

University of Westminster

March 2010

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Westminster (the University) from 15 to 19 March 2010 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 the University offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

As the University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision, these judgements do not apply to that provision.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit team concluded that processes and procedures for the enhancement of student learning opportunities were supported by key University strategies, allowed identification and transmission of good practice and were making an effective contribution to student learning opportunities.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit team concluded that the University policies for managing the experience of postgraduate research students generally met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, but that some further work was needed to strengthen their implementation, particularly in regard to postgraduate research students who undertake teaching, but also by ensuring robust and representative feedback from postgraduate research students.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the systematic introduction and embedding of Curriculum and Assessment Enhancement Workshops to facilitate a structured approach to the further development and enhancement of courses (paragraphs 30, 55, 63, 69, 105, 112)
- the University's determined approach to address issues of the consistency of the student experience through institutional reorganisation (paragraphs 16, 35, 62, 81, 83-85, 94)
- the systematic introduction of networks for key school staff to promote dialogue on quality enhancement and the dissemination of good practice (paragraphs 90, 119)
- the positive impact the Developmental Engagements have had upon the provision of a more consistent postgraduate research student experience (paragraphs 117, 126).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- ensure that the revised arrangements for Guided Independent Study consistently provide a positive and integrated learning experience for students (paragraphs 44, 56, 68-69).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- ensure that external examiners' reports are routinely shared with relevant student representatives (paragraph 46)
- expedite the presentation of management information in a more easily accessible form to facilitate the work of course teams in preparing for annual monitoring (paragraph 60)
- make clear that the University's policy for Teaching Informed and Enriched by Research is intended to give opportunities for research within the curriculum (paragraphs 76-77)
- provide all part-time visiting lecturers with information concerning their entitlements to staff development opportunities together with details of the support available (paragraph 96)
- ensure that the University's policy on training for postgraduate students who teach is adhered to and consistently applied (paragraph 132).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The original Polytechnic Institution was founded in 1838 becoming The Royal Polytechnic Institution in 1841. In 1891 this became publicly funded and was re-named Regent Street Polytechnic. During the period 1945-1970 the portfolio of courses was expanded to meet the training needs of returning ex-servicemen and women.

2 A major expansion scheme was undertaken during the 1960s with new sites at Marylebone Road and New Cavendish Street being developed. In 1970, Regent Street Polytechnic merged with Holborn College of Law, Languages and Commerce to form the Polytechnic of Central London (PCL), which was one of 30 new polytechnics with degree awarding powers from the Council for National Academic Awards. Harrow College of Higher Education merged with the Polytechnic in 1990, which then gained University status and was re-named as The University of Westminster in 1992, having the right to award its own degrees and to participate in publicly-funded research.

3 The mission of the University of Westminster is to provide high quality higher education and research in both national and international contexts for the intellectual, social and professional development of the individual and for the economic and cultural enrichment of London and wider communities.

4 In February 2010, 22,704 students were registered directly with the University, of whom 14,574 (64 per cent) were full-time and 8,130 (36 per cent) part-time. The number of undergraduates was 16,478 (72.5 per cent), postgraduate taught 5,964 (26.3 per cent) and postgraduate research 262 (1.2 per cent). The overall percentage of overseas students was 14.5 per cent.

5 The University's strategic framework is set out by the Vice-Chancellor in 'Westminster 2015: a strategic framework', which has three key objectives: to become a diverse, vibrant and inspirational learning environment; embedding internationalism, employability, entrepreneurship and green thinking; expand cutting edge, innovative and creative research culture. At meetings

with senior staff, the audit team was informed that these three objectives characterise the distinctive nature of the Institution. The academic vision presented in the framework is driven by six lead priorities. The document also presents the case for reorganisation of the academic structure and restructuring of Corporate Services.

Developments since the last audit

6 The QAA's previous audit visit of the University in 2005 resulted in a judgment of confidence in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards and the report recognised three features of good practice. The outcome was qualified by eight recommendations, four of which were considered to be 'advisable', the other four being 'desirable'.

7 The mid-cycle follow up review report of October 2007 concluded that 'the University appears to have made good progress in addressing the recommendations of the institutional audit, March 2005'. It also identified a number of matters that might be explored during the current Institutional audit:

- the proposed risk-based approach to annual programme monitoring (see paragraphs 38, 40)
- the institutional arrangements of the University for enhancing its provision following the identification in internal reports and external reports of strengths and features of good practice in individual programmes and the management of academic standards and programme quality with regard to the identification of areas for development in these reports (see paragraphs 115-120)
- the flexible management arrangements for schools and the consequent possibility of unequal research degree provision (see paragraph 126).

8 An audit of Collaborative provision took place in May 2006, and resulted in judgements of limited confidence in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements; and confidence in the present and likely future capacity of the University to satisfy itself that the learning opportunities offered to students through its collaborative arrangements are managed effectively and meet its requirements. Following the audit, QAA was provided with information indicating that appropriate action had been taken by the University in response to the findings of the Collaborative provision audit report. As a result the audit was signed off in June 2007.

9 Since the last Institutional audit, the University has undergone a major reorganisation with significant changes to its structure and senior management, which it considers to offer 'improved (and shorter) lines of communication', at both University and school level. The new structure is also said to recognise 'the importance of learning and teaching as well as quality and research'. At the time of the last audit there was significant devolution with 10 schools located on four separate campuses. Westminster 2015 recognises a need for change and is aimed 'at addressing issues of fragmentation and local practices arising from this devolved structure'. As part of this process, the campuses were disestablished during 2008-09 in favour of a University structure with schools as the academic focus. A significant structural change has been the reduction in the number of schools from 10 to seven. These seven schools provide the lead organisational structure within the University management framework. This is an evolving process that is not fully completed and the University acknowledged that the benefits have not, as yet, been fully realised.

10 In addition to the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor in 2007, there have been a number of changes in the University's senior management team. As part of the 'one University' vision, the previous campus Provost role was abolished and a University Executive Board (UEB), the senior decision-making executive committee, was established.

11 As well as being academic leaders for their schools deans, reporting to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, have a central role and share responsibility for developing University strategies and decision making. Under the revised structure, they have a greater responsibility for ensuring that their schools meet the strategic objectives and targets set by the Institution.

12 Following a review of the committee structure in 2008, focus on academic policy was directed to three core committees reporting directly to Academic Council (AC); Learning, Teaching and Student Support (LTSSC), Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAEC) and Research, Enterprise and Knowledge Transfer (REKTC). Chairs of these committees are also members of AC. The review also recommended that most of the detailed work for committees and groups should be undertaken by finite life sub groups. The review further recommended student representation on all non-confidential committees, groups and boards and the introduction of the Student Forum, a subgroup of LTSSC, to provide a channel for informal communications.

13 The revised school committee structure is intended 'to reflect the new University structure'. The School Board (SB), chaired by the Dean, has an oversight role in respect of the vision and strategic direction of the school. A School Executive Group (SEG), which comprises the Dean and senior school staff, is responsible for policy and resourcing decisions. Five-year business plans are developed by the Dean, approved by the SB, reviewed with the Vice-Chancellor, and considered by UEB and the Strategic Planning and Resources Committee (SPRC) (paragraph 18). The SB reviews all new course proposals and quality enhancement processes.

14 Each school is required to have two designated subcommittees, the school Learning, Teaching and Quality Subcommittee (LTQSC), normally chaired by the Dean or the School Director of Learning, Teaching and Quality Enhancement, and a research related subcommittee, chaired by the School Research Director, which report to SB and to LTSSC, QAEC and REKTC, as appropriate. The school LTQSC develops and reviews school learning, teaching, assessment and quality enhancement policies and monitors the implementation of the corresponding University policies and strategies. The school research subcommittee encourages a research culture within the school, monitors the progress of and support for its research students and the school's adherence to University research policies, regulations and procedures.

15 Since the last Institutional audit there has also been a complete restructuring of Corporate Services into a single group bringing together all functions which report to the Registrar and Secretary: Human Resources; Planning; Information Systems and Library Services; Estates and Facilities; Academic Services; Marketing, Communication and Development.

16 Another particular feature of the central reorganisation has been the development of Westminster Exchange (see paragraph 107ff), which has brought together the Educational Initiative Centre, Online Learning Development and the Centre for Excellence in Professional Learning from the Workplace into a new single academic unit. The function of Westminster Exchange is to work closely with the schools to facilitate the enhancement of learning and teaching. A new Director of Learning and Teaching Development has been appointed to lead this unit.

17 School registries have been established to support the work of the Dean and provide support and guidance to school staff. Each school has a part-time dedicated Quality and Standards Officer, acting as an outreach from the Quality and Standards Office. School managers have been appointed to each school 'to work in a high level partnership with Deans to deliver a step change in the University's planning and delivery of services' and play a full role in school policy management. They are members of the SEG, SB and school LTQSC and have University-level responsibility, as members of Academic Services, to ensure that University policies and procedures are embedded and applied consistently.

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

18 The overall responsibility for University governance rests with the Court of Governors, responsible for determining the educational character and mission of the University. Academic Council (AC) is responsible for the academic provision and reports to the Court. The Strategic Planning and Resources Committee provides the link between AC and Court. In particular, strategic and resource requirements of the University and schools are discussed by both the independent governors and the senior academic and management representatives via SPRC. The Statutes and Principles govern all aspects of academic provision by the University. Quality assurance processes for all taught courses are based on these Statutes and Principles. Ultimate responsibility for quality and standards rests with AC but with operational devolution of responsibilities to LTSSC, QAEC and REKTC. Other subcommittees are established for specific and detailed actions.

19 The University's academic standards and quality policies and procedures are described in a number of documents: The Handbook of Academic Regulations; The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook and the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes, in conjunction with two major strategy documents: The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and the Research, Enterprise and Knowledge Transfer Strategy.

20 In particular, the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 'defines the University's ethos of learning, teaching and assessment'. From this the deans in turn define their own school's approach to effective practice in learning, teaching and assessment, ongoing evaluation and development of the curriculum and resources to enhance the learning and teaching and the student experience. The use of technology is seen as playing a key role in enhancing teaching, learning, assessment and academic administration. The Strategy recognises the importance of providing mechanisms to ensure the sharing of ideas and good practice across the Institution.

21 The LTSSC's terms of reference include oversight of the implementation of the Learning, Teaching and Development Vision, development of new policies and initiatives in learning and teaching and the monitoring and review of student feedback. The terms of reference for QAEC includes the development and monitoring of quality assurance procedures and their effectiveness, consideration of external examiners' reports and oversight of the annual monitoring process. Both committees have a quality enhancement remit (see paragraphs 104-106).

22 The REKTC's terms of reference include development and implementation of the University's research and research degrees policy and strategy, to promote the University's research culture and to monitor and consider the progression and completion data for research students.

23 School deans have key strategic and operational roles in quality assurance. They are involved in strategic quality assurance policy decision-making at University level and are responsible for the implementation of these policies at school level. The school LTQSC and RKTSC support the dean in ensuring that University policies and procedures for taught and research degrees are replicated at school level.

24 The audit team formed the view that the University's framework for managing standards and the quality of learning opportunities was appropriate.

The information base for the audit

25 The University provided the audit team with a Briefing Paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The team had a hard copy of all documents referenced in the briefing paper; in addition, the team had access to the Institution's intranet.

26 The Students' Union produced a student written submission setting out the students' views on the accuracy of the information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management.

27 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous Institutional audit, March 2005
- the report of the audit of Collaborative provision, May 2006
- the report on the mid-cycle follow up to Institutional audit and audit of collaborative provision
- the report of a Review of research degree programmes, June 2006 (unpublished)
- reports of Foundation Degree reviews, April 2005 and June 2005
- reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example, Ofsted and professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs))
- the Institution's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

28 Procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of courses leading to awards of the University are described in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook (QAEH). Through validation, new courses may be approved without time limit but subject to a six-yearly review, or approved for a limited period followed by revalidation.

29 Programme approval is a two-stage process with an initial consideration of rationale, market and resources, including staff, by the University Executive Board prior to validation, and currently known as the 'First Filter Process'. The second stage is academic validation. At the time of the audit visit, the University was modifying this process, devolving market and resource considerations to schools whilst retaining central oversight, to ensure complementarity of provision across the institution, by a revised First Filter group. The intention was to facilitate the better alignment of new programme proposals with the development of school plans. The team viewed this proposed change as appropriate recognition of the growing maturity of the schools' academic and administrative structures.

30 In preparing their proposal for validation or review each course development team undertakes a Curriculum and Assessment Enhancement Workshop (CAEW) facilitated by Westminster Exchange. Originally introduced to aid course teams in the transition to the New Undergraduate Academic Model, the audit team heard that CAEWs are now a standard feature of validation and review, have evolved to meet changing needs and have been effective and helpful in course development and team building. The team considered that the systematic introduction and embedding of CAEWs was a feature of good practice.

31 Validation panels include external advisers and have a clearly defined remit and report structure. There is training and an annual update for internal panel members. An initial meeting between panel and course team representatives plans the validation process, which is intended to be overtly developmental and normally conducted through a sequence of meetings, although a single stage validation can be adopted, for example, where a proposed new course includes modules already in approval. If granted, approval may be with or without time limit and may have conditions and recommendations.

32 The processes for revalidation and review are similar to those for validation, including panel composition. A revised course handbook and a critical review are required, the latter comprising the cumulative monitoring material for the previous three years and a critical evaluation. Revalidation has the same possible outcomes as validation while review panels can decide to continue approval without time limit, place a time limit on further approval, or withdraw approval altogether.

33 To help course teams adapt to the New Undergraduate Academic Model and to the outcomes of a major review of assessment and feedback (see paragraphs 55, 58), the University introduced a new form of interim 'transitional reviews', which did not affect the normal timings for review or revalidation, and which are due to be completed by May 2010.

34 The 2008-09 timetable of validations, revalidations and reviews was delayed because of reorganisation of the University's structure. Although delayed validations had resulted in recruitment to some new courses being suspended, the audit team was assured that reviews and revalidations scheduled for 2008-09 had been completed within the time limit approved by Academic Council and that the normal schedule had resumed in 2009-10.

35 The audit team accepted that the circumstances leading to this disruption were unlikely to recur. The team took the view that the validation, revalidation and review processes were generally robust, comprehensive and developmental with an appropriate level of externality; that the transitional reviews had illustrated the University's structured approach to reorganisation; and that periodic reviews and revalidations included reflective critical reviews which drew appropriately on evidence gleaned from course monitoring and provided a good basis for enhancement.

36 The University is planning a service of stand-alone accreditation through Westminster Exchange for externally delivered continuing professional development (CPD) activity offered by employers or training organisations. The University is taking a measured approach to this venture by careful planning and preparation for a future pilot accreditation phase.

37 All taught provision leading to an award of the University is subject to annual monitoring. Annual monitoring is considered as a 'spot check' on whether issues raised during the course of a year have been dealt with appropriately.

38 To streamline arrangements that it considered too protracted the University introduced a risk-based process for monitoring courses in 2007-08. Subsequently the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) concluded that the new process was 'robust and focused'; identified benefits that included a lighter touch, a focus on key performance indicators (KPIs) leading to targeted action, and a faster timescale; and proposed modifications which were implemented in 2008-09.

39 Schools are now responsible for monitoring their academic provision against a set of KPIs based on threshold values for module pass rates and marks; course progression rates; student survey outcomes; and numerical responses in poor or excellent categories by external examiners. Each school produces an annual school monitoring review and planning document (ASMRPD) for QAEC's Annual Monitoring Subcommittee, which subsequently and separately meets the dean and other representatives of each school. Minutes of these meetings are included in the Subcommittee's extensive report for Academic Council which draws out school and University-level issues and examples of good practice and enhancement, and makes recommendations to each school. In its February 2010 report on the annual monitoring of 2008-09 courses QAEC took the view that the process had been 'comprehensively and satisfactorily carried out' with the exception of one school which was required to, and subsequently did, submit a complete ASMRPD. The report also reflected on the monitoring procedures and made recommendations for further amendments.

40 The minutes of meetings between the Annual Monitoring Subcommittee and schools noted variation between schools in the use of and responses to the KPIs and in approaches to reporting. Notwithstanding this variability, the University expressed its confidence in its annual monitoring processes 'as contributing to the maintenance of standards and quality, through the rigorous examination of the evidence base and the involvement of a wide range of staff who are directly involved in the student experience'. From its analysis of relevant documents and meetings with staff, the audit team noted the University's continuing reflection on and developmental approach to annual monitoring and the generally positive view of the new procedures taken by school and course-level staff. While the risk-based approach was still evolving and bedding in at the time of the audit, and there were variations between schools in reporting on specific KPIs, the team recognised the careful approach that the University is taking to monitoring, evaluating and improving its own procedures against a background of considerable change in academic structures. While it is too early to judge the longer term effectiveness and sustainability of the new procedures, the team took the view that the University is developing a monitoring system which is suited to its new school arrangements while providing for appropriate annual institutional overview of the standards and quality of its academic provision.

External examiners

41 The University defines the primary role of external examiners as 'to verify that standards are appropriate, to assist in the comparison of academic standards across higher education awards and to ensure that assessment processes are fair and operated in accordance with the regulations'. The QAEH sets out procedures for nomination, approval and briefing of external examiners that are aligned with the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*, published by QAA.

42 There are two stages of assessment boards: subject boards consider module results for a subject area while conferment boards consider the full set of module results of individual students and progression and exclusion issues, and make awards. External examiners are appointed to provide subject area expertise to subject boards and/or display more general expertise and familiarity with course coverage and credit accumulation schemes at conferment boards. Whether the dual board procedures make the most effective use of external examiners' input has been a matter of ongoing discussions within the University with recent suggestions for changes in external examiners' roles. QAEC has adopted a cautious approach to proposed changes to what is considered a fundamental feature of the University's approach to maintaining academic standards and is seeking wider consultation and the opinion of the Academic Council.

43 New external examiners receive an institutional induction pack and there are comprehensive online guidance notes. More specific induction is the responsibility of the course leader or other main contact. The audit team heard of good examples of course-based induction arrangements and school-based meetings but also noted the view of senior managers of a need for greater consistency in induction at school level, and the intention to give this additional attention in the present session, a move which the team welcomed.

44 External examiners are required to submit an annual report commenting on policies and procedures relating to external examining and assessment processes and standards, and to grade them on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). Scores of 1 or other significant concerns are investigated by the Chair of QAEC, and the numbers of 1 and 5 scores are included in the annual monitoring KPIs. A comprehensive and reflective review of external examiner appointments and reports is prepared annually for the Academic Council. The 2007-08 review showed only eight reports with scores of 1 while the average scores were above 4. In the 2008-09 round, several reports raised concerns about the new academic calendar including a perceived lack of consultation and the reduction in scheduled teaching time.

45 Deans are responsible for ensuring written responses to external examiners. In a change to previous practice, Academic Council agreed that for 2008-09, members of the external examiner team for each assessment board should receive a 'collegiate response' and an action plan addressing all issues raised. The audit team learned that there had been variation in implementation of the new approach with delays in producing collective responses leading to some schools reverting to individual responses. However, the team also noted the University's intention to retain and improve the operation of the new system as an important element of annual monitoring.

46 All school staff members have access to external examiners' reports and responses, but, that has not yet been extended comprehensively to student representatives, although the University is aware that it needs to address this issue. The audit team therefore recommends the desirability of the University ensuring that external examiners' reports are routinely shared with relevant student representatives.

47 In other respects the audit team was able to concur with the University's confidence that its 'external examining procedures are effective in their contribution to maintaining and enhancing the standards and quality of the taught course provision' and considers that strong and scrupulous use is made of independent external examiners.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

48 The audit team confirmed that the University takes account of the *Code of practice* and other parts of the Academic Infrastructure when developing policy and procedures, and points to the Handbook of Academic Regulations and the QAEH as examples of where the Academic Infrastructure has been embedded.

49 QAEC has, as part of its remit, a duty to 'develop and monitor the effectiveness of policy, procedures and course development in accordance with the QAA's Academic Infrastructure'. The audit team was told of a systematic approach to addressing the *Code of practice*. The Quality and Standards Office is responsible for directing new and updated sections of the *Code* towards the relevant body or individual for action. University policies and procedures seen by the team were considered to reflect the *Code's* precepts.

50 Teams developing new courses are directed to a range of external reference points including professional body accreditation, subject benchmark statements (SBSs), *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and qualification descriptors. CAEWs cover the relationship between FHEQ levels and learning outcomes as do induction for new staff and training for validation panel members. Validation panels are expected to consider curriculum content, balance and relevance with reference to any appropriate SBS and Professional Body requirements; and course output and level in the context of the FHEQ and credit level descriptors. Programme specifications produced to a comprehensive University format are incorporated into course handbooks.

51 PSRB reports are considered within schools and forwarded to QAEC, which requires the school to produce a response in relation to any issues raised. There is not as yet a University-level analysis of PSRB reports but the audit team was told of plans for this.

52 QAEC has concluded that the University's quality assurance processes are in accordance with the principles of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, and the audit team concurs with this.

53 The audit team considers that the University makes appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in assuring the academic standards of its awards and quality of student learning opportunities.

Assessment policies and regulations

54 The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2009-11 includes assessment objectives, the Handbook of Academic Regulations contains assessment regulations for taught courses, the QAEH deals with approaches to quality assurance and enhancement of assessment, and Westminster Exchange provides a range of staff development materials. Course-related aspects of assessment are covered in course handbooks and module documents, which were found to be usefully informative by students whom the audit team met.

55 An institution-wide review of assessment and feedback in 2006-07 evaluated assessment related matters at school and subject level. The outcomes included a focus on assessment and feedback in CAEWs; strengthening of staff development; increased communication of policy on timescales for feedback; changes to the academic calendar; and the eventual introduction of the new undergraduate academic model. Progress on outcomes is checked in reports to the Learning, Teaching and Student Support Committee (LTSSC). The audit team heard from academic staff how the outcomes of the review had featured strongly and helpfully in both transitional reviews and CAEWs, the latter playing a developmental role in helping course teams to develop their approach to assessment.

56 Despite the review, the student written submission still counted feedback on coursework as a major concern, and noted continuing low scores on feedback-related matters in the National Student Survey. There were more mixed views among students whom the audit team met. Some undergraduates and all those on taught postgraduate courses reported timely and helpful feedback; while others had a less positive experience, particularly when assignments had been bunched together, the result, some students suggested, of a reduction in 'normal' teaching weeks following the introduction of Guided Independent Study weeks.

57 The University's concerns about plagiarism resulted in an Academic Integrity Policy, which attempts to develop understanding of plagiarism and its unacceptability, and provide students with developmental support on the first occasion plagiarism is detected. Students who met the audit team had been comprehensively briefed about plagiarism and felt well informed about University procedures.

58 The audit team found that the University has well documented and generally effective policies and regulations for assessment. Following identification of problems with aspects of assessment and feedback it took a proactive, evaluative, institution-wide approach to reviewing the area and followed up the review outcomes in its transitional review and validation procedures, particularly through the developmental role of the CAEWs. However, this is still work in progress, as evidenced by the mixed reports from students about feedback, and in the team's view continued monitoring of review outcomes by the LTSSC will be helpful in providing the University with assurance that progress is being maintained.

Management information - statistics

59 In its Briefing Paper, the University acknowledged that there was still 'room for improvement in the provision of detailed and accurate management information' but that 'it is working to strengthen this'. The Briefing Paper also reported difficulties in benchmarking retention and progression data, which could be a limiting factor in evaluating progress.

60 The audit team heard that the Planning Office is making improvements to the consistency and timeliness of data provision and to the production of management information on progression. The helpfulness and efficiency of the Planning Office was praised by staff, particularly in relation to the provision of customised data. However, while acknowledging improvements, course-related staff reported difficulties in interpreting the spreadsheets they received for annual monitoring. Given the importance that the University attaches to the use of KPIs in its development of annual monitoring, it would be desirable for the University to expedite the presentation of management information in a more easily accessible form.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

61 The University's engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points has been addressed in Section 2.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

62 As noted in Section 2, programme validation is a two-stage process which has recently been revised to try to ensure better alignment of new programme proposals with the development of school plans. Consequent upon the reorganisation of University structures, schools and central support services such as the Information Systems and Library Services are able to liaise in a more effective manner to enhance local delivery of the services necessary for programme delivery.

63 As mentioned in paragraph 30 new curriculum developments are supported by Curriculum and Assessment Enhancement Workshops (CAEW). The audit team considered that CAEWs are positive from a number of perspectives, for example, by providing comprehensive staff development in a range of pedagogic matters related to the review of assessment and feedback. The planning of CAEWs has been modified to involve school directors of learning, teaching and quality enhancement subsequent to a review by the Learning, Teaching and Student Support Committee (LTSSC). The process of programme approval can be undertaken at the same time as PSRB accreditation if that is seen to be beneficial.

64 Courses to be studied via distance learning have additional information requirements at validation. This additional material consists of samples of study packs or other supporting material together with comments upon the materials given by suitably experienced external subject specialist assessors. It is a requirement that validation panels also consider the impact on the achievement of outcomes of blended programmes containing online learning elements. The team heard of modest plans for increased use of distance-learning methods, often in a blended setting, strongly supported by the work of the Technology Enhanced Learning Team, part of Westminster Exchange.

65 The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook (QAEH) describes processes for the modification of an existing award via either major or minor routes and articulates the distinguishing criteria. Modifications, covering both curriculum and regulations, must be endorsed by a school Learning, Teaching and Quality Subcommittee (LTQS). Minor ones may be processed by the Quality and Standards Office; major modifications require academic consideration from an independent representative of Academic Council (AC). Subsequent to approval, course leaders are responsible for submitting revised documentation, including a new programme specification, to the Quality and Standards Office. The audit team heard that whilst categorisation of a given change was not, in all cases, straightforward, a process of discussion with the Quality and Standards Office, validation panel chair and school LTQSS should prevent significant change occurring without proper consideration.

66 The annual monitoring process has been described in Section 2. A sample of recent monitoring reports seen by the audit team revealed a wide range of issues being given serious consideration. Examples included the identification of continuing resource requirements, the need for enhanced statistical information, issues relating to the study environment, and matters raised by the NSS and the University's own Student Experience Survey. It was also apparent that schools were responding to the action plans generated by the previous year's monitoring. The team was able to conclude that schools were addressing the annual monitoring reports in an honest and self-critical manner.

67 Earlier rounds of annual monitoring prompted a comprehensive review of the University's undergraduate curriculum model. The new undergraduate academic model (NUAM) was introduced in 2008-09, moving away from the previously predominant model of courses comprising a set of 15-credit models to a combination of 15 and 30-credit modules. The introduction of a greater proportion of larger modules was to provide scope for greater in-depth learning and the opportunity for increased student-centred learning. As intended, it has also resulted in a reduction in the number of small assessments. Central support has been provided to assist in the implementation of the NUAM (see paragraph 30).

68 A review of the academic calendar resulted in the introduction of two Guided Independent Study (GIS) weeks in the academic year 2008-09. These were introduced to 'give students the opportunity to reflect on the previous ten weeks of learning and consolidate their development of knowledge, insights and skills, before the summative assessment point in each module'. Problems arose in the initial round of GIS weeks reported upon in annual monitoring reports, for example, an inability to run the two-tier examination board process due to compressed end-of-semester timescales. The Students' Union also raised serious concerns with the University about the effectiveness of GIS weeks. The University acknowledged inconsistencies in the introduction of GIS, but believed that a re-modelled and more flexible approach would solve the initial problems. Students met by the team reported that they were very dissatisfied by the current operation of GIS weeks, viewing them simply as representing reduced teaching time and leading to situations in which time for assessment completion and practical work was unduly compressed. Some students had not been given purposeful activities and said staff seemed to have little idea of what the rationale for such weeks was, beyond allowing further time for research.

69 In discussion with staff, the team learnt that difficulties with GIS weeks were recognised. It was believed that by creating a more flexible approach and by devolving more detailed considerations to schools, the problems would be solved. Consequently, school LTQCs had included planning for GIS for the next academic year on their agendas and would ultimately report back to AC. The timing of GIS weeks had also been devolved to schools. In terms of increasing staff understanding, GIS weeks were discussed in CAEWs and the team observed that Westminster Exchange had also placed a brief guide on its website. Given the troubled history of GIS weeks, and the potential for significantly detracting from the student educational experience that poorly implemented and overseen GIS weeks represent, the audit team formed the view that it was advisable for the University to ensure that the revised arrangements for Guided Independent Study consistently provide a positive and integrated learning experience for students. The team considered that the introduction of the Guided Independent Study weeks provide the potential opportunity for enhancing the student learning experience, if organised in a more pedagogically sound way.

Management information - feedback from students

70 The University has a recently established Student Survey Steering Group (SSSG) which has oversight of NSS, and other survey matters, reporting to the University Executive Board (UEB). Internally, surveys include module feedback questionnaires, the student experience questionnaire (SEQ), and surveys of central services. The student experience surveys are administered to those cohorts not covered by the NSS. Among other things, survey results are used to inform annual monitoring. In annual monitoring, student feedback is obtained through module leader's reports. The latter are informed by the results of administering the module feedback questionnaire, newly online universally from 2009-10. LTSSC has ultimate responsibility for monitoring progress with the NSS and SEQ results, via school action plans, as it does progress regarding the assessment and feedback review. In meetings, students confirmed that they were indeed subject to many surveys. The team formed the view that, while there were some weaknesses in the student feedback process, notably in making clear to students institutional responses, and the take-up of training for course committee representatives (see below), the University was listening to its students and trying to improve its feedback collection mechanisms.

Role of students in quality assurance

71 The QAEH sets clear requirements for student involvement in annual monitoring, review and validation, and emphasises the importance of students contributing to course development and review processes. At programme level, formal representation of taught students is normally through a Course Committee. The terms of reference and guidance for the management of such committees are provided in the QAEH.

72 Course committee minutes are a key source of student comment drawn on by the annual monitoring process. Student representatives on course committees are given a handbook setting out their role and responsibilities. While the University stated that it does offer training sessions for course committee representatives at the start of each academic year, none of the representatives whom the audit team met had been trained. The expectation that students should make up 50 per cent of the membership of course committees is ambitious and minutes confirmed that meetings are generally well attended by students and that issues raised are addressed by course leaders and student services staff. Student course committee representatives to whom the audit team spoke confirmed that their views were heard although some felt feedback loops were not always closed.

73 The audit confirmed that panels held as part of periodic reviews and revalidations scrutinise course committee minutes and hold meetings with students. In the case of annual monitoring, the Briefing Paper reported that student meetings had been discontinued due to poor attendance. However, the audit team noted that QAEC had recently been informed that, despite the decision to end direct meetings with students, some schools are continuing to hold these as part of annual monitoring and QAEC had agreed that, in future, students should be included directly in the process.

74 Students are represented in the University's formal committee structure although the number of representatives is limited and there are problems on occasions in securing attendance. At the time of the audit the University was in the final phase of establishing the revised committee structure initiated in 2008-09 as part of its reorganisation. For example, school boards, on which students are represented, had been recently established in 2009-10 and only inaugural meetings had been held by schools. Therefore, at the time the audit took place, it was too early to judge whether the new committee structure will serve to strengthen student participation in the University's deliberative processes, a matter the University will wish to monitor. However, it was evident that student contributions to course committees are valued and effective and that the views of students are considered both directly and indirectly in the University's quality assurance processes.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

75 The mission statement provided in the QAEH sets the University the goal of achieving a position as the leading practice-informed teaching and research university, and staff are expected to use their experience in research and knowledge transfer to provide 'inspirational teaching'. It is therefore a strategic objective for all major teaching areas to be informed at least by nationally excellent research.

76 Achievement of this objective is promoted through a policy framework for Teaching Informed and Enriched by Research (TIER), embedded in a suite of handbooks and strategy documents. The TIER framework embraces both staff and student engagement with research and is designed to give students opportunities for research activity as part of their learning experience. Westminster Exchange publishes a notably useful guide to linking teaching and research in course design and quality assurance procedures for periodic review and validation incorporate TIER. Schools are required to set TIER targets which are kept under review by LTSSC.

77 Therefore, the audit was able to confirm that the University takes a strategic approach to linking teaching and research and has put in place a carefully designed structure to enable staff to achieve TIER objectives. Targets are set, progress is evaluated and there is a high level of support and guidance given to academic staff on how to develop effective links between teaching and research. Senior staff met by the audit team agreed that publications such as the Westminster Exchange Guide focused more on staff input to curriculum design and less on encouraging students to undertake research as part of their learning activities. It would help students if handbooks make clear that the University's policy for Teaching Informed and Enriched by Research is intended to give opportunities for research within the curriculum.

Other modes of study

78 The University routinely offers flexible programmes of study to its diverse student body. Policy statements emphasise the primary use of technology to support and enhance face-to-face teaching for all students. A Technology Enhanced Learning Team, based in Westminster Exchange, supports staff and students. Students the audit team met were positive about the use made of the University's virtual learning environment, and the support available to them. Careers and Student Employment Services provide a work placement service which is accessed through its web pages and postgraduate students whom the team met appreciated having this facility.

79 The University is currently exploring distance-learning opportunities in selected areas and at the time the audit took place one distance-learning programme was being delivered to the first intake and a further eight programmes were either proceeding to validation or at the planning stage. The audit team drew attention to a programme which was incorrectly described on the University web pages as a University distance-learning programme. The University was unaware of this mistake and undertook to correct it immediately.

80 The audit concluded that the University's arrangements for technology supported learning are sound and well supported.

Resources for learning

81 As part of the University's reorganisation, all library and IT services across the four campuses are now managed centrally by Information Systems and Library Services located within Corporate Services. The Estates and Facilities Department, also part of Corporate Services, is responsible for the physical infrastructure. The Briefing Paper explained that the new structure was designed to improve services and deliver a more consistent student and staff experience in order to address recurring problems identified in annual monitoring with IT, library provision, buildings and facilities.

82 The University is concerned that learning resources and some aspects of the estate received low ratings in the 2009 NSS and in the University's most recent student experience survey, against a general trend of improved satisfaction scores in most categories.

83 The University is confident that the measures it is taking to improve learning resources and the staff and student experience will be effective in addressing the issues it has identified. Immediate actions include the introduction of service-level agreements together with regular meetings between staff in corporate services and schools in order to resolve issues promptly where possible. Over the medium term, school and Corporate Services five-year strategic plans identify priorities for improving the learning and teaching environment for staff and students and set targets for strengthening the provision of learning resources. Development and renewal of the University's facilities is a strategic priority and an overarching strategy is in place to integrate and track progress on all the actions being taken to improve learning and teaching, including learning resources and planned major capital projects.

84 Students and staff whom the audit team spoke to confirmed the University's assessment of the progress that has been made. While accepting that initially there had been some short-term difficulties, the view was that the reorganised services were working and that when problems occurred support was available. Postgraduate students were notably positive about their experience of access both to specialist and general learning resources. The aim to shorten lines of communications between school staff and resource managers in central services in order to deal with problems quickly was endorsed. These positive assessments were reflected in school plans, which, while identifying issues that still need to be addressed, generally confirm the impact the new Corporate Services structure has made on resource management and provision. A review, prepared for the LTSSC, was further evidence of the progress that had been made. In discussion, students met by the team expressed general satisfaction with the learning resources made available, the additional resources available to them by virtue of the University location in central London, and were particularly approving of the use made of the virtual learning environment.

85 The audit team therefore judged the arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of learning resources to be effective and provided further evidence of the University's determined approach to address issues of the consistency of the student experience through institutional reorganisation, which the team recognised as good practice.

Admissions policy

86 Academic Council is responsible for admissions and the Admissions Policy and in 2007 introduced a minimum UCAS tariff of 160 points after considering evidence of a correlation between low tariffs and student performance. The intention is progressively to raise threshold points required for entry with the aim of improving acceptance rates by reducing the number of candidates who choose the University as an insurance offer. The audit team noted that schools are implementing this policy. University handbooks make reference to admissions requirements based on minimum attainment levels and will need to be revised to reflect the current position. English Language entry requirements for applicants whose first language is not English are published within a range of IELTS 5.5-6.5.

87 The University is a mature institution with a well-established policy framework and practice for admissions. Both are monitored and kept under review, as evidenced by the oversight that is now being taken of admissions by AC, and arrangements for admissions are being further developed as part of the University's reorganisation of schools and corporate services. Therefore, the audit found the University's oversight of admissions policy and practice to be effective.

Student support

88 The University has defined as one of three conditions for its success a focus on offering best service and 'first class' support for students. The 2008 strategic plan made it an 'immediate concern' to address the quality of the student experience. One context for these concerns has been the declining levels of satisfaction in the NSS and critical comment on aspects of the student experience. The Student Written Submission expressed some reservations with the University's provision of student services and drew attention specifically to concerns with the personal tutoring system and the effectiveness of careers advice.

89 Course handbooks provide comprehensive details of academic and related support for students. A Personal Tutoring Policy sets out student entitlements and detailed requirements for the personal tutoring role at school level, which is regarded as fundamental in ensuring students are supported throughout their studies. The Personal Tutoring Policy was under review at the time of the audit both in response to NSS scores and as part of a wider review of induction, academic and personal tutoring. The review of the Personal Tutoring Policy was being undertaken by a working group of LTSSC chaired by a Dean of School.

90 The evidence of the most recent University student experience survey shows increased satisfaction on each of the academic support questions. Also, a recent Ofsted Initial Teacher Education inspection noted key strengths in academic and pastoral support and the quality of the feedback provided to trainees. Students whom the audit team met spoke highly of their personal tutors and reported regular, timetabled meetings. There is a university-wide infrastructure of senior tutors in each school who form the Senior Tutor Group that reports to the LTSSC. From its discussions with students and senior tutors it was evident that the University reorganisation had actively promoted cross-institutional liaison to the benefit of students and the audit team considered the Senior Tutor Group an example of the systematic introduction of networks for key school staff to promote dialogue on quality enhancement and the dissemination of good practice.

91 The full range of academic and related support services is published to all students in a guide, *Essential Westminster*. This is a comprehensive and accessible document giving details of student support delivered by careers, counselling and disability services. At the time of the audit, student services units were being integrated within a single Student Services Department as part of the wider reorganisation of academic services and a new Head of Student Services had recently been appointed.

92 The University has noted evidence of some decline in international student satisfaction and support services for international students were also in the process of reorganisation. An integrated International Office had been established, although international students use many of the same student services as home students. The audit team met international students who were very positive about their experience.

93 The Widening Participation Strategic Assessment Plan describes an 'integrated approach to employability across the University'. This is supported by Careers and Employment Services and the Westminster Exchange. There is a commitment to include career management and enterprise skills in all undergraduate courses in order to give every student an entitlement to personal development planning (PDP). The audit evidence indicated varied take-up of PDP but there are plans to expand the model of ePDP. Students were positive about their access to Careers and Employment Services using the University's virtual learning environment and the placement service offered to them.

94 The University has in place a framework of support modelled, since reorganisation, on the principles of central management and local delivery. It has undertaken rigorous, evidence-based assessments of its performance in providing academic and related support services to students in a complex environment. The reorganisation of schools has strengthened and expanded the capacity of the personal tutoring system by helping to make school practices consistent, enabling a university-wide cross school infrastructure and creating the conditions for consistent application of a university policy on tutoring. The reorganisation of support services is intended to address issues identified in student feedback. The audit team met students who were overwhelmingly positive about the support they are receiving from academic and student services' staff. Here, as in other areas, there was evidence of the University's determined approach to address issues of the consistency of the student experience through institutional reorganisation.

Staff support (including staff development)

95 The University has established procedures for human resource (HR) management functions, underpinned by a comprehensive suite of policy documents, available on the HR web pages. There is a University-wide corporate induction programme, details of which are organised in a dedicated portal. Newly appointed academic staff without teaching experience are required to take the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education stage of the MA in Higher Education provided by Westminster Exchange. School staff development plans indicate that this and other development opportunities are actively supported. There is an annual schedule for appraisal of staff and schools and departments return information to HR on the coverage of appraisal and staff

development plans. The audit team saw a number of examples of detailed returns from schools and departments. From its meetings with staff the team understood that appraisal linked to staff development and workload allocation could be effective but that coverage was patchy.

96 The audit team was supplied with examples of staff development activities provided by HR, schools and Westminster Exchange. The evidence was consistent with the Briefing Paper's statement that responsibility is placed on the schools and line managers to plan, identify and address the developmental needs of staff, supported by Westminster Exchange, HR and other Corporate Services units. A positive feature of current arrangements is that staff development opportunities are open to all categories of staff but the audit team learned that part-time visiting lecturers may not be aware of the support that they can request and that the level of support may vary between schools. It would be desirable to provide all part-time visiting lecturers with information concerning their entitlements to staff development opportunities together with details of the support available.

97 The 2006 University Staff Development Policy set the goal of improving the planning, implementation, coordination and consistency of staff development and appraisal. Feedback from the 2008 staff engagement survey recorded numerous requests for more, and a wider range of, staff development opportunities. Staff development is a key element of the Westminster 2015 strategic framework, which commits the University to 'growing the confidence, skills and professionalism of staff at all levels through training and development programmes' and makes investment in the development of people one of the University's three critical success factors.

98 To achieve these objectives a new five-year HR strategy has been developed, a draft version of which was available to the audit team. The draft policy had been approved shortly before the audit and members of staff whom the audit team met were unaware of the discussions that had been taking place or of the changes to be introduced. However, the team judged the University's present arrangements for staff support and development, the responses already made to the staff engagement survey and the deliberate steps being taken to secure better alignment of HR management processes and strategic objectives, as substantial evidence of a planned and rigorous approach.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

99 The University's approach to quality enhancement is through its embedding within key University strategies supported by University and local initiatives. The audit team heard that all members of staff are expected to engage in quality enhancement. However, the audit team was informed that the University recognises the need to place more emphasis on quality enhancement. Although the development of a separate quality enhancement strategy has recently been discussed at both the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) and Learning, Teaching and Student Support Committee (LTSSC), an agreement was reached by LTSSC in March 2010 that a separate strategy should not be taken forward and that a draft proposal for a Quality Enhancement Statement should be endorsed and needed to be reflected in the Corporate Strategy.

100 The Statement indicates that the University has adopted the definition of quality enhancement given in the Handbook for Institutional audit: 'the process of taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities' and that 'it is proposed to ensure that quality enhancement is embedded into the Corporate Strategy and all key University strategies which support this'. These strategies are to make explicit reference to quality enhancement and the steps taken to improve the quality of the learning opportunities.

101 In particular, the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy sets generic targets, with named responsibility, against five Strategic Objectives for 2008-09: student-centred learning, teaching informed and enriched by research, assessment, technology-enhanced learning and employability, enterprise and work-related learning. These are translated into school targets within

the school action plans and many of these targets are associated with quality enhancement. School and University targets are reported to the Learning Policy Review Subcommittee (made up of School Directors of Learning, Teaching and Quality Enhancement, and staff from Westminster Exchange and Corporate Services) annually, which informs annual revision of the Strategy.

102 The vision to establish the University of Westminster as 'an acknowledged centre of excellence in key flagship areas of the curriculum and learning, teaching and development' is set out in the document Learning, Teaching and Development@Westminster: A Vision for the Future. This includes continuous quality enhancement to ensure that student expectations are met, that the wider experience positively enhances the learning experience and that this success can be clearly demonstrated. The Learning, Teaching and Development@Westminster vision has now been incorporated in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy.

103 A Pro Vice-Chancellor, with overall responsibility for learning and teaching, was appointed in 2007-08. This post recognised the need for placing more emphasis on quality enhancement and led to the 'Learning, Teaching and Development@Westminster: A Vision for the Future' document agreed by Learning and Teaching Committee (now replaced by LTSSC) and approved by the Academic Council.

104 The audit team noted that the devolved responsibility for the quality enhancement agenda is shared between QAEC and LTSSC with QAEC having strategic oversight and LTSSC being responsible for day-to-day operational aspects. The team was also informed that the chairs of these committees meet on a regular basis to discuss and align agenda items and their interaction.

105 The QAEC oversees the development of quality enhancement processes, focusing on the student experience and the audit team was able to see clear evidence of where this responsibility was being undertaken, for example through enhancements to the Curriculum and Assessment Enhancement Workshops by the introduction of school-based events to encourage the cross-fertilisation of ideas.

106 The LTSSC terms of reference include requirements to promote the identification and dissemination of good practice and innovation and to monitor student feedback related to the wider student experience. Enhancement themes are identified for particular consideration during the year with the current focus on 'transition' (to higher education) recommended by LTSSC and approved by Academic Council.

107 Westminster Exchange has a leading role in taking forward the University agenda on quality enhancement in learning and teaching in partnership with schools and Corporate Services. It provides a range of resources and workshops to support staff development, including customised activities for individuals and schools. Westminster Exchange is represented on all school Learning, Teaching and Quality Subcommittees. Particular emphasis is placed on interdisciplinary activities which promote the dissemination of good practice. Westminster Exchange activities include the organisation of a Learning and Teaching Forum and an annual Learning and Teaching Symposium, teaching and learning workshops and seminars to assist staff in continuing professional development. The audit team found that details of these events are provided on the Westminster Exchange website together with a list of current international pedagogic research publications, national and international events, and links to more detailed information.

108 The Learning and Teaching Forum is an informal group made up of school directors of learning, teaching and quality enhancement, staff from Westminster Exchange and Corporate Services and holders of University Fellowships and Awards for the purpose of discussion on common issues and the sharing of initiatives and good practice to assist in the development and implementation of school learning and teaching agendas. In the recent past, the Forum has addressed such issues as feedback from school reviews, the new undergraduate academic model and the RISE report (international student experience).

109 Full-day themed Learning and Teaching Symposia, open to all University staff and colleagues from partner colleges, provide 'an opportunity for staff to share and celebrate their practice and debate issues in learning and teaching'. Recent themes have been enhancing learning (June 08), engaging students in their learning (June 09) and transitions in learning (for June 10). The audit team was informed that the Symposia are regarded positively and attract high attendance.

110 Westminster Exchange administers the Interdisciplinary Strategic Learning and Teaching Enhancement Fund for projects which enhance learning and teaching, scholarship and research with the Learning Policy Review Subcommittee receiving reports from Westminster Exchange on the innovation and development projects. Groups or individuals are invited to bid for funding to support learning and teaching innovation and development projects, at University and school level. The schools have been allocated £417,800 in 2009-10 for projects to address specific priorities which enable them to achieve their learning, teaching and quality enhancement targets. School directors of learning, teaching and quality enhancement play a key role in allocating the funds and implementing the outcomes from these projects. The audit team noted plans for the University-wide dissemination of these outcomes via an online learning and teaching journal.

111 Westminster Exchange also administers a number of awards and fellowships to support the University's Vision for Learning, Teaching and Development and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. Funds are available to members of staff to develop approaches to teaching and learning, to support research and to attend conferences. The audit team found that in 2009-10, £65,000 had been allocated for up to 10 University fellowships and up to 5 (new) senior fellowships. Also, holders of Westminster Learning and Teaching Awards in 2009 each received £5,000 to develop their teaching. Holders of these fellowships and awards are expected to become members of the Learning and Teaching Forum and contribute to the annual Learning and Teaching Symposium. These awards are also used to identify nominees for the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme.

112 The audit team considered that Westminster Exchange was making a valuable contribution to the development and implementation of the University's quality enhancement agenda. The Curriculum and Assessment Enhancement Workshops provide the opportunity for the consideration and dissemination of quality enhancement processes and elements of good practice between schools.

113 At school level, deans 'ensure the University Learning and Teaching Strategy and quality assurance and quality enhancement procedures are implemented effectively'. The school boards review all new course proposals and quality enhancement processes and school learning, teaching and quality subcommittees focus on the 'continuous enhancement for the benefit of students'.

114 The recently-appointed directors of learning, teaching and quality enhancement lead and coordinate the school's quality assurance and enhancement plans. They play a key role, normally being members of the School Executive Group, and being key members of the school learning, teaching and quality subcommittees (which they or the Dean chair). They work with the Dean and heads of department to lead the development, enhancement and quality assurance of learning and teaching and assessment provision and practices in the school. This involves organising staff development activities (including lunch and learn sessions and away days) and peer observation, reflective practices and organising symposia to promote and support the development of pedagogical research and scholarship. Their role is part-funded by Westminster Exchange (£24,000 per school in 2009-10).

115 Robust mechanisms are in place to address quality enhancement as part of revalidation, review and monitoring of taught programmes, although the Briefing Paper suggests that the link between annual monitoring and the dissemination of good practice is 'weak' and that student involvement in quality enhancement is 'patchy'. The audit team noted that, for revalidation and review, the reflective Critical Review report template contains a section on quality assurance and

enhancement where local enhancement procedures are reviewed, including the implementation, where appropriate, of student feedback and external examiners' comments. Similarly, for annual monitoring, the revised template, introduced in 2009-10, has an explicit section on quality enhancement and the module leaders' report template includes a section entitled 'Identify enhancements for implementation before the module is next delivered'. The audit team found that course handbooks, required as part of revalidation and review, also contain a section on 'Quality Management and Enhancement'.

116 The Annual Monitoring Outcomes Report (produced by the Quality and Standards Office for the Annual Monitoring Subcommittee on behalf of QAEC for reporting to Academic Council) has a section on good practice and quality enhancement which lists examples identified in the individual annual monitoring reports. In 2008-09, the Subcommittee recommended that school annual monitoring reports should differentiate between good practice and quality enhancement and that the future impact on the student experience of quality enhancement initiatives should be identified. The report also recommended that further consideration should be given as to how students can contribute more directly to annual monitoring. QAEC endorsed the report in February 2010 and agreed that, in future, students should be included directly in the process. It was further agreed that the QAEC Secretary should circulate the Report to school Learning, Teaching and Quality Subcommittees to assist further in the dissemination of quality enhancement initiatives and good practice.

117 The audit team was informed that, for postgraduate research students, Developmental Engagements (see paragraph 126), set up as a direct result of the QAA review enable the spread of good practice and encourage comparability of student experience.

118 The audit team noted that, at a recent meeting of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, it had been agreed that a library of good practice documents resulting from course validations and reviews and from annual monitoring exercises would be set up by the Quality and Standards Office.

119 One particular feature resulting from the reorganisation has been the opportunity for the cross-school networking of staff actively involved in quality enhancement. Westminster 2015 states that an aim of the reorganisation was to establish schools 'with permeable boundaries so that interactions between staff and students can be fostered within a dynamic, high-quality University environment where excellence in all we do is our shared aim'. Examples of where this horizontal networking is facilitated include the University Executive Board (deans), the Learning Policy Review Subcommittee (directors of learning, teaching and quality enhancement), the University Research Degree Subcommittee (research directors), School managers (fortnightly meetings with Head of School Administration), Quality and Standards Office (School quality and standards officers) and the Senior Tutor Group (senior tutors). The audit team considers that the systematic introduction of these networks for key school staff to promote dialogue on quality enhancement and the dissemination of good practice is itself, a feature of good practice.

120 The audit team concluded that much had been achieved to address 'the institutional arrangements of the University for enhancing its provision following the identification in internal reports and external reports of strengths and features of good practice in individual programmes', as identified in QAA's mid-cycle follow up report (2007), and agreed with the University's view that processes and procedures for the enhancement of the student experience had improved.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

121 The University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

122 The University has a strategic objective to expand its 'cutting-edge, innovative and creative research culture' in support of which it has developed a Research, Enterprise and Knowledge Transfer Strategy for the period 2009 to 2015. There are currently 262 postgraduate research students, of which 159 are home-based and 103 are from overseas, 86 are studying part-time and 176 are full-time. Postgraduate research students are registered in all schools, although the distribution is uneven. The research strategy explains that the University is developing its research activity in selected subjects, in part by establishing 60 University Research Studentships by 2011-12 and the audit team met some studentship holders.

Institutional arrangements

123 The framework for research degrees is defined in several key documents; the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and Regulations for the Award of MPhil and PhD being the two primary ones. The latter is also incorporated into the Handbook of Academic Regulations, where there is additionally a separate and recently approved framework of regulations for professional doctorate awards. Institutional responsibility for research degrees lies with the Research Degrees Subcommittee (RDSC), whilst research students provide feedback on quality via the Research Students' Forum. The Research Office supports the various structural elements and provides central administration. The institutional Briefing Paper stated that the framework was developed with a variety of external reference points, including the *Code of practice* and one of the terms of reference the RDSC is reviewing the University's policies, regulations and quality assurance processes for research degrees in the context of the precepts set out in the *Code of practice*. On considering the framework and regulations for research degrees, the audit team concluded that they did reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1*.

124 Research is driven strategically through the Research, Enterprise and Knowledge Transfer Strategy 2009 to 2015, which blends consideration of the three strands of activity in its title. The Corporate Strategy provides details of several key performance indicators (KPIs) whereby the relevant strategic objectives will be monitored. Key documents for research students are readily accessible via the University's research website or a specific set of pages from the virtual learning environment. Postgraduate research students met by the team were aware of these documents and had referred to them as appropriate. Responsibility for research is delegated from Academic Council to the Research, Enterprise and Knowledge Transfer Committee (REKTC), currently chaired by the Vice-Chancellor who is fulfilling the regulatory role of the vacant Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research). REKTC is directly subordinate to the Academic Council, being one of its three core committees, and is responsible for the research strategy, policy, academic standards and oversight of the quality of provision. Responsibility for research degrees is in turn delegated to the RDSC. REKTC and RDSC have remained largely unchanged through the recent re-organisation. Schools each have research related committees equivalent to REKTC that report to the respective school board. However, deans retain overall responsibility for research degree provision whilst they delegate operational matters to school research directors. The latter are ex officio members of the University RDSC and thereby contribute to policy development and its consistent implementation.

The research environment

125 Westminster 2015 states that the University intends to invest in high quality research centres and interdisciplinary networks. Deans have responsibility to make provision for an adequate research environment with the details being elaborated in the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes. Students are normally admitted to research groups which have reached a certain critical mass and have an active research profile. Oversight of the management

of the research environment at school level is via a process of annual monitoring, considering individual student progress, and through School Research Directors' annual overview reports.

126 The Review of research degree programmes in 2006 raised concerns about the consistency of the research environment. The recent move to seven schools represents a structural change intended to increase consistency by bringing smaller and/or newer provision into more robust structures and environments. Research annual progress reviews read by the audit team showed that, for example, in the case of the merged schools, a more consistent approach to the research environment was indeed being developed. The process of Developmental Engagements with schools is also intended to enhance consistency, amongst other matters. The process involves meetings between RDSC representatives and key school staff, together with associated workshops and briefings. Initially introduced, in part, as a response to the Review of research degree programmes, 2006, the University has decided that instead of being a single event, Developmental Engagements would be retained as a worthwhile mechanism for helping to ensure consistent implementation of the postgraduate research framework. Schools draw up action plans in response to these engagements, progress against which is monitored and reported to RDSC. While Developmental Engagements have revealed much good practice at school level, the University recognises that this attempt to enhance consistency is as yet unfinished. The positive impact the Developmental Engagements have had upon the provision of a more consistent postgraduate research student experience was considered by the audit team, to be a feature of good practice.

Selection, admission and induction

127 The admissions process requirements are comprehensively described on the University Research Study website and further elaborated in the Guidelines for Research Degree Students. School research directors are responsible for overseeing admissions processes after an initial application via UKPASS, a national admissions service for postgraduates provided by UCAS. The use of UKPASS had only been introduced during the academic year of the audit visit. The University Research Office organises a compulsory University induction which is the initial part of the University Research Training Programme (URTP) (see paragraphs 130-132). University induction is supplemented by school-level induction. Enrolment is followed by a period of some months developing a well-formed research proposal. The audit team noted the care and quality of the admission and induction experiences of students they met.

Supervision

128 All postgraduate research students are allocated a supervisory team which includes a Director of Studies, as primary supervisor, and normally one or two second supervisors. Detailed requirements for such appointments are set out in the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes. This document lists in detail the role of Director of Studies, together with the other bodies or individuals significant in the provision of research programmes. The University recognises the need to induct new supervisors and has built into its system an opportunity for new staff to obtain supervisory experience with due regard for postgraduate research student needs for competent supervision. Including more conventional continuing professional development elements, supervisor training extends to a 15-credit module from the MA in Higher Education as providing relevant experience. The audit team heard that the careful mentoring of staff new to supervision can occur and met students who spoke highly of their individual supervision. However, the team also read of concerns that a minority of existing supervisors were not always adhering to the Research Code of Practice framework and steps were being considered to rectify such situations.

Progress and review

129 University expectations, of formal supervisory meetings, annual progress reports and the degree transfer process are set out in the University Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes. These expectations include joint student/supervisor completion of a research supervision log. Such logs inform preparation of the school annual progress review by the School Research Director. There are two particularly significant individual checks on progress, initially at project registration and secondly at transfer from MPhil to PhD. Initial MPhil registration is the normal route to PhD registration. Oversight of these processes is maintained by school and University REKTCs. In its Corporate Strategy, the University has set itself a KPI of ensuring that at least 70 per cent of full-time research students complete within four years. Data on completion is provided by the Research Office to enable school research directors to complete annual progress reviews and schools now report on their completion rates via these reviews. The audit team read of progress towards the target, often through the detailed consideration of the circumstances of individual students. Students met by the team confirmed that their progression had been properly dealt with.

Development of research and other skills

130 The University has been actively developing research student training for some while, partly in response to the Review of research degree programmes, 2006. Progress at the time of the audit visit included embedding a policy and framework on research skills training within the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes. The framework devolves to schools responsibility to produce a locally applicable policy on teaching and other academic duties, which they should publish. Training is provided under the auspices of the URTP. The training policy specifies an initial evaluation of existing skills and training, followed by annual reviews, to identify training needs throughout the research degree programme. Under the University's policy, the Director of Studies plays the fundamental role in identifying a student's existing skills and specifying their training needs within the scope of the URTP and using the research skills training log.

131 Schools have to make clear to applicants their policy on the availability and range of teaching opportunities and other duties within an overall University cap of six hours per week. For postgraduate research students who do teach, the policy has recently been approved that training for teaching is mandatory, the extent of which varies according to their teaching role. Schools are required to maintain records of teaching undertaken by students to enable monitoring by the Research Office.

132 During the visit, the audit team heard that all schools had not as yet completed the task of agreeing and publishing the required policies, an issue raised in the Research Students' Forum. Neither was there a working method for the institution to assure itself that all postgraduate research students who teach receive the mandatory training in advance, notwithstanding the record-keeping requirement. Also, weaknesses with the overall URTP have initiated the establishment of a group to review matters connected with postgraduate research training. While postgraduate research university scholarship students met by the team had undertaken the required training, documentary evidence seen by the team showed that postgraduate research students did sometimes teach without training. Consequently, the team considered it desirable to ensure that the University policy on training for postgraduate students who teach is adhered to and consistently applied.

Feedback mechanisms

133 The primary route for postgraduate students to have a voice heard is through the recently constituted Research Students' Forum. The currently developed position stems partly from response to the Review of research degree programmes, 2006, and following on from two open consultative meetings with research students. The Forum has a core membership of school representatives and

relevant staff. Meetings of the core membership are supplemented by biannual open meetings. Action resulting from feedback at the Forum is monitored via the Research Students' Feedback Tracker. Forum feedback is supplemented by the research student annual questionnaire issued to individual continuing students. RDSC receives an annual analysis prepared by the Research Office. The University believes that these arrangements are more effective than student representation on committees. Students met by the team spoke well of the first year of the Forum's activity, confirming that it was able to solve practical problems. However, minutes of the RDSC show that there are concerns over declining response rates to the questionnaire and at the time of the audit visit, the core Forum still did not have complete representation from all schools. Whilst the audit team recognised the good work of the Forum, and the benefits of the questionnaire, it concluded that there was still work to be done to provide the institution with more robust and representative feedback from postgraduate research students.

Assessment

134 Regulations relating to the assessment of research students are set out in the University Handbook of Regulations 2009, Part 7. The regulations are clear about the need for an examination panel to be independently chaired, normally by the School Research Director, and to use at least two independent examiners, one of whom will be external. REKTC monitors the use of individual external examiners to ensure they are not overused and to maintain a sufficiently objective relationship with the academic unit concerned. Standards are referenced to the FHEQ, but only the descriptor for doctoral awards is embedded explicitly in the University Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes, and not that related to masters. Students met by the audit team were fully aware of the processes involved in assessing their progress and had received very helpful preparation from their supervisors.

Representations

135 The University's procedures for 'Review of an Examination', University terminology for initiating an appeal, are set out in the Handbook of Academic Regulations and the University Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes. The latter states that the University maintains clear procedures for students to make complaints. The Academic Services for Students home webpage contains links to information regarding procedures related to complaints and appeals. Students were confident that they knew where to find this information should they need to.

136 The audit team concluded that the University policies for managing the experience of postgraduate research students generally met the expectations of the Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes, but that further work was needed to strengthen their implementation, particularly in regard to postgraduate research students who undertake teaching, but also by ensuring robust and representative feedback from these students.

Section 7: Published information

137 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the Director of Marketing, Communications and Development have overall responsibility for the accuracy of the information and the corporate image of all university-level published information.

138 The undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses are produced by the Marketing, Communications and Development Department, in collaboration with the schools, Westminster Exchange and Corporate Services.

139 The Director of Marketing, Communications and Development has overall responsibility for the accuracy of the information in the undergraduate prospectus. Deans are responsible for detailed information from their school, which is provided by course leaders. For the postgraduate prospectus, the line of responsibility is essentially the same but with detailed school information

being provided by the research directors.

140 The Director of Academic Services has ultimate responsibility for the accuracy of the information provided in the University Calendar and Essential Westminster. Essential Westminster provides a comprehensive guide to all the information needed by a student to enrol and study at the University including academic guidance, finance, student representation, use of information, rights and responsibilities, University services and the academic year. Students are invited to comment on the quality of the guide, using the pull-out feedback form provided. The audit team considered that Essential Westminster is a very useful overview reference document for students and this view was supported by the students that met the audit team.

141 The University launched phase one of a new website, with improved search and navigation facilities in September 2009. The second phase, to be operational in 2010-11, will have improved content design and structure and phase three will have improved web integration and provide additional functions such as document and records management. The Director of Academic Services has responsibility for the information provided on the website

142 The students that met the audit team confirmed that the prospectuses, supporting documents, open days and the website provided them with clear and accurate pre-entry information, particularly for overseas students.

143 Course handbooks are produced to a common format, provided by the Quality and Standards Office and described in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook. Handbooks include programme specifications, contact details, student support, teaching, learning and assessment methods, student representation, mitigating circumstances and course regulations. They are required to be updated annually, with any relevant changes being included in the programme specification, which also follows a common template available on the Academic Services Department website. Deans are responsible for detailed information, which is provided by course leaders, and ensuring that it conforms to the University house-style as determined by the Marketing, Communications and Development Department. The accuracy of the information in the programme specifications is controlled as part of the validation and review process (see paragraphs 50, 65).

144 Students reported very positively about their course information, particularly the course handbooks.

145 The Teaching Quality Information Working Group has responsibility for coordinating the capture and storage of statistical information provided by the Planning Office, including that required for the Unistats website and the Registrar has ultimate responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of the information.

146 The audit team found that, overall, reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

RG 618a 08/10

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2010

ISBN 978 1 84979 146 5

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786