

Institutional audit

Royal Holloway, University of London

Annex to the report

May 2011

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Outcomes of the Institutional audit.....	1
Institutional approach to quality enhancement	1
Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students.....	1
Published information.....	1
Features of good practice.....	1
Recommendations for action.....	2
Section 1: Introduction and background	3
The institution and its mission	3
The information base for the audit.....	3
Developments since the last audit.....	4
Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.....	5
Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards	6
Approval, monitoring and review of award standards.....	6
External examiners.....	7
Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points	8
Assessment policies and regulations	9
Management information - statistics.....	10
Overall conclusion	10
Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities	11
Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points	11
Approval, monitoring and review of programmes	11
Management information - feedback from students	12
Role of students in quality assurance.....	13
Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities	14
Other modes of study.....	15
Resources for learning	15
Admissions policy.....	16
Student support.....	17
Staff support and development	18

Overall conclusion	19
Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement	19
Section 5: Collaborative arrangements.....	20
Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students.....	21
Institutional arrangements and the research environment.....	21
Selection, admission, induction and supervision of research students.....	23
Progress and review arrangements.....	24
Development of research and other skills	24
Feedback arrangements	25
Assessment of research students	25
Representation: complaints and appeals arrangements for research students.....	25
Overall conclusion	26
Section 7: Published information	26

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Royal Holloway, University of London from 16 to 20 May 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 institution makes under its own degree awarding powers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

In the audit team's view, the institution's approach to managing quality enhancement is firmly rooted in both process and strategy. Student experience working groups are proving increasingly effective in making sure that the improvements most important to students are identified and put into practice.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

In the audit team's view, the institution provides an appropriate research environment and research student experience. The recent recommendations of a working group that has thoroughly reviewed arrangements for research students were broadly supported by the team as a basis for effective policy and a way for the institution to ensure that it fully meets the expectations stated in the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA.

Published information

In the audit team's view, the institution has systems in place to ensure that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy of the information it publishes about the standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. It meets the current national expectations for public information on teaching quality.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the mechanisms for ensuring parity across the institution and consistency over time in the consideration of those cases of student assessment that might require a waiver of regulations (paragraph 33)
- the effective contribution of the various central services to programme approval and review processes (paragraph 47)

Institutional audit: annex

- the use of student experience working groups, following student-led agenda, to review and enhance the student experience (paragraph 55).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- to ensure that programme validation reports contain a confirmatory note indicating that the validation process has, for the purpose of checking the academic standard of the programme, included explicit reference to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and any relevant subject benchmark statements (paragraph 18)
- to clarify the lines of deliberative and executive responsibility for postgraduate research degree programmes, with particular reference to the function and remit of the Graduate School (paragraph 98).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- to establish a timescale for departments to make their written response to external examiners, addressing issues identified in their reports (paragraph 25)
- to ensure that descriptions of programmes of study in departmental handbooks always include the overall learning outcomes of the programme and their mode of assessment (paragraph 30).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 Royal Holloway, University of London (Royal Holloway), whose main campus is at Egham in Surrey, grew from the merger in 1985 of Bedford College and Royal Holloway College. It has its own degree awarding powers (granted in 2008), although it continues to award University of London taught and research degrees under delegated authority.

2 Royal Holloway's educational provision is organised within 18 academic departments grouped into three faculties: Arts; History and Social Sciences; and Science. There are around 450 academic staff. In 2010-11 there were almost 9,000 students, equating to approximately 8,500 full-time equivalents: 80 per cent undergraduate, 12 per cent postgraduate taught and eight per cent postgraduate research. Part-time provision accounts for five per cent, the majority being at postgraduate research level. A small number of students study on collaborative programmes leading to Royal Holloway awards, with the most significant in terms of student numbers being in the field of geosciences, involving two separate partnerships.

3 As a member of the University of London, Royal Holloway participates in the inter-collegiate system, whereby students are able to take courses at other institutions of the University; it also acts as the lead institution on 17 distance-learning programmes run by the University of London International Academy. In addition, Royal Holloway is a member of a consortium within the University of London which oversees the academic provision of the University of London Institute in Paris; it has particular responsibility for the management of quality assurance processes. Royal Holloway is also a member, together with St George's Medical School and Kingston University, of the South West [London] Academic Network, which facilitates joint teaching initiatives in biomedical sciences and leadership and management education for health professionals.

4 Royal Holloway's mission is to provide an environment which nurtures research, learning and teaching of the highest quality and advances knowledge and the development of useful skills in its stakeholder community locally, nationally and globally. Its vision is to be in the top tier of UK universities, as measured by periodic research assessment exercises and the National Student Survey. Objectives for the period 2009-13 are published in the Corporate Strategic Plan, based on which the related strategies for Research and Learning and Teaching, covering the period 2010-14, have been developed.

The information base for the audit

5 Royal Holloway provided the audit team with a briefing paper and supporting documentation. The briefing paper referenced sources of evidence to illustrate the institution's approach to managing the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision.

6 Royal Holloway Students' Union provided a written submission, which covered both undergraduate and postgraduate students, drawing on the results of both internal and external surveys, supplemented by evidence from focus groups. The submission set out the students' views on the utility and accuracy of student information, the experience of students as learners, their experience of assessment, and the effectiveness of student feedback and representation systems. It included action points and key recommendations for consideration by the institution, although these were set against a clear recognition that Royal Holloway offers a wealth of opportunity to its students.

7 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the previous Institutional audit report, QAA, January 2005
- the mid-cycle follow-up report on the Institutional audit, June 2007
- the report on the major review of healthcare programmes: Allied Health Professions, December 2005
- the report on the special review of research-degree programmes, July 2006
- sample reports produced by professional bodies
- internal documents as requested by the audit team
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

8 QAA's last Institutional audit of Royal Holloway, in January 2005, resulted in an overall judgement of broad confidence in the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The audit recommendations were subject to a mid-cycle follow-up by QAA in June 2007. Based on documentation provided by the institution, this concluded that good progress had been made in addressing the audit recommendations. It identified the following areas as being of particular interest for the present audit:

- how administrative reorganisation has contributed to ensuring greater consistency in aspects of the student experience
- the institution's effectiveness in identifying and addressing the learning needs and expectations of international students, following the establishment of Royal Holloway International in 2007
- quality assurance arrangements for the University of London Institute in Paris
- development of the South West [London] Academic Network.

9 The audit team paid attention to each of the above areas and comments are included within relevant sections of the report. In broad terms, the team found that Royal Holloway had taken appropriate action. In particular, bringing together under single management within the Registry the Academic Development and Educational Development teams is enabling them to work more closely in supporting the institution's quality enhancement agenda (paragraph 81); a periodic review, in May 2009, commended the teaching staff of Royal Holloway International for the high quality of the support and teaching provision on offer to international students (paragraph 73); Royal Holloway carried out quality assurance visits in spring and autumn 2010 to the University of London Institute in Paris, although, at the time of the audit, aspects of the arrangements regarding provision at the Institute had yet to be finalised; and the South West [London] Academic Network (known as SWan) is now focusing on jointly-delivered postgraduate programmes and research collaboration (paragraph 87).

10 In the last two years, a number of significant changes have been made to the institution's senior management team. A new Principal took up office in August 2010 and there have also been a number of personnel changes at the levels of vice-principal and faculty dean. In January 2011, an appointment was made to the newly established post of Registrar and Director of Operations, which has responsibility for the central services, Information Technology, Library Services, Registry, and Royal Holloway International.

Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

11 Academic Board, chaired by the Principal, has overall responsibility for academic standards and the quality of provision, which it discharges through the work of its committees. The Academic Development Committee, also chaired by the Principal, has responsibility for academic planning and for reviewing proposals for new academic developments, including those involving collaborative provision. The Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, chaired by the Deputy Principal, has responsibility for the development of academic policy and procedures in relation to learning and teaching. In order to allow the Academic Development Committee to concentrate on more strategic issues, from January 2011, the remit for periodic reviews of academic departments and oversight of the annual review of programmes has been transferred to the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee. These review processes cover arrangements for postgraduate research students, although overall responsibility for developing research strategy rests with the Research Committee, chaired by the Vice-Principal (Research and Enterprise).

12 Faculty boards, chaired by the relevant faculty dean, have delegated authority from Academic Board for the processes that confirm academic standards: programme and course unit validation and the annual review of programmes. Responsibility for confirming attainment of standards rests, in the case of taught programmes, with a [college] board of examiners for each faculty, convened by Academic Board, with sub-boards of examiners operating at departmental or programme level. Teaching and learning committees within departments are responsible for curriculum development and delivery, while departments with sufficient postgraduate students have separate postgraduate committees covering both taught and research provision.

13 Executive responsibility for the work of Royal Holloway is vested in its Principal, supported by a Deputy Principal with responsibility for academic affairs and two vice-principals, one with responsibility for planning and resources and the other with responsibility for research and enterprise. Together with the faculty deans and senior administrative staff, these office-holders form the Principal's Briefing Group. The faculty deans are each supported by two deputy deans who respectively have responsibility for teaching and research. Faculty executive groups deal with planning and resource allocation and comprise the dean, deputy deans and heads of department and (from Academic Development Services) an assistant registrar. A non-executive dean heads the Graduate School and chairs a Graduate School Forum, whose membership comprises the directors of graduate studies from each department. The post exists to provide academic leadership for the training of both postgraduate research students and supervisors, as part of an institution-wide brief centred on quality enhancement.

14 At the time of the audit, a general review of decision-making processes was underway, with a view to implementation from the start of the 2011-12 academic year. However, the audit team was able to judge only the institution's current framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, which it considered to be generally effective. The team nevertheless understood that the proposed changes were intended to streamline committee work within a flexible structure more suited to a fast-changing environment and to encourage individuals to accept greater direct responsibility for decision making.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

15 Within the institutional framework described above, Royal Holloway establishes and monitors the academic standards of its awards through the application of approval and review processes for individual programmes. The same processes also deal with the learning opportunities that enable students to achieve their awards. The relevant procedures are documented in a staff handbook and published on the institution's website; they are administered by the Academic Development team within the Registry.

16 Proposals for new programmes are dealt with through the programme validation process. There is a series of approval stages: first, in-principle approval by the Academic Development Committee, based on strategic fit and the presentation of a business case; second, educational and operational appraisal of a draft programme specification by a range of central service departments; and third, detailed scrutiny of programme documentation by a validation panel, chaired by the dean or the deputy dean (teaching), reporting to the faculty board for final approval. The same process also deals with major changes, defined as where these affect more than 25 per cent of a programme. Assistant registrars and deputy deans ensure that a consistent approach is taken in interpreting this definition and are on the look out for sequential minor changes.

17 Validation panels include one or more subject specialists from outside Royal Holloway, and validation reports examined by the audit team demonstrated their involvement. These specialists are asked to verify the consistency of the programme with national standards, using external benchmarks - specifically the sector-agreed reference points for describing and assuring academic standards that comprise the Academic Infrastructure (*The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice*). Validation reports may recommend that before a programme is offered, conditions should be met within a specified timeframe (typically 30 days). In such cases, the dean, as chair of the faculty board, may determine whether the conditions have been met, usually without recourse to the external specialist, and then report the outcome to the faculty board. One recent validation report seen by the team included a condition directly related to use of the FHEQ qualification descriptors.

18 However, scrutiny of the reports submitted to all three faculty boards in 2010-11 revealed some inconsistency, in that some reports referred to the standards benchmarks, while others did not. The audit team considers it advisable for the institution to ensure that programme validation reports contain a confirmatory note indicating that the validation process has, for the purpose of checking the academic standard of the programme, included explicit reference to the FHEQ and any relevant subject benchmark statements.

19 Programmes are subject to annual review at a point in the cycle when information on student progress and achievement becomes available. Many aspects of these reviews are concerned with students' learning opportunities and improvements in provision (paragraphs 45 and 80), but in the context of academic standards there is a focus on student achievement and the comments of external examiners (paragraphs 23 to 24). Annual review reports follow a pro forma which requires departments to highlight the principal issues (up to four) raised by these examiners and attach copies of responses made, for scrutiny and consolidation at faculty level. This process was evident from numerous reports seen by the audit team. Key points are reported at institutional level to the Learning, Teaching and

Quality Committee via faculty summary reports on annual review. There is a parallel procedure for research degree programmes (paragraph 95).

20 Departments undergo a formal review every six years through a centrally-managed process of periodic departmental review dealing with all aspects of academic provision, including collaborative, distance-learning and external programmes. The scope of the review covers curriculum design, delivery and assessment; research training and supervision; learning resources and support; and arrangements for the review and enhancement of provision. As far as possible, the process is based on existing documentation, including both internal and external reports, together with a concise overview report from the head of department and comments from the faculty dean and central service departments (paragraph 47). The review is conducted by a panel, chaired by the Deputy Principal, which includes at least two external reviewers and a student reviewer (normally the Students' Union officer for education). The panel produces a report, which leads to the development of an action plan by the head of department and faculty dean. These are considered at faculty level by faculty boards, approved at institutional level by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (formerly by the Academic Development Committee) and ratified by Academic Board. Progress with the implementation of action plans is followed up at faculty and institutional levels about one year after the original review.

21 The audit team looked in detail (through sampling audit trails) at documentation relating to two periodic departmental reviews and concluded that this indicated a thorough process. With relevance to standards, the reviews drew on programme and course specifications, annual review reports, including external examiner reports and departmental responses, and statistical data on student performance and graduate destinations. In a recent development, review panels are expected to comment on the alignment of programme outcomes with the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements, and the team noted the inclusion of such comments in all three periodic departmental review reports produced in 2010-11.

External examiners

22 Under Royal Holloway's examination board system each faculty has a college board of examiners and then each department has separate sub-boards for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. In some cases there is a separate sub-board for discrete postgraduate programmes. The results for students on joint degrees are also considered by a special cross-faculty sub-board of examiners. The college boards of examiners have responsibility for confirming the recommendations of the sub-boards about degree classification and individual student progression, bringing consistency across the departments within a faculty. Consistency across the institution is assisted by having assistant registrars each attend several sub-board meetings spread across different faculties. A College Board of Examiners' Executive Committee, comprising the Deputy Principal and faculty deans, takes an institutional overview and acts as an arbiter where assessment arrangements or decisions may entail a suspension of regulations.

23 External examiners, known as 'visiting examiners', are appointed as members of sub-boards of examiners by the College Board of Examiners' Executive Committee, although since 2010 approval has in practice been delegated to the faculty deans. There are clear appointment criteria, and as a general policy at least one visiting examiner is external to the University of London, while another is from a different institution within the University. For some specialised master's programmes, two externals are appointed where no expert from within the University of London is available. The audit team was satisfied that the appointment process was conducted in accordance with institutional regulations, noting that

appointments covered a wide range of institutions, both inside and outside the University of London.

24 The duties of visiting examiners are defined in institutional regulations on the conduct of assessment and clarified through briefing materials and online resources. There are plans to improve the induction and training for visiting examiners through the development of a distance-learning package and the expansion of facilities available on the existing visiting examiner website. Visiting examiners complete their reports on a standard form following a series of questions with tick-boxes and spaces for additional comments. The form specifically requests confirmation that the aims, intended learning outcomes and content of programmes are consistent with the expectations of national benchmarks. The audit team saw examples of reports where visiting examiners made little or no written comment, a point which has been noted by Royal Holloway itself through its Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.

25 Reports from visiting examiners are received centrally in the first instance, but chairs of sub-boards of examiners are charged with making the necessary response. The annual review process is the primary means by which the response of departments to visiting examiners is scrutinised. The audit team found from studying documentation that sub-board chairs mostly responded fully and carefully to visiting examiners, although in a small number of cases a response had not been made by the time of the annual review. The team concluded that this could indicate a lack of timely consideration of visiting examiners' reports by some departments, leading to a delay in implementing any necessary action. Therefore, the team considers it desirable for the institution to establish a timescale for departments to make their written response to visiting examiners, addressing issues identified in their reports.

26 Students currently learn about visiting examiner reports only indirectly through the annual review reports presented at departmental staff-student committees. These address only the key points raised by visiting external examiners. At the time of the audit visit, a proposal was under consideration to include visiting examiner reports along with annual review reports as a standing agenda item for staff-student committees. This was part of a wider review of the operation of these committees which was to due make recommendations to Academic Board in June 2011.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

27 According to the briefing paper, minimum requirements in terms of academic level and volume of study for all Royal Holloway's awards are well established within the institution. At undergraduate level, course units are linked to higher education credit values (30 credits representing a full unit) and there is a single unit-based assessment scheme. For postgraduate taught programmes there are parameters for notional hours of learning, 1,800 for a masters degree. There are plans to introduce a credit framework, although currently each programme has its own assessment scheme. The programme validation process provides the mechanism for confirming that awards are positioned at the correct level within the FHEQ, and the importance of making this explicit in validation reports is the subject of an earlier recommendation (paragraph 18). An exercise, undertaken in 2004, which benchmarked undergraduate degree results against comparable institutions, is to be repeated in 2011-12 to ensure that the degree classification scheme remains in line with sector norms.

28 The relationship between curricula and subject benchmark statements is considered in programme development and validation, with continued alignment confirmed through annual and periodic review. The Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee has

recently taken on responsibility for notifying departments of revisions to benchmark statements in their subject area and for monitoring departmental responses. It also receives responses on the implications of revisions to the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, from relevant departments within the institution (paragraph 39). The requirements for accreditation by professional bodies are treated in the same way, with accreditation reports now being received by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.

29 Programme specifications are part of the required documentation for both programme validation and periodic departmental review, and are regarded as being an authoritative description of a programme's structure, progression and award requirements, and its overarching aims and learning outcomes. Whenever feasible, a single specification covers all variants of a particular programme, with the aim of simplifying the information presented. Programme specifications are produced to a standard 'web-friendly' template and accessible via a course-finder website targeted at potential applicants.

30 Nevertheless, the institution does not see programme specifications as 'student-friendly' documents by comparison with programme descriptions in departmental handbooks. These are also produced to a template, which has been adopted by most departments. However, the template does not list learning outcomes as a standard item and, although it recommends referencing programme specifications, it does so in the context of structure and progression requirements rather than as overarching aims and learning outcomes. The audit team found examples of departmental handbooks that did not contain a description of programme learning outcomes, or make reference to programme specifications; moreover it found that the existence of programme specifications was not generally well known among the students it met. The team therefore considers it desirable for the institution to ensure that descriptions of programmes of study in departmental handbooks always include the overall learning outcomes of the programme and their mode of assessment.

Assessment policies and regulations

31 Assessment policies and procedural guidance are readily accessible to students, staff and visiting examiners through their respective gateways on the institutional website and are also referenced in departmental handbooks. There are policies covering such topics as late submission of coursework, over-length work, and the timescale for the returning marked student work. There are separate academic regulations for undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research programmes which each deal with assessment. There are also regulations on the conduct of assessment, governing the operation of the various boards of examiners and arrangements for setting and marking work.

32 The students' written submission pointed to some inconsistency between departments in the practical application of assessment policy, in particular the four-week turnaround for feedback on assessment. However, the audit team recognised that this was a relatively new requirement, which might need more time to become established. The students who met the team were rather more positive about other aspects of assessment, notably the clarity of marking schemes in departmental handbooks. Plagiarism policy is also well defined and understood by students, with their use of the 'Turnitin' plagiarism detection software being widespread to help avoid its occurrence.

33 Departmental handbooks contain clear procedures for students on requesting consideration of extenuating circumstances affecting their assessment. Such requests are normally dealt with by a committee, with at least one visiting examiner present, convened by each sub-board of examiners prior to its main meeting. Complex cases are dealt with by the

College Board of Examiners' Executive Committee; these usually involve borderline cases where extenuating circumstances might suggest the need for a waiver of regulations. The cases from all programmes are considered together at a single meeting, at which a summary of past 'case law' is made available to the Committee to assist its deliberations. The audit team identifies as a feature of good practice the mechanisms for ensuring parity across the institution and consistency over time in the consideration of those cases of student assessment that might require a waiver of regulations.

34 During 2010, a working group has been reviewing aspects of the regulations and, after extensive consultation with departments, proposals are now at an advanced stage for approval through the committee system. Of particular focus has been the fairness and consistency of the regulations in dealing with extenuating circumstances and repeat assessment, where the options available within the regulations have been seen by the institution as being highly constrained. The proposals being considered would give greater flexibility to sub-boards of examiners in determining such cases. The audit team considered that, if this greater level of flexibility were introduced, the existence of the college boards of examiners at faculty level and the attendance at the sub-boards of assistant registrars would allow consistency across the institution to be maintained.

35 Procedures for academic appeals are clearly specified, with detailed information and guidance on the institution's website. Cases are generally investigated by an assistant registrar, but all are reviewed by the Head of Academic Development, who is responsible for the process. The availability of recourse to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator is made explicit. Responsibility for monitoring appeals and complaints has recently been transferred from the Academic Development Committee to the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, which receives statistical information accompanied by a commentary from the Head of Academic Development Services.

Management information - statistics

36 Centrally-produced statistics on student progression and degree classification, covering a five-year period, are provided to departments to inform the annual review of programmes. Departments comment on their data relative to institution-wide data, enabling any apparent problems to be identified through the review process and reported to faculty boards. These statistics are also used in periodic departmental review. Statistics on student admissions against targets and on total registrations are considered annually by faculty boards and by Academic Board.

37 Student progress and performance in relation to equality of opportunity is monitored at senior executive level. The College Board of Examiners' Executive Committee considers statistical reports grouping students by gender, declared ethnicity, and fees status. Any anomalies that are identified are routed as appropriate through executive or committee structures. Staff who met the audit team gave examples of how this had operated in practice. The team considered that Royal Holloway was making effective use of statistical management information, both in its routine review processes and its mechanisms for monitoring academic standards against broader issues relevant to student achievement.

Overall conclusion

38 The judgement reached by the audit team is that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present 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

39 According to the briefing paper, Royal Holloway has considered and acted upon sections of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, as they have been issued and revised. An example was given of the use of a plenary meeting of admissions tutors in 2006 to consider changes to the *Code of practice* on admissions, particularly focusing on feedback to applicants. The institution is confident that this informal approach has kept it up to date with changes in the *Code of practice*, but has moved in the current academic year to a more formal system, through the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, for recording revisions to the *Code of practice* and resultant institutional responses. Examples were provided in relation to the sections on careers education and disabled students, both revised in 2010, which showed a high level of honest engagement with the *Code of practice*, identifying areas where more work was needed. Work is ongoing on mapping the institution's procedures to the amplified version of the section on collaborative provision, issued in October 2010.

40 The section of the *Code of practice* relating to work-based and placement learning is not supported by specific institutional guidance. The audit team considered this to be reasonable given the current scale of this type of provision, but was also aware of expansion plans in this area. Therefore, in the team's view, institutional guidance on this section of the *Code of practice* would be a helpful addition to Royal Holloway's procedural documents (see also paragraph 60).

41 It was also clear that procedures were being aligned to relevant reference points, in addition to the *Code of practice*. For example, support for disabled students is based upon the requirements of the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001*, guidance about which is available for staff on the Royal Holloway website, while the institutional admissions policy (paragraph 67) reflects the recommendations of the Schwartz Report 2004 and the associated guidance on Supporting Professionalism in Admissions.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

42 Royal Holloway's approval and review processes have been described above in the context of academic standards, so the focus here is on how these processes help to ensure the continuing availability of appropriate learning opportunities that allow students to achieve the learning outcomes of their programme.

43 The programme validation process, in its initial assessment of the business case for developing a programme, explicitly takes account of resource issues, such as staffing levels and departmental workload. Programme proposals are circulated for comment to staff in the Academic Development and Educational Development teams, Library Services, the Careers Service, and UK and Overseas Recruitment. Review of one example showed that a number of interesting issues with a potential impact on the quality of learning opportunities had been raised, for example the organisation of project work and library resource provision.

44 The audit team reviewed documentation relating to the withdrawal of two undergraduate programmes. While the formal paperwork requirements are minimal, it was clear from committee papers that the needs of current students were taken into account and staff who met the team also gave assurance that withdrawn programmes would be taught-out where necessary.

45 The annual review of taught programmes is designed to pull together the views of teaching staff, students and external specialists and create an opportunity for reflection on delivery and outcomes, so as to achieve improvements in provision. It involves the use of data on achievement and progression, student feedback, external examiners' comments, outside reports and equal opportunities reports. However, the report pro forma limits reporting to the four principal issues raised by students and by visiting examiners respectively, so only the most important generic issues identified are likely to be reported to faculty level. The actual mechanism for scrutinising reports varies slightly from faculty to faculty, but it is clear that there is an effective process, involving a panel that has access to the source documents, and that annual review reports are reviewed by faculty boards. The resultant faculty summary reports identify good practice to be shared through faculty teaching groups, as well as issues to be referred to institution-level committees.

46 The audit team was concerned that a departmentally focused annual review process might not pay sufficient attention to the learning opportunities of students on joint or combined degrees, parts of whose programme would be reviewed separately by two different departments. There is no formal requirement in the annual review procedure to consider these programmes, and the report pro forma does not explicitly require any comments. Nevertheless, the team saw an example where the pro forma used by one department contained a prompt to comment on joint or combined degrees and the report made mention of students on these programmes in a number of contexts. The dataset provided also included these students, both in aggregate and by programme. The institution, being aware of issues relating to the experience of joint degree students, is in the process of taking steps to ensure that there is a named academic coordinator for each such programme by 2011-12. In the team's view there was scope in annual review for adopting a more systematic approach when considering the experience of students on joint or combined programmes.

47 Periodic departmental review is designed to test the implementation of institutional strategy and policy at departmental level and to scrutinise departmental provision for students. The review panel receives documentation that includes comments from the relevant faculty dean, the Director of IT, the Director of Library Services, the Head of Student Services and the Deputy Head of Academic Development. These deal with departmental strengths and suggested issues to be pursued in the review and, in the case of central services, to the effectiveness of interaction with the department. The audit team saw this as a sensible way of bringing into the review process the views of central services, and the process appears to be working well. One head of service confirmed that the facility to contribute both quantitative and qualitative data was valuable and provided the opportunity to raise issues and get action taken. In the reviews sampled by the team, some of the issues raised in this way were evident in the final report. Noting also the role played by central services in the programme validation process, the team identifies as a feature of good practice the effective contribution of the various central services to programme approval and review processes.

Management information - feedback from students

48 Royal Holloway uses a standard questionnaire to obtain student feedback on course units. The questionnaires are administered for new units (and for those substantially changed) after the first year of operation and thereafter every other year. After analysis by an external agency, the questionnaire results are circulated to departments. There is some central monitoring of the number of course units evaluated in any one year. The standardisation of the process does not prevent departments from adding their own questions to the normal set or from administering additional questionnaires to elicit

information specific to a discipline or department. Questionnaire results feed into course unit reports, which in turn inform departmental annual review reports; these identify up to four issues raised by students, as explained above (paragraph 25). Postgraduate research students also complete an institution-wide questionnaire (paragraph 111). In addition, Royal Holloway participates in the main externally administered student experience surveys. Student representation on committees, which may also provide another source of feedback, is dealt with below (paragraph 53).

49 National Student Survey (NSS) results are analysed and benchmarked at institutional and departmental levels. Departments are required to reflect on the outcomes and develop action plans, which are monitored by faculty deans through the annual review process. Dissemination of good practice and the sharing of initiatives emanating from the NSS take place through discussion of summaries at the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee and a report to Academic Board. This is structured so as to identify generic issues and then review how different departments have addressed them. In the audit team's view this was an effective way of dealing with the outcomes of the NSS and well designed to enhance provision (paragraph 80).

50 Royal Holloway has more recently started to take part in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). Although summaries of PTES and PRES results are available on the institution's website, the audit team found no evidence that faculty boards, the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee or Academic Board had considered the outcomes, even though the most recent PTES was carried out in May 2010 and PRES in October 2009. However there was evidence that PRES results from October 2008 had been discussed at the Graduate School Forum. It appeared to the team that the institution has yet to give systematic attention to postgraduate student surveys, despite its stated aim that these should be dealt with in the same way as the NSS, which focuses on final-year undergraduate students.

51 Twice a year Royal Holloway takes part in the Student Barometer, the results of which are circulated in summary form for action by faculty deans and heads of central services. Examples of responses to survey findings include the extension of wireless internet access across a student hall of residence in 2008 and, more recently, to proposals for improving the Health Centre. However, the results (although available on the institution's website) do not appear to be systematically reviewed by relevant faculty and institutional committees, with only one faculty board considering the report in 2010-11.

52 Overall, the audit team concluded that Royal Holloway generally has good systems in place for dealing with management information derived from student feedback, although it could make fuller use of the results from postgraduate surveys and the Student Barometer.

Role of students in quality assurance

53 The student representation system is the formal mechanism for students to communicate views and contribute to decision making. Student members, usually Students' Union sabbatical officers, sit on a range of institutional committees, including the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee and Academic Board. Departments have staff-student committees, which are normally chaired by students. In 2010-11, the Students' Union introduced, with the support of senior staff, a programme of training for newly-elected course representatives, supplemented by a guidance manual. About half of the student representatives undertook training; students who met the audit team were under the impression that the programme was targeted at first-year students. In an evaluation report presented to the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, the Students' Union

acknowledged that this was a first step in creating a more effective student representation system, noting that those who had attended the training sessions had found them useful.

54 In addition to their representation on committees, students play a role in quality assurance through their involvement in periodic departmental review. The panels include a student reviewer, normally the Students' Union sabbatical officer for education, and also hold meetings with student groups. While students do not have a direct involvement in annual review, their views form an integral part of the process through consideration of survey feedback (paragraph 48). In relation to the broader student experience, the Students' Union sabbatical team have regular contact with the Principal and heads of key student services through an informal group, the '5+5' group.

55 Students are also represented on the user groups that advise on the strategic development of learning resources - library, IT and e-learning - and on the various working groups set up to review and improve the student experience. There are currently five such groups (focusing on the themes of learning, studying, employability, communication, and student life), whose leaders form a steering group reporting to the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee. These working groups, which consist of a mixture of academic staff, students, Students' Union officers and central services staff, are generally credited within the institution with having provided the stimulus for significant improvements to the student experience. Examples include extended library hours and the four-week turnaround for assessed work. Staff who met the audit team gave other examples that were in prospect, notably the plan to establish an academic coordinator for every joint degree programme, so as to ensure a clear point of contact (paragraph 46). They also clarified that students influence the particular areas addressed by the groups, through, for example, the survey feedback they provide. The team identifies as a feature of good practice the use of student experience working groups, following student-led agenda, to review and enhance the student experience.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

56 Royal Holloway recognises the importance of linking staff research and scholarship with learning opportunities for students. This is achieved by involving research-active staff in curriculum design, enabling teaching to be research-informed, and by providing opportunities within the curriculum for students to conduct research, so that they can develop research skills. Periodic departmental review provides the main quality assurance mechanism for ensuring that the curriculum reflects contemporary research and scholarship and continues to meet national standards as set out in subject benchmarks statements and the FHEQ. The audit team noted a recent review report which had commended the integration of postgraduate taught and research students into the departmental research culture.

57 The development of research skills is an integral part of both undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. Students learn how to conduct a project and to evaluate critically their own and others' research. Some undergraduate programmes have mandatory research units, while others take a problem-based learning approach involving analysis of case studies. Students who met the audit team spoke enthusiastically about the final-year research project, which some saw as the highlight of their course. Students also clearly valued the exposure to research in the curriculum and being taught by staff with research expertise who, in many cases, had authored books/articles on reading lists. In addition, students, particularly postgraduates, are able to benefit from visiting lecturers who are experts in their field.

58 Through its staffing policies and training and development opportunities, Royal Holloway encourages staff to see research and teaching as synergetic activities. Induction materials illustrate how staff have gone on to develop course units based on their area of research expertise, and there are accredited programmes, which are mandatory for staff new to teaching, to support their pedagogical development (paragraph 76). One of these programmes is aimed at postgraduate research students, some of whom have opportunities to teach at Royal Holloway, thereby further underpinning its culture of research-informed teaching. There is institutional guidance on the amount of teaching that may be undertaken by research students during term time (although those who met the audit team seemed unaware of this). Some research students may also work as demonstrators in laboratory-based sciences and there is a separate training programme for this role. Promotion to more senior academic positions in Royal Holloway requires staff to demonstrate how they contribute to the advancement of teaching, learning and curriculum development or assessment, thus ensuring that recognition and reward is given for sustained excellence in teaching.

Other modes of study

59 None of Royal Holloway's own programmes is offered through distance learning. However, as explained above (paragraph 3), it leads on several University of London international programmes offered through distance learning which are outside the scope of this audit. Royal Holloway is not involved in teaching at the University of London Institute in Paris, rather it provides quality assurance services (paragraph 3).

60 With regard to study in the workplace, there are practice placements in psychology and social work, and study-abroad placements in modern languages. There is no institutional guidance covering work-based and placement learning and neither is it explicitly covered in the written procedures for programme validation, annual review or periodic departmental review. Instead Royal Holloway relies on departments to ensure that their placement handbooks are consistent with the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. A scrutiny of the placement handbooks provided to the audit team showed that these did cover all necessary angles. There is also useful general guidance for students undertaking a period of residence abroad. The team considered this devolved approach as adequate, given the amount of provision currently involving work-based and placement learning, but also saw the lack of institutional guidance as potentially problematic, given Royal Holloway's plans to expand in this area. The same point applies to guidance on flexible and distributed learning, particularly since offshore delivery has been identified as an area for growth.

Resources for learning

61 A substantial building plan was approved in 2005 and this has already led to improvements in the teaching infrastructure, but development of the estate continues to be a key priority in the Corporate Strategic Plan for 2009-13. Estate development is driven by the Estates Committee, but it is informed by the Space Sub-Committee, which ensures the efficient and appropriate use of teaching rooms, and the Teaching and Research Rooms Steering Group, which has responsibility for monitoring the quality of teaching spaces. Students who met the audit team mentioned specific teaching spaces which they felt needed improvement, although on the whole matters were satisfactory. They also mentioned a lack of study space for some postgraduate research students, especially outside the sciences (paragraph 101).

62 The Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee is in overall charge of the development of learning technologies, but separate advisory groups (which include student representation) discuss strategy and policies, operational and financial plans, and elicit user

inputs to make recommendations on IT and library provision. Advisory group papers show how important the student experience is to the deliberations of these groups, for example the Information Services Advisory Group (in February 2010) received detailed feedback on focus groups held with students about IT services, together with an action plan.

63 It was clear to the audit team from discussion with student representatives that they are able to raise issues about resources with the institution and that they are listened to. The Students' Union also runs campaigns jointly with Royal Holloway staff to promote services such as the library, an example being the campaign to improve the availability to students of reading-list materials; this had been initiated by one of the student experience working groups (paragraph 55).

64 The library benchmarks itself against other institutions (using data produced annually by the Society of College, National and University Libraries) on such parameters as spend per student, study space per student and seat hours per week. Analysis showed Royal Holloway was below average relative to its comparator group (the 1994 group) and as a result steps have been taken to improve facilities and increase spending. There has been substantial spending on library buildings, rationalising three sites to two, as well as on the purchase of electronic resources and improvements to customer service, in particular the creation of a 'one-stop shop' at the Bedford Library for both library and basic IT enquiries.

65 The current virtual learning environment (VLE) was introduced in 2006 and its use has expanded considerably since then to cover more than 1,000 course units. There is no requirement that staff should use the VLE and students who met the audit team did not appear concerned about the differences in respect of VLE usage between course units and between departments. Students also remarked that usage was more common at undergraduate level than at postgraduate level. Support for developing e-learning applications is provided through a dedicated team within Academic Development Services. There is guidance on the website for staff and students and a range of training sessions are run for staff. Recent years have also seen a growth in the use of online plagiarism detection services, as well as the development of e-assessment. An e-learning users' advisory group maintains an overview of such developments.

66 The audit team concluded that Royal Holloway has sound arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of learning resources, which incorporate the student voice effectively. The contribution of the central services to programme approval and review processes has already been identified as good practice (paragraph 47).

Admissions policy

67 Royal Holloway's admissions policy and procedures include a statement of fair admissions, which sets out its position on the equitable treatment of applicants. The admissions process is managed centrally, with entry requirements and selection processes for particular programmes agreed with departments, and admissions decisions made in conjunction with departmental admissions tutors. There are termly meetings of admissions tutors, as well as an induction session for those new to the role. Royal Holloway is well aware of the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) guidance (paragraph 41), and uses its annual meetings with SPA representatives to ensure that its practice matches the best in the sector. Academic Board receives an annual report on admissions, analysed by department.

68 Admissions requirements are clearly communicated to potential applicants on the institution's website. There is guidance for international students on English language requirements and on expectations in respect of 'in-country' qualifications. Applicants who

disclose disability at the admissions stage are put in touch with the Educational Support office. Royal Holloway regularly surveys applicants on their reasons for deciding to come or not to come to the institution. An annual report is circulated to heads of department and admissions tutors, which also deals with the information supplied to entrants and their experience of the admissions process. In addition, as part of wider intelligence gathering, data is available internally on the other institutions to which Royal Holloway applicants tend to apply.

69 In relation to widening participation, Royal Holloway's attention has focused on encouraging mature students, through running open evenings and outreach events and providing suitable access routes. It also takes part in a regional forum for access to higher education. Data relevant to equal opportunities is monitored as part of both annual review and periodic departmental review, indicative of the institution's concern to monitor its track record. The College Board of Examiners' Executive Committee and faculty boards also receive annual reports in this area (paragraph 37). Royal Holloway encourages admissions tutors to make a holistic assessment of applicants, taking account of factors of relevance to widening participation, although there is no policy of giving preferential offers to particular categories of student. The institution admits that it has a mixed record in widening participation, as was apparent from the data provided to the audit team.

Student support

70 Support for undergraduate students is based on the personal adviser system. Every student is allocated a personal adviser/tutor whose role is to provide guidance on academic issues and first-line pastoral care. For postgraduate taught students, the equivalent role is performed by the relevant programme director (or nominee) and for research students by the supervisor and adviser (paragraph 104).

71 Royal Holloway issues guidelines to departments on the personal adviser system. The audit team considered these to be comprehensive, covering matters such as frequency of contact with students and practical advice on dealing with a range of situations that advisers should expect to face, including the appropriate point at which to direct students to more specialist support services (paragraph 73). The team also saw examples of departmental staff handbooks that gave guidance on the role. Royal Holloway is aware from student surveys of inconsistency between departments in the operation of the personal adviser role and is to review support and training for personal advisers before the start of the 2011-12 session. Students who met the team, while broadly satisfied with the level of support available, also pointed to some variability between departments, leading the team to conclude that the planned review was timely.

72 One of the responsibilities of the personal adviser is to assist students in their personal development and career planning through discussions structured around personal development records. There is detailed web-based information on personal development planning and the facility to download forms for keeping personal development records. In the briefing paper, Royal Holloway acknowledges that students have not always been actively encouraged to maintain such records, and has identified this as a particular training need for personal advisers. Careers advice for students is available through an on-site careers service, which is part of the University of London Careers Group, thus extending the network of support. The group has been awarded the Matrix quality standard (a national accreditation scheme for counselling and guidance services). The audit team noted that staff in the careers service, in conjunction with the Students' Union, had organised a work fair involving local employers focused on part-time opportunities for students.

73 The arrangements described above are supplemented by a variety of central support services, covering disabilities, learning difficulties, counselling, finance, health, community liaison and faith. These are brought together through a termly executive forum, which gives overall direction to an operational management group, while separate user groups seek feedback on specific services. The Student Barometer is used for monitoring purposes (paragraph 51) and in the most recent survey, support for disabled students scored particularly well. Specific arrangements for international students, including English language and study skills support, are provided through Royal Holloway International, whose institution-wide remit encompasses facilitating the integration of international students into the 'host' community. Royal Holloway International is subject to periodic departmental review and the report on the 2009 review was highly positive about the support being offered.

74 Details of support arrangements are communicated to students through departmental handbooks. These cover the personal adviser system, give information (where relevant) on support for placements (paragraph 60) and draw attention to central services, in electronic versions through web links, although these were not always working properly. Information about the personal adviser role is not easy to find on the main institutional website, even though there is a lot of information about other support services that are available. The audit team was of the view that information concerning departmental and central student support systems could be better linked in Royal Holloway's website presentation.

Staff support and development

75 Royal Holloway's staffing policies, covering appointment, induction, probation, mentoring, appraisal, training and staff development are available to staff on the institutional website. They are managed by the Human Resources department, with input from the Educational Development team to the professional development of academic staff. A Human Resources Strategy and operational plan are kept under regular review by the Human Resources and Equal Opportunities Committee; the strategy document incorporates the relevant HEFCE guidance on rewarding and developing staff.

76 There is a comprehensive induction and training programme for new staff. The Educational Development team runs two programmes accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA): a postgraduate certificate aimed at lecturers and senior lecturers who are not HEA members, or need to achieve 'recognition' as teachers as a probationary requirement; and a skills programme that is mandatory for postgraduate research students and 'associate staff' having a lead teaching role. These programmes were identified as good practice in the 2005 QAA Institutional audit report and, since then, the postgraduate certificate has been aligned with HEA professional standards as part of a re-accreditation process in 2008. The staff and postgraduate research students who met the audit team confirmed the value of both programmes.

77 A well-established support system is in place for academic staff during their three-year probationary period, involving mentoring and the monitoring of workload; again the process is viewed positively by staff. A system of peer observation of teaching, which is operated at departmental level, provides further opportunities for staff to support one another in their professional development. Departments are asked to evaluate the effectiveness of their peer observation schemes as part of periodic departmental review. All staff are subject to annual appraisal and those conducting appraisals are given training, thereby facilitating the sharing of best practice. The system is centrally administered with records kept by the Human Resources department. Training and development needs are identified through the appraisal process.

78 A wide range of development opportunities is available to staff through the Staff Development team. Relevant areas for staff development emerge from a number of sources, including probation reviews, annual appraisal, peer observation of teaching and staff surveys. For example, the development of an institution-wide training programme for research student supervisors resulted from a staff survey. Bespoke programmes are also run for individual departments. A number of senior staff have participated in leadership programmes and a programme aimed particularly at current and aspiring heads of department is being planned with external management consultants to replace the series of one-day events on specific topics currently on offer.

Overall conclusion

79 The judgement reached by the audit team is that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

80 Royal Holloway seeks to bring about improvements in the student learning experience through the application of established processes, such as annual review and periodic departmental review and the implementation of its Learning and Teaching Strategy. The development and monitoring of action plans is a feature of both review processes, while the Learning and Teaching Strategy is supported by an operational plan that explicitly assigns responsibilities and timeframes to actions. The review processes themselves are kept under review to ensure that they continue to be effective; the periodic departmental review process is due for such re-assessment at the end of 2010-11.

81 There has also been a clearer delineation of committee responsibilities. The Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee now oversees the outcomes of review processes, as well as the delivery of the Learning and Teaching Strategy; in addition, it provides either a direct or indirect reporting route for various working groups instrumental in driving the enhancement agenda. There is now more coherent support for this agenda, achieved by bringing together the Academic and Educational Development teams. The audit team was told that this had already led to tangible benefits, particularly in relation to dissemination of good practice in teaching and learning. The team also noted that some faculties were piloting peer assessment of annual review reports by representatives from each department to enable more immediate and effective sharing of good practice.

82 Faculty teaching groups were introduced in 2009 as forums for debating issues concerned with learning and teaching and sharing good practice. The briefing paper gave examples of institutional policies emanating from these groups, which had been taken forward through the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee to Academic Board. The Graduate School Forum fulfils an equivalent function for matters relating to the postgraduate research student experience.

83 Royal Holloway sees the establishment of the student experience working groups as the most significant enhancement project undertaken in recent years. There are currently five such groups and their particular spheres of activity are outlined above (paragraph 55). They grew out of a single group set up in 2008 to respond to the results of the National Student Survey, but now take a more proactive stance, tackling the breadth of the student experience through the development of action plans that feed into the committee structure. The groups have also adopted a more dynamic communications strategy, giving an interview to the in-house student newspaper and organising an internal debate on the student experience, with group members forming the question panel.

84 An informal learning and teaching interest group, established in 2009-10, organises workshops on various aspects of pedagogy, some led by external speakers, and has also introduced an annual symposium. The first such event was held in February 2011 on the subject of assessment and was attended by about 60 staff, with others able to share the experience through a podcast. Further use of the virtual learning environment is planned as a means of sharing good practice in relation to teaching and learning. Royal Holloway has in place a recognition scheme for good practice in teaching through the award of annual prizes. The scheme has recently been revised to encourage greater participation and the symposium will be used to raise its profile.

85 In the audit team's view, the institution's approach to managing quality enhancement is firmly rooted in both process and strategy. Student experience working groups are proving increasingly effective in making sure that the improvements most important to students are identified and put into practice.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

86 Outside its participation in the University of London inter-collegiate system, whereby students are able to take courses at other institutions of the University, Royal Holloway has a limited amount of collaborative provision. This mainly comprises programmes in biomedical sciences, informatics, and leadership and management in health, organised through the South West [London] Academic Network (SWan) and programmes in geosciences, offered through two separate partnerships: one with a Russian university, the other with an international geosciences company.

87 The SWan programmes are jointly delivered by the three institutional partners (Royal Holloway, St George's University of London, and Kingston University). None leads to a Royal Holloway award, although under a reciprocal arrangement students following certain Royal Holloway programmes may take course units offered by the other two partners in the network. In meetings, staff clarified that there would be no further recruitment to undergraduate programmes through SWan and that appropriate 'teach-out' arrangements were in place to enable current students to complete their studies. In future SWan would focus on postgraduate taught programmes and research collaboration.

88 The two geosciences programmes both lead to Royal Holloway awards and both are delivered at the partners' premises. The partnership with the overseas university involves an MSc degree, validated in 2008, which is also available at Royal Holloway. Teaching is done mainly by Royal Holloway, with input from locally-based staff. Royal Holloway is also responsible for all assessment and the programme is subject to its quality assurance procedures. The partnership with the international company involves a postgraduate diploma, jointly developed by Royal Holloway and the company. Royal Holloway provides a programme director, and is responsible for all assessment and for monitoring and maintaining the quality and standards of learning materials. It also verifies the suitability of the staff who teach on the programme, these being employed directly by the partner company.

89 Royal Holloway's existing collaborative arrangements are programme specific and have resulted from ad hoc opportunities. The audit team learned in meetings that the institution is developing plans to expand its overseas provision and noted that a proposal for the delivery of a master's programme in information security had recently been approved in principle by the Academic Development Committee with a planned start in 2011-12.

90 In relation to new collaborative ventures, Royal Holloway urges those involved first to obtain administrative advice from the Research and Enterprise office and from the relevant assistant registrar. There then follow informal discussions between the relevant head of department and the faculty dean. If specific proposals are developed, these are considered as part of the institution's normal planning and approval processes, but with additional safeguards. Therefore, in considering the business case, the Academic Development Committee takes account of the particular risk factors associated with collaborative ventures. Once approval in principle has been given, the relevant central services take the lead in negotiating a memorandum of agreement with the partner organisation. Additional scrutiny is applied at the educational appraisal stage to check that the proposal is in alignment with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. The final version of the memorandum, amended in the light of the educational appraisal and validation, is signed by the Principal (or nominee).

91 The audit team confirmed that both geosciences programmes had received detailed scrutiny at validation by panels including external reviewers. In both cases, particular attention was paid to the management of students' pastoral care. The team judged that the approval process was thorough and in conformity with Royal Holloway's requirements. The team found that the memoranda of agreement signed with partner organisations were clear and in accordance with the *Code of practice*. In particular, they stipulated entry requirements for the programme, specified the management structure for the partnership, indicating how teaching responsibilities and financial arrangements were to be apportioned, and made clear that all quality assurance responsibilities remained with Royal Holloway.

92 Once approved, collaborative provision is subject to mainstream quality assurance procedures, including annual review and periodic departmental review. In the case of the master's programme delivered in Russia, the audit team found annual review reports to be detailed, highlighting both strengths and weaknesses in student performance; in particular the team noted the role played by the course director in ensuring that students had adequate materials to support their study. Points raised by the visiting examiner and in student feedback were considered appropriately by both department and faculty. The visiting examiner reports were completed on the standard form, and the visiting examiner had also interviewed students, noting that most had adapted to, and appreciated, the teaching styles used by UK academic staff. Points for further consideration formed part of the report, to which the course director responded.

93 The audit team concluded that the institution had in place mechanisms which allowed it to manage the quality and standards of its partnership arrangements and collaborative provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Institutional arrangements and the research environment

94 Royal Holloway has some 900 research students, split roughly 50:50 between full-time and part-time registrations. Since 2008, it has taken full responsibility for the operation of its postgraduate research programmes, which previously were subject to University of London regulations. Programmes are now subject to Royal Holloway's own academic regulations, which are supplemented by an institutional code of practice (Code of practice for the academic welfare of postgraduate research students) setting out roles and

responsibilities of those involved in postgraduate research programmes, which is regarded as having an advisory rather than a procedural status.

95 The management of the selection, induction, supervision and examination of research students, is devolved to academic departments, where responsibility is assigned to a director of graduate studies. This role may be an onerous one in departments with large numbers of research students, although the audit team noted that there was no formal job description. Postgraduate research programmes are covered by the institution's normal annual and periodic review processes. The procedure for annual review has been adapted to take account of factors particular to postgraduate research, but it remains closely aligned to the procedure for taught programmes (paragraph 19). Quality assurance responsibilities rest with faculty boards and the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.

96 At institutional level, the Graduate School has a remit to enhance the postgraduate research student experience, in particular through the provision of relevant training for both staff and students. All postgraduates are members of the School, which is led by the Dean of the Graduate School. A Graduate School Forum, chaired by the Dean and comprising the directors of graduate studies from each department, exists outside the formal committee structure to discuss a range of strategic, policy and operational matters. While the institution states that the Forum presents opportunities for staff and students to discuss all aspects of the graduate student experience, it has no formal terms of reference and the audit team noted that it only included two student members, both Students' Union officers.

97 All current arrangements relating to postgraduate research programmes were reviewed during 2010, in the context of the *Code of practice*, by a special working group, the Research Degree Programmes Working Group (RDPWG), which has recently reported through faculty boards and the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee to Academic Board. Following a recommendation from the RDPWG, reporting lines from the Graduate School have recently been revised, such that most issues arising are now reported to the Research Committee, while the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee retains responsibility specifically for quality assurance matters. The Dean of the Graduate School continues to be a member of both committees. These developments reflect an increasing emphasis on the role of postgraduate research within the institution's overall research strategy, which is overseen by the Research Committee. Even so, the audit team could see from the agenda and minutes of the Research Committee that consideration of postgraduate research issues still represented a relatively small part of the Committee's work and noted that its terms of reference had not been amended to include these additional responsibilities.

98 The audit team concluded that the division of responsibility for postgraduate research students between the Research Committee and the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee remained an uneasy one, an issue exacerbated by the absence of a clear role for the Graduate School Forum in the institution's governance structure. The team noted that the institution was aware of these issues and plans to address them as part of a reorganisation that was under preliminary discussion at the time of the audit. This is likely to encompass a review of the work of the Graduate School. In this context, the team considers it advisable for the institution to clarify the lines of deliberative and executive responsibility for postgraduate research degree programmes, with particular reference to the function and remit of the Graduate School (paragraphs 104 and 110).

99 Royal Holloway considers its research students to be a key focus of its research strategy and that they can play a significant role in the development of the research culture within departments. Factors contributing to the research environment are scrutinised through the periodic departmental review process. Reflecting external recognition of the research environment at Royal Holloway, the institution has secured access to studentships funded by

the Economic and Social Research Council, as part of a collaborative doctoral training centre involving four institutions.

100 Library provision is critical to the research environment and the Library works closely with the Graduate School to ensure that there is appropriate support for research students. It also provides information skills training as part of a generic research skills training programme (paragraph 108). In addition, research students have access to the University of London's library services and many make extensive use of this facility.

101 One issue that has been consistently raised by both staff and students in annual review is the inadequacy of study and social space for research students, particularly outside the sciences. In the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, students at Royal Holloway gave ratings to the research infrastructure that were significantly lower than those given by their counterparts in comparable institutions. The audit team noted that the issue was being addressed by the institution as part of its space utilisation strategy.

Selection, admission, induction and supervision of research students

102 The Dean of the Graduate School has recently presented a set of guidelines on admissions to the Graduate School Forum. As well as academic readiness and equity considerations, these cover English language proficiency, financial issues, special needs support and the importance of consistent record-keeping. In meetings, the audit team learned that most academic staff involved in the admission of research students have not received any specific formal training for the role. The team was aware that this was a point that had been identified on previous occasions, and therefore considered the production of the new guidelines on admissions to be a timely development, which would allow departments to incorporate them into their own admissions processes without further delay.

103 There are induction sessions for research students provided at institutional level, which are augmented by departmental induction. Each academic department also produces an annually updated handbook aimed at research students. From its scrutiny of documentation and from meetings with research students, the audit team confirmed that appropriate departmental material was readily available and generally user-friendly. The team found the Graduate School website to contain much useful material, including information on central support services.

104 Academic departments allocate to each of their research students an appropriately qualified supervisor and also an academic adviser, who is 'an additional source of academic and pastoral support' and may also act as a second or replacement supervisor. Together they form the core supervisory team. However, the audit team became aware of variations in supervisory practice from one department to another, which appeared not to arise from subject differences. The team noted that the RDPWG had picked up on many of the same points and had made appropriate recommendations for the institution to consider, with a view to establishing consistent practice aligned with the *Code of practice*. These points included the fact that not all research students have a 'back-up supervisor' and the role of the adviser is interpreted in different ways in different departments; some departments have no guidelines on the maximum number of research students that a member of staff should be expected to supervise at any one time; and there was a variation in views about the value of keeping written records of all supervisory meetings. Another point emphasised by the RDPWG was that training should be available regularly for all supervisors. The team noted that a workshop run by one faculty revealed that those attending had mostly never previously attended any supervisor training event and that there

was little understanding of the role of the Graduate School in relation to that of faculties and departments (see related recommendation, paragraph 98).

Progress and review arrangements

105 The institution's regulations state that a research student's academic progress will be reviewed at least once every twelve months under procedures, requirements and criteria determined and published by the relevant academic department. The review is conducted by a panel comprising the supervisor, or supervisors, the academic adviser and at least one other member of academic staff outside the supervisory team. The review meeting is documented on a standard form to which are attached the supervisor meeting log and generic training log for the student (paragraph 109), covering the previous twelve months. Research students who met the audit team confirmed that they found the annual review process useful in checking that they were on track with their research work, to set a plan for the coming year and as a preparation for the final oral examination (viva-voce).

106 The same panel process is used to evaluate whether a student may be upgraded from an MPhil to a PhD registration. This should normally take place within twenty months of the commencement of study (for full-time students) and the evaluation is based on a substantial piece of work undertaken by the student. The students were clear about how this process worked and aware of the conditions under which they would not be permitted to upgrade.

107 The outcomes of all annual progress reviews are considered by the relevant departmental committee dealing with postgraduate research students. The audit team noted that the RDPWG had recommended minimum requirements for the frequency of departmental meetings dealing exclusively with research student matters.

Development of research and other skills

108 Research skills training is a mandatory part of any postgraduate research degree at Royal Holloway. The Graduate School runs a programme comprising a range of courses covering diverse generic skills, such as research management and critical thinking, communication, career development, research ethics and IT. There is also a separate programme designed to prepare research students for a teaching role (paragraph 76).

109 Each research student undertakes a bespoke training programme, the precise composition of which is determined by agreement between student and supervisor. This combines courses from the generic skills programme (including some which are compulsory) with specific research methods training provided by the academic department. Thus the majority of courses from the generic skills programme are optional elements used in building the bespoke programme for each student. Royal Holloway stipulates that as a minimum these programmes should involve the student in five days training per year (increased to 10 days per year for those funded by research councils). No upper limit is placed on the amount of generic skills training that an individual student may undertake. There is no formal assessment and attendance is the only requirement for successful completion. Attendance at the appropriate courses is recorded in a research training log and monitored at annual progress reviews. Completion of the elements of the generic skills programme compulsory for the first year is a requirement for students to upgrade their registration from MPhil to PhD.

110 The RDPWG has recommended a fundamental rethink of research skills training, in terms of delivery, focus and content, with each academic department being asked to identify what constitutes core training for its research students. In the audit team's view this

approach would encourage departments to take ownership of skills training criteria and to identify the core and ancillary skills which their students need for successful study at postgraduate research level. It also considered that the process would be helpful in clarifying the relative responsibilities of academic departments and the Graduate School (see related recommendation, paragraph 98). The team also agreed with the RDPWG's suggestion that training logs should be more comprehensive, containing reflective and evaluative comment as well as simply recording attendance.

Feedback arrangements

111 Research students are included in Royal Holloway's normal feedback arrangements, involving departmental staff-student committees and questionnaires. Also, as mentioned previously, the institution participates in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). There is no institutional requirement for departments to hold separate postgraduate staff-student committees, but the Graduate School Forum has advised that separate committees should be used where the number of postgraduate students justifies it. In response to student comment about variable opportunities to provide feedback, a revised feedback questionnaire has recently been produced which specifically asks about student perception of the institution's research culture.

112 Feedback is an input to the annual review and periodic departmental review processes. The key generic issues identified from research student feedback are separate and additional to the generic issues raised by students on taught programmes. As previously noted, the institution has been receptive in its response to student concern about dedicated study space and about the value of aspects of the generic skills programme (paragraphs 101 and 110).

113 Feedback is an input to annual and periodic review processes. As previously noted, the institution had been receptive in its response to student concern about dedicated study space and about the value of aspects of the generic skills programme.

Assessment of research students

114 As is normal practice, final assessment of postgraduate research students entails examination of a thesis and an oral (viva-voce) examination. There are two examiners, one external to the University of London and the other normally from another institution within the University of London. Examiners are nominated by a student's supervisor and then considered by a departmental board with responsibility for postgraduate research programmes which undertakes a consultation process involving the Dean of Graduate Studies. If nominations are considered secure, the relevant faculty dean gives final approval, using powers delegated by the College Board of Examiners' Executive Committee. The institution has appropriate criteria for examiner appointments and its regulations contain clear protocols governing both the written and oral components of the examination.

115 The audit team noted that all three faculties were currently trialling the digital recording of doctoral examinations and that the appointment of an independent chair to examination panels has also been under consideration. These developments have provoked lively debate, unresolved at the time of the audit.

Representation: complaints and appeals arrangements for research students

116 The transfer of regulatory authority from the University of London brought with it responsibility for student appeals. Grounds for appeal against the outcome of assessment (either in relation to progress review or final examination) are clearly stated in Royal Holloway's regulations. In a recent change to the regulations, all decisions on appeals are now reviewed by a senior member of academic staff, or referred to an Appeals Committee, following detailed investigation by Academic Development Services. The number of appeals from postgraduate research students is very small, with only two appeals being submitted in 2009-10.

Overall conclusion

117 In the audit team's view, the institution provides an appropriate research environment and research student experience. The recent recommendations of a working group that has thoroughly reviewed arrangements for research students were broadly supported by the team as a way for the institution to move forward and to ensure that it fully meets the expectations stated in the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 7: Published information

118 Royal Holloway produces a wide range of information for both prospective and current students on both the institution itself and on its programmes, with much of this now web-based. The prospectus is available through the main institutional website and survey results from the students' written submission indicated that students were generally satisfied with the helpfulness of both the prospectus and publicity material. Departments produce student handbooks, with most following a standard template, and these are checked for accuracy by faculty managers; there is also an institutional handbook containing regulations, policies and procedures, as well as a student charter, outlining students' rights and obligations.

119 There are protocols for ensuring that web-based information is kept accurate and up to date, with academic departments having responsibility for the information they publish about their programmes, and the Communications and External Relations Department having responsibility for core institutional publications. Student feedback is sought on institutional publications at various points in the production cycle, and on departmental publications through periodic departmental review. Again, survey results in the students' written submission showed students to be satisfied with the information they receive about their programmes.

120 A new website, launched in September 2010, was designed in consultation with students and the audit team found this straightforward to navigate from a student home page to other pages giving details on a broad range of information and services, including the procedures for appeals and complaints. In addition, there are online facilities for students to update personal information, make fees payments or obtain examination results. Most departments now use the virtual learning environment in order to disseminate information.

121 According to the briefing paper, Royal Holloway employs various internal checks to ensure that its official information is accurately presented on the UniStats website, which enables comparisons to be made between institutions and courses. Royal Holloway undertakes an internal audit of its annual return to the Higher Education Statistics Agency, and it was included in the HEFCE audit cycle in June 2010, when its institutional processes and data quality were approved with minor recommendations. The accuracy of all statutory returns is the ultimate responsibility of the Vice Principal (Planning and Resources).

122 Royal Holloway makes publicly available on its website many of the items of information suggested to be of public interest in the 2006 Review of the [national] Quality Assurance Framework. These include policy and strategy documents, programme specifications, regulations, and details of quality assurance procedures. Information about links with employers is available through the careers section of the website.

123 In the audit team's view, the institution has systems in place to ensure that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy of the information it publishes about the standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. It meets the current national expectations for public information on teaching quality.

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