA teams about the strength of quality assurance arrangements for validated provision. This endorsement extends to one complex and potentially risky dual or triple-award scheme, where the team particularly noted the rigour with which the quality assurance arrangements have been maintained. In this arrangement the University takes steps, in collaboration with partner institutions, to maintain broad consistency of the quality of students' learning opportunities and the academic standards of the awards across all sites. These steps have included making a timely and appropriate response to the comments of an external examiner who had called this consistency into question.

98   The audit team considers that the robustness of the validation system is equally applicable to non-validation partnership arrangements, and that to move towards convergence would both simplify and strengthen the process. The team, noting that the University has recently adopted a unified initial selection procedure for all types of collaborative arrangements, considers it desirable for the University to continue to move towards convergence of its collaborative provision processes for validation and partnership.

99   The assessment procedures and systems required of collaborative institutions, described in detail in the Handbook, appear appropriate and comprehensive, their robustness and equity being secured by the requirement that a senior member of University academic staff chair assessment panels, and that evidence be provided that external examiners' comments have been acted upon quickly and effectively. Nevertheless, the weaknesses as well as the strengths of the process match those of internal arrangements, and the difficulties surrounding the timeliness and quality of assessment feedback to which attention has already been drawn in relation to internal programmes (paragraph 57) apply here also. In addition, the audit team noted that the University does not require the imposition of standard penalties for late or non-submission of work by students in collaborative provision: it issues guidance but permits each institution to have its own system. While appreciating that this can be a sensitive issue, the team encourages the University to continue to take steps to satisfy itself as to the consistency and equity of its internal and collaborative systems as a whole.

100   The audit team found a number of examples of the sharing of good practice, including the development of one department's institutional assessment procedures as a result of the practices of a specialist validated institution. The team also noted, however, that a more strategic approach to the dissemination of good practice would potentially put the assessment regimes of both institutions on a firmer footing. Undertaking a comparative analysis and evaluation of student data in respect of collaborative and internal provision, for example, would provide important insights. The team is aware that the University's Collaborative Provision Working Group itself regards this as an issue to be addressed in a consistent and regular manner.

101   The University, which has clear expectations of partner institutions in respect of staff development, makes some of its own provision available to staff in such institutions. Nevertheless, in 2007 a QAA team undertaking an Integrated quality and enhancement review of a partner college noted scope for improvement in this area (including continuing professional development). The University recognises that, particularly in respect of non-validation partnerships, a review of its present arrangements would be beneficial.

102   The audit team confirms that the University's collaborative provision meets the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

103   The University participated in the QAA Review of research degree programmes in 2006, the report of which confirmed that its ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of provision was appropriate and satisfactory. The audit team notes that the University has taken steps to address the one recommendation made (to monitor the volume of supervisory responsibilities and the new supervisory training programme) by considering whether, in the light also of the subsequent increase in research student numbers, more structured guidance should be offered to schools concerning research supervisors' volume of responsibilities. The University has also identified a need for further development opportunities for early-career research staff and students, and has established a working group to make proposals.

104   The management framework considered by the 2006 review changed as a result of the institutional restructuring in the summer of 2008. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) now has academic oversight of research degree programmes, with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and International Affairs) retaining responsibility for the research environment and the Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategy. Under the revised committee arrangements, the Academic Practice, Programmes and Standards Committee (APPSC) has now assumed the academic responsibilities previously exercised by the Research Degrees Committee. While this new structure has yet to mature, it retains a number of previously well-established procedures, to which the Research Studies Handbook, which specifies the relevant regulations and procedures and defines the responsibilities of the various stakeholders, makes periodic reference. The audit team accepts that the University will need to continue to exercise appropriate oversight of both the research environment and the quality of the research student experience.

105   Research, which is central to the University's culture, is managed within an institution-wide governance framework, its centre of gravity lying in schools, whose boards of studies have, subject to the existence of an appropriate infrastructure, formally delegated authority to establish research centres, units and groups in accordance with institutional guidance. The University supports the research infrastructure by such strategies as sabbatical leave; research fellowship and studentship schemes; pump-priming; and development activities that enable staff, students and professionals to exchange ideas and explore opportunities for collaboration.

106   Application and admission procedures for research students are detailed in the Handbook and appear appropriate and comprehensive. School senior tutors for research are required to indicate support for research proposals and supervisory arrangements, although the final decision to admit is taken by the school board of studies. In most cases, registration takes place during a biannual induction programme, when students meet relevant academic staff and are familiarised with the relevant regulations and procedures (bespoke arrangements are made for students for whom this timing is inappropriate). New students also receive a brief guide summarising and signposting appropriate procedural and support information which, the audit team learnt, has proved so beneficial that the University plans to produce the Handbook in two versions, one for staff and one for students. This institutional-level induction programme complements the main school-based programme, at which event, new students meet their supervisor, the senior tutor for research, administrative staff and other research students. The team confirms the soundness of the University's admission and induction procedures.

107   The University maintains a register of approved research degree supervisors; this is updated by school boards of studies and reviewed annually by APPSC. The list distinguishes between experienced supervisors who are permanent academic staff (Category A) and inexperienced or visiting staff (Category B): all supervisory teams contain at least one Category A supervisor, although both categories (as well as senior tutors) are required to have been appropriately trained. Supervisory meetings take place at a minimum twice a term, with supervisors and students encouraged to keep records of all formal meetings. For first-year students a detailed programme of training, courses, research work, targets and reviews is agreed, and, while supervisory arrangements thereafter are more flexible, students are encouraged to make use of a template learning agreement to plan, monitor and renegotiate targets for study. Progress is monitored throughout, and formally reviewed at the six-month point, the 12-month point and annually thereafter, with outcomes reported to the school senior tutor. Transfers to PhD and writing-up are subject to the formal approval of school boards of studies.

108   School senior tutors are responsible for preparing an annual evaluation of research degree programmes for the school board of studies and, ultimately, APPSC, where they are considered both collectively and alongside taught programme evaluations. The audit team confirms that schools identify both aspects of good practice and matters requiring remediation. The fact that, alongside many positive points, critical issues raised include the inadequacy of institutional data to enable inter-programme comparisons, poor completion rates, supervisor loading and capacity, and poor student uptake of committee representation opportunities confirms that schools are appropriately self-critical. The team also noted that the annual evaluation procedure has helped alert the University to the need to undertake a cross-institutional comparison of research degree progression and completion rates. In addition, the University is currently migrating its research student record system to the general student management database. At present, however, while the rich and detailed institutional summary of aspects of good practice and areas for development is considered by APPSC, as indicated earlier (paragraph 85) the team was unable to find evidence that the lessons to be learnt from the summaries receive formal consideration.

109   The University is part of a national university development consortium, which has produced online research-skills training materials for research students; these are being launched during the current academic year. At institutional level, the Learning Development Centre and the Academic Development Unit provide generic training supported by ring-fenced funds, with schools providing specialised research training of different but appropriate kinds.

110   The University has also piloted the use of the Higher Education Academy's Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, achieving, however, a disappointing response rate (albeit only slightly lower than the national average). In the case of the University, the survey highlighted, among other things, the high proportion of self-funded research students; the positive support received from supervisory teams; the difficulty of engendering a research community in a diverse and multi-study mode student population; and a paucity of formal training for new research

students. This latter point has been actively addressed since the Survey, with which the University intends to re-engage in the current academic year.

111   Detailed regulations exist concerning the appointment of external examiners, the submission of theses, the conduct of the viva voce examinations, complaints and appeals. The audit team confirms that these regulations are appropriate and appear to be conscientiously followed.

112   From its scrutiny of processes and procedures relating to the management of research programmes undertaken by postgraduate research students, the audit team confirms that there have been no adverse changes following the special review of 2006. The team found that the supervision and support arrangements for postgraduate research students at City University London are satisfactory and meet the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 7: Published information

113   Within the University's Web Controls Policy, responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of institutional-level materials lies with the Chief Operating Officer, subject to being signed-off by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education). Responsibility for the accuracy of all other published information lies with the dean of the school or head of the central department from which it originates. For collaborative programmes, general requirements of partner institutions are specified in the Handbook and specific ones in the validation or partnership agreements. Web-based materials produced by partner institutions are subject to spot checks and all materials to annual review; the Academic Development Unit also examines updated information, undertaking a formal scrutiny at revalidation.

114   The audit team scrutinised a wide range of hard copy and online information, including publicity and marketing materials, website publicity, student handbooks, student guides, online programme specifications and Teaching Quality Information (TQI) data on the Unistats website. While finding the large majority of such materials wholly satisfactory, the team found both that version control of school-based material was, on occasion, weak, and that significant sections of the Unistats TQI data (UCAS points, destinations of leavers and student satisfaction) were unavailable or incomplete. The University website also contains inconsistencies in relation to programme specifications. While the team accepts that some of these issues are beyond the University's control, as this is not invariably so, the University may wish to give consideration to this issue.

115   The audit team noted, both in its two meetings with students and in the students' written submission, the existence of different opinions about the detail and quality of information provided in respect of such matters as resource provision on different campuses and students' entitlement to specialist tuition from partner institutions. While accepting that the information provided is strictly correct, and acknowledging the difficulties involved in communicating effectively with a diverse and dispersed student population, the team considers it desirable for the University to satisfy itself that all published information, including that which appears online, is accurate, accessible and current.

116   The audit team found that reliance can largely be placed on the accuracy of the information the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards, but that aspects of version control and accuracy would benefit from management attention.