

**University of the Arts London**

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*Printed copies are available from:*

Linney Direct  
Adamsway  
Mansfield  
NG18 4FN

Tel 01623 450788

Fax 01623 450481

Email [qaa@linneydirect.com](mailto:qaa@linneydirect.com)

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## Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes
- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research

- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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

### **Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex**

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

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

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary and the report, without the annex, are published in hard copy. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (*Institutional audit handbook: England and Northern Ireland 2006* - Annexes B and C refer).

## Summary

### Introduction

An audit team from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carried out an institutional audit of the University of the Arts London (the University) from 3 to 7 March 2008. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. To arrive at its conclusions, the team spoke to members of staff and students and also read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision.

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

### Outcomes of the institutional audit

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

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

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University is moving towards a coordinated approach to quality enhancement, guided by its new Quality Enhancement Framework and the identification of University-wide enhancement themes, which build on a range of activities undertaken at its constituent colleges.

### Postgraduate research students

In general, the University's arrangements for research students are providing an appropriate research environment and student experience. In some areas there is a need for the University to review the alignment of its policies and procedures with the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA.

### Published information

The University has implemented systems to ensure that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy of the information it publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards. There is a need to ensure consistency in the application of its policy for the development and publication of course handbooks.

### Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following features of good practice:

- the University's management of the merger with Wimbledon School of Art
- the University's iterative approach to the process of validation
- the identification of institution-wide enhancement themes as a means of progressing the agenda for quality enhancement.

## Recommendations for action

The audit team recommends that the University considers action in certain areas.

The team advises the University to:

- implement all elements of its Assessment Policy to enable it to meet its stated strategic objective of working towards the comparability of the student experience in assessment across its constituent colleges
- review the alignment of its policies and procedures relating to postgraduate research students with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA, paying particular attention to the frequency of contact between students and their supervisors and to the provision of training for supervisors.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- ensure that postgraduate students are given timely and appropriate training before undertaking teaching within the University
- ensure consistency across all colleges in the application of its policy for the development of course handbooks, paying particular attention to information about placement learning.

## Reference points

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

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

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

## Report

1 An audit team from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carried out an institutional audit of the University of the Arts London from 3 to 7 March 2008. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The team comprised Professor M Cook, Professor M Davies, Professor A Dean and Professor D Lockton, auditors, and Mr D Stannard, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated by Mr W Naylor, Assistant Director, QAA Reviews Group.

### Section 1: Introduction and background

2 The University of the Arts London (the University) has its origins in four long established art colleges and three specialist colleges, which merged in 1986 to form the London Institute. The Institute was awarded taught degree awarding powers in 1993 and research degree awarding powers in 2002. The Institute became the University of the Arts London in 2004 when it was granted the University title. The Wimbledon School of Art merged with the University in 2006.

3 At the time of the audit, the constituent colleges of the University were: Camberwell College of Arts; Chelsea College of Art and Design; Wimbledon College of Art; Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design; London College of Fashion and London College of Communication. Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon colleges operate as a three-college cluster. In 2006-07, the University had 13,985 full-time equivalent student enrolments on higher education courses. Of these, 12,159 were enrolled on undergraduate courses (including Foundation Degrees); 1,728 on postgraduate taught courses and 98 on postgraduate research degrees.

4 In its briefing paper the University stated that an appreciation of its collegiate structure is key to understanding the University and its contribution to education in the arts, design and communication. The collegiate structure preserves the individual brand and identity of each college and their distinctive approaches to their disciplines. Colleges issue individual prospectuses for taught and research degree courses. Applicants are offered a choice of courses within disciplines that reflect the ethos and resources of the different colleges. The duplication of particular subjects across different colleges, notably in fine art, graphic design and fashion, is regarded by the University as a virtue. The allocation of resources among colleges allows significant freedom for colleges to develop their own portfolio of courses and research.

5 According to the University's Medium term strategy 2005-10, its vision is 'To be recognised as one of the foremost institutions in the world for learning, practice, research and development in arts, design and communication'.

6 The Academic Board is the University's most senior academic committee. It discharges its responsibilities through its standing committees: the Academic Standards and Development Committee, Student Life Committee, Research Standards and Development Committee and the Academic Planning Committee. The key committee with respect to the management of the academic standards of taught courses is the Academic Standards and Development Committee, which is responsible for the validation and review of courses (partly through delegation to its Validations Subcommittee), oversight of the course monitoring system, the appointment of external examiners and, more generally, for advising the Academic Board on all matters concerned with academic standards. In addition, the Committee acts as a forum for the discussion of developments in quality assurance. The Research Standards and Development Committee is responsible for the academic standards and quality of research degree courses.

7 Each college has a college academic committee (with the exception of Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon colleges, which operate as a three-college cluster with a single academic committee). College academic committees are formal committees of the Academic Board and they are ultimately responsible to the Board for ensuring that courses are of an appropriate

quality and for implementing the University's quality assurance procedures. College academic committees tend to have a number of subcommittees with responsibilities for quality and standards, although the University does not prescribe how these should be organised. Individual courses are managed by course directors, which are permanent positions.

8 The senior manager with responsibility for standards is the Pro Rector Academic Development and Quality, who is a member of the University management team. Responsibility for the operation of the University's quality assurance framework lies with the Director of Academic Affairs and Planning, who leads Academic Affairs, a small central unit that provides advice and guidance to University committees and staff on a wide range of matters including validation, external examining, annual monitoring and periodic review. Academic Affairs also monitors the effectiveness of the University's quality assurance framework and advises on its development.

9 This is the first audit of the University since it was granted University title in 2004. QAA's last audit of the London Institute in 2004 resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of the Institute's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The report noted four features of good practice and made four recommendations where action was considered advisable and a further four where action was considered desirable. The advisable recommendations related to the consistent operation of the Institute's regulations and procedures for external examining; the consistency of procedures for admissions, tutorial support and assessment; the implementation of policies and procedures related to quality enhancement; and a review of its policies for dealing with appeals and extenuating circumstances. The desirable recommendations related to the Institute's procedures for addressing the Academic Infrastructure; its strategy for internal and external communications; an enhanced role for external members involved in internal quality assurance procedures; and the Institute's strategy for collaborative provision.

10 In considering the University's response to the recommendations of the Institute's 2004 audit report, the audit team noted that the University had made progress on several fronts. In particular, it had carried out a major review of the purpose and operation of the external examiner system; developed and implemented new policies for admissions, tutorial support and assessment; created a new Quality Enhancement Framework; established a new procedure for responding to revisions to the Academic Infrastructure; developed new criteria for the involvement of external members of internal quality assurance processes; created a new communications strategy; and established a new strategy for collaborative provision. These developments are discussed in more detail in the relevant sections below. The audit team concluded that the University had responded appropriately to the recommendations of the 2004 audit of the London Institute.

11 The Wimbledon School of Art merged with the University in August 2006. Two years before the merger, QAA carried out an institutional audit of the Wimbledon School of Art, which resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The report noted four features of good practice and made four recommendations where action was considered advisable and a further five where action was considered desirable. The advisable recommendations related to the availability of learning resources for undergraduate and postgraduate students; the formal approval by external examiners of assessment tasks prior to their allocation; the involvement of Human Resources staff in the recruitment and appointment of visiting lecturers; and the alignment of placement learning with the relevant section of the *Code of practice*. The desirable recommendations concerned opportunities to obtain systematic feedback from the School's graduates and employers; the implementation of the School's schemes for mentoring and peer observation for new and promoted staff; the consideration of learning resources within validation and review procedures; the School's strategies for learning resources and information technology; and the balance between formative and summative feedback to students in respect of practice-based work.



12 The audit team noted that the recommendations of the previous audit at Wimbledon had mainly been addressed as a function of the merger with the University and, in particular, by Wimbledon's adoption of the University's quality assurance framework and by access to the University's staff development support and learning resources. The team was therefore satisfied that the University had responded appropriately to the recommendations of the Wimbledon audit.

13 Given the challenges inherent in bringing together separate institutions with different approaches to the management of academic standards and quality, the audit team was interested to understand how the University had gone about the merger with Wimbledon and in particular how it had managed its responsibilities both for the academic standards of the new courses which the merger added to the University's portfolio, and for the learning opportunities of its new students. The team therefore reviewed a series of documents related to the merger and discussed the process with several staff and students from what is now the Wimbledon College of Art. The team's overall impression was that the merger had been well planned and managed. The team noted, in particular, the care which the University had taken to consult and inform staff in both institutions about the aims and progress of the merger; the comprehensive risk analysis and management apparent from the merger business plan; and the sophistication of the progress reports which the merger team provided to University Management Team. Notwithstanding a few minor problems concerning access to the University's information technology systems among students on courses validated by Wimbledon's previous awarding body, the team's impression of the documentary evidence was confirmed in meetings with students and staff. The team therefore identified the University's management of the merger with Wimbledon School of Art as a feature of good practice, which may serve as a valuable example for other institutions planning or preparing for similar changes.

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

14 According to the Briefing Paper, the University's key quality assurance processes are course validation, revalidation and review, Quality Audit and Review, annual course monitoring and the external examiner system. The procedures and regulations for these processes are described in the Academic Affairs Handbook.

15 The University's current procedures for approving new courses were introduced in 2005, replacing a system based on day-long validation panels. Under the new system, proposals for new courses go through three distinct phases: planning, which is concerned with the alignment of the proposal with the University's broad academic development; proposal, which considers evidence of demand and resource requirements; and validation, which is a detailed scrutiny of academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities. Salient features of the procedure include the appointment of at least one internal adviser to the course team (usually from a separate college) and at least one external assessor, who may be a professional practitioner; and the occurrence of two formal meetings to review the course handbook, programme specification and validation papers. The procedure provides the course team with opportunities at every stage to reflect on and refine their proposals. There is no limit on the number of meetings that course teams may hold with assessors, subject to an overall budget limit set by Academic Affairs.

16 According to the Briefing Paper, the University's validation procedure invests greater responsibility at college level than the preceding system, and has therefore achieved a better balance between the need, in some circumstances, for rapid course development with the necessary critical input required to secure academic standards and quality. Based on its analysis of the validation process, the audit team concurred with this view. Moreover, the team noted that the shift away from a process focused on a single, day-long validation event, to a more gradual and iterative course development process seemed to have increased its effectiveness, particularly with respect to the consideration of students' learning opportunities. Against this

backdrop, the team identified the University's iterative approach to the process of validation as a feature of good practice.

17 The University requires every course to be monitored as a means of keeping its effectiveness under review. Course monitoring leads to the production of an annual report in the summer term by each course director, which follows a standard format set out in the Academic Affairs Handbook. The reports are circulated to Readers groups, which review them and report back to the relevant Board of Studies, highlighting good practice or any potential problems. Deans then produce a summary report for college academic committees, highlighting any issues to be addressed or potential features of good practice. College academic committees may require further actions as a result. The Head of College, as chair of the College Academic Committee, then submits an annual report to the Academic Standards and Development Committee, which, in turn, makes an annual report on quality assurance to the Academic Board.

18 The audit team saw several examples of course monitoring reports, which demonstrated that the process had been conducted according to the University's requirements. However, the team did have some concerns about the use of management information within course monitoring, which are discussed below.

19 Course review and revalidation is a two-part process: review, which all courses must undergo every four to six years, is followed by revalidation for some courses. An established course in good academic standing and in which no major changes to structure and content are proposed may follow the review process alone. Revalidation is required for those courses which are not in good academic standing or where restructuring or rewriting is proposed. Heads of College are responsible for deciding which route to follow, in consultation with the Pro Rector Academic Development and Quality. In the event of a disagreement over the most appropriate route, the matter is referred to the Academic Standards and Development Committee.

20 The audit team saw documentation relating to several course revalidations, all of which demonstrated that the process had been applied in accordance with the University's requirements.

21 In addition to course review and revalidation, the University reviews schools and colleges periodically. This process is called Quality Audit and Review and it takes place in two stages: an audit conducted by Academic Affairs, which prepares and considers standard sets of data and checks compliance against the University's requirements; followed by a review visit lasting two and a half days. The review is conducted by a panel chaired by a Pro Rector or Head of College and including two external subject experts (including, where appropriate, an external expert from outside higher education) and a student sabbatical officer. The review may include an enhancement theme or themes chosen by the school.

22 The audit team saw a range of reports and supporting evidence related to two examples of Quality Audit and Review which the University provided as part of its sampling trails. In general, these documents demonstrated that the process was rigorously applied and the team noted in particular the candour of the self-evaluation documents. In one case, however, the team observed that the final review report had not been submitted to the relevant college academic committee, although the staff whom the team met indicated that this was part of the standard protocol. This may indicate a need for more consistency in the application of the later stages of the process.

23 The University undertook a major review of the purpose and operation of external examining following the QAA audit of the London Institute in 2004, which advised the Institute to '...take action, without delay, to ensure consistent operation throughout all of the colleges of the Institute's regulations and procedures for external examining'. This led to the development of a new external examiners' handbook and briefing pack. The latter includes details of a formal mentoring scheme, whereby new external examiners are mentored by an existing examiner of the course in question or a similar course for the first year of their appointment.

24 External examiners write an annual report following standard headings to the Pro Rector Academic Development and Quality. Academic Affairs reads all reports and distributes them to Heads of College, Deans and course directors. Where a report raises an issue of serious concern, the Pro Rector will draw this to the attention of the appropriate Head of College and Dean of School. External examiners obtain feedback on their comments via a formal annex of the course monitoring report, which they receive once the report has been approved by the Board of Studies. External examiners are also invited to comment at the end of the Board of Examiners' meetings on their findings arising from viewing student work and discussions with staff, and in their reports they are required to comment explicitly on assessment and other aspects of the course. Course teams are required to make a formal response to all external examiners' comments in an annex to the annual course monitoring report. The reports seen by the audit team indicated that external examiners' comments are routinely identified by course teams and their responses and actions are clearly logged.

25 A salient feature of the University's external examiner system is the facility to appoint more than one external examiner to a course on the advice of Heads of College or Deans of School. This may occur where the particular characteristics of a course may benefit from a duality of external scrutiny, typically, where it is desirable to ensure that the professional, as well as the academic, standards are appropriate to the award in question.

26 The University makes extensive use of the Academic Infrastructure to identify and maintain academic standards, including by scrutinising the alignment of the academic standards of specific courses with the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements in validations, course monitoring and Quality Audit and Review.

27 The audit team noted that the University's provision in Broadcast Journalism had been reaccredited by the Broadcast Journalism Training Council in 2007. However, the team found that the Council's reaccreditation report had not been discussed by the University's key committees, including the Academic Board, despite it having raised concerns about the University's grading thresholds. In its meetings with staff, the team heard that the School of Media Studies had considered the report and the course director had given a verbal response to the Broadcast Journalism Training Council. The team also heard that the report had, in fact, subsequently been discussed at the relevant college academic committee, although the minutes of that meeting had not reached the Academic Board by the time of the audit visit. Given that almost a year had elapsed since the University received the original report, the team concluded that the University may wish to consider accelerating its procedures for considering and responding to reports from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

28 The University has an Assessment Policy which describes the overall purpose of assessment and explains the mandatory requirements of assessment for higher education. The policy, which was recently introduced following a review of assessment against the revised section of the *Code of practice*, seeks to strike a balance between, on the one hand, the variety of learning and teaching practices in the colleges (and in the art and design sector more generally); and, on the other, the University's responsibility to establish a minimum set of expectations across these different approaches which respond to the precepts set out within the *Code* and other relevant parts of the Academic Infrastructure. Thus, while there are acknowledged variations in assessment across the University which reflect its collegiate structure, the University sets a number of mandatory requirements which it expects every college to apply in the same way, including the use of a standard classification system.

29 The audit team saw much evidence of activity at University level regarding the development of strategies for ensuring that the new assessment policy was implemented consistently across the constituent colleges. However, it was clear from student feedback, Deans' reports and Quality Audit and Review reports that the consistency which the University's Assessment Policy calls for

has not yet been achieved. Moreover, the team was concerned that many of the academic staff whom it met were not able to articulate the processes by which the University was seeking to realise the consistent application of its assessment processes. Against this background, the team concluded that it is advisable for the University to implement all elements of its Assessment Policy to enable it to meet its stated strategic objective of working towards the comparability of the student experience in assessment across its constituent colleges.

30 The University holds data on student applications, progression and achievement on a central database. The Central Registry draws on these data to compile detailed overview reports on completions and student retention for the Academic Standards and Development Committee, the Academic Board and University Management Team. In addition to the data themselves, the reports include commentaries on the salient features of the data by students' college, gender, ethnicity and domicile, and a comparison between the University's data and national trends. Registry also produces reports for the Widening Participation Subcommittee and University Management Team on students' performance by social class, low participation neighbourhoods and ethnicity. The audit team reviewed minutes of the relevant committees, which revealed full discussions of the data along with appropriate action planning where the data indicated a need for the University to respond.

31 The audit team noted that the University's procedures for annual course monitoring expect course directors to consider a range of management information in producing their annual monitoring reports, including achievement and first destination data. However, the team's analysis of a sample of course monitoring reports revealed inconsistent use of this information. In some reports data sets were used systematically to inform course developments; in others some data were not considered, particularly data on graduates' first destinations. The team therefore encourages the University to improve the consistency with which management information is used in annual course monitoring.

32 The audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

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

33 The University's procedures for course validation, course monitoring, course review and revalidation and Quality Audit and Review, described in Section 2 above, each expect course teams, and independent and external assessors where appropriate, to consider the availability of appropriate learning opportunities for students to help them achieve the intended learning outcomes. Validation is particularly geared to the consideration of learning opportunities in a developmental and iterative way. The papers that course teams are required to submit for validation must address staffing and staff development, learning resources and, where appropriate, the research profile of the course team. In addition, course teams are required to demonstrate in an 'admissions policy' how the proposed curriculum and intended learning and teaching methods will meet the particular needs of the intended student group. These features contributed to the audit team's identification of the University's approach to validation as a feature of good practice.

34 Overall responsibility for monitoring the University's alignment with the *Code of practice* rests with Academic Standards and Development Committee. The committee has established a new process for considering revisions to the *Code* in response to a recommendation from the 2004 QAA institutional audit of the London Institute. The audit team saw that the *Code* was reflected in the University's key policies and procedures, for example in its revised policies on assessment and admissions.

35 A high proportion of academic staff combine part-time or fractional teaching posts in the University with careers in the art, design and communications sectors, which helps them to draw on external reference points in developing their teaching practices. The University also has an employer engagement strategy, which is manifest in part in the involvement of employers in the

University's key quality assurance processes, for example on validation panels. In addition, the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design monitors the extent of employer engagement and publishes examples of effective practice; and the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Creative Learning in Practice is investigating how work-based learning can enhance employability skills.

36 In 2006 the University launched a new, single survey of undergraduate students' views, bringing together a number of separate feedback mechanisms. The new survey employs the same questions as the National Student Survey but it is distributed to all students and is therefore capable of detecting temporal changes in feedback from each cohort of students. (The University also runs a parallel postgraduate survey using the same questions as the undergraduate survey for students on postgraduate taught courses.) Notwithstanding the advantages of the new survey over the various different measures it replaced, including the relative ease with which student satisfaction may now be compared across different courses, schools, and colleges, the University has recognised that the new data set is not as detailed as that generated by the previous systems. In response, the University had decided to pilot a unit evaluation survey at two colleges. The University was evaluating this pilot at the time of the audit.

37 The audit team saw several examples of the University's responsiveness to data from its new survey, including the preparation of case studies by colleges that had recorded relatively high levels of student satisfaction for distribution among colleges which had fared less well. The team also noted a number of actions which the University had taken in response to data from the National Student Survey, such as the creation of a new Student Life Committee.

38 The University regards student representation on its key committees as an important component of its quality assurance framework. The University manages student representation in partnership with the Students' Union, which organises training events for student representatives. In 2006, the University established a Student Life Committee, which reports directly to the Academic Board. This Committee considers a broad range of issues related to the student experience and the membership includes a larger representation from the Students' Union than on other committees to try to ensure that the experiences of students from across the colleges inform its work. The University, in partnership with the Students' Union, has also established a network of student democracy assistants and a dedicated post in the Union office to support the student representation system. The Student Democracy Assistants act as a 'bridge' between students and senior management in the colleges and also coordinate the training of student course representatives.

39 All students have the opportunity to give feedback on the quality of their learning experience at course level. This feedback is reported, evaluated and responded to through annual monitoring. The audit team saw evidence that matters raised by students through this route, as well as through student fora and student surveys, fed into the University's quality assurance processes and discussions at the relevant committees. However, it was not always evident to the team how the University makes students aware of actions it has taken in response to their feedback. This may be an area which requires further attention.

40 The University has a strategic commitment to linking teaching and learning to the research interests of its staff. This is articulated through two key documents: the Strategy for Student Learning 2006-10; and the Research Strategy. The University seeks to discharge this commitment in several ways, including by expecting to see evidence that new course proposals are informed by the research interests of teaching staff and by encouraging staff who are active in research to become involved in validations as internal assessors. In addition, the University offers staff the opportunity to engage in a range of research and placement activities with a specific aim of improving the student learning experience, through the Teaching and Professional Fellowship scheme.

41 The University offers a small number of courses through flexible and distributed learning methods and a number of other courses include elements of flexible and distributed learning

methods as part of a blended learning approach. In addition, over 300 courses use the University's virtual learning environment to support communication, learning and teaching, some extensively. The University's aim is for all courses to have active virtual learning environment sites by September 2008, with each including a minimum core of relevant information (including learning outcomes, staff contact details and assessment schedules) by September 2009.

42 The development of the virtual learning environment is led by the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design. The Centre has been recognised by the Joint Information Systems Committee as being among the leaders in the sector in the integration of learning technologies into the curriculum. However, the audit team saw evidence in student feedback and course monitoring reports which indicated that students' experience of the virtual learning environment varied significantly among different courses. The University will doubtless take care to monitor students' experience of the virtual learning environment as it becomes more reliant on this tool for delivering and supporting its provision, and respond to any concerns which this may expose.

43 Some of the University's learning resources are managed locally by the colleges while others are managed centrally. The central Library and Learning Resources unit engages with the University's academic objectives through representation on various college and University committees and through involvement in course validation, monitoring and review procedures. In addition, it is proactive in seeking student feedback through focus groups, college fora and questionnaires. The 2007 Quality Audit and Review of Library and Learning Resources, carried out as part of the University's Central Service Review Programme, concluded that it provided high quality services and that its aims and objectives were closely and effectively aligned with those of the University.

44 The students whom the audit team met indicated that there was some concern among the student body about the opening hours of some library facilities. The team learnt that Library and Learning Resources had already extended opening hours in response to student demand and were assured that further extensions were under active consideration, particularly in the interests of research students.

45 In addition to library resources, the University provides a range of specialist resources including laboratories, production units, foundries, specialist workshops, printmaking suites and film, video and sound-editing suites. Students benefit from the specialist expertise of technical support staff who maintain these facilities. The University has succeeded in attracting sponsorship, in the form of equipment loans and free supplies, from several commercial companies. These sponsorships are valuable not only in terms of the resources they have secured but also because they strengthen links with the relevant industries and employers.

46 The institutional audit of the London Institute in 2004 raised concerns about the consistency of admissions procedures across the different colleges and the alignment of these procedures with the relevant section of the *Code of practice*. In response, the University undertook a major redevelopment of admissions in 2006-07, called the 'Admissions programme', comprising the addition of admissions to the Registrar's remit; the appointment of an Admissions Manager in each college; the identification of clearer lines of accountability governing admissions; the establishment of an Admissions Group overseeing activity at University level; the development and dissemination of good practice in interviewing and recording interview decisions; and the implementation of a new set of admissions procedures from 2007-08. In order to determine the effectiveness of these changes, the audit team reviewed evidence including the notes from the Admissions Programme team and the University's new Admissions procedures, and spoke to a number of staff including the Registrar and Director of Admissions. The team's overall impression was that the University's redevelopment of admissions had been successful in achieving its intended aims: to improve consistency, promote fairness and increase efficiency. The team noted in particular the consistency that the new systems brought to admissions across the colleges, the alignment of these systems with the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education* and the efforts that the University was making to incorporate admissions into its staff development activities.

47 The University has recently appointed a Director of Widening Participation and Progression who leads the University's widening participation team. The University has an extensive outreach programme. Each college has a Progression Manager who oversees work with students from local Further Education colleges under the National Arts Learning Network Progression Agreement, which is designed to promote progression into higher education for vocational learners in the performing and visual arts.

48 Under the University's tutorial policy, students are entitled to meet with a member of academic staff individually for 20 minutes on three occasions in the academic year to discuss their academic progress. In addition, students receive written feedback on summative assessment, which may be augmented by a tutorial. The provision of timely feedback has been particularly problematic in one postgraduate course; the University is taking steps to address this particular issue.

49 The University has recently adopted a policy on study support. The role of study support is to enhance the achievement of any student who chooses to take advantage of the associated support on offer. This support includes diagnostic assessment for particular learning needs and ongoing specialist support for academic writing, numeracy and dyslexia. The policy calls for a consistent study support offer across the institution and the promotion of the support available in prospectuses and course handbooks. The senior quality manager in each college is required to monitor the implementation of the new policy and report to the Dean of Students.

50 The University requires all of its courses to include personal development planning either as a discrete unit or embedded within the curricula, as part of its Common Credit Framework. Personal development planning addresses the development of key subject skills as well as wider aspects of personal development and career planning. Undergraduate students whom the team met confirmed that this was the case. A two-year Higher Education Innovation Funded-project is underway to investigate personal development planning across the University, identify the impact of existing programmes and share good practice.

51 Pastoral support for students is provided by a network of central and local services. A student arrival handbook, INTRO, describes the services provided. In addition, the central Student Services team has a website and a site on the virtual learning environment. Student Services also contribute to Pathfinder Week, the University's central induction to all University and Student Union services and social activities.

52 The University's new study-support policy requires personal tutors to identify and refer students who might benefit from further academic support. However, the audit team noted that some of the staff and students whom it met were unclear about the scope of this role: some regarded personal tutors as being responsible for both academic and pastoral support, while others saw the role as limited to academic support, as the new policy implies. The team encourages the University to clarify the role of the personal tutor, particularly in the information it gives to students.

53 Another important vehicle for student support is the Student Hub, which is currently housed within the University's central administration building. The Hub provides a focal point for students from different colleges and a place where they can come together to socialise, study and seek support. However, it is not easily accessible to students at some of the University's outlying colleges.

54 Over 30 per cent of the University's students speak English as their second language. All overseas students are offered a free place on the University's pre-sessional English Language University Preparation Programme. English language support is also offered during the academic year, tailored to the relevant subject area, as well as during vacations using online tutorials through the virtual learning environment. Each college has international tutors who work with course directors to identify international students who may be experiencing language problems and ensure such students have access to appropriate support. However, the team noted that

external examiners in at least two courses had identified students' competence in English language as a source of concern. This is clearly an area which the University will wish to keep under close scrutiny.

55 The University is working towards the accreditation of all salaried academic staff by 2010, through the provision of a postgraduate certificate in learning and teaching by the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design. The audit team saw evidence to indicate that it was on course to achieve this objective. In addition, the University runs a learning and teaching observation scheme, designed to enhance the quality of learning and teaching across the University through constructive advice and the sharing of good practice. It has recently been re-approved as an Investor in People. It has provided training to all managers in the use of a new planning, review and appraisal scheme, which encompasses all staff. Total funding for staff development as a proportion of the University's income is a Human Resources key performance indicator, which is reviewed annually by the University management team and Governors.

56 Some postgraduate students have the opportunity to teach undergraduates. The University expects postgraduates who teach to undergo formal training in learning, teaching and assessment through a two-day training course. However, in some cases, the training occurs after students have begun teaching. Although the audit team was assured that this happened only in a small minority of cases, and that all postgraduates who teach undergo formal training at some stage, it concluded that it is desirable for the University to ensure that postgraduate students are given timely and appropriate training before undertaking teaching within the University.

57 The audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

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

58 Since the 2004 institutional audit of the London Institute, the University has taken action on a number of fronts to raise the profile of quality enhancement. This has led to the creation of a new post of Dean of Learning and Teaching Development; the amalgamation of the units supporting teaching development and learning technologies under the leadership of the new Dean; the consolidation of various posts in the colleges into a single learning and teaching coordinator for each college (and one for the cluster of Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon); the creation in 2004 of the Learning and Teaching subcommittee; and the creation in 2005 of the Quality Enhancement Network, to act as a forum for academic staff at school level and equivalent with responsibility for quality assurance, quality enhancement and learning and teaching, to share ideas and to learn about good practice elsewhere in the University. In addition, the University has modified many of its key quality assurance processes, including external examining, course monitoring and Quality Audit and Review, in order to give greater prominence to quality enhancement.

59 Overlaying these developments is a new Quality Enhancement Framework, which was endorsed by Academic Standards and Development Committee in late 2007. The Framework, '...seeks to provide an institutional framework in which good practice and innovation are encouraged, identified, supported, developed and disseminated'. The Framework defines quality enhancement '...as a process which not only identifies and disseminates good practice but through development and implementation results in improvement'.

60 In order to determine the impact of the University's heightened emphasis on quality enhancement, the audit team looked in detail at the evidence of some of the quality assurance processes which had recently been modified. The team found that the working definition of quality enhancement within these processes tended to differ from that offered by the new Quality Enhancement Framework. For example, many of the college action plans prepared in



response to the new undergraduate student survey were described as 'Enhancement/Action' or 'Enhancement' Plans, yet they were almost wholly concerned with reactive or remedial activity. The team also noted that Heads of Colleges' reports on annual monitoring tended to regard enhancement as the dissemination of good practice, rather than as its systematic development and capture as well. Furthermore, although the Briefing Paper claimed that good practice was disseminated among staff in part through their participation in validation and revalidation events, the team found that these processes tended not to record and share good practice.

61 The audit team acknowledged that much of the evidence noted above predated the approval of the new Quality Enhancement Framework and that it will take time for the University to achieve a common appreciation of the new definition of, and emphasis on, quality enhancement which the Framework has provided. Within this context, the team was encouraged to learn that the Academic Standards and Development Committee had identified annual enhancement themes on behalf of the University in order to focus the work of its various subcommittees and other groups. The team's analysis of the minutes of Academic Standards and Development Committee and other fora revealed a firm steer by the Committee on the selected enhancement themes, accompanied by serious and focused discussions, with appropriate action planning. Given the challenges inherent in moving a large and diverse institution towards a common understanding of quality enhancement, the team regarded the identification of institution-wide enhancement themes as a means of progressing the agenda for quality enhancement as a feature of good practice.

62 The University also promotes quality enhancement in staff development through the activities of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Creative Learning in Practice, and the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design. The Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning offers, among other things, funding to support pedagogic research on personal and professional development and on employability skills. The audit team noted that the 2007 evaluation report on the Centre included several examples of how support from the Centre had led to enhancements in teaching practice. The Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design provides curriculum development secondments, whereby up to eight academic staff spend one day per week for a term working with mentors from the Centre to make enhancements to the courses they support.

63 The University's commitment to enhancing the quality of its students' learning opportunities is evident in a number of activities, many of which have led to demonstrable improvements. Until recently, these activities have tended to be confined to its constituent colleges and the University is now taking steps towards a more coordinated approach through the Quality Enhancement Framework. Notwithstanding its concerns about the confusion around quality enhancement among some staff, which the new framework should help to address, the audit team concluded that the University's approach to the development and implementation of a strategy to enhance quality was appropriate and realistic. The University may now wish to consider how it will measure the effectiveness of its enhancement activities, in order to inform further developments.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

64 At the time of the audit, the University's collaborative provision comprised three links:

- validation of research degrees at another higher education institution in the UK
- validation of a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Dance and a Foundation Degree in Arts at a private college in London
- delivery of part of the University's Master of Arts in European Classical Acting at an institution in Russia.

In addition, students studying units in theatre lighting design at Wimbledon College receive some specialist electrical tuition at a neighbouring further education college.

65 The University produced its first collaborative strategy in 2006-07, responding to a recommendation from the 2004 audit of the London Institute. The strategy expresses the University's desire to build collaborative provision with educational partners nationally and internationally, to enable the University to enhance its reputation and the quality of the curricula, learning, teaching and research, while safeguarding the standards of its awards.

66 The University's procedures for the validation, review, assessment, external examining and marketing of its collaborative provision reflect those for home provision. These procedures are described in a Collaborative Procedures Handbook, which also contains details of how different kinds of collaboration operate. In order to review the operation of these procedures, the audit team looked in detail at the partnership with the private college in London, which demonstrated that the procedures were rigorously implemented.

67 Based on its analysis of the University's strategy and procedures for collaborative provision, and on the evidence of its largest partnership, the audit team concluded that the University's management of the academic standards and quality of its collaborative provision is secure.

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

68 The University's framework for the management of the standards and quality of research degree courses reflects its framework for the management of undergraduate courses. Institutional responsibility rests with the Research Standards and Development Committee, supported by the Research Degrees Subcommittee. Within colleges, a college research committee, chaired by the college research director, maintains an overview of research degrees, supported by a college research degree subcommittee which advises the Head of College on the registration and progression of students and on the appointment of supervisory teams and examiners. Within the London College of Communication the functions of these two committees are performed by a single college research committee.

69 A small number of research students who were studying at the former Wimbledon School of Art before the School's merger with the University continue to be registered for degrees with Wimbledon's previous awarding body. The audit team looked in detail at the quality assurance arrangements for these students and concluded that they were satisfactory.

70 Prospective research students apply to individual colleges, rather than to the University centrally. All applicants are interviewed, normally by the College Research Director, or a deputy, the proposed Director of Studies and the proposed second supervisor. Colleges are responsible for ensuring that the necessary resources and an appropriate supervisory team are available, though the team is formally approved at University-level by the Research Degree Subcommittee when students register. Feedback to applicants on their proposed topic of study is provided either by college research committees or college research degree subcommittees. The audit team considered that the early involvement of staff outside the supervisory team was a positive feature of the application process.

71 Registrations are confirmed through a meeting between the applicant, his or her supervisors and another member of academic staff who is not a member of the supervisory team. A recommendation for the formal confirmation of the registration is then made by the supervisory team to the College Research Committee.

72 The University issues its Research Degrees Handbook and Regulations to new research students at enrolment. Induction, which is not mandatory, is provided in a one-week block run by the 'Research Network University of the Arts London'. Newly enrolled students may also take a five-week course on academic writing and presentation skills.

73 College research committees are responsible for students' progress. In its Briefing Paper the university stated that '...a brief report on each student is received at every committee meeting'. However, the audit team found that this was not the case at all colleges. In the spring term, every student and his or her supervisory team produce an annual report, describing the progress made

during the preceding year including details of attendance at conferences, supervisory arrangements and a Training Needs Analysis.

74 The Research Network University of the Arts London provides a range of training for research students. In their first year of study, research students are expected to attend three one-week blocks of training spread across the academic year. Thereafter, the University expects students to receive a minimum of two weeks' training per year, though such training need not be provided by this Research Network. Directors of Studies are responsible for ensuring that students receive appropriate training, informed by the Training Needs Analysis.

75 The University introduced personal development planning for research students in 2005-06. However, the research students whom the audit team met were not aware of the process. This may indicate a need for further development and promulgation of this facility to supervisory teams.

76 Research students provide feedback to the University through their representation on relevant committees and via the Research Degree Student Survey. The University distributes a summary of research students' feedback annually accompanied by an explanation of how the University has responded. However, the audit team noted that the relationship between the issues raised by students and the University's responses was not always obvious. The team encourages the University to ensure that this relationship is made more explicit.

77 Research students are supervised by a team comprising at least two members of academic staff, one of whom is designated Director of Studies. The frequency and duration of meetings between students and supervisors are determined according to individual students' needs. The University's Code of Practice for supervisors and research students states that 'The normal expectation for full-time students is that at least two formal (i.e. recorded) supervisions must take place each term'. However, data from the 2006-07 Research Degree Student Survey indicated that 57 per cent of research students met their supervisors once per term or less often. The audit team regarded these data as inconsistent with the University's Code of Practice, and therefore concluded that the frequency of supervisory meetings is a matter to which the University needs to pay further attention (see paragraph 81).

78 Formal training for supervisors is provided by the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design. Training for supervisors is not mandatory. The University also has a Supervisors' Forum which meets each term and some colleges have introduced mentoring schemes for new supervisors.

79 College research committees and the Research Degree Subcommittee monitor supervisors' workloads. A review of workloads conducted by the Research Support Office in 2006-07 found that a small number of supervisors were supervising more than six students, although in each of these cases the supervisor was supervising as his or her main teaching duty.

80 Directors of Study are responsible for making nominations for research degree examiners. Nominations are subject to the approval of College Research Degree Subcommittees and the Research Degree Subcommittee. Criteria for the appointment of external examiners are given in the Research Degrees Handbook and Regulations, which also describes procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals.

81 In 2006 the University's arrangements for managing research degree programmes were considered by QAA's Review of postgraduate research degree programmes against the precepts in *Section 1* of the *Code of practice*. The review team found that, overall, the University's management of the quality and standards of its research degree provision was appropriate and satisfactory. These findings were broadly echoed by the present audit team. However, the team identified several examples where the practice of research degree provision seemed to be inconsistent with the University's stated policies and procedures and with elements of the *Code*. The team therefore concluded that it is advisable for the University to review the alignment of its

policies and procedures relating to postgraduate research students with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, paying particular attention to the frequency of contact between students and their supervisors and to the provision of training for supervisors.

### **Section 7: Published information**

82 According to the Briefing Paper, 'The University strives to ensure that information it publishes about its educational provision and the academic standards that it supports is accurate and complete'. In furtherance of this aim, the University has created a single management information system called QL. The University website, course handbooks and other forms of published information are based on information held in this system. New information is not uploaded into QL until it has been verified by Academic Affairs and approved by the Validations Subcommittee.

83 Course handbooks represent a vital source of information for students about their courses. Academic Affairs issues detailed guidance to course teams about the information which these handbooks should contain. However, the audit team found that some handbooks did not contain all the information specified by the University. In particular, some handbooks did not describe arrangements for work placements where placements were an integral part of the course; while some others did not include the full course specification. The team therefore concluded that it would be desirable for the University to ensure consistency across all colleges in the application of its policy for the development of course handbooks, paying particular attention to information about placement learning.

### **Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations**

84 Features of good practice identified by the audit team:

- the University's management of the merger with Wimbledon School of Art
- the University's iterative approach to the process of validation
- the identification of institution-wide enhancement themes as a means of progressing the agenda for quality enhancement.

85 Recommendations for action by the University that the audit team considers advisable:

- to implement all elements of its Assessment Policy to enable it to meet its stated strategic objective of working towards the comparability of the student experience in assessment across its constituent colleges
- to review the alignment of its policies and procedures relating to postgraduate research students with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, paying particular attention to the frequency of contact between students and their supervisors and to the provision of training for supervisors.

86 Recommendations for action by the University that the audit team considers desirable:

- to ensure that postgraduate students are given timely and appropriate training before undertaking teaching within the University
- to ensure consistency across all colleges in the application of its policy for the development of course handbooks, paying particular attention to information about placement learning.

## Appendix

### **The University of the Arts London's response to the institutional audit report**

The University welcomes the findings of the institutional audit team and is pleased to receive confirmation of the strength of systems in place for the maintenance of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities provided to students. The recommendations and detailed comments in the report have been combined with the lessons learnt from the University's own self assessment carried out as part of the preparations for institutional audit and an overall plan of action to address issues of concern is well under way as this report is published. In this plan particular attention is being given to the research student experience; assessment; student support and engagement and the continuing evolution of the University's approach to quality enhancement. The University is particularly pleased that the auditors acknowledged the value of the use of quality enhancement themes through a commendation in this report; we will build on this feature to maintain a balance between quality assurance and quality enhancement in a way that delivers improvements to the student experience.



