

# London Business School

## Annex to the report

November 2008

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## Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the London Business School (the School) from 2 to 6 June 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 School offers on behalf of the University of London.

### Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its domestic provision, on behalf of the University of London; limited confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its collaborative provision, on behalf of the University of London
- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students in its domestic and collaborative provision.

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit found that the School has a highly responsive environment but, as its approach to quality enhancement is largely reactive, there is some work to be done before it can be said to have a strategic approach designed to ensure the enhancement of the quality of its provision.

### Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit found that, overall, the School's arrangements for its postgraduate research students meet the requirements 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 by QAA, and provide evidence of full and proper attention being paid to the quality of learning opportunities and the academic standards of the awards the School makes on behalf of the University of London.

### Published information

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

### Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the responsive and collaborative culture the School has created as a context for securing the active engagement of students in its feedback processes (paragraphs 71; 90)
- the quantity and quality of information available to students on the Portal and in the form of published guides, both prior to and following their admission (paragraph 77)
- the School's proactive approach to the use of alumni and alumnae in recruitment and admissions (paragraph 80)
- the work of the programme offices in providing support to students throughout their period of study (paragraph 81)

- the quality and timeliness of feedback to students on their assessed work (paragraph 82)
- the School's academically rigorous management of the assessment of those of its students who take the foreign language programme offered as part of its collaborative provision arrangements (paragraph 108).

### **Recommendations for action**

The audit team recommends that the School consider further action in some areas. In particular, it is considered essential for the School to:

- devise and implement a means of ensuring independent oversight of all credit derived from summative assessment within collaborative provision which contributes to an award (paragraph 104)
- establish, implement and monitor such a systematic set of institution-wide processes and reporting systems as will ensure the effective oversight of all aspects of its collaborative provision (paragraph 110).

It would be advisable for the School to:

- ensure it has in place a full and formal process for the routine monitoring of programmes over time, including overseeing the cumulative impact of incremental changes to curricula (paragraph 36)
- give further consideration to the involvement of external examiners in the assessment process for elective courses (paragraph 46)
- ensure that it develops and implements procedures for the systematic deliberative oversight of the quality and standards of its educational provision as a whole, with particular reference to the nature and level of its engagement with external reference points (paragraph 70)
- ensure that all certificates and transcripts issued to graduates on the basis of work undertaken in collaborative provision record the name and location of the partner organisation concerned (paragraph 100)
- ensure that all members of staff acting as supervisors of research students undertake such development activities as will enable the School to be assured of their competence in this role (paragraph 121).

It would be desirable for the School to:

- formalise and document its management and consideration of, and response to, external examiners' reports (paragraph 52)
- continue to develop a strategic approach designed to secure steady, reliable and demonstrable improvement in the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 95)
- require both research degree supervisors and students to maintain records of all formal supervision meetings (paragraph 120).

## Section 1: Introduction and background

### The institution and its mission

1 The School, which is situated on two attractive neighbouring sites adjacent to Regent's Park, is a graduate business school and full college of the University of London. A single subject institution, it was established in 1965 following the 1963 Franks Report which recommended the establishment of two high-quality university business schools, one in each of London and Manchester; from the first it offered postgraduate degrees and post-experience executive education. Although the School was granted a Royal Charter in 1986, giving it the right to confer its own degrees, since becoming a full college of the University of London in 1996 it has held these powers in abeyance and continues to award degrees of the University. The School currently values its links with the University's other colleges, and its collegiate status entitles its students to forms of support that it would otherwise fall to the School to provide.

2 The present Dean (the head of the institution) joined the School in September 2007 from a well-established global business consultancy firm where he had been the senior United Kingdom (UK) partner. His arrival followed an eight-month interregnum after the completion of the former Dean's five-year tenure in December 2006. The Dean is supported by a range of senior staff, led by two deputy deans, who have responsibility, respectively, for programmes and faculty. Both incumbents were appointed by the present Dean early in his tenure, and together they appear to constitute an effective and professional senior management team.

3 The School described itself in its briefing paper as having a strong culture of professionalism, characterised by responsiveness to students as consumers and strong global competitiveness with other business schools. This approach is reinforced by policies which include a very thorough and holistic approach to annual appraisal and an internationally competitive performance related pay system. The School permits core faculty to undertake consultancy activities for up to 52 days per year, but expects them in turn to ensure that their teaching is innovative, relevant and global in scope, and that it includes case-studies based on real business situations.

4 The School has 98 core faculty (of whom 93 are tenure track, offering both teaching and research, the remaining five being in research posts, normally based in one of the School's six research centres and institutes). Core faculty are supported by 21 adjunct faculty and a small number of teaching fellows and bought-in lecturers; 83 per cent of faculty are non-UK nationals.

5 The School's largest programme is a two-year full-time MBA (with a fast-track option permitting completion in 15 to 18 months), with an annual intake of 316 students in four equal streams. The School also offers a part-time Executive MBA (EMBA) over two academic years, with one stream of 70 students admitted biannually, and a third stream taught in Dubai; a part-time EMBA-Global, which is a dual degree programme with Columbia Business School, again taught over two academic years, admitting one stream of 75 students annually; an MSc Management (the Sloan Fellowship Programme), taught full-time over one academic year, with one stream of around 50 students admitted annually; an MSc Finance (MiF) taught over one academic year full-time or two academic years part-time, admitting three streams of 72 students annually; and a four to five-year PhD Programme, admitting 15 students annually, all of whom have the benefit of full School-funded stipends. Students who successfully complete the first two years of the Programme are awarded the Master of Research (MRes) degree before upgrading to MPhil/PhD. Almost 90 per cent of all students are not UK nationals.

6 The Dubai stream, described as a modular version of the existing EMBA, received its first students in September 2007; at the time of the audit the stream had 78 students, comprising 30 nationalities. It is overseen by an experienced Faculty Director, supported by staff who include a Director of the Dubai Centre, a Programme Manager, an Admissions and Marketing Officer, and an Office Coordinator, all of whom have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Teaching is

delivered in Dubai on a block basis (one four-day block a month) by School faculty. Admission standards, academic content, delivery pattern, student support and feedback procedures, and assessment and external examining arrangements are identical to those applicable in London; academic support for the students is available from the School faculty who teach on the London programmes, flying to Dubai specifically for this purpose. At the time of the audit the physical facilities in Dubai were limited. Nevertheless, given that the School has acknowledged the problem by arranging a move into more suitable accommodation in September 2008, no further comment is made about the limitations of the current facilities. In responding to this report the School will doubtless wish to update QAA on developments in this area.

7 A distinctive feature of the School's academic portfolio is its International Exchange Programme, under which up to one-third of second year full-time MBA students spend a term at one of around 35 selected partner institutions in 15 countries, earning elective credits; the School reciprocally receives students from partner institutions. The School also has a contract with King's College, London, for the provision of language instruction to full-time MBA students. Further comment is made about both these arrangements later in this report (see, respectively, paragraphs 101 to 104, and 108).

8 The School's strong research orientation is reflected in its rankings in successive research assessment exercises: most recently, in 2001, it was the only institution to be awarded a 5\*A in business and management. The School is committed to ensuring a close link between research and teaching; all core faculty are required to be research active, a requirement supported by formal teaching loads of only 120 hours per annum.

### **The information base for the audit**

9 The School provided a briefing paper and supporting documentation. The index to the Briefing Paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate its 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 (May 2003) and the special 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 London Business School Student Association (the Association) 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 Association for its valuable contribution.

### **Developments since the last audit**

10 The School's previous Institutional audit 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.

11 The audit report noted the following areas of good practice:

- the involvement of students in the work of the School's MBA Admissions Committee
- its provision of evaluation data on previously offered elective courses to its students, to inform their choice of courses
- the work of the Alumni Relations Office and the Career Management Centre in integrating feedback on the School's provision from alumni, recruiters, former staff, and employers
- its culture of rapid response to continuous student feedback
- the School's expectation that faculty will identify items of innovation in teaching and learning as part of their annual review

- its measures to identify faculty who could benefit from support and development in teaching and learning techniques, and the support that it offers such staff
- its arrangements to offer students who have been formally accepted onto its courses immediate access to its intranet forums.

12 The School was advised as a matter of priority to consider:

- what measures are needed to enable it to engage with, learn from, and contribute to the Academic Infrastructure developed by QAA on behalf of the UK higher education sector.

13 The School was advised to:

- reflect on its existing processes and procedures for the validation and approval of new programmes and awards and, in the context of major initiatives for future development, formalise these, taking note of the precepts of the *Code of practice*
- take steps to ensure that its arrangements for the appointment of intercollegiate external examiners are consistent with its obligations as a constituent institution of the University; review the involvement of external examiners in the assessment process for elective courses; consider the merits of providing reports from external examiners to inform its process of Subject Area Reviews
- identify means to champion, at a strategic level across the institution, the management of quality and academic standards
- reconcile its recently produced mappings of the *Code of practice*, at institution level, to inform a review of its quality management and academic standards procedures by the appropriate deliberative mechanisms, in order to secure continuing senior faculty engagement and ownership of such arrangements
- extend its procedures for handling complaints by students to cover complaints about their learning opportunities.

14 It was considered desirable for the School to:

- set out more clearly the procedures to be used by its faculty to introduce changes in elective and core courses.

15 In 2006, when the School's research degree provision was reviewed by QAA as part of the national special review of such provision, the School's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programmes was considered appropriate and satisfactory. The School is also subject to the international accreditation of its awards by the professional bodies concerned, in particular the European Quality Improvement System (which confirmed in 2003, that the School met its criteria for programme quality, resources and students' learning opportunities), the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, and the Association of MBAs.

16 The present audit team reviewed the School's progress in responding to the recommendations of the 2003 Institutional audit. The School reported in its briefing document that it had addressed the 'matter of priority' recommendation by establishing the post of Quality Assurance Manager, based in the Academic Affairs Office. The duties of the post holder include servicing the Deans and Directors Committee (to ensure consistent engagement with the Academic Infrastructure), servicing all review committees (to support programme review and ensure procedural compliance), and keeping the School abreast of developments in quality assurance by representing the School at a range of external events. The School judges the innovation a success, although the team noted that the level of the post is not especially senior, that the present incumbent is the third in less than four years, and that, while the Manager

serves as the School's representative on the University of London's new Quality Practitioners' Forum, there is no formal route through which issues raised there can be considered in and, if appropriate, disseminated through, the School.

17 In response to the second recommendation the School, acknowledging that it had no formal procedures for the introduction of new programmes (not having introduced a new programme to its portfolio since 1996) has put in place a formal approval procedure.

18 The third recommendation contains three elements, to all of which the School has responded at some level. It had some difficulty finding an intercollegiate examiner with the specialist expertise required, but, in that the audit team's concern was with the School's compliance with University of London regulations, it reported in its Briefing Paper that the regulations are themselves under consideration and that the School is engaging fully in the discussions taking place. In respect of the second element, the School has taken the view that the volume of elective courses (which exceeds the total number of core courses) and the level of specialisation involved in many of them make it impractical for external examiners to review every course. The current situation is that a selection of electives on all programmes is sent to external examiners for review. The present report returns to this issue later, since it does not consider the School has as yet responded fully to this recommendation (see paragraph 46). The third element of the recommendation was addressed in a review of the procedures for the periodic review of programmes designed, inter alia, to ensure that they are informed by the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*.

19 In responding to the fourth recommendation the School changed its senior management structure, most significantly appointing a senior professor to the role of Deputy Dean (Programmes), charged with the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities across all programmes. The current incumbent, the second since the last audit, was appointed by the present Dean and is currently undertaking a strategic review of the degree programme portfolio. At the same time the School was streamlining its administrative procedures for programme management and delivery by replacing the previous structure, under which each programme was separately managed by an associate dean, by a more unified model designed to create an effective and efficient environment for ensuring consistency in quality assurance. In particular, the Sloan and EMBA programmes were brought together in the academic year 2003-04, and the full-time MBA and Master's in Finance were similarly unified in January 2008.

20 In responding to the fifth recommendation the School developed a teaching and learning area on its Portal (for an explanation and evaluation of the Portal see paragraphs 76-77) from which the *Code of practice*, programme specifications, degree programme regulations, policies, procedures, guidance notes and a range of support mechanisms available for teachers may be downloaded. The sixth recommendation was addressed by the introduction of a formal complaints procedure. The School addressed the desirable recommendation (to set out more clearly the procedures to be used by its faculty to introduce changes in elective and core courses), only to a limited extent; this issue is discussed later in the present report (see paragraphs 35-36).

### **Institutional framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities**

21 The School outlined its management and deliberative framework in its Briefing Paper. The Management Board is responsible to the Dean and Governing Body for the development and implementation of major policies affecting educational and research activities, including maintenance of high academic standards, as well as for staff, premises and finance (although in practice a number of these duties are undertaken by the Management Committee). The Management Committee, which meets weekly in term-time, is, at least in theory, a predominantly operational body responsible for taking and implementing those administrative and academic decisions necessary to the management of the School; it does, however, have



delegated powers from the Management Board to enable it to make and implement a wide range of decisions, albeit that fundamental academic or constitutional decisions continue to be taken by the Management Board. The Faculty Board acts as the main sounding board on matters of academic policy and the terms and conditions of faculty; the Appointments Committee advises the Dean on faculty appointments, contracts, promotions and associated policy and procedures; the Assessment Policy Committee, a subcommittee of the Management Board, approves degree regulations and changes to assessment policies, appoints external examiners and receives reports from examination boards and external examiners; the Deans and Directors Committee, which meets monthly, is responsible for reviewing and making recommendations on cross-programme strategy and management (including grading, feedback and the Academic Infrastructure); the PhD Committee ensures the academic quality and standards of the PhD Programme, and advises the Programme Chair on all relevant matters.

22 The School has seven subject areas (accounting; economics; finance, management science and operations; marketing; organisational behaviour; strategic and international management). Each is managed by a subject area chair (a senior faculty member responsible for coordinating activities, recruiting, counselling and developing faculty and, in discussion with associate deans of programmes, resource allocation). Subject area chairs, as members of both the Management Board and Assessment Policy Committee, also play an important part in developing academic policy and identifying learning objectives, and are important contact points when associate deans of programmes have concerns about any aspect of teaching within their area of responsibility.

23 Both deputy deans meet the Faculty Director for Executive Education annually to review the allocation of teachers across all programmes in order to ensure that teaching resources are optimised, that a strategic plan is in place to meet the demands of different programmes, and that each student group has exposure to experienced teachers. The previous year's teaching evaluations are used to identify potential areas for concern and to ensure that any necessary support strategy is devised and implemented.

24 Each programme is managed by an associate dean (a professional manager with responsibility all of the non-academic elements of the programme including admissions and some aspects of quality management as well as curriculum development) working with academic faculty. They also work closely with the Deputy Dean (Programmes) on academic policy, curriculum design, and the setting and monitoring of objectives for educational quality and student attainment. In addition the full-time MBA has a Core Course Committee; the Dubai stream (see paragraph 6) has a Faculty Director; and the MSc Finance has a Faculty Adviser. At the time of the audit the Deputy Dean (Programmes) was considering the possibility of appointing a faculty adviser for each programme. The School's extensive range of elective courses, open to students from all programmes and described in the Briefing Paper as offering an innovative portfolio, responsive to the external environment and characterised by both breadth and depth, is managed by the Deans and Directors Committee.

25 The School has clear assessment objectives for each programme. Responsibility for proposing these objectives rests with the Deputy Dean (Programmes) and the relevant associate dean; assessments on courses are proposed by individual faculty within the framework of degree regulations subject to the approval and oversight of the Assessment Policy Committee, which is also required to approve any major changes in the assessment regime. Boards of examiners are responsible for monitoring assessment practice against the regulations determined by the Assessment Policy Committee; students whose progress is giving cause for concern are placed on academic notice, a mechanism which, while supportive in intent, also prevents at-risk students from progressing.

26 The School explained in its Briefing Paper that its quality assurance policies and associated systems aim to secure academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. These policies include rigorous admissions standards and processes; close monitoring of student performance; regular feedback; hiring the best available faculty internationally; regularly

reviewing both individual subject areas and the overall portfolio of degree programmes; and seeking and acting on student feedback, both formal and informal, on a regular basis.

27 Like all University of London colleges, the School is required to submit an annual report covering student completion statistics, summaries of external examiners' reports and subsequent actions arising from them, commentary on topics selected by the University to contribute to best practice, and copies of the reports of any audits which have taken place during the year.

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

28 As already explained (see paragraph 21), a range of committees, all ultimately responsible to the Governing Body, oversees the institutional management of academic standards. Each has clearly stated terms of reference, although in practice there is considerable overlap among them. In particular, the functional distinction between the Management Board and Management Committee is not wholly reflected in practice. The Management Committee, which is chaired by the Dean and comprises the School's seven key senior staff, was described by the Dean as having both academic and business leadership responsibilities, and by senior staff as the School's academic engine room.

29 This diffusion of responsibility extends to the remit of the Faculty Board, the membership of which includes the majority of faculty engaged in programme design and delivery, and described by the School as an academic policy sounding board. The Faculty Board, under the terms of the School's statutes, is required to meet at least once during each academic term. In practice, normally two meetings are scheduled per term. If there is insufficient business one may be cancelled, although, conversely, additional meetings are occasionally held. While the audit found some concern within the School that the Faculty Board's communications with faculty and other staff are not optimally effective, it also found the Board had taken an active role in responding to a number of significant issues, including concerns expressed by students about an aspect of teaching quality (see paragraph 42).

30 Overall, the audit team confirms the frank acknowledgment of the Deputy Dean (Programmes) that an element of opacity and duplication of responsibility for the management of academic standards exists within and among these bodies. The team noted that similar, if broader, concerns had already been expressed within the School. When this issue was explored in the course of the audit, the response, that the School's management style was one of consensual decision-making, was tempered by an acknowledgement among senior personnel of a need for greater operational efficiency. Reflecting this view, in the academic year 2007-08 the School undertook a review of its internal governance arrangements with the intention of streamlining them. This led to the preparation, early in 2008, of the School Decision-Making Review which at the time of the audit visit was close to being agreed.

31 This lack of clarity in the School's management of its academic standards has contributed to what the School recognises as a weakness in its current procedures. Between its six-yearly reviews the School undertakes only limited academic oversight of the content of its programmes, of its core and elective courses, and of coordination across them.

### **Approval, monitoring and review of award standards**

32 The School relies for its approval, monitoring and review of the standards of its awards on a combination of internal and external mechanisms and points of reference. Internally these comprise a range of institutional arrangements (including a parallel system of six-yearly programme and subject area reviews) and student feedback; externally the School relies largely on external examiners, the University of London and the international accreditation arrangements associated with the European Quality Improvement System, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, and the Association of MBAs.

33 The current programme approval procedure came into force in January 2008 as part of the School's response to the recommendations of the 2003 Institutional audit. Proposals, which originate with the relevant associate dean, are initially brought to the attention of the Quality Assurance Manager before approval to proceed is sought from the Deputy Dean (Programmes). Subject to this being received, proposals are sent to the Management Board for 'in principle' approval; at this point a full academic and business case is developed on the basis of extensive internal consultation and the use of external assessors appointed by the Deputy Dean (Programmes); the full documentation then returns to the Management Board for approval. Although the audit team saw documents relating to a proposed programme (the first use of the procedure), the proposal had not been to Management Board at the time of the audit and it would be premature to express a view as to its efficacy in assuring academic standards. The audit team noted that the procedure does not apply to the School's many new elective courses which are signed off administratively and not subjected to independent academic scrutiny. This point is elaborated later (see paragraph 35).

34 The School's approach to annual programme monitoring is almost wholly dependent on the analysis of student feedback, although the audit team was told that some subject area chairs undertake informal annual reviews. The School, which recognises that its current procedures require formalising, currently exercises little or no formal oversight of year-on-year incremental changes to both courses and programmes, changes which can be cumulatively significant. While a number of courses of action to address this have been proposed, none had been adopted at the time of the audit, when a decision had yet to be taken about the future development of the process. In the meantime there remain three matters over which the School has been able to exercise only limited oversight since the last Institutional audit: all of them relate to the annual monitoring of academic standards and the absence of regular (annual) and structured procedures for reviewing provision.

35 First, while it was clear to the audit team that the School responds quickly and effectively to students' concerns, it does not take a systematic and proactive role in reviewing its programme standards on an annual basis. Secondly, due to the changes made to its provision in an annual exercise in which elective courses may be retained, withdrawn (typically for resource reasons) or introduced (normally in response to faculty interest or student demand), it is possible for elective courses never to be subject to any form of monitoring or review. While the team was informed that 85 per cent of electives remain unchanged, and that in practice students select from a very small minority of the full range of over 70, the lack of oversight of possible cumulative incremental changes is exacerbated by the fact that it is also possible for assessments in an elective offered for only a few years never to be seen by an external examiner. Thirdly, in January 2008, a paper prepared for the Management Committee by the Deputy Dean (Programmes) asked whether the academic content of degree courses receives the necessary level of senior faculty scrutiny. While the MBA has a core course committee that regularly reviews programme delivery, this kind of review is not repeated across the institution. This absence of formal procedures for annual programme review means that since the last audit only limited faculty scrutiny of the structure of core courses and electives, and curricula and teaching materials, has taken place.

36 The School is aware of these limitations, which closely reflect the recommendation of the last Institutional audit that it would be desirable for it to set out more clearly the procedures for introducing changes in elective and core courses. For example, in January 2008 the Management Committee identified a need for greater consideration to be given to the curriculum and for a more formal procedure for introducing and approving new electives. With this point in mind, but on the basis also of the audit team's consideration of the School's provision as a whole, the School is advised to ensure it has in place a full and formal process for the routine monitoring of programmes over time, including overseeing the cumulative impact of incremental changes to curricula.

37 As explained above (see paragraph 32), for periodic review the School operates separate six-yearly review cycles at subject area and programme levels. While there is evidence that until recently the reviews did not always run to schedule, the team found evidence that the process has recently been reinvigorated.

38 A revised periodic (programme) review process has recently been introduced, involving the Deputy Dean (Programmes) chairing a panel which includes another senior member of faculty, a student and two external advisers. The procedure is based on a briefing document prepared by or on behalf of the associate dean concerned, and leads to the submission of a report to the Management Board, including a confidential report from the external advisers. It is the responsibility of the Deputy Dean (Programmes) to monitor the responses to, and implementation of, any recommendations, but there is no formal requirement for an action plan to be developed, and the audit team was unable to discern any procedure for implementing and monitoring programme-level responses. Subject area review, for which the Deputy Dean (Faculty) has overall responsibility, follows a broadly similar procedure and again involves the use of two external advisers. Similar, too, is the fact that the Deputy Dean concerned is described by the School as maintaining a watching brief on the response to, and implementation of, any recommendations, and the team confirms that the process involved is appropriate in design and implementation. Again, however, no requirement exists for an action plan. Nevertheless, the School expressed the view that subject area review is a valuable process and confirmed its commitment to its continuation.

39 The audit team reviewed reports from both kinds of review. In subject area review, four of which had taken place, the external advisers were fully engaged, with their views taken into account in formulating the conclusions. Only one programme review (of the full-time MBA) had been completed, although a second (of the MSc Finance) was in progress. Here the team noted that the procedure operated less smoothly, with some slippages in the timetable, and a decision was taken following the first phase review, which also included the EMBA programmes, to focus primarily on the full-time MBA, with the EMBA review commencing some months later. At the time of the audit the School, acknowledging the limitations of the current procedure, was considering a suite of proposals for change; nevertheless these remained at the discussion stage, and had provided the team with a timetable for completion of programme review.

40 The audit team enquired whether the School sought to use these two possibly parallel review procedures to inform its overall understanding of the quality of provision. It was informed that subject area reviews are stand-alone events that review the entire composition of a subject area and are largely research-driven: they are not intended to, nor do they articulate closely with programme reviews, nor do they consistently address the management of academic standards. In the view of the audit team the limited relationship between these two review methods is currently denying the School the opportunity of achieving a holistic perspective on its procedures.

41 The School's multinational, high fee-paying and articulate student cohort has a highly developed sensitivity to the credibility of the School's awards among global business communities. It is understandable, therefore, that the School places substantial reliance on student views as a benchmark against which to measure both academic standards and learning opportunities. Its open-door policy provides students with regular and frequent opportunities to raise matters of academic concern, engaging them in a potentially continual process of critical evaluation. Overall, the audit found ample evidence, not least from students themselves, to support the School's claim that it is always ready, outside of the formal review processes, to consider amending or enhancing its practices in response to student feedback.

42 The School also operates a course evaluation questionnaire, which has recently been conscientiously reviewed and enhanced by the Deans and Directors Committee, and an additional exit questionnaire. The Deans and Directors Committee also supports the Student Association's end-of-year annual student survey: the audit team learned from the two most recent of these surveys that the Association analyses the considerable statistical data each survey

contains, presenting its analysis to the School with recommendations. The team noted as an instance of effective practice the School's response to student dissatisfaction with the teaching delivered by a number of newly-appointed faculty in academic year 2006-07 when, following discussion in the Faculty Board and Management Committee, a mid-term survey questionnaire was initiated to facilitate the early identification of potential problems.

43 The School places the highest value on professional bodies' national and international accreditation of its awards. It has a clearly defined objective of achieving a global standard of excellence, and regards professional accreditation procedures as evidence of success and benchmarks against which to measure the standards of its awards. The School also benchmarks itself against its international competitors, particularly in the United States of America, on the quality of its student intake and the salience of the corporate destination in which its graduates are employed, using criteria which include journal citations, faculty seniority and the number and mix of electives available in other institutions. While the School's documentation places less emphasis on the Academic Infrastructure than on such indicators it would be wrong to suggest that the School does not take the Infrastructure seriously, or to deny that it has, since the last Institutional audit, taken steps to strengthen its engagement with it (see paragraphs 53-56). Nevertheless, international benchmarking continues, very reasonably, to be a principal driver in the School's programme strategy, and a key factor in its day-to-day engagement with its students.

### External examiners

44 The School's documentation states that the primary duty of external examiners is to ensure that the academic standards of the degrees conferred by the School on behalf of the University of London are consistent with those of the University generally and the sector nationally, and that they reflect the level descriptors contained in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). External examiners are appointed to examine at both programme and course level. During 2006, in the light of a recommendation from the last Institutional audit and on the basis of further consideration of the *Code of practice*, the School reviewed and developed its appointment procedures, which are now clear and accessible, with subject areas submitting nominations (normally of academics of at least senior lecturer level, residing in the UK and with experience of external examining) to the Assessment Policy Committee, which in turn reports them to the University. Appointments are for a three-year term with one renewal subject to the approval of the Assessment Policy Committee. The audit team found that the School's description of its procedures is accurate.

45 A briefing document (Guidance Notes for External Examiners), containing basic information about the School and its examining arrangements, is sent to new appointees together with the letter of appointment and copies of the General Assessment Regulations, Individual Programme Regulations and faculty guidelines. The General Assessment Regulations amplify aspects of the Guidance Notes (such as the role of the Assessment Policy Committee and the School's grading structure), while the programme-specific regulations spell out individual assessment structures. Faculty guidelines specify the assessments that faculty are required to send to external examiners. The audit found that these documents give external examiners an adequate statement of assessment arrangements and their role within them. External examiners are empowered to change marks, although the audit team was told that this rarely happens.

46 The General Assessment Regulations apply to all core courses taught at the School's London base but not to those taught by partner institutions, in which external examiners currently play no role (see paragraph 104); nor do external examiners routinely see samples of work from all of the electives taken in any one year, and given that external examiners on any one programme may see only five or six electives in any year out of the 70 or more available, it is clear that some can never have been subject to external scrutiny. Accordingly, the audit found that, in spite of the School's response to the advice of the previous audit that it should review the involvement of its external examiners in the assessment process for elective courses, the matter

remains less than wholly resolved. Accordingly, the School is advised to give further consideration to the involvement of external examiners in the assessment process for elective courses.

47 External examiners are asked to comment on a wide range of relevant issues, including whether assessment standards are consistent with those of the sector nationally and whether the standards achieved by students are consistent with any relevant benchmark statements. Reports are submitted to the Academic Affairs Office, which copies them to the associate dean for the programme and the subject area chair; the latter involves relevant faculty in discussion. Appropriate action is taken to pursue non-submitted reports. These procedures appear to be implemented effectively.

48 External examiners' reports are included in the briefing document prepared for programme review and as appendices to the suggested generic headings for subject area reviews. The audit found that these arrangements are followed, and that the School has responded appropriately to the advice of the last Institutional audit to use external examiners' reports to inform subject area reviews.

49 The Quality Assurance Manager and the Chair of Assessment Policy Committee draw up a list of assessment policy issues raised in external examiners' reports for the Committee's consideration; operational matters are addressed in the appropriate programme offices. A summary is also prepared for the annual report submitted to the University of London. As well as listing the external examiners, this provides statistics on degree results, appeals, external examiners' comments, actions taken by the School, any QAA reports and the School's response to matters raised by the University.

50 The audit team studied a range of external examiners' reports for core courses drawn from eight programmes in academic year 2006-07. The large majority were complimentary, although a minority pointed to unresolved issues: in one case an examiner noted that throughout his term there had been an issue with non-compliance with dissertation marking guidelines; another referred to frequently unresolved discrepancies between internal markers, together with variation in grading and illegibility of feedback comments; a third noted that it was difficult to disentangle the individual elements of all of the assessments to see clearly what standards were being pursued. All of these issues, however, were taken to the Assessment Policy Committee and discussed in detail at the Board of Examiners.

51 The most recent summary prepared for the Assessment Policy Committee stated that external examiners are generally positive about academic standards and student achievement. It raised five matters: double-marking; the academic content and marking of projects; take-home examination papers; standard referencing conventions; and the assessment of class participation. In each case an individual or committee was identified to investigate the matter and respond. The audit found that progress on the matters raised was reported at the following meeting of the Committee, and that the results of earlier action were reported back to the external examiners concerned at the following Board of Examiners. Overall, therefore, the audit team's scrutiny of external examiners' reports suggested that the academic standards of the School's awards are appropriately set and assured.

52 Although the Assessment Policy Committee refers matters affecting the School more widely to the Deans and Directors Committee, it was not clear from the Committee's minutes that the School uses this procedure to identify and address any generic institution-wide issues emerging within the reports as a whole. Nor were the means by which the School manages its exchanges with external examiners clear from the documents that were published to them and to faculty. The audit team noted that not all issues raised by external examiners appear to be acted on or reported back to the next Board of Examiners' meeting, and it was confirmed orally in the course of the audit visit that instances exist of a lack of procedural clarity. With these considerations in mind, it would be desirable for the School to formalise and document its management and consideration of, and response to, external examiners' reports.

## Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

53 As indicated above (paragraphs 16-18) the School's last Institutional audit report identified three areas connected with the Academic Infrastructure for the School's consideration, and, while the present audit team is satisfied that some elements of these recommendations have been met, some significant omissions remain.

54 The School appointed to the new post of Quality Assurance Manager in early 2005, and, during the academic year 2005-06, began to review in detail the implications of the recommendations of the last audit, particularly in relation to the *Code of practice*. In late 2007, the Deans and Directors Committee conducted three one-hour brainstorming sessions around the *Code*, the purpose of which was to prepare the Briefing Paper for the audit. As a result of the meetings a mapping document was constructed, in which named members of staff were assigned to analyse the implications of each section of the *Code*. In the light of this range of activities the School was able to state in its Briefing Paper that it had made use of subject benchmark statements; and that the *Code* had contributed significantly to its disability scheme. It is particularly noteworthy that the School has reviewed its policies and procedures for diversity and disability through termly meetings of the Diversity Action Group and the publication of its Diversity Policy, a policy which reflects the relevant precepts of the *Code* and is accompanied by a suite of policies on a range of relevant issues, all of which are available on the Portal. Overall, the team confirms that many of the School's procedures reflect the *Code's* precepts, and that the majority of its responses to the previous audit report reflect relevant parts of the Infrastructure as a whole.

55 The audit team did not, however, find evidence that the School's engagement with the Academic Infrastructure is fully embedded. First, two of the three sampling trails conducted in the course of the audit were based on the reviews of the MSc Finance and MBA programmes. While the former makes appropriate reference to programme specifications and the FHEQ M-level benchmark, the first stage report of the MBA review makes no reference to the M-level statement. Secondly, at an institutional level the benchmark statement for M-level business studies figures in the School's programme review procedures and its suggested generic headings for subject area reviews, but is not mandatory in programme approval. Thirdly, while the School now makes extensive and generally appropriate use of programme specifications, the recency with which the matter was discussed in three senior committees makes it difficult to confirm that the use of them is as yet routine procedure. Similarly, it was only in December 2007 that the School's Degree Regulations became subject to formal annual approval, so bringing the procedure into alignment with the precepts of the *Code of practice*. Fourthly, while the School has identified individuals with responsibilities for the *Code*, with overall responsibility for action residing primarily with two individuals, in that it has yet to map the precepts across its entire provision, it has not wholly addressed the 'priority' recommendation of the 2003 Institutional audit.

56 The audit found that the School does not make systematic use of the FHEQ. This has particular implications for an institution with educational provision solely at master's and doctorate level, not least (though also not solely) for the levels of courses taken in partner institutions outside the UK: it also has implications for the level of the Master of Research, the main function of which is to provide a structured entry into research for students with a UK undergraduate degree or its equivalent.

## Assessment policies and regulations

57 The School's assessment arrangements are overseen by the Assessment Policy Committee, which meets termly under the chairmanship of the Chief Examiner. At programme level, where faculty guidelines require staff to specify the assessment regime, the methods of assessment are determined by the associate dean concerned, subject to the approval of the Deputy Dean (Programmes) and external examiners.

58 In all cases the details of assessment principles and methods are clearly communicated to students, both in specific documentation and through the Portal. This includes an explanation of

the anonymity and sampled double-marking schemes and a detailed information about the grading system. In brief, the School introduced a forced distribution system in the academic year 2003-04, following external examiners' concerns about possible grade inflation. This system involves a percentage-based grade distribution for all Pass grades (with some discretion at the margins) once the absolute Pass/Fail decision has been made; its introduction constitutes a thought-through response to external examiners' concerns about a possible threat to academic standards. When the audit team sought to establish students' attitude towards the system (noting in doing so that it was not an issue ever raised with the School) it found a large degree of acceptance, with only a small minority of students mounting a justice-based argument against it. Since the School does offer Distinctions there is potential merit in this argument, although the team notes that a degree of discretion exists in the award of Distinctions and assumes that boards of examiners bear this possibility in mind when making Distinction recommendations. The team also assumes that the School will continue to monitor the system, particularly given the potential distortional effect of small class sizes. It did, however, infer from the very low level of student appeals that this is not an area of controversy with the student body.

59 The School does not currently publish explicit assessment criteria specifying what a student must demonstrate to achieve an improved mark within any element of assessment, leaving it to the student to discover this by reading, discussing feedback on previous work with the member of staff concerned and studying model answers on the Portal. Students informed the audit team that, for the most part, these arrangements are fit for purpose, although the School may nevertheless find it helpful to work towards a more precise articulation of the criteria by which students are to be assessed.

60 The audit found evidence of the School's responsiveness to student concern in respect of the assessment of class participation: this involves certain record-keeping obligations being visited upon faculty and information being provided for students as to how the grade is arrived at and absences handled. The audit team studied the School's Statement on Class Contribution that is currently being piloted and which continues to attract some degree of student disquiet. The team is of the view that this Statement, in that it has universal application, expresses its aims (to facilitate a safe environment for sharing ideas and to develop specified skills) rather broadly and its method (that it will be implemented in different ways in different classes) rather vaguely. Since the team considers it possible that this approach does not wholly reflect the definition of assessment criteria contained in the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* ('students...[should be] aware of and understand the assessment criteria and/or schemes that will be used to mark each assessment task'), the School may find it helpful, as part of the piloting process, to consider the optimal means of applying this definition to course assessment.

61 The School has two boards of examiners, one for the general management degrees and one for the MSc (Finance). The latter, which meets annually, has two external examiners; the former, which meets three times a year, has seven: in both cases, given the discipline spread this appears appropriate. The functions of the boards are specified in the Guidelines for External Examiners and accompanying documents. While the audit team was unable to find a clear statement of the terms of reference of boards of examiners, scrutiny of the recent minutes of both bodies enabled it to confirm their competence and professionalism, including the manner in which they respond to issues raised by external examiners.

62 The School is currently giving thought to developing an institution-wide policy on penalties for late submission, although thus far attempts to do so have proved controversial. Allegations of plagiarism are dealt with initially at programme level by the Associate Dean, and escalated to the Student Discipline Advisory Committee (which has a student member) when the need arises. The Committee is currently giving thought to the routine exclusion of offenders, an approach which, the audit team was informed, draws support from the student community. The appeal body for assessments also contains student representation, an approach which, as the School is aware, requires very careful handling. The team found no evidence of difficulties having arisen thus far.



63 Overall, the audit found the School's assessment procedures robust and well documented.

### **Management information**

64 The School stated that the brevity of its taught programmes means that the annual monitoring of progression, as opposed to completion, statistics would be of little value. Completion rates which are, for the most part, outstanding, are carefully monitored. As required by the University, the School submits a year-on-year comparison of results as part of its annual reporting arrangement. It was, however, only in the current academic year that the School referred its completion rates to its own Assessment Policy Committee, having hitherto used student data principally to validate its admissions policy and admissions decisions. On the other hand the Diversity Action Group routinely reviews information on disability to monitor the impact of its policies. Overall, in contrast with the comprehensiveness of the School's annual financial out-turn, its use of management information concerning students remains limited, and the audit found that the success with which the School delivers its taught and postgraduate research provision could usefully be informed by a more systematic approach to management information.

65 Overall, the audit found that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

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

### **Approval, monitoring and review of programmes**

66 For ease of reference the School's procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes have been described in the previous section, where a number of areas which would benefit from further consideration were identified. In particular the audit team found a degree of inefficiency in the relationships between key committees responsible for overseeing these procedures; it noted that the School has yet to address in its entirety the recommendation of the 2003 audit that it should set out more clearly the procedures to be used by its faculty to introduce changes in elective and core courses (a recommendation broadly repeated in this report), and that there remains no formal approval procedure for proposed new electives; it found a very heavy dependence on student feedback in annual programme monitoring and noted the School's acknowledgement that there is room for further improvement; it found that while the parallel six-yearly review process is not optimally effective in offering the School a holistic view of its provision, the School has yet to find a satisfactory means of systematically monitoring the effectiveness of the implementation of recommendations deriving from these reviews; and it found that, in spite of progress since the 2003 Institutional audit, there remains scope for the School to strengthen and systematise its engagement with the Academic Infrastructure.

67 Overall, however, and in spite of these significant caveats and the existence of scope for further enhancement, the audit team considers the current arrangements for subject area and periodic programme review in line with expectations and increasingly efficient and effective.

### **Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points**

68 As indicated already (see paragraph 21), the Management Board and Management Committee exercise broad oversight of all aspects of academic affairs, ultimate responsibility resting with the former but the latter being, in practice, the senior body charged with discussing and determining academic quality issues. The audit team, noting the absence of any subordinate body reporting and offering specialist advice to the Management Committee on such matters, concluded that the burden of work in this area, which includes consideration of the Academic Infrastructure as a whole, falls on the Quality Assurance Manager and the Deputy Dean (Programmes), who has many other responsibilities.

69 To make this point is not to imply criticism of either of these post holders - as it happens, the views of the audit team about both are wholly positive, as they are about the School's most senior management team as a whole. At the time of the audit visit, however, many of their plans remained work in progress. But while the Deputy Dean (Programmes) in particular has been active in these matters, the School currently lacks any mechanism to ensure that this is always the case and that it would be in a position to withstand possible future changes in personnel. In consequence, significant quality issues, including the application of the Academic Infrastructure, have no firm locus within the deliberative structure of the School.

70 Overall, the School makes some use of external points of reference through its conformity to University of London requirements and its own systems, and it has in particular taken steps towards analysing its articulation with the *Code of practice*, although the audit team was unable to find evidence of systematic engagement with the FHEQ. The team also noted that the School lacks systems to ensure the systematic and deliberative oversight of academic standards or the quality of student learning opportunities, whether by measuring provision against the Academic Infrastructure or by ensuring the systematic analysis of accreditation reports and the implementation of their recommendations. Given that the audit found a parallel omission in the case of external examiners' reports (see paragraph 52) and the response to the 2003 Institutional audit, where it could not produce evidence of having systematically addressed all the recommendations (see paragraphs 18 and 20), the School is advised to ensure that it develops and implements procedures for the systematic deliberative oversight of the quality and standards of its educational provision as a whole, with particular reference to the nature and level of its engagement with external reference points.

### **Student feedback and participation**

71 The Student Association, which represents all students, is the formal mechanism for student representation, and its representatives sit on both the Faculty Board and the Governing Body; at subject and programme levels, where most routine matters are dealt with, elected representatives liaise as appropriate with faculty, associate deans and programme directors. The Association and its elected officers (none of whom is sabbatical) enjoy a good relationship with the School, expressing wholehearted satisfaction with the available feedback and consultation mechanisms, saying also that, informally as well as formally, the School responds in a timely and appropriate way to issues as they arise. The justification for this view, as well as the fact that the School has created a supportive but rigorous academic climate in which students play a full part, were apparent in all written and oral evidence sources available to the audit team in the course of its enquiries. The responsive and collaborative culture the School has created as a context for securing the active engagement of students in its feedback processes is a feature of good practice.

72 Although as a wholly postgraduate institution the School is unable to take part in the National Student Survey, it supports the annual student survey conducted by the Association in so far as the results are widely disseminated, both formally and informally, and used as part of the staff review process for performance evaluation, promotion and salary enhancement purposes. The School's routine feedback mechanisms elicit the views of all students and, in particular, returning study abroad students are encouraged to provide feedback on their experience.

73 Taken as a whole, the School maintains excellent relationships with its students, both formally (in terms of representation and feedback) and informally (in sustaining a culture of mature engagement and mutual learning). The audit also found substantial evidence of good practice in the quantity and quality of information given to students and in the work of the programme offices, which are critical to the maintenance of formal and informal relationships with students at this level.

74 In addition to the Association's representative role, its officers hold regular meetings with programme directors; and students as a whole, as well as being engaged in the development of some academic policies, sit on committees dealing with academic appeals, complaints and

disciplinary matters. All matters relating to representation and informal interactions with the School are brought to the attention of new students in the course of induction.

### **Learning resources**

75 Budgets for the library and information technology are determined as part of the annual planning process. The focus is on electronic resources, towards the acquisition of which the School has made a very substantial investment. The physical library is not extensive but tightly focused on current and research material in the subject areas of business and finance. Students, who expressed themselves very satisfied with this provision, understand that they are in some cases (notably full-time MBA students) expected to buy their own textbooks. In addition, students do, of course, have access to the wide-ranging resources available elsewhere in the University and in London generally.

76 The School's intranet system, the Portal, is a very significant contributor to both learning and personal support, and has been universally praised by users, faculty as well as students, as the key source of information for all their needs. The Portal site includes course directories; transcripts; access to careers guidance; online library databases; the calendar of events; student and alumni profiles and contact information; and discussion areas for general discussion, study groups, clubs and programme information. In addition, each academic programme has its own dedicated space.

77 The students who met the audit team regarded the Portal as essential to their experience at the School, and the team confirms that it is a comprehensive source of information, covering all aspects of student life, from general information prior to departure from their home country through useful information on living in London to detailed programme specifications. The Portal also provides detailed information about the School's appeals and complaints procedures, and students confirmed that it enables them to know exactly where to find the relevant information. Students regard their programme and course guides as detailed and informative, and the team confirms the existence of detailed hard copy course and programme-level information, and that this is replicated and supplemented by copious quantities of information on the Portal. In the view of the team, the quantity and quality of information to students on the Portal and in the form of published guides, both prior to and following admission, constitutes a feature of good practice.

### **Admissions policy**

78 As a postgraduate institution the School's basic requirement for entry is a good first degree and a high Graduate Management Admission Test score; the requirement is specified on the School's website. The same policies and procedures apply to all programmes, and while subject-specific criteria may vary the same principles are applied.

79 Each programme has its own admissions committee, chaired by an associate dean and consisting of senior representatives of the programme office concerned, senior members of the programme's admissions team, an associate director of the Career Services, a faculty member nominated by the subject area chair and any co-opted members of faculty or other staff. Each committee is a decision-making body, but distributes its powers among members according to a specified procedure.

80 Applicants are interviewed all over the world, typically by an alumnus or alumna of the School (though without decision-making responsibilities); in all cases external references are taken up. The School provides written guidelines for interviewers, including a list of frequently asked questions and an interview report form. The audit team studied these guidelines with care, noting in particular the helpfulness and relevance of, and the level of detail provided in, the 16-page guidance note for the MSc in Finance. The team formed the view that the recruitment and admissions process is well-designed and effectively managed, and that the standard interview forms and reporting systems provided for interviewers, combined with the support and advice such

interviewers receive from faculty, are such as to enable the School to have confidence in the consistency and fairness of the system. More generally, the team considers the School's deployment of its graduates in such a responsible role to be evidence both of constructive and proactive engagement with the employer community and of the seriousness with which it takes its outward-facing responsibilities. Conversely, the willingness of senior professionals and managers to devote time to this activity could reasonably be taken as evidence that they hold their alma mater in high esteem. Given the levels of support and information provided for interviewers and the School's careful moderation of their recommendations, the audit found the School's proactive approach to the use of alumni and alumnae in recruitment and admissions a feature of good practice.

### **Student support**

81 Academic support and guidance are primarily delivered through the programme offices: currently two such offices serve the taught programmes and one the PhD Programme. The programme offices have pages on the Portal, which lead to pages containing comprehensive information on academic and administrative matters. Programme offices are open during normal office hours, and 24-hour access is possible by email or telephone. Students emphasised the excellence of these arrangements, both orally to the audit team and in the annual student survey. The team endorses this view, and regards the sensitivity and efficiency with which this service is provided to students as quite exceptional. Accordingly, the work of the programme offices in providing support to students throughout their period of study is considered a feature of good practice.

82 Students also commented very positively on the nature, quality and timeliness of the feedback they receive on their assessed work. Such feedback, which extends to examination performance as well as essays and project work, is offered, orally and in writing, in an informal but engaged and non-threatening way, normally on demand, and supported by reference to the manner in which students might learn from, and make best use of, the model answers available on the Portal. The audit team, noting the persuasiveness with which students expressed the view that such feedback genuinely supports their development as learners and professionals, concludes that the quality and timeliness of feedback to students constitute a feature of good practice.

83 Information about personal support services for students, including contact details of independent professional counsellors and coaches and how to obtain support in a medical or social crisis outside office hours, is available on the Portal. The audit found that students are aware of the availability of support services and how to access them.

84 The School operates a personal development planning scheme for all MBA students. This is supported by the compulsory Global Leadership Assessment for Managers module, successful completion of which gives access to a suite of other personal development planning modules provided for the School by external agencies. Students confirmed the helpfulness of this provision.

### **Staff support and development**

85 Following the MBA programme review in 2006 there emerged a strong expectation that all faculty should undertake biennial teaching-related development (take-up is monitored in annual review); and in academic year 2006-07 the Academic Affairs Office piloted a revised professional development programme for faculty, which led to an increased emphasis on staff development on the part of the Management Board. Accordingly, the Academic Affairs Team now provides a faculty development programme of which full details are available on portal. The School has also introduced a staff development scheme, run by the Learning and Development Team, which is taught to management-level staff by the School's faculty.

86 More generally, the Human Resources Policies for the Faculty document includes an extensive section on human resources policies, including details of personal review, performance management policies (all faculty are subject to annual performance review) and the tenure system. Applicants for tenure undergo an extensive scrutiny of teaching and research, a central

feature of which is the use of external advice and the application of metric measures. Faculty have a clear understanding of the system and the criteria employed, and confirm that the procedures are fully implemented.

87 Overall, the audit found that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

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

88 The School's declared approach to quality enhancement falls under two heads: management information, and staff development and reward. At the same time, there is evidence of some recent strategic initiatives at senior management level, which, while not primarily driven by a concern with quality, include the intention to enhance it.

89 In terms of management information the School stated in its Briefing Paper that it provides many opportunities for obtaining information; that it aims to respond quickly and effectively to issues raised; and that many examples exist of systematic changes having been made in response to these sources of information. Overall, the School identifies three mechanisms through which it enhances its provision by way of management information. The first is the annual student survey, to which reference has already been made (see paragraphs 42 and 72). This raised a number of issues, in particular the quality of teaching offered by some newly-appointed faculty, to which the School responded in an active and thorough way. The team noted, however, that the survey is conducted by the Association; that the School does not have an institutional policy or formal procedure requiring that it take place annually; that the survey methodology and scope are not under institutional control: while the Senior Management Group and department heads receive the findings of the survey and students are informed of resultant actions, the School may wish to consider publishing a formal procedure for processing the findings. Overall, the team considers that the School's use of its committee structure in responding to the 2007 survey has the potential to serve as the basis of a future strategic approach to quality enhancement.

90 The second enhancement mechanism is the provision of localised opportunities for student feedback, in particular exit questionnaires and student representation. So far as the former are concerned, the School has an established monitoring and response procedure, which it states has led to improvements in provision - a claim confirmed by the audit team's enquiries; and, in the case of the latter, the team found evidence to support the School's claim that its use of student representatives has led to enhanced provision. Overall, the team was impressed by the School's responsiveness to student feedback in particular, and the responsive and collaborative culture the School has created as a context for securing the active engagement of students in its feedback processes is a feature of good practice.

91 Thirdly, the School drew attention to the role of the programme offices in enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities. While this report has already spoken very positively about the work of these offices more generally (see paragraph 81); while it acknowledges the role of the Deans and Directors Committee in disseminating good practice; and while the School cited an instance of this work which clearly improved some students' experience, the audit team is of the view that the School has yet to develop procedures which will ensure that such practice is effectively and systematically disseminated. The team's scrutiny of all relevant committee minutes suggests that when such dissemination occurs it does so largely on the basis of the initiative of individuals in exploiting an opportunity (normally provided by a meeting with different purposes). In addition, the team could not discover any formal mechanism for encouraging programme offices to take initiatives or for ensuring that good practice is regularly disseminated. In fact the only committee on which the School is represented with terms of reference including the

dissemination of good practice is the University of London Research Degrees Committee, the minutes of which suggest that enhancement is less than central to its concerns.

92 In its Briefing Paper the School identified four ways in which it believes its staff development and reward mechanisms contribute to the enhancement of provision. The first is performance-related pay, which is based, for academic staff, on an annual review of performance in teaching, research, internal contribution and external visibility. The second is the very thorough tenure review process (see paragraph 86), under the terms of which applicants must demonstrate that they are at least good in both teaching and research and very good in at least one of them, and at least good on internal contribution and external visibility. The third is the procedure for promotion to full professor, which requires applicants to be very good in both teaching and research and excellent in at least one of them, and at least good on internal contribution and external visibility. Similar procedures were commended in the School's last two audit reports, and the current audit team considers them thorough, systematic and fit for purpose. Nevertheless, while these procedures indubitably contribute valuably to the quality assurance of teaching provision, they do not of themselves constitute evidence of deliberate steps to improve the provision of students' learning opportunities.

93 The fourth mechanism is the annual award system: a Distinguished Contribution Award is made to a member of non-academic staff in recognition of outstanding and sustained contribution to the School and its community; and members of faculty are eligible for nomination for the Student Teaching Award (based on a student vote) and the Excellence in Teaching Award (selected by the deputy deans). The audit team, while acknowledging the potential of these awards as contributory elements to a quality enhancement process, believes they would benefit from being integrated into an explicit framework of deliberative procedures focused on the improvement of learning opportunities.

94 The audit team was presented with two examples of recent strategic initiatives in the form of papers written by the Deputy Dean (Programmes) which were, at the time of the audit, being considered by the Management Committee. One reviewed the overall market for postgraduate degree programmes, the other assessed the contribution of faculty to the design of the School's curriculum. These initiatives have the potential to result in the institution taking deliberate strategic steps leading to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities in the future; at present, however, in that the papers have yet to be formally approved, they cannot be said to be playing this role.

95 The audit found that the School is justified in describing itself as having a highly responsive environment, but also that its approach to quality enhancement is largely reactive, and that there is some work to be done before it can be said to have a strategic approach designed to ensure the enhancement of the quality of provision. It is considered desirable for the School to continue to develop a strategic approach designed to secure steady, reliable and demonstrable improvement in the quality of learning opportunities.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

96 In its Briefing Paper the School stated that it is not heavily involved in collaborative provision, and that there has been little change in the profile of such provision since the last Institutional audit. It described its collaborative provision as falling into three categories: the EMBA-Global (Columbia); the International Exchange Programme, under which around one-third of full-time MBA students in their second year choose to spend a term at one of around 35 selected partner schools; and the MBA Language Learning Programme delivered under contract by King's College London. In addition, the School is developing a new joint MBA in collaboration with Columbia Business School and Hong Kong University, building upon its existing links with these two institutions. This programme has been approved in principle and is now undergoing detailed preparatory work with a view to a first intake in May 2009.

97 In 2000, the School launched its 19-month EMBA-Global with the Columbia Business School, New York; this is a dual award, with graduands awarded a degree by both institutions. In its Briefing Paper the School stated that it had sought a partner with a suitably high international ranking; that Columbia, a 'top ten' business school, was considered appropriate; and that the relationship with Columbia is a 'partnership of equals'. Accordingly teaching, marketing and administration are shared equally, as are fees and direct costs; the programme is run jointly, with fortnightly conference calls between the two teams and day-long review meetings four to six times annually. Students are taught in intensive monthly blocks of several days each, alternating between New York and London, although the programme structure allows for up to 75 per cent of credit to be based on study at either institution. The programme is said to have the same quality assurance processes and standards as all the School's programmes.

98 It follows, since this is a dual award, that each institution accepts study at the other institution as contributing to the credits on which the award is based. Graded credit is therefore transferred to the other institution and included in the calculations for the final award. The methods of calculation for the award of a Distinction differ between the two institutions: in particular, students receiving the London award may be awarded a Distinction, but this is not recorded on the Columbia award.

99 External examiners are present at the Board of Examiners at which the final award for the (London) programme is made, and they therefore have sight of the grades awarded at Columbia. They do not, however, have any modifying input to the grades awarded there, albeit that these grades contribute to the overall award; nor are they in a position to comment on the overall academic standards of work from the cohort: the Programme Assessment Regulations state that the grading policies and the evaluation of student work undertaken in New York rest entirely with the Columbia faculty. The audit team, while accepting that external examining does not feature in United States of America's higher education, nonetheless hopes it will be possible for the School to negotiate a mutually acceptable procedure for this programme (as it has sought to do for the proposed joint degree, see paragraph 107) to ensure that its external examiners have effective and comprehensive oversight of the standards of the summative assessments which contribute directly to the University of London award; it strongly encourages the School to explore the possibility of doing so at an early date.

100 The audit team, noting that the certificates and transcripts issued to students do not specify the location of study, advises the School to ensure that all certificates and transcripts issued to graduates on the basis of work undertaken in collaborative provision record the name and location of the partner organisation concerned.

101 The School's International Exchange Programme (the Programme) involves about one-third of the second-year full-time MBA class spending a term with one of around 35 exchange partners, based in 15 countries. The School stated in its Briefing Paper that it has developed strict criteria for assessing prospective partners; that it has formal agreements with all partner institutions, which are formally reviewed every three years; and that it undertakes an annual student stocktake to identify and enable it to address exchange imbalances. The audit team confirms that the programme is approved by the MBA Programme Director in consultation with appropriate senior colleagues; that a document exists which outlines the factors considered, including global rankings and international accreditations; and that the triennial review does indeed take place. The team also noted, however, that this review is based almost entirely on student feedback, with little or no faculty or school-level evaluation. Hence, in spite of the fact that courses taken by exchange students count as elective credits towards the degree, the audit found that the Programme is not covered by the School's approval, monitoring and review processes.

102 Students are issued with an International Exchange Handbook, which gives useful information on the partner institutions, sets out the responsibilities of the students, and gathers the, overwhelmingly positive, views of returning students. This Handbook which acknowledges frankly that occasionally host institutions do not give equal access to exchange students in

comparison to their own students, also explains that, although courses which count towards students' 'specialisation' (for example, in international business or marketing) are reviewed in advance by a senior faculty member, students are otherwise responsible for selecting their own elective courses at the partner institution (but with no guarantee that the courses selected will be available). While the audit did find some evidence of constructive intervention on the School's part to ensure that students were given sufficient access to M-level courses, it remains the fact that the School has only limited control over, or input to, those elements of the University of London award constituted of elective courses taken in the International Exchange Programme.

103 The audit found that the approach taken to the exchange programme, from selection of courses, to monitoring and review, is almost entirely student-driven and reactive only to student feedback. There is an absence of institutional-level oversight of such a kind as would enable the School to take an informed and systematic view of the suitability of the exchange programme and the elective courses available to students at partner institutions.

104 Members of faculty informed the audit team that students participating in the exchange programme are required to take four elective courses at the partner institution, all of them examined on an ungraded Pass/Fail basis. Accordingly, students are able to accumulate up to one-sixth of programme credits from such courses, the results of which are received from the partner institution and submitted to the appropriate board of examiners with neither faculty nor external examiners involved in assessment or moderation. The team, while appreciating that imposing external examiners on some 35 institutions in 15 countries would be impractical, considers it paramount that the School find a means of assuring itself that the academic standards of each of these institutions are comparable both with each other and with national expectations of a UK M-level award. The lack of any independent oversight of student work undertaken in these institutions constitutes a current threat to the academic standards of the award, making it essential for the School to devise and implement a means of ensuring independent oversight of all credit derived from summative assessment within collaborative provision which contributes to an award.

105 In the past year the EMBA programme has begun to develop an exchange arrangement, to be launched shortly after the audit visit, allowing fourth and fifth term Executive MBA students to take a block week elective at one of six business schools in Europe and the United States of America, earning one elective credit towards the degree.

106 The School is also developing a new joint degree in collaboration with Columbia Business School and Hong Kong University, building upon its existing links with these two institutions. At the time of the audit visit the programme had been approved in principle, and detailed work was in progress, drawing on the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. Strategically the programme aims to extend the School's presence in Asia and China and to generate revenue without additional space requirements in London: the programme will initially be targeted at students from east and south-east Asia, with admissions managed by Hong Kong University in accordance with an agreed admissions procedure; graduands will receive a degree conferred jointly by the three institutions.

107 The School acknowledged that it had found reaching agreement on this new venture challenging for a number of reasons, both procedural and quality related, but draft regulations are now in place, with a view to an initial intake in May 2009. In the view of the audit team the proposed procedures constitute a detailed and well-documented regulatory framework, with a clearly articulated governance and management structure setting out the respective roles and responsibilities of the three parties. External examiners will be appointed, and will see any core course individual assessment that they wish to consider, agreeing with the internal examiner a grade to be reported to the Examinations Review Panel. It is particularly noteworthy that the Columbia Business School has agreed to the system of external examiners required by the other two partners. The team, however, noting that the proposed procedures do not involve any



independent oversight of the summative assessment of elective courses which will contribute directly to the joint award, strongly suggests, in the light of the earlier recommendation (see paragraph 104) that the School give active consideration to this omission before the programme becomes operational.

108 The School has a requirement that, by graduation, all full-time MBA students should have business-related fluency in one foreign language. Instruction is provided to those students who do not already meet this criterion through a contract with the Language and Communication Centre, King's College London. The information available to students about the language programme is clear and comprehensive, and contains a lucid exposition of the language competence required. Students informed the audit team that the language assessment and tuition systems are rigorous and effective, explaining the diagnostic and pedagogic procedures in some detail. The team also saw examples of completing students who failed to meet the language competence level being referred, and given a further 12 months within which to reach the required level. The School's academically rigorous management of the assessment of those of its students who take the foreign language programme offered as part of its collaborative provision arrangements constitutes a feature of good practice.

109 The School acknowledged in early 2007 that it did not have a clearly defined strategy for approving, monitoring and reviewing collaborative arrangements with other academic institutions. At the time of the audit this was still the case, although a document submitted to, and approved by, the Management Board immediately before the audit contained proposed arrangements for 'the Introduction of a New Programme in Collaboration with one or more Partner Institutions'. This document, which has the potential to form part of a future strategy, proposed the alignment of approval arrangements for new collaborative programmes with the existing programme approval process and provided detailed procedural arrangements for an 'audit visit' to proposed partner institutions, with a team consisting of several senior staff and the Quality Assurance Manager. Although the document made no reference to external membership, the audit team was subsequently informed that the process will in fact be overseen by an external assessor.

110 Although this paper contains considerable detail in some areas, the School acknowledged that it lacks significant sections on procedures for reporting, monitoring and review; on good practice in assessment; and on the use of external examiners in collaborative provision. While the final paper, which is scheduled for approval by December 2008, has the potential to meet the audit team's concerns, it remains the fact that the School currently lacks systematic institutional-level processes for the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision, and that it has no procedure for ensuring that credit-bearing courses taken at partner institutions have been evaluated with regard to their level, content or their alignment with FHEQ or other external indicators. The team considers that the lack of such reference points, in rendering it impossible for the School to assure itself as to the academic standards of awards undertaken as part of collaborative provision, constitutes a current threat to those standards. It is therefore essential that the School establish, implement and monitor such a systematic set of institution-wide processes and reporting systems as will ensure the effective oversight of all aspects of its collaborative provision.

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

111 The School follows, and research students are subject to, University of London regulations for the award of the MPhil and PhD degrees. The PhD Programme reports annually both to the School's Management Committee and to the University of London Research Degrees Committee, providing a range of data covering thesis examinations and selected quality assurance procedures. The audit team noted, however, that whereas the report submitted in academic year

2006-07 showed a serious engagement with a range of substantive issues, the most recent report was less detailed; in fact the section on handling examiners' reports reproduced verbatim the corresponding section in the previous report. The team also noted that while the University Research Degrees Committee has recently discussed a number of general issues inviting responses from colleges, including the School, the minutes of that Committee are not reported to, or considered by, any School committee. And, while the team was assured that the Chair of the School's PhD Committee brings issues relating to the School's management of its Programme to that Committee's attention, it was not evident from the minutes with which it was supplied that this is invariably so.

112 Responsibility for the PhD Programme, which has full (2 + 2) recognition from the Economic and Social Science Research Council, lies jointly with the Programme Director and Programme Chair, respectively a senior administrator and senior academic. The Programme Chair is assisted by a PhD Committee consisting of representatives from each of the School's seven subject areas. The Committee, which is charged with maintaining the academic quality of the Programme and advising the Chair on all relevant matters, has extensive powers and areas of responsibility including approving transfers from MPhil to PhD; allocating scholarships; and forwarding (with a commentary) nominations of examiners to the University for approval.

113 The PhD Programme is subject to the School's Procedures for Periodic Review, but although it is a requirement that programmes be reviewed every six years, this Programme was in fact last reviewed in 1997, and is next scheduled for review in academic year 2008-09, potentially twice the permitted time-span. While this slippage clearly highlights a weakness in the School's management of quality and standards (which is currently being addressed), the audit team found no reason to challenge the positive findings of QAA's special review concerning the environment for research degree students, or to doubt that the School meets Precept 5 of the *Code of practice* (that institutions will provide an environment in which high-quality research is occurring).

114 Other than in exceptional cases, postgraduate research students are required to graduate with a two-year MRes before being permitted to register for the research phase of the Programme: normally, therefore, a four to five-year period of full-time study is involved. MRes students are included in PhD Programme numbers which, at the time of the audit visit, stood at 65.

115 Data made available to the audit team indicate that, of students admitted between 1999 and 2002, 30.5 per cent left prematurely or were terminated, and 74 per cent of those remaining (constituting slightly over half of all entrants) completed within the five-year period. On the face of it, a timely completion rate of little over 50 per cent, particularly given the excellence of the intake, would be of concern, but the School believes the figures to be skewed by a large intake in 2000, an experiment which was not deemed successful and which has not been repeated.

116 MRes students are required to complete their coursework by the end of the second year: each subject area nominates five courses, from which a grade of B or above must be attained in at least three, with one resubmit opportunity; in the case of a single Fail, the other four grades must all be at least B, and students who fail to attain this minimum level are asked to withdraw. In addition, second-year students are required to write an 8,000-12,000 word research paper, and may also be required to take an oral examination: those who successfully complete the coursework component and obtain a C or above in the research paper are awarded the University of London Master of Research degree. This does not, however, automatically lead to registration for MPhil/PhD, since students who fail any part of the comprehensive examination are asked to withdraw. Progressing students are registered for the MPhil, transferring to PhD normally within six months on the successful oral defence of a thesis proposal; those who fail to transfer are normally invited to complete the MPhil requirements.

117 All core faculty are required to be research active, and the publication of original research of international standing and relevance to the School's objectives is a key criterion in initial appointment and tenure. Research performance is closely supported and monitored, and is a

central feature of tenure and promotion procedures (see paragraphs 86 and 92); the School benchmarks its institutional performance against international competitors, and its excellent performance in successive research assessment exercises and high international ranking among business schools stand testimony to the success of this approach.

118 The management of research, which attracted slightly equivocal comment in a professional body report five years ago, has been significantly modified since, with the Dean of Research post replaced by a Research Centres Review Committee (chaired by the Deputy Dean (Faculty)), meeting termly and reporting annually to the Management Board. The School has no internal mechanism for giving ethical approval for staff or student research projects, but has an arrangement with the London School of Economics and Political Science, whereby all research projects requiring ethical approval are processed through the latter's Ethics Committee. The audit team assumes, not least given the rapidly evolving nature of the field, that the School will monitor this arrangement very closely, weighing carefully the respective merits of continuing with this arrangement and establishing a research ethics committee of its own.

119 The audit team reviewed in some detail the School's procedures for applications and admissions, and found them meticulous and non-discriminatory in design and conscientiously applied. The induction process is similarly well-conceived and the students who met the team were especially appreciative of sessions introducing new students to the faculty, research and the range of courses on offer. New students are matched with a first-year supervisor who provides mentorship during the coursework period and effects a hand-over to the thesis supervisor: this process appears well-handled. The School has effective mechanisms and resources for student research training (the methodology section of which was strengthened following the expression of concern two years ago); for compulsory research seminars for PhD students; for encouraging such students to present papers at external conferences and at the School's annual Trans-Atlantic Doctoral Conference; for appointing, monitoring and training new supervisors; for providing excellent learning support facilities (including, but not restricted to, the Portal); for feedback arrangements; for handling requests for supervisory changes; for supervisors' leave of absence or departure; and for monitoring and for controlling supervisory numbers. The School has also begun to use exit questionnaires from former supervisors of new doctoral graduates to obtain systematic feedback about a range of matters, including the quality and needs of students and the supervisory process.

120 While it will be clear that there are many strengths in the School's supervisory process and that the size and culture of the institution facilitate high levels of informal contact between supervisors and students, the audit team noted that no obligation exists for supervisions, which are required to be held at least monthly, to be recorded. Not only could this omission, which places the School out of alignment with the relevant precept of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, put the School in difficulty in the case of disputes, but also the recording of the progress of successful students is of potential value to both parties. It would therefore be desirable for the School to require both research degree supervisors and students to maintain records of all formal supervision meetings.

121 The audit team, while noting that a one-day seminar about the PhD Programme for new faculty took place shortly before the audit visit, noted also that such seminars are not compulsory and that no refresher training appears to exist for experienced supervisors who are not necessarily familiar with developing sector-wide expectations and practices in this area. The team believes the new faculty seminar could usefully be developed into a fuller programme for both new and experienced supervisors, and advises the School to ensure that all members of staff acting as supervisors of research students undertake such development activities as will enable the School to be assured of their competence in this role.

122 The career development of PhD students is encouraged by the mutually beneficial expectation that they provide faculty with 40 days' assistance on research papers, case writing, tutoring and grading. At the same time, the Programme hires the consultancy services of a

professional development adviser, who works closely with the Programme Office to identify individual students' needs and provide feedback. The adviser is accessible to students at any time; observes students' presentations; runs a presentation skills workshop using videotaping facilities to work with small groups of students; and ensures that students are provided with guidance on presentation and interviewing skills.

123 Research students are represented on the PhD Committee by one MRes student and one student from the third, fourth or fifth years. PhD students informed the audit team that the representation system is implemented and effective, that they have many opportunities to provide feedback, and that critical comment leads to prompt responsive action. In addition, following QAA's special Review of research degree programmes, 2006, the School instituted a formal complaints procedure, which led to those aspects of the Programme which fall within the School's areas of responsibility following the same appeals, complaints and disciplinary procedures as those used by its other degree programmes.

124 On the basis of its scrutiny of recent reports, the audit team confirms that the PhD Programme responded appropriately to QAA's special Review of research degree programmes; that it monitors attrition and completion rates and placements; that it responds to external examiners' comments; and that it monitors the frequency of the use of external examiners through its annual report to the PhD Committee. Overall, the School's arrangements for its postgraduate research students meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1*, and provide evidence of full and proper attention being paid to the quality of learning opportunities and the academic standards of the awards the School makes on behalf of the University of London.

## **Section 7: Published information**

125 The School stated in its Briefing Paper that each programme office is responsible for the accuracy of information published in brochures and on the School's website; that the School's Communications Department oversees the production of hard copy brochures and the development of the site; and that the annual student survey and entry and exit questionnaires provide data to help programme offices judge the effectiveness of their published information. As a postgraduate institution, the School's teaching quality information is limited to completion and employment data, which derive directly from its Higher Education Statistics Agency returns.

126 The School provides information about its programmes orally as well as in writing and globally as well as domestically. The documentation invites prospective applicants to contact its graduates and current students for information and guidance, and to attend sample classes and mock courses; the audit found that these arrangements are conscientiously undertaken. The student view, as expressed in the written submission, is positive about the quality of published information and confirms that students are frequently consulted on the development of course brochures and web pages. Students also have opportunities to raise concerns about promotional material with programme office staff, academic heads and other senior members of the School; and incoming students are asked to comment on marketing materials in entry questionnaires.

127 The audit found that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the School publishes about its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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