Institutional audit

The Courtauld Institute of Art

February 2011

Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and the quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes
- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

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

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website.

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Courtauld Institute of Art (the Institute; the Courtauld) from 14 to 18 February 2011 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the Institute offers on behalf of the University of London.

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

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

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

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

Postgraduate research students

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

Published information

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

Features of good practice

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

- the advantage to students of studying in an environment characterised by a pervasive culture of research
- the broad benefits of the virtual learning environment in providing a single source of information for staff and students, thus supporting effective engagement with the academic activity of the institution, including teaching
- the contribution of the Department of Public Programmes and the Gallery to outreach and widening participation work
- the establishment of productive associations with other institutions, providing complementary access to facilities that enhance the students' learning experience
- the Research Forum, which offers a focus and support for a range of research activities from which students at all levels of study benefit
- the role of the teaching assistants in supporting small-group teaching
- the structured approach to the continuous professional development of the teaching assistants.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the Institute to:

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

It would be desirable for the Institute to:

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

Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by the Institute of the Academic Infrastructure which provides a means of describing academic standards in UK higher education. It allows for diversity and innovation within academic programmes offered by higher education. QAA worked with the higher education sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure, which are:

- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

The audit found that the Institute took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Report

1   An Institutional audit of the Courtauld Institute of Art (the Institute; the Courtauld) was undertaken during the week commencing 14 February 2011. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the Institute's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers on behalf of the University of London and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2   The audit team comprised: Professor R Allen, Dr C Beeson, Dr M Bowen, Mr H Smith and Dr C Stevens, auditors, and Ms S Welham, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mrs S Patterson, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   Based at Somerset House in London, the Courtauld Institute of Art is a small, specialist higher education institution that provides undergraduate, postgraduate and research programmes in the history and conservation of art. The Courtauld was founded as a Senate Institute of the University of London in 1932 and became a self-governing college responsible for its own governance, academic programmes and financial viability in 2002. Students of the Institute are awarded degrees of the University of London. The Institute's mission is to be 'a world-class centre of intellectual enquiry in the fields of the history, conservation and curatorship of art and architecture'.

4   Degree programmes include a BA, Graduate Diploma and MA in the History of Art; a Postgraduate Diploma in the Conservation of Easel Paintings; an MA in the Conservation of Wall Paintings; an MA in Curating the Art Museum and MPhil and PhD research degrees. Academic provision is structured into courses within programmes. Facilities for students include the Courtauld Gallery collection of paintings, drawings and prints, and sculpture and decorative arts. There are also public lectures, short courses and lunchtime talks.

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

6   In November 2010 there were120 staff: 42 academic staff and 78 administrative/ other staff. 70 per cent were full-time staff and 30 per cent part-time. There were also 26 visiting lecturers, employed on a casual basis.

7   The previous audit of the Institute in 2005 resulted in a number of recommendations relating to the monitoring and management of academic standards. The present audit team found that the Institute had considered carefully and responded to the findings of the audit. One of the most notable changes for students since the last audit has been the introduction of a virtual learning environment which has provided students and staff with a single reference point for information.

8   The Institute's Governing Body assumes overall responsibility for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities but delegates operational responsibility to the Academic Board and its sub-committees. All members of the academic staff community are members of the Academic Board, which provides the opportunity for

such staff to be informed and involved in decision-making. The Quality Assurance Framework provides the starting reference for staff on all matters relating to academic quality including programme and course approval and monitoring.

9   Within the area of History of Art there are period sections which are semi-formal groupings of academic staff that perform a variety of administrative and organisational roles and provide a community for postgraduate students. The sections serve as an interface between individual members of faculty and formal committees and provide research communities for postgraduate students. The section structure is used as the basis for ensuring broad chronological representation both in committees and working groups, and in the balance of teaching. The Institute's programmes comprise courses that extend the breadth of study available, being based on the specialist research interests of the academic staff who deliver them. Only one new programme has been introduced in the last ten years: the MA in Curating the Art Museum.

10   To counter the potential for insularity as a consequence of its size and specialist nature, the Institute has systematically cultivated a variety of external links and associations which serve to widen the base of external reference points and broaden the circle of expertise on which it can draw. The arrangements include the recruitment of external members of senior academic committees, and the establishment of International Advisory Boards to oversee and advise the Institute's work in highly specialist areas such as the postgraduate conservation programmes in easel painting and wall paintings.

11   The process for course approvals is described in the Institute's Quality Assurance Framework. Courses are initially discussed in the period sections prior to scrutiny by the Teaching and Learning Committee and subsequent approval by the Academic Board. The Head of Libraries and the Academic Registrar are also involved in the discussions. Scrutiny of documentation related to course approvals demonstrates that the process establishes the academic standards and quality of programmes and promotes student learning that is at the forefront of current research and scholarly activity.

12   Annual monitoring, described by the Institute as a 'check on the academic standards of programmes of study and their resources' is based on information collated by heads of programme from student feedback and external examiner reports. This information is compiled into a report and discussed at programme boards before being referred to the Teaching and Learning Committee.

13   Periodic review is conducted entirely by external academic experts who are appointed by the Teaching and Learning Committee. Reviewers are provided with all information available relating to the programme along with a report from the Dean and Deputy Director. The reviewers will complete a report for the Institute that will be scrutinised, and the recommendations will be discussed and where appropriate acted upon. Scrutiny of review reports and the relevant committee minutes established that procedures for periodic programme review were consistent with effective management of academic standards and quality and met the expectations of the *Code of practice*.

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

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

15   The Institute's approach to its assurance of academic standards is set out in the Quality Assurance Framework (2009), which applies to undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. The Institute identifies engagement with the Academic Infrastructure, external examiners' reports, and internal quality assurance procedures such as periodic reviews, annual monitoring, and module evaluation, as key mechanisms for the institutional management of academic standards. A noteworthy feature is the extent and range of external advice that the Institute uses to confirm that programmes are of appropriate academic standard.

16   Procedures for modifying programmes and their constituent courses involve input from academic experts external to the Institute. Any proposed changes to existing programmes must be confirmed by the Academic Board. Changes that have the capacity to affect the integrity of the validated programme, such as the adoption of new assessment regulations, require the explicit approval of the Academic Board. Scrutiny of documentation and discussion with staff established that procedures for course approval and programme modification were consistent with the maintenance of academic standards.

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

18   Periodic review assesses: whether each programme meets its stated aims and programme outcomes as outlined in the programme specification; whether the resources available are adequate to support programme delivery; and whether assessment remains appropriate. It is a means whereby significant changes to the programme can be made. Reviewers are asked to comment on both issues that need consideration and on the strengths of the programme. The audit team's reading of a sample of periodic review reports confirmed that the periodic review process was an important feature of the Institute's processes for the management of academic standards involving thorough consideration of the operation of programmes. The periodic review reports circulated to staff are considered in full by the Teaching and Learning Committee and are reported to Academic Board. The audit team confirmed from its scrutiny of review reports and the relevant committee minutes that procedures for periodic programme review were consistent with the maintenance of academic standards.

External examiners

19   The appointment of external examiners is overseen by Academic Board. The Institute engages the services of a large number of external examiners in order to ensure a high degree of specialisation across the range of periods assessed in the programmes. There are clear criteria and procedures for the nomination and appointment of external examiners to ensure that potential conflicts of interest are avoided. On appointment, external examiners receive a copy of the Handbook for External Examiners which provides full details of the Institute's assessment and examination regulations and requirements. The Institute believes that the recommendation and appointments process is rigorous, and, on the basis of its audit investigations, the audit team concurs with this view. Arrangements for external examining are fully in line with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice.*

20   There are sound arrangements for reporting by external examiners, who are asked to comment on the balance and content of the degree course, the administration of assessment, the examination process, and the appropriateness of the assessments. Some external examiners also provide overview reports. A Board of Examiners 'post-mortem' report prepared largely by the Head of Examinations and the Academic Registrar gathers together issues from each of the programmes. This report contributes to the annual programme monitoring process. Until 2010 the report was considered by the Teaching and Learning Committee but it now goes to the Academic Board thus securing direct oversight of the examination process by the Board.

21   The minutes of the meetings at which the reports are discussed indicate that the Institute takes the comments of its external examiners seriously and debates the issues raised. Frequently, issues are passed to ad hoc working parties for further deliberation and resolution. In some cases it is difficult to track the debate and outcomes, including formal verification of actions having been completed, as decisions are not always formally reported back to the originating committee. In most instances, it was clear that actions had been completed, whether or not reported back.

22   External examiners are asked to confirm whether suggestions made the previous year have been taken on board, and there is overwhelming confirmation from the examiners that they are. The response to external examiner reports is provided through the 'post-mortem' report, which is sent to them. External examiners do not receive any other notification of action taken in response to their reports. The audit team considers it advisable that the Institute report formally to individual external examiners on action taken in response to matters raised in their reports. There was clear evidence that the Institute has robust processes for the operation of its external examiner procedures and that it makes strong and scrupulous use of independent external examiners in summative assessment.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

23   Responsibility for ensuring that the Institute's regulations and policies are in accordance with the Academic Infrastructure lies with the Academic Board. All of the Institute's programmes are aligned with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The Institute does not have a credit framework for its awards although, in discussion with the audit team and in their written submission, students expressed a wish that awards of the Institute be credit bearing. All students are provided with a diploma supplement. The Institute considers the relevant subject benchmark statements in defining its programmes and courses. Subject benchmark statements are identified in definitive programme documents and in programme specifications. Periodic review procedures require that reviewers assess the operation programmes against the relevant subject benchmarks. Programme specifications are

available for all Institute programmes, and there is a procedure to update these in the light of any development. Aims and programmes' learning outcomes, both for levels and for the programme as a whole, are well disseminated to students and routinely appear in module guides as well as in student handbooks, and are set out in easily accessible language.

24   On the basis of its discussion and reading of documentation in the course of the audit, the audit team was able to confirm that the Academic Infrastructure was used in the calibration and maintenance of academic standards. The Institute makes consistent and effective use of external expert opinion in programme design, approval and review in relation to the management of academic standards. The Teaching and Learning Committee and the Academic Board include external academics. None of the Institute's programmes is subject to professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements. From the evidence available to it from documentation and meetings with staff, the audit team can confirm that, overall, effective use is made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure in its processes for the management of academic standards. The Institute considers the use of external advice to be a strength, a view endorsed by the team.

Assessment policies and regulations

25   There are defined assessment principles, procedures and processes that are brought to the attention of all interested parties, being staff, students and external examiners. The Academic Board is responsible for policies and procedures for the examination and assessment of the academic performance of students, while the Teaching and Learning Committee has operational responsibility for both regulations and for the assessment of programmes and courses, except where major policy issues are raised. From observation of the minutes of both committees, the audit team can confirm that these functions are appropriately conducted.

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

27   On the basis of the evidence provided to it, the audit team confirmed that the design and organisation of curricula and their relationship with assessment was clear, and that the amount and timing of assessment enabled effective and appropriate measurement of students' achievement. The Institute's arrangements for the assessment of students are effective in maintaining the academic standards of awards.

Management information - statistics

28   The Institute produces a statistical paper containing an overview of student numbers, a summary of achievement and results, and National Student Survey results, as part of the annual monitoring process. This paper presents headline information and does not contribute explicitly to consideration of management information about the provision as a whole. The previous audit resulted in recommendations about planning and the monitoring of strategic and operational priorities and targets and about formal procedures for using and evaluating management information. The Institute has made structural changes to the Registry in response to these recommendations. Nonetheless, the Institute recognises that

there remains work to be undertaken in this area. While the audit team is sympathetic to the view that the student cohort is too small for some quantitative processes, it agrees with the Institute's own appraisal that there is scope for further development in this area in support of quality management. The current shortcoming does not represent a threat to academic standards but the audit team considers it desirable that the Institute establish a systematic approach to the gathering and use of a pertinent range of management information in its quality assurance and enhancement processes.

Conclusion

29   There can be confidence in the Institute's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

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

Management information - feedback from students

31   Feedback from students is collected mainly through the National Student Survey. The library and IT services also conduct surveys. The Director conducts voluntary exit meetings with individual students on completion of their programmes; at the time of the audit, the Institute was reviewing the effectiveness of these meetings as a source of feedback. In response to the most recent National Student Survey results the Institute set up a working group, which had not reported at the time of the audit, to look holistically at the various forms of student feedback.

32   Individual courses on programmes have a two-stage process in respect of student feedback. Midway through the course there is informal feedback, which may be anonymous, to the individual delivering the course; a response is provided to the students, and appropriate action is taken. The second is an end-of-course formal questionnaire from which a report is produced; this is analysed by a designated teacher, not from the course, who produces a further narrative report. These latter reports are discussed at programme boards where there is good student representation. The students regard a culture of institutional critique to be integral to the Courtauld's ethos and to contribute to improvements to programmes of study.

33   There is a Student Staff Liaison Committee which is run entirely by the Students' Union. Specific staff are mandated to attend, however all staff and all students can attend. This forum provides for open discussion on various issues of interest to the students.

34   The audit team considers that the Institute has a range of means of gathering student feedback and is committed to developing a more holistic approach to obtaining such feedback. The audit team considers it desirable that the Institute review the effectiveness of its communication with students about policies, procedures and action taken in response to matters raised through feedback and consultation processes.

Role of students in quality assurance

35   The Students' Union President, the only sabbatical post in the Institute, attends most of the key committees with the exception of the research committees, which have no student representation. The Institute ensures that the Academic Board has taught undergraduate and postgraduate student representation. The Teaching and Learning Committee has the Students' Union President and the Academic Affairs Officer in its membership. There is good student representation at the programme boards, where student feedback is discussed and reviewed.

36   There is no formal quality assurance training for the students at the Institute; such training could be of benefit to both the students and the institution in regard to the students' contribution and involvement in decision-making.

37   The programme review process is conducted entirely by two external experts who meet with students and receive a detailed review report prepared by the Student's Union officers in consultation with past and present students.

38   The audit team found that although students are represented at most of the Institute's committees, their lack of training limited their effective participation. Accordingly, the team came to the view that it is desirable that the Institute consider how it might promote and support effective student representation and involvement in decision-making by all student constituencies, including the potential benefits of providing formal training for representatives.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

39   Securing the Institute's international eminence as a centre for research in the history and conservation of art is a major priority for the Institute. The audit team judged that this priority was being pursued in an inclusive way and for the benefit of students. All teaching takes full account of current research. The BA degree, for example, covers a wide range of subjects, which provide comprehensive coverage; within that coverage lecturers may propose and offer courses related to their research. Teaching assistants, usually postgraduate research students, who lead seminars to support the main lecture courses are encouraged to use examples drawn from their own and other current research in their follow-up to lectures. The links between the Institute and the Gallery are significant here in that the collection brings students into contact with primary source material in a way that encourages approaches characteristic of research at all levels of taught programmes. Overall the team found that research at the Institute works very much to the advantage of students and identified the advantage of studying in an environment characterised by a pervasive culture of research as a feature of good practice.

Other modes of study

40   All programmes at the Institute are either full-time or part-time: it does not offer any other modes of study.

Resources for learning

41   The Institution has a thorough and effective procedure for the allocation of resources, which is linked to strategic planning. There is also a mechanism that allows the development of a business plan for a new resource such as was the case in the development of the virtual learning environment (which has proven to be very effective in regard to student support and communication). Undergraduates who were studying at the Courtauld prior to the introduction of the virtual learning environment made particular reference to the significant improvement it has made to their overall learning experience, providing a key starting point in finding answers to their queries. The audit team recognised the broad benefits of the virtual learning environment in providing a single source of information for staff and students, thus supporting effective engagement with the academic activity of the institution, including teaching as a feature of good practice.

42   The audit team considers that resources for learning are of a high standard; all students have full access to these resources. The Institute has digitised its slide library and the Courtauld Gallery's collection of paintings, drawings and photographs of architecture and sculpture.

43   There is an issue in regard to space and basic facilities such as photocopying in the library. The Institute is constrained in regard to change to the space it occupies as Somerset House is a listed building.

44   The audit team considered that the Institute effectively managed and networked with other institutions to ensure that students were provided with good learning resources.

Admissions policy

45   The Institute has a comprehensive Admissions Policy which is overseen by a senior member of staff and is updated on a regular basis using the expertise of external members of its Admission and Widening Participation Committee. Due to the fierce competition for a place on the BA History of Art programme the Institute has developed a procedure involving submission of a questionnaire and an essay to allow students to be shortlisted for interview. Key to the interview process is ensuring that applicants are aware that the programme is demanding and rigorous and that the successful candidates are highly valued by the Institute.

46   The Institute has developed an impressive number of strategies such as Teacher Gallery Events and Forum and Public programmes in order to widen participation. It runs successful collaborative programmes with the other institutions in London. This initiative is largely altruistic, embodying widening participation in a broader sense. The Institute currently has clear short and long-term aims to increase student recruitment from the state sector and low-participation neighbourhoods. The contribution of the Department of Public Programmes and the Gallery to outreach and widening participation work is regarded by the audit team to be an example of good practice.

Student support

47   Students at the Institute are provided with various student services which meet their needs. There is a particular emphasis on writing skills, supported through the Royal Literary Funds Fellows. An Academic Support Officer provides support with study skills and helps students for whom English is a second language. The policies and procedure for disabled students are in the process of being amended. Students whom the audit team met were happy with their induction, which includes a detailed induction pack, and a week-long induction with organised social events.

48   The newly developed virtual learning environment has made a marked difference to the student experience at the Institute. Information in regard to induction, course and programme material and names of tutors and tutees for the BA students is posted on this system. The Institute has developed formal timetabled meetings for personal tutors with their students and provides a comprehensive and clear personal tutor handbook for the academic staff for guidance. Personal tutors are used to guide students on academic issues and to feed back details of their performance in assessed work. The personal tutor system at master's level varies depending on the student numbers on the programme. There is evidence of extensive feedback for MA students on their assessed work. The size of the Institute encourages informality and easy access to staff. Complaints and appeals procedures are clear and such matters are dealt with fairly.

49   Although available for students, personal development planning is not being proactively utilised. The introduction of the virtual learning environment has been recognised as providing opportunities to have a more interactive user-friendly personal development planning resource, and the Institute is considering integrating personal development planning into the curriculum. The audit team considers it desirable that the Institute develop a purposeful approach to personal development planning for all students.

50   There has been a marked improvement in support to students in regard to employability since the previous audit. The Institute draws on the careers service at another London institution which provides dedicated careers advice for the Courtauld students. There are guest speakers and there is clear networking with eminent Courtauld alumni. There are various internships, which the Institute plans to expand. Students give Gallery talks and are trained for this work, and student ambassadors assist with education programmes. The Institute is developing an action plan to develop further its students' employability.

51   Students at the Institute are privileged in that they have access not only to highly specialist resources but also through the Research Forum to a diverse programme of lectures, workshops, conferences and seminars throughout the year. Small-group teaching by experts in their field is one of the major strengths of the institution.

Staff support (including staff development)

52   The Institute aims to support staff across the lifetime of their employment through a mix of bespoke arrangements, standard procedures and group events. The evidence available to the audit team indicated that the Courtauld broadly achieves this aim. All staff are invited to 'Best Practice Lunches' and an annual 'away day' where new developments but also current practice can be discussed. Staff also benefit from a Courtauld Staff Handbook which provides a wide range of information on structures and procedures. Staff are all subject to regular appraisal of performance and training needs.

53   For new staff there is an effective initial induction process. Academic staff who do not have teaching experience undertake a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice.

54   The audit team found that confidence could reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

55   The Institute does not define 'quality enhancement' formally, but cites the use of externality as its 'most significant enhancement principle'. As has been noted above, the process of periodic review is conducted entirely by a panel of external specialists, and it is clear both from the detailed and comprehensive reports prepared by the external reviewers, and from the institution's responses to them, that the institution derives great benefit from review, and implements significant enhancements as a result. Examples of such improvements include: the acquisition of a comprehensive virtual learning environment which has been very well received by staff and students; the introduction of a more user-friendly personal tutor system for students; and a redesign of the delivery and content of the year 2 'Frameworks' course.

56   Productive associations have been established with other institutions, providing complementary access to facilities that enhance the students' learning experience. These include student access to the libraries of other institutions within the University of London and access to the collections of the Warburg Institute, which the students greatly value. Further, the access students have both to the main collections of the Courtauld Gallery and to those holdings not on public display, were held to be an exciting and stimulating aspect of their study at the Institute.

57   The Institute's systematic engagement with external groups to enhance its work is also evident in the area of postgraduate research. The team heard, for example, of the Institute's involvement in the Research Skills Intercollegiate Network (ReSkIN) and of a recent Research Forum event involving 20 Visiting Fellows from the University of Naples. The associations the Institute has with the Terra Foundation and with the Mellon Foundation have provided substantial opportunities for developing links with other communities of scholars through the funding for Visiting Professorships, Fellowships and visiting Conservators, bringing a substantial number of international scholars to the Institute and enhancing both the work of the Institute as whole and its network of contacts.

58   The audit team regard the establishment of these productive associations with other institutions and organisations (which provide, among other things, complementary access to facilities that enhance the students' learning experience) to be a feature of good practice.

59   As another means of enhancing the quality of its work and provision, the Institute is keen to promote and disseminate best practice through regular 'Best Practice Lunches' and through staff away days. Recent events have led to improvements in recruitment practices for both staff and students in light of developments in equal opportunities legislation and to significant changes to the undergraduate admissions processes. The Best Practice Lunch in November 2009 was devoted to the debate around the content and delivery of the year 2 undergraduate 'Frameworks' course, which arose from the BA History of Art Periodic Review, completed earlier in that year, and led to key changes which were implemented in the 2010-11 academic year. Funding for both individuals and groups of staff to meet their development needs as identified through the Institute's staff appraisal system is also designed to promote and enhance quality across the institution, and is available equally to full-time and part-time staff members.

60   A Student Experience Group has been established in order to develop greater institutional oversight of the student experience by making recommendations to the Senior Management Team in order to develop a more holistic approach to this area. At the time of the audit visit, only two meetings of this group had taken place so the audit team was unable to judge the Group's effectiveness in enhancing the student experience. Nonetheless, its potential to do so, and the clear commitment of those involved to make this Group effective was evident. The team would wish to encourage the senior management to continue its work with this Group precisely in recognition of this potential.

61   From the evidence available and on the basis of discussions with staff and students, it is clear that many enhancement activities are taking place across the Institute. The audit team would therefore wish to encourage the Institute to pull its many strands of good practice together to support the development of a more systematic approach to the management of quality enhancement.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

62   The limited amount of collaborative provision at the Institute takes the form of language teaching for first-year undergraduates, which is delivered and assessed by another college of the University of London. Feedback on the provision is solicited as part of the normal annual monitoring of courses, and students are generally satisfied with what is provided, albeit that they would like tuition extended into other years of their programme, and would like a broader range of languages available.

63   Although the initial agreement to outsource language tuition was set up in 2005 for one academic year, it appears from the evidence available that no formal renewal of this agreement has been enacted, and the relationship is actively managed through an annual meeting between the Dean and the Head of the Language Centre of the providing college.

64   Although this collaborative arrangement was not explored in any further depth, the audit team has no reason to doubt the quality of the student experience or the standard of provision in this instance. Nonetheless to protect its own interests and those of its students, the Institute is advised that it should formalise the management of this collaborative arrangement.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

65   Research is at the heart of the life of the Institute. It is key to the creation of an environment for postgraduate research students that is supportive and sets high expectations. This environment has been enhanced recently by the creation of the Research Forum, funded by the Mellon Foundation. The audit team judged that the Forum, bringing together a wide range of research activity (from research student training to eminent visiting professors) within a quite informal structure, was a feature of good practice. This provision complements the formal embedding of the management of the postgraduate research degree programme within the overall academic governance and management structures. The Research Degrees Committee is a sub-committee of the Academic Board with significant devolved powers; the Head of Research (who heads the Research Forum) reports to the Director; the Head of Research Degree Programmes reports to the Dean and Deputy Director.

66   Research degree programmes in colleges and institutes of the University of London have until recently always been a central University responsibility: considerable devolution is now possible, and the Institute will have taken almost complete responsibility for research degree students and programmes by September 2011. A key element here has been the development of what the audit found to be effective Institute regulations to replace those of the University.

67   The Institute's prospectus makes clear for applicants what is required of research students. The admissions procedure is clear and well managed, with the Research Degrees Committee making final decisions to ensure that the student's project matches the supervisor's interests, and that the supervisor has capacity for the work in his/her schedule. Once registered, all students are given the Research Student Handbook which provides a range of information including the Institute's Code of Practice for research student programmes. Initial induction is judged effective by students, and is followed up in a two-term First Year Seminar - offered within the Research Forum - which combines subject and initial skills development. Research students benefit from the scale of this programme at the Institute which enables the commitment of staff time over and above supervision. The numbers of students working within each of what the Institute calls its period sections also facilitates supportive links between students.

68   Students may be allocated to one supervisor, or where the subject makes it appropriate, two co-supervisors. The Handbook sets out the required frequency of supervision meetings although the evidence from students was that this was regarded as a minimum frequently exceeded rather than a norm. Policy and practice here broadly meet the requirements of the *Code of practice*. The Institute has not adopted the practice of appointed supervision teams which might provide wider intellectual stimulus and other benefits, as noted in the *Code of practice*. The Institute has just adopted a new Supervision Policy which seems to take a step in that direction, but the audit team found a measure of confusion which led it to consider it advisable that the Institute resolve its position on whether postgraduate research students should have second supervisors.

69   All postgraduate students are initially registered for an MPhil degree and are subject to an 'upgrade' procedure at the end of the first year or equivalent of study. This process is rigorous, involving submission of written work which is assessed by an independent second reader, and is subject to scrutiny at the Research Degrees Committee. Student progress is also monitored annually, with reports again scrutinised by the Research Degrees Committee. Students complete a self-assessment, of progress against expected date of completion and training requirements, which is reviewed by their supervisor. The combined report is scrutinised by the Research Degrees Committee. There was evidence of the Committee acting decisively to deregister students whose progress was inadequate. The effectiveness of the annual monitoring process was marred by a persistent problem whereby a number of reports were not received in a timely way by the Research Degrees Committee and by a failure clearly to record the Chair's action taken in relation to these late reports.

70   Students have access to a wide range of research skills training 'in house' through the Research Forum, but also through the Research Skills Intercollegiate Network based at another college of the University of London. Students who so wish may also apply to work as teaching assistants in the Institute. The auditors saw the induction and training of teaching assistants and their contribution to teaching as features of good practice, and the experience is particularly valuable for those wishing to pursue an academic career in the History of Art. There were fewer opportunities for those with different aims. The audit team noted a lack of progress in the provision of personal development planning since the special review of research degree programmes in 2006; the present audit team considers it desirable that the Institute develop a purposeful approach to personal development planning for all students.

71   At the end of their studies, students are assessed by two examiners. Normally both will be independent of the Institute; one will be from another college of the University of London, the other from another higher education institution. A strong regulatory framework is in place governing the selection of examiners, the form of the thesis, the nature of the viva voce examination, and the criteria by which the thesis is judged. Academic Standards are in this way well managed. The audit team noted that the Institute did not use a 'mock viva' and did not appoint independent non-examining chairs for examination panels, as suggested in guidance in the *Code of practice*. The team thought it desirable that the Institute consider whether there might be advantage in the use of independent chairs of examiners and mock vivas in the assessment, and preparation for assessment, of postgraduate research students.

72   Students who are unhappy with their experience at the Institute may make representations through the Institute's complaints procedure. Appeal against the decision of a research degree examination panel is a separate process. An Institute procedure for appeals to replace the University of London procedure has recently been established. Both complaints and appeals procedures are set out clearly on the Institute's virtual learning environment. The complaints procedure has a number of stages but leads to review by an external adjudicator; an appeal against a research degree result is passed immediately to a specially constituted and independent appellate committee with membership drawn from other University of London colleges or institutes.

73   Students give more general feedback through the annual monitoring process or through the Postgraduate Advisory Group of the Research Forum. Postgraduate research students do not, however, have the opportunity to make their voices heard through committee membership, since neither the Research Committee nor the Research Degrees Committee has a student member. This arrangement is said to be a necessary corollary of the business of the committees, but the audit team saw no evidence that the Institute had tried to find a way of enabling student participation in these forums and in discussions of policies that directly affect them. The team considers it desirable that the Institute consider how it might promote and support effective student representation and involvement in decision-making by postgraduate research students.

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

Section 7: Published information

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

76   The audit team examined a variety of resources when considering the published information for the institution. The information reviewed included prospectuses, student handbooks and the Institute's website. There was evidence that the majority of information provided to students was comprehensive and accurate.

77   Only a small proportion of students met by the audit team stated that they had seen the reports of external examiners. The team therefore recommends as desirable that the Institute ensure that external examiner reports are shared with student representatives in

accordance with the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, phase two outcomes*, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45).

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

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the advantage to students of studying in an environment characterised by a pervasive culture of research (paragraph 39)
- the broad benefits of the virtual learning environment in providing a single source of information for staff and students, thus supporting effective engagement with the academic activity of the institution, including teaching (paragraph 41)
- the contribution of the Department of Public Programmes and the Gallery to outreach and widening participation work (paragraph 46)
- the establishment of productive associations with other institutions, which provides complementary access to facilities that enhance the students' learning experience (paragraph 56)
- the Research Forum, which offers a focus and support for a range of research activities from which students at all levels of study benefit (paragraph 65)
- the role of the teaching assistants in supporting small-group teaching (paragraph 70)
- the structured approach to the continuous professional development of the teaching assistants (paragraph 70).

Recommendations for action

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

80   The team advises the Institute to:

- report formally to individual external examiners on action taken in response to matters raised in their reports (paragraph 22)
- define, implement consistently, and communicate clearly to staff and students the policies and procedures relating to plagiarism and extenuating circumstances (paragraph 26)
- formalise the management of the collaborative arrangement for the provision of language teaching (paragraph 64)
- resolve its position on whether postgraduate research students should have second supervisors (paragraph 68).

81   It would be desirable for the Institute to:

- establish a systematic approach to the gathering and use of a pertinent range of management information in its quality assurance and enhancement processes (paragraph 28)

- review the effectiveness of its communication with students about policies, procedures and action taken in response to matters raised through feedback and consultation processes (paragraph 34)
- consider how it might promote and support effective student representation and involvement in decision-making by all student constituencies, including the potential benefits of providing formal training for representatives (paragraph 38)
- develop a purposeful approach to personal development planning for all students (paragraphs 49 and 70)
- consider whether there might be advantage in use of independent chairs of examiners and mock vivas in the assessment, and preparation for assessment, of postgraduate research students (paragraph 71)
- share external examiner reports with student representatives in accordance with the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, phase two outcomes*, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45)(paragraph 77) .

Appendix

The Courtauld Institute of Art's response to the Institutional audit report

The Courtauld Institute of Art welcomes this positive audit report and notes QAA's confidence in the management of both our academic standards and the learning opportunities made available to our students.

We are particularly pleased that the audit team has commended the Institute's approach to a range of our activities, not least the role of both the Courtauld Gallery and the Research Forum in our teaching and research culture.

We note that the team's 'advisable' recommendations relate to areas the Institute had already identified as requiring review and revision, for example the need to respond to external examiners individually and the need to improve internal communications, and we will be acting accordingly in due course.

The Institute accepts all the recommendations made by the audit team, some of which are already being implemented, and will put an action plan into effect to address them during the coming academic year.

The Courtauld Institute of Art would like to thank the audit team for their efforts.