

University of the Arts London

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Annex to the report

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Section 1: Introduction and background

The University and its vision

1 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 University title. The Wimbledon School of Art merged with the University in 2006.

2 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.

3 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 which 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.

4 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'.

The information base for the audit

5 The audit team had access to the reports of the following QAA reviews: the Institutional audit of the Wimbledon School of Art, May 2004; the Institutional audit of the London Institute, April 2004; and the Review of research degree programmes for the University of the Arts London, July 2006.

6 The University provided the audit team with a briefing paper outlining its approach to managing quality and standards, supporting information as cited in the Briefing Paper, and sets of documents relating to the sampling audit trails selected by the team.

7 The University's Students' Union produced a written submission (the student written submission) covering the accuracy of the information provided for students, the experience of students as learners, and students' involvement in quality assurance processes.

8 The audit team was given full access to the University's internal documents on the intranet. It met groups of staff and students, according to a programme agreed with the University.

Developments since the last audit

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; and established a new strategy for collaborative provision. Each of these developments is discussed within the relevant section of this annex below.

11 In response to the fourth advisable recommendation on appeals and extenuating circumstances, the University carried out an appeals review in 2004-05, which led to changes to the structure for appeals, complaints and extenuating circumstances. The University introduced further changes in 2005-06, which included the creation of a complaints and appeals network and the strengthening of guidance and support for exam boards.

12 In response to the second desirable recommendation on the Institute's strategy for internal and external communications, the University Management Team approved a new communications strategy in 2007 and created a communications strategy group to monitor its implementation.

13 The audit team concluded that the University had responded appropriately to the recommendations of the 2004 audit of the London Institute.

14 In 2004, QAA also carried out an institutional audit of the Wimbledon School of Art, two years before it merged with the University. This 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.

15 The audit team noted that the recommendations of the previous audit at Wimbledon had mainly been addressed de facto 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.

The institution's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

Committee structure

16 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 Academic Board maintains oversight of academic standards mainly by receiving regular reports from its standing committees. It also receives reports on student achievement and retention, which include comparisons with national data, and an annual report on the findings of the University's student satisfaction survey and the National Student Survey.

17 The key University committees with responsibilities for the management of the academic standards of taught courses are the Academic Standards and Development Committee and its Validations Subcommittee. The Academic Standards and Development Committee is responsible for the validation and review of courses (through delegation to the Validations Subcommittee), oversight of the course monitoring system, the appointment of external examiners and for advising the Academic Board on all matters concerned with academic standards. In addition, the Committee acts as the forum for the discussion of developments in quality assurance. The Validations Subcommittee has delegated authority to give development approval to detailed course proposals, to approve course titles for new courses and changes to existing course titles, and to give final approval to the validation and revalidation of individual courses.

18 The Academic Standards and Development Committee has two other subgroups concerned with higher education provision:

- the Learning and Teaching Subcommittee, which provides a forum for detailed debate on learning and teaching in the University and advises the Academic Standards and Development Committee on the development of policies and procedures on learning and teaching
- the Higher Education Quality Coordinators Group, which has a remit to advise on academic development and quality issues and coordinate the University's quality activities that apply to higher education.

19 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.

20 The Academic Planning Committee is the main forum for discussion about the future academic developments within the University. Each college is responsible for maintaining a three-year rolling plan, which the Academic Planning Committee reviews annually in summer term.

Management structure

21 The University's senior management team is known as the University Management Team. It comprises the Rector (the University's chief executive officer), Deputy Rector, three Pro Rectors, four Heads of College (including the Head of the three-college cluster) and the Director of International Development. Members of University Management Team chair the Academic Board's standing committees, thus providing what the Briefing Paper described as a constructive alignment of the executive with the academic committee structure.

22 The senior manager with responsibility for standards is the Pro Rector Academic Development and Quality. 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 which 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 processes and advises on their development and enhancement.

23 At college level, the Head of College is responsible for academic and resource management and chairs the senior management team (called the College Executive within the three-college cluster) and the College Academic Committee. Colleges' senior management teams comprise the Head of College, the College Administrator, the Deans and other senior managers as appropriate. Deans lead schools, which are organised around broad subject areas, and are responsible to the Head of College for academic leadership and resource management. There are also deans or heads with cross-college responsibilities for academic standards and quality, known as the Dean of Academic Development and Quality at London College of Communication and London College of Fashion, the Dean of Academic Development within the three-college cluster and the Head of Academic Services at Central Saint Martins College. These staff meet monthly with the Pro Rector Academic Development and Quality, the Director of Academic Affairs and Planning and other central services managers in the Higher Education Quality Coordinators Group. Notable examples of ideas and proposals that this group had debated and helped to develop prior to discussion at other University committees included a standardised policy on the accreditation of prior experiential learning and changes to annual course monitoring. The team concurred with the University's view of the Higher Education Quality Coordinators Group as an important and effective forum for debate on such matters.

24 Individual courses are managed by course directors, which are permanent positions. Course directors manage the course teaching team and have budgetary responsibilities for staff and consumables. All courses have course committees, chaired by the course director, which meet once a term and comprise staff and student representatives. Course committees report to the School Board of Studies, which, in turn, report to College academic committees. To encourage lateral communication among peers in separate colleges, the University has established the Deans' Group, which meets six times a year, and the Course Directors' Forum, which takes place once per term.

25 The audit team noted that the University had identified a shortage of administrative support for course directors as an area of possible weakness in some schools. In response, the Pro Rector Academic Development and Quality has made a number of recommendations to the University Management Team, including a review of the course director's role and administrative support; the exploration of the possibility of paying graduate students to undertake administrative duties; simplifying some quality assurance processes; creating a mentoring scheme for new course directors; and developing a course director professional development programme. These recommendations were still under discussion at the time of the audit visit.

Effectiveness of the framework

26 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities was effective in enabling colleges to maintain ownership of quality assurance in respect of their own courses, while also providing the University's central committees, including its most senior academic committee, the Academic Board, with the information that they require to manage standards and quality effectively across the institution.

Merger with the Wimbledon School of Art

27 The Wimbledon School of Art merged with the University in August 2006. 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 process 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 number of documents related to the merger, including the University Mergers Protocol, minutes of the merger project team and the merger operations group, the merger business plan and a series of reports on the progress of the merger to the University management team. The team also discussed the process with several staff and students from what is now the Wimbledon College of Art.

28 The audit team learnt that the University Merger Protocol provided the framework for the merger, including discussions with Wimbledon's awarding body about transitional arrangements for students who were part-way through their studies. These discussions led to an agreement that all existing students would finish their courses according to the outgoing awarding body's academic regulations and quality assurance arrangements. For new students, a special University working party revalidated all courses at Wimbledon using an adapted validation process in time for the beginning of the 2006-07 academic year.

29 Based on its analysis of the evidence, the audit team's overall impression of the merger was that it 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 business plan; and the sophistication of the progress reports which the merger team provided to the University management team. Notwithstanding a few minor problems about access to the University's information technology systems among students on courses validated by the outgoing 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

30 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.

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

Validation

31 The University's current procedures for validating new courses have been in place since 2005, replacing a system based on day-long validation panels managed by the University's central administration. Under the new system, all new course developments go through three distinct phases: planning, proposal and validation. Colleges are responsible for planning new courses and for putting new course proposals forward to the Academic Planning Committee within their three-year rolling plans. The Academic Planning Committee gives outline approval for new courses. Course teams then develop a detailed proposal to present to Validations Subcommittee on a standard form. The Validations Subcommittee considers the proposal according to its alignment with the University's mission, evidence of demand and resource requirements. If the proposal satisfies these criteria, the Subcommittee approves the course for detailed development, prompting the course team to begin a validation log. At this stage, the University appoints external assessors and internal advisors to assist the course development team. Internal advisors are drawn from a separate college and chosen from a list held on Academic Affairs' intranet pages. External assessors are experts in the subject from outside the

University and also, where appropriate, from outside the higher education sector. Academic Affairs sets criteria for the appointment of external assessors, and their curricula vitae are part of the documentation sent to the Validations Subcommittee at the final approval stage.

32 The course development team is required to hold two formal meetings. A Stage 1 meeting, which is chaired by the Dean of School or College Dean, is held when the outline structure of the course has been agreed and the team has written the course aims and outcomes, but not the full unit descriptions. Documentation for this meeting includes the course structure, outline curriculum and the background paperwork which went to Validation Subcommittee at the previous stage. Following further development, a Stage 2 meeting occurs, chaired by the Head, Dean or senior academic from a separate college. This meeting reviews the course handbook, programme specification and validation papers. The External assessor normally attends both Stage 1 and Stage 2 meetings. The Academic Affairs Handbook contains a list of what should be included in the handbook, including the aims and outcomes of the course, its structure and curriculum, assessment strategy, teaching and learning methods, unit descriptors, regulations and policies, admission policy and programme specifications.

33 After the Stage 2 meeting, the Head of College makes a recommendation to the Validations Subcommittee for final approval. This subcommittee receives the validation log, the programme specifications and the notes of Stage 1 and Stage 2 meetings. It considers the Head of College's recommendation, checks that the validation has followed the University protocol, and confirms that the external assessor's advice has been taken into consideration. It may ask for further information or approve the new course with conditions, the fulfilment of which must be reported back to the Committee.

34 The Academic Affairs Handbook sets out additional quality assurance guidelines for new courses which are intended to be delivered online. The audit team saw one example of where these guidelines had been applied to the validation of a postgraduate taught course, and confirmed that they had been applied rigorously.

35 According to the Briefing Paper, the University's current validation process 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 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.

Annual course monitoring

36 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 report is in three parts: a brief evaluative report including the director's view of the course's strengths and weaknesses; a development plan listing issues by theme (such as student support or learning resources) and actions to address these issues; and a response to issues raised by external examiners. The reports are submitted to the course committee, the Dean of School and Academic Affairs, along with data about student progression and achievement. The reports are read by a readers group which also has access to all the evidence on which the report is based. The readers group sends a written report to the Board of Studies, which may refine the report at a meeting in the autumn term. A representative from Academic Affairs normally attends these meetings. The Dean then produces a summary report for the College Academic Committee, which includes 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. This report may include issues raised by Deans' reports.

37 The audit team saw several examples of course monitoring reports, which demonstrated that the process had been conducted according to the University's requirements set out above. However, the team did have some concerns about the inconsistent use of management information within course monitoring. This is discussed in more detail below.

Course review and revalidation

38 Course review and revalidation is a two-part process: review, which all courses must undergo every four to six years, followed by revalidation for some courses. The timetable for course review is set by colleges. Course reviews may take place four, five or six years after validation or review according to the other demands on the school or portfolio. However, no course may run for more than six years without a review. 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.

39 Regardless of which of the two routes is taken, the process begins with the preparation by the course team of a self-evaluation. The University then holds a review meeting led by a panel comprising a chair from the panel of validation chairs, two external assessors, one college representative, one representative from another college and one or two graduates from the course. If the course is undergoing revalidation, this meeting is regarded as the Stage 1 meeting and the process continues thereafter according to the validation process described above. If the course is undergoing review only, the review panel may recommend changes to the course handbook, which the course team incorporates and then submits to Academic Affairs, which then checks the alignment of the revised handbook with the University's requirements and advises the Head of College whether or not the review should be approved. The Head of College then puts the review report to College Academic Committee for approval and Validations Subcommittee is notified of the outcome.

40 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.

Quality audit and review

41 In addition to Course review and revalidation, the University reviews schools and colleges periodically '...to support schools in their management of quality and standards by exposing the plans and outcomes of teaching and research to periodic peer review'. This process is called Quality Audit and Review. It takes place in two stages: an audit conducted by Academic Affairs, which prepares and considers standard sets of data and checks compliance against University and national policy; 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 industry) and a student sabbatical officer. The evidence base for the review includes the audit report prepared in stage one, the school's self-assessment and a student written evaluation. The review may include an enhancement theme or themes chosen by the school, although this is not mandatory. After the visit the panel is asked to comment on each statement in the self-assessment and may make recommendations for remedial action and commend any practice they regard as worthy of wider dissemination by the University. The review report is received by the Academic Standards and Development Committee along with a response from the Dean of School.

42 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.

External examiners

43 The Briefing Paper stated that external examiners play a crucial role in the University's framework for the management of academic standards. The operation of the external examiner system is scrutinised annually by the Academic Standards and Development Committee, which has also recently mapped its assessment policy against the revised *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*.

44 The roles and responsibilities of external examiners are described in the University's External Examiners' Handbook. 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 examiner 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.

45 The University undertook a major review of the purpose and operation of external examining following QAA's audit of the London Institute in 2004. This has resulted in a more focused system with more extensive advice and guidance. Academic Affairs has produced a briefing pack to assist college staff in briefing external examiners, and externals who may lack experience of examining are mentored by an existing examiner on the course in question or a similar course for the first year of their appointment. The University has formalised this scheme within a set of guidelines that outline the responsibilities of the mentor together with criteria for their selection and appointment. Academic Affairs reads all reports and serious issues raised by external examiners that might need urgent action are brought to the notice of the Pro Rector Academic Development and Quality, who may write to the Dean to ask for an early response ahead of course monitoring. In addition, colleges produce a summary of points raised by externals and any issues that may need to be considered at University level are discussed at the Higher Education Quality Coordinators Group and brought to the attention of the Academic Standards and Development Committee if appropriate.

46 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.

47 Based on its analysis of evidence at the audit visit, the audit team concluded that the University's external examiner system is thorough and effective.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points - standards

48 According to the Briefing Paper, 'University staff make wide use of external reference points in the development and continued maintenance of academic standards', including '...all aspects of the QAA Academic Infrastructure'. The audit team found evidence to substantiate this statement throughout the University's procedures for course validation, monitoring, review and Quality Audit and Review. The validation and revalidation form, which course teams prepare for submission to the Validations Subcommittee, explicitly asks for a description of the fit between the proposed provision with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and subject benchmark statements. The guidelines for reader groups who scrutinise annual course monitoring reports on behalf of boards of studies stipulate that the readers should consider whether the learning outcomes are '...consonant with external reference points including relevant subject benchmarks statements, the qualifications framework and any professional requirements'. The audit strand of Quality Audit and Review pays close attention to the alignment of schools' provision with the Academic Infrastructure.

49 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.

50 The University is in the early stages of considering and responding to the European Standards and Guidelines. The audit team saw evidence that the University had received a briefing on the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* more generally at a joint meeting of the Quality Administrators Network and the Quality Enhancement Network in December 2007. However, it had made no further progress in this area by the time of the present audit.

Assessment policies and regulations

51 The University has an Assessment Policy which describes the overall purpose of assessment and explains the mandatory requirements of assessment for higher education. The Assessment Policy is accompanied by guidance on implementation which sets out the responsibilities of course teams and other staff. All courses operate under the University's academic regulations. These regulations govern the constitution of boards of examiners, progression and final award and classification.

52 The Academic Standards and Development Committee introduced the current Assessment Policy following a review of assessment against the revised *Code of practice*. The policy 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.

53 The Academic Standards and Development Committee maintains oversight of assessment across the University and also undertakes detailed scrutiny of proposed new developments such as the creation of new awards, changes to assessment regulations or policy and the appointment of all external examiners. In maintaining its overview of assessment, the Committee seeks to balance the need for consistency in aspects of assessment practice with a desire to ensure staff running courses have sufficient control and ownership over assessment to ensure it remains a vehicle for learning as well as a means of measuring achievement. The University is currently considering, through the work of Academic Affairs and the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design, how best to support academic staff in their approach to assessment both in terms of the application of University policy and in sharing approaches to aspects of assessment across the University. A working party set up by the Academic Standards and Development Committee has recently proposed a range of changes to assessment and these are under consideration by the Committee; another working party is currently looking at a range of regulatory matters such as compensation schemes and aspects of retrieval.

54 The audit team saw much evidence of activity at University level regarding the enhancement of assessment policy and the development of strategies for ensuring that the new assessment policy was implemented consistently across the constituent colleges. However, it was clear from the evidence provided in student feedback, reports from deans and quality audit 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.

Management information - statistics

55 The University holds data on student applications, progression and achievement on a central database. The University's Central Registry uses the data to compile detailed overview reports on completions and student retention for the Academic Standards and Development Committee, 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, using publicly available data produced by HESA wherever possible. The Central Registry makes these reports available to colleges and they are discussed at College academic committees. The 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 Academic Board, Academic Standards and Development Committee and the Widening Participation Subcommittee, which revealed full discussions of the data along with appropriate action planning where the data indicated a need for the University to respond.

56 The Central Registry also collects data on the first destinations of the University's graduates and distributes these to heads of college and deans. The Head of Creative Careers prepares an overview report on these data and submits it to the Academic Standards and Development Committee. The report compares individual colleges' performance and the University's performance with several comparator institutions and with the wider domestic higher education sector.

57 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 were used systematically to inform course developments; in others some data were not considered, particularly data on first destinations. The team also noted that one college

had recently indicated to the University that the data supplied for use in annual monitoring was not detailed enough to fulfil its purpose. The team encourages the University to improve the consistency with which management information is used in annual course monitoring.

Conclusion

58 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

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points - quality of learning opportunities

59 Overall responsibility for monitoring the University's alignment with the *Code of practice* rests with the Academic Standards and Development Committee. The Committee has established a process for considering revisions to the *Code* whereby a senior manager is given the responsibility of analysing the revised section and the relevant committee charged with discussing and deciding on the implications for the University's processes and procedures before reporting back to the Academic Standards and Development Committee. The audit team saw that the *Code* was indeed reflected in the University's key policies and procedures, for example, in its revised policies on assessment and admissions.

60 The University encourages academic staff to maintain their professional practice and a high proportion of 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 and engagement with employers is a salient feature of the University's quality assurance processes, for example in the membership of validation panels. The Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design monitors the extent of employer engagement and publishes examples of effective practice. In addition, the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Creative Learning in Practice is investigating how work-based learning can enhance employability skills.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

61 The University's procedures for course validation, course monitoring, course review and revalidation and the Quality Audit and Review, described in section two of this annex, each expects course teams, and independent assessors where appropriate, to consider the availability of appropriate learning opportunities for students to help them achieve the intended learning outcomes, alongside the consideration of academic standards. Validation, as discussed in section two, is particularly geared to the consideration of learning opportunities in a developmental and iterative way. According to the Briefing Paper, Validation has a focus on '...the planned student experience in areas such as realistic workloads, the balance between the depth and breadth of the curriculum, or practical arrangements for work based learning'. The papers that course teams are required to submit for validation alongside the course handbook 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 of the validation process, which the audit team confirmed by reading a number of recent course validation proposals, contributed to its identification of the University's approach to validation as a feature of good practice.

62 According to the Briefing Paper, the University regards the annual monitoring process as the most important component of its framework for assuring the quality of students' learning opportunities and for enhancement. The outcome of course monitoring is the annual course

monitoring report, which includes the development plan. The plan is informed by student feedback, discussions at course committee (which comprises staff and student representatives) and through the comments raised by readers groups' reports. The guidelines for readers groups include specific areas and questions to consider, including the effectiveness of learning, teaching and assessment, student support and guidance, learning resources and quality management and enhancement.

63 Course review and revalidation looks at the experience of the course and allows the review panel to examine practice in learning and teaching and identify the views of students and graduates. Quality Audit and Review supports the development of overall management and quality. The process is enhancement focused and supports schools in the benchmarking of their provision against both internal and external reference points. In addition, the Briefing Paper stated that the participation of staff across the University in the process enables those staff to learn about good practice. Good practice arising out of annual course monitoring forms part of the Deans' reports and the head of college reports and is included in the Academic Standards and Development Committee's annual quality assurance report to the Academic Board.

Management information - feedback from students

64 According to the University's Guidelines for Good Practice on Student Feedback, which forms chapter 12 of the Academic Affairs Handbook, the University is '...committed to using student feedback as one of the means of evaluating and enhancing the quality of the student teaching and learning experience'.

65 In 2006, the University launched a new single survey of students' views, bringing together a number of separate feedback mechanisms. The new survey employs the same questions as the National Student Survey. The University explained to the audit team that, unlike the National Student Survey, the survey is distributed to all students and is therefore capable of detecting temporal changes in feedback from each cohort of students.

66 Colleges produce overview reports of the new survey, and present these to the Academic Standards and Development Committee. Academic Affairs prepares an overview report for the whole University, which it presents to the Academic Board, Academic Standards and Development Committee, Student Life Committee, Learning and Teaching Subcommittee and the Higher Education Quality Coordinators' Group. Academic Affairs appends an 'enhancement/action plan' to the University overview, which describes the responses made to the survey results at college level, identifying staff responsible for taking forward any remedial activity and the timescale within which this will take place.

67 In the Briefing Paper, the University reported that '...the availability of such comprehensive and high quality data which is directly comparable to the National Student Survey is a valuable feature of the feedback process which enables benchmarking across courses, schools and colleges'. Nevertheless, the University recognised, in part through feedback from the colleges, that the data from the new survey were not as detailed as those from its predecessors. In response, the University had decided to pilot a unit evaluation survey at the London College of Fashion and Wimbledon College of Art. The University was evaluating this pilot at the time of the audit.

68 Course directors use data from the new survey to inform the annual monitoring process. Furthermore, the audit team saw evidence that these data were considered by heads of colleges in their annual reports on course monitoring to the Academic Standards and Development Committee.

69 The audit team saw several examples of the University's responsiveness to data from the new survey. For example, the University overview report for 2007 noted high levels of satisfaction at Wimbledon College of Art and significant improvements since 2006 at Chelsea College of Art and Design. In response, the Academic Standards and Development Committee asked these colleges to develop case-studies on their strategies for improvement. The case-studies were subsequently distributed to the other colleges in order to share good practice.

70 For students on postgraduate taught courses, the University runs a postgraduate student survey using the same questions as the new undergraduate survey. Again Academic Affairs prepares a University-wide report on the data, which it submits to the Academic Standards and Development Committee.

71 The National Student Survey results are considered by the University Management Team, Academic Board, Academic Standards and Development Committee and the Learning and Teaching Subcommittee. The University reported in its Briefing Paper that the 2005 National Student Survey data indicated some dissatisfaction among its students in comparison with the sector in general. In part to address this, the University commissioned an internal 'student experience report' which led to the creation of the post of Dean of Students and the Student Life Committee. The internal report concluded that '...there is undoubtedly a need for a far more systematic, University wide approach to ensure the quality and consistency of the student experience'. The Briefing Paper also reported that student dissatisfaction was evident in the 2007 National Student Survey. The Academic Standards and Development Committee has responded by asking colleges to identify courses with relatively high and low levels of satisfaction, in order that potential good practice can be disseminated from one group to the other. This process was underway at the time of the audit.

72 In addition, Academic Affairs produces an annual 'Report on the NSS and University Internal Surveys', which it submits to the Academic Board, Academic Standards and Development Committee, Student Life Committee and the Higher Education Quality Coordinators' Group. The report includes initiatives that address perceived problems arising from the results of the surveys, which may be subsequently endorsed by the Academic Standards and Development Committee. For example, following consideration of the 2007 report, the Committee asked colleges to identify and scrutinise those courses with a low score in any of the sections of the surveys and to report back on the action they had taken.

73 The audit team concluded that the University was using the feedback it collected from students in an appropriate way to secure the quality of learning opportunities. The University has adopted a reflective approach to the manner in which data are collected and takes appropriate and timely steps to address any shortcomings that the data expose.

Role of students in quality assurance

74 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. Similar committees exist at college level. 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.

75 All students have the opportunity to give feedback on the quality of their learning experience at course level and this feedback is reported, evaluated and responded to through the normal processes of annual monitoring. At present, the University does not routinely gather evaluative feedback from students at the level of the course unit, though the University is currently piloting unit evaluation systems on some courses. The University's Quality Audit and Review now includes a sabbatical officer of the Students' Union as a full member of the review panel. Students whom the audit team met regarded this as a positive development. The University, through the role of the Dean of Students, is currently reviewing all aspects of

student involvement, particularly that which enhances student feedback. Training for student representatives has been re-designed recently and the University is continuing to examine ways of improving communication between student representatives, and between student representatives and the University. A new focus group for black and minority ethnic students has also been established recently.

76 In 2006, the University launched a new, single survey of students' views, which is described in the previous section. The results of this survey have reflected data from the National Student Survey, indicating relatively low levels of student satisfaction across a number of areas such as course organisation and management, access to specialist facilities and some aspects of assessment.

77 The University has a collaborative procedures handbook, which includes a requirement that independent student feedback is collected for each course. The University provides a mechanism for formal feedback from both taught postgraduate and research students at the end of each academic year, organised by the Research Support office. Comments from each annual feedback survey are reported back to the students, along with the University's response, in the following academic year.

78 The audit team concluded that the University's management of student representation enables it to identify students' views accurately and systematically. The team saw evidence that matters raised by students through course evaluation, 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.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

79 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.

80 The University seeks to discharge this commitment through a number of activities. At validation and annual monitoring, the University expects to see evidence that the curricula are informed by the research interests of staff. The University also encourages staff who are active in research to become involved in validations, either within their own school or by adding their name to the list of available validation chairs and advisers.

81 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. The Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Creative Learning in Practice also offers staff the opportunity to undertake periods of industrial placement or engage in research into the pedagogy of practice with a view to benefiting student learning and improving courses. The Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design provides professional development and support to staff in pedagogic research. The Strategy for Student Learning 2006-2010 includes the strategic objectives of establishing a pedagogic research group and holding regular learning and teaching conferences and events, both internally and internationally.

Other modes of study

82 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 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. The University recognises the

special nature of online learning and this has led to the development of 'Quality Assurance Guidelines for Courses Delivered Online'.

83 The University has recently approved an eLearning Strategy which sets out a range of objectives structured around the strands identified in the HEFCE eLearning Strategy published in 2005. The University's strategy identifies the various staff, task groups and committees responsible for the development and implementation of the Strategy. A key objective of the Strategy is to '...ensure that [the VLE] is fully embedded in the curriculum and used effectively to support student learning'. The objectives of the eLearning Strategy are also embedded in the University's Strategy for Student Learning, which states that eLearning is considered 'an area of strength' and anticipates a 'continuing focus on blended learning'. The University has also developed a policy on virtual learning environment activation, which sets out the key information included as part of the minimum site requirements for all courses across the University.

84 The development of the virtual learning environment and other eLearning initiatives are managed by the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design, which is led by the Dean of Learning and Teaching Development. 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. The Centre has also developed a training course for staff seeking to make more use of the virtual learning environment. The audit team did, however, see 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 that this may expose.

85 The team also noted from evidence of the course validation process that the University was giving careful consideration to the special characteristics and requirements of flexible and distributed learning. This confirmed that the University's 'Quality Assurance Guidelines for Courses Delivered Online' were being implemented effectively.

Resources for learning

86 The University provides learning resources through a combination of University and college-level services, library, open-access information technology and reprographic services are located within each of the colleges alongside workshop, studio and other specialist facilities. Some of these are managed directly by the colleges while others are managed centrally, by the library and learning resources. Students' resource needs are identified through a range of mechanisms at course, school, college and University levels and the effectiveness of learning resources is monitored through the University's quality assurance processes. The library and learning resources has identified a range of comparator institutions for benchmarking. It engages with academic staff through a variety of means, including by attending various college and University committees and through involvement in course validation, monitoring and review procedures. The library and learning resources' policies and strategies are closely aligned with those of the University and they are formally approved at the relevant University committees before implementation to ensure their relevance and institutional fit. Library and Learning Resources is proactive in seeking student feedback through focus groups, college fora and the use of printed and online questionnaires.

87 Staff and students have access to a wide range of learning materials, including extensive collections of books, journals, audiovisual and electronic resources plus a diverse range of special collections. Each of the University's libraries specialises in the subjects taught and researched in the host college. The combined collections represent an internationally-renowned resource in the fields of arts, design and communication. Qualified librarians with responsibility for designated subject areas and courses collaborate with course teams to ensure appropriate learning materials and facilities are in place to support projects, assignments and independent study, and the service

is generally well integrated into the course-planning process through their membership of course committees. Information about the services provided by the library and learning resources is also embedded in the University's virtual learning environment and within the University's intranet and internet sites. The library and learning resources also provide information-skills sessions, library guides and individual support at the point of need to assist students and staff in navigating its collections and facilities. In 2007, the library and learning resources was subject to a quality audit and review as part of the University's Central Service Review Programme. The review concluded that it provided high-quality services and that its aims and objectives were closely and effectively aligned with those of the University.

88 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 the 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.

89 The University has a major concentration of specialist resources distributed across its constituent colleges. These include laboratories, production units, foundries, specialist workshops, printmaking suites and film, video and sound-editing suites. These facilities support both traditional and new technologies and the ranges of equipment, studios, workshops and technician support are often used by external individuals and bodies, including from industry. Students benefit from the specialist expertise of technical support staff who work closely with academic staff in the day-to-day support of students. The maintenance and enhancement of major technical equipment is managed and resourced within each college and school, according to devolved budgets. 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.

90 The University has established a learning zone in the Student Hub (which is described below). The Learning Zone provides a flexible space for social and activity-based learning equipped with a wide range of facilities, and it is open to all students seven days a week. While the Learning Zone is currently located in central London, which may not be easily accessible for students in some of the University's outlying colleges, the University plans to create other learning zones in line with its estates strategy.

91 The University has a comprehensive information technology network that links together all the college sites and provides links to the internet and JANET via the London Metropolitan Area Network. Specialist information technology resources related to subject specialisms are available in the colleges. The Information Strategy Group ensures that the constant investment required in this area is used to further the mission and values of the University. This group also considers long term plans for investment and organisation of information technology in support of students' learning and staff research and for the general management and support services in the University. The Information Strategy is approved and funded by the University management team.

92 The University's Estate Strategy has the overarching aim of consolidating each college on a single site. The University has made significant progress in this area over recent years with both Chelsea College of Art and London College of Communication now operating on single sites. Plans are in place for a new building at Kings Cross for Central St Martins College and proposals for single-site operations are emerging for the other colleges too.

Admissions policy

93 The University's admissions procedures reflect its overarching strategy to maintain the separate identities of its constituent colleges. Thus prospective students apply to individual colleges rather than to the University centrally. Each college produces its own prospectus. Some colleges compete with one another for students in the same subject area.

94 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*. This led to an advisable recommendation for the Institute '...to strengthen its mechanisms for ensuring the consistency of operation of procedures such as admissions, tutorial support and assessment, where variation in practice has the potential to undermine the Institute's policies for safeguarding equality and fairness of the student experience'.

95 In response, the University undertook a major redevelopment of admissions in 2006-07, called the 'Admissions programme'. The programme involved a comprehensive analysis of the admissions process from marketing to enrolment, leading to a number of changes in policy designed in the main to bring greater consistency to applicants' experience, ensure fairness and increase efficiency. More specifically, the Admissions programme led to 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 creation of a new set of admissions procedures, which were implemented from 2007-08.

96 In order to determine the effectiveness of these changes, the audit team reviewed evidence including the notes from the Admissions Programme team, which informed the preparation of its final report, the University's new Admissions procedures, and spoke to a number of staff about the issue, 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 which 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.

97 The University has recently appointed a Director of Widening Participation and Progression who leads the University's widening participation team. The central team works closely with staff in colleges. The University has an extensive outreach programme and 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. The University hosts the secretariat of the National Arts Learning Network and the University's Director of Widening Participation and Progression is also a Director of that Network.

Student support

98 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.

99 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 responsible for monitoring the implementation of the new policy and reporting to the Dean of Students.

100 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.

101 Pastoral support for students is provided by a network of central and local services encompassing welfare, finance, immigration, housing, disability, health, counselling and careers advice. A student arrival handbook, INTRO, which is distributed to all new students prior to their arrival, describes the services on offer. 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, which draws together, and adds to, a range of activities which were previously based in colleges. Careers advice is devolved to College Employability Advisers. They are involved in curriculum planning and deliver workshops on career management skills through the personal development planning in colleges. Student counsellors work centrally and at college sites.

102 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 many 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.

103 Another important vehicle for student support is the Student Hub, which is currently housed within the University's central administration building. The Hub is practically and symbolically important; it 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. The student written submission commented that 'It is crucial that the Student Hub concept is continued as a priority alongside the individual college spaces in any future University Estates Strategy, and that this development is driven by student views'.

104 The University has stipulated that each college should designate a proportion of the academic timetable as non-teaching time, to facilitate students' participation in sport and other non-curricular activities. However, the student written submission commented that this policy was not applied consistently across the University.

105 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, which runs for between four and 12 weeks. English language support is also offered during the academic year, tailored to the relevant subject area, as well as in the Christmas and Easter vacations using online tutorials and support provided through the virtual learning environment. In addition, the University offers language courses in the evening, including the Foreign Languages at Work which leads to an internationally recognised London Chamber of Commerce and Industry qualification. 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.

106 Based on its analysis of the University's Language Support overview report, and meetings with students, the audit team's overall impression of the University's support for students who speak English as a second language was that it was comprehensive and effective. However, the team also 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.

Staff support (including staff development)

107 The University's approach to staff support and development is informed by its Human Resources strategy. All new staff, including academic staff, undergo 12 months' probation, during which they are expected to follow a comprehensive induction programme. All staff are employed within a common grading structure and work to a common planning, review and appraisal system. According to the Briefing Paper, 'The University has a strong commitment to the professional standing of its staff both as researchers and practitioners in their subjects and as teachers'. All teaching staff are expected to obtain the Postgraduate certificate in Learning and Teaching managed by the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design and are supported in this through funding and some remission from teaching or other duties. Technical support staff are also encouraged to undertake this course. The University aims to have all salaried academic staff accredited through this course by 2010 and the audit team learnt that the institution had made significant progress towards achieving this objective.

108 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 'Developing Academic Practice' offered by the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design. 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.

109 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. The University has recently been re-approved as an Investor in People. It has provided training to all managers in the use of the new planning, review and appraisal scheme.

110 The Staff and Career Development Forum, chaired by the Pro Rector Academic Development and Quality, is responsible for agreeing the University's staff development objectives, receiving and monitoring staff development plans from each college and Pro Rectorate and for sharing information and best practice.

111 The University supports staff development needs in two ways:

- the Staff Development Operating Plan, which is endorsed annually by the University management team and the Governors' Personnel Committee, provides support for central service providers (in particular the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design), the development and training provided by Human Resources, Academic Affairs, Research Support training, and information technology training
- each college and service is expected to set aside funding from within its own budget to support the local needs identified in staff development operating plans submitted to, and monitored by, the Staff and Career Development Forum, and through the business planning process, each year.

112 In each case, funding is used to support posts dedicated to staff development design, delivery and administration, and, for example, to pay for external trainers, to support staff on externally-provided programmes, and to ensure hourly-paid and part-time staff are enabled to take part. The size and shape of both elements of this budget are also a standing item on the Staff and Career Development Forum agenda. The overall funding, 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.

113 Under the overall direction of the Head of Human Resources, a dedicated Development and Training team runs programmes on a wide range of subjects. This provision is complemented

by staff development run by the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design, Academic Affairs, Research Training and the Central Registry, in support of their areas of responsibility across the University. Learning and teaching coordinators also run staff development in each college, and in each school there is funding and opportunities for support for professional development or research activity as appropriate.

114 The audit team concluded that, overall, the University's management of staff development was consistent with its responsibilities for providing students with high quality learning opportunities. However, the team did have some concerns about the timing of the training for postgraduate students who teach.

Conclusion

115 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

Institutional framework for managing quality enhancement

116 The 2004 institutional audit report on the London Institute concluded that it would be advisable for the Institute 'to bring to early completion the implementation of policies and procedures that will enable the Institute to realise its intentions for enhancing the quality of its provision'. Although that recommendation largely concerned the validation process, the University responded on a number of fronts, leading to what the Briefing Paper regarded as '...significant progress in improving its approach to quality enhancement over the past two years'. Key developments have included:

- the creation of a new post of Dean of Learning and Teaching Development
- the amalgamation of the units supporting teaching development (The Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design) and learning technologies (Information Technology Research and Development Unit) 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 three-college cluster of Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon)
- the creation in 2004 of the Learning and Teaching Subcommittee
- the separation in 2004 of the Quality Coordinators' Group into two groups: one for higher education and one for further education
- 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.

117 Overlaying these developments is a new Quality Enhancement Framework, which was endorsed by the 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'.

118 In broad terms, the audit team regarded the developments described above as consistent with the University's claims regarding the emergence of a more coordinated approach to

enhancement. In practice, however, the team identified some ambiguity and inconsistency about the University's approach to, and definition of, quality enhancement. For example, many of the college action plans prepared in response to the new undergraduate student survey which the team saw were described as 'Enhancement/Action' or 'Enhancement' Plans, although they were almost wholly concerned with reactive and remedial activity. The team also noted that Heads of Colleges' reports on annual monitoring generally blurred the distinction between the development and identification of good practice and its dissemination and enhancement. 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's analysis of the documentary evidence found that good practice tended not to be captured and shared systematically within these processes. The team's perceptions of the documentary evidence were reinforced in meetings with staff.

119 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, it 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 the 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.

Management information - quality enhancement

120 The University's 2005 review of the purpose and operation of the University's external examining system revealed that external examiners made a major contribution to the development of teaching and learning, as well as securing academic standards. In order to take full advantage of the role of external examiners in developing teaching practice, the University amended the external examiners' report form to encourage them to make suggestions for enhancement. In tandem with this amendment, the University required each college from 2006-07 to produce a summary of key messages from external examiners' reports, which may include examples of good practice for wider dissemination. These summaries are considered in the first instance by the Higher Education Quality Coordinators' Group, which may draw on them to inform proposals to amend and improve policies and procedures, and later form part of the Academic Standards and Development Committee's annual report to the Academic Board.

121 The Briefing Paper stated that the University regards annual monitoring '...as a crucially important part of the quality enhancement framework', within which '...a number of changes have been made over the years to shift from a focus on accountability towards one on enhancement'. These changes have included a shift in emphasis away from a retrospective report to a forward-looking developmental plan; and the implementation of a reduced timescale for the exercise, which, according to the Briefing Paper '...ensures freshness based on the immediate experience of the year and allows teams to take any immediate action necessary for implementation for the following year'. The Briefing Paper also maintained that there was an enhancement focus within the annual course monitoring summary reports by Deans to heads of college, and by heads of college to the Academic Standards and Development Committee, although, as discussed above, the audit team was concerned that the working definition of enhancement within these processes was generally understood to be the dissemination of good practice rather than as its systematic development and capture as well.

122 The University overhauled Quality Audit and Review in 2006-07 in part to allow the process to consider an enhancement theme. The theme is selected by the school undergoing review and it is optional. The audit team saw a small sample of Quality Audit and Review reports from the 2006-07 academic year; one of these indicated that an enhancement theme had been explored. The team encourages the University to continue to embed enhancement activities within the Quality Audit and Review.

Dissemination of good practice

123 The University promotes the identification and dissemination of good practice in all of its key quality assurance processes, including annual course monitoring, the Quality Audit and Review and external examining. As noted above, based on its analysis of the associated documentary evidence, the audit team had some reservations both about the working definition of quality enhancement within some of these processes; and about the capacity of these processes to promote quality enhancement at University level, in addition to performing their primary quality assurance functions. The University is aware of the challenge to disseminate good practice beyond college level; the Briefing Paper spoke of '...the need to put mechanisms in place to ensure dissemination across the University'. These mechanisms include the new Quality Enhancement Framework, an annual teaching and learning day (see below), away days for the Quality Enhancement Network and a pedagogic research event. At the time of the audit it was too early for the team to determine the effectiveness of these new mechanisms.

Staff development and reward

124 The University promotes quality enhancement within staff development in large part through the activities of the HEFCE-funded Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Creative Learning in Practice and the University's Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design.

125 The Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Creative Learning in Practice is based in Chelsea College of Art and Design and the London College of Fashion, but its activities are open to the entire University. It supports fellowships for academic staff and offers funding to support pedagogic research and projects, for example, on personal and professional development and on employability skills. The audit team saw the 2007 evaluation report on the Centre, which included several examples of how support from the Centre had led to enhancements in teaching practice.

126 The Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design provides professional development and support in learning and teaching, technology to support learning, and pedagogic research. It offers curriculum development secondments, where 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. The Centre also organises bespoke workshops on request for course teams to support developments in the curricula.

127 Both Centres jointly organise a 'conversations' series based on informal discussions among staff and external delegates about learning and teaching; and dissemination events, including the Learning and Teaching Day, which comprises workshops, presentations by internal and external speakers, and an exhibition of students' views on their experiences at the University. The 2008 Learning and Teaching Day attracted 157 participants, of which 29 received Associate Lecturer bursaries to facilitate their attendance.

Conclusion

128 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

the definition of 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

129 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.

130 The University produced a collaborative strategy in 2006-07. 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. Minutes of the Academic Planning Committee noted that 'Members agreed that the key drivers of the proposed strategy should focus on building the international reputation of the University and on enhancing the student experience'.

131 The University's procedures for the validation, review, assessment, external examining and marketing of its collaborative provision match 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 examined the partnership with the private college in London, which is the University's oldest collaboration and its largest in terms of student numbers. The link is underpinned by a formal written agreement specifying the responsibilities of both partners. It is managed by Central Saint Martins College and overseen by a liaison group, comprising members from both institutions. The liaison group submits its minutes to the University's Rector. The Head of Central Saint Martins College prepares an annual report on the link for the Academic Standards and Development Committee. The team read the report for 2005-06, which included comments from the external examiners, and noted that there were no major concerns. The team also saw the Annual Course Monitoring Report for the BA Honours course for 2006-07, which gave a candid and comprehensive account of the course's strengths and weaknesses informed by comments from the external examiner, leading to a set of priorities for improvement.

Conclusion

132 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

Institutional framework for research degree courses

133 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 for overseeing standards and quality rests with the Research Standards and Development Committee, which has delegated responsibility from the Academic Board. This committee is supported by the Research Degrees Subcommittee, which advises and acts on behalf of the main committee as appropriate. The latter is chaired by the Pro Rector Research and Enterprise and its members include the Head of Research Training, college research directors and student representatives.

134 At college level, two committees are involved: a college research committee chaired by the college research director, which maintains an overview of research degrees and encourages the development of a research culture; and a college research degree subcommittee, which supports the main committee and advises the Head of College on the registration and progression of students and on the appointment of supervisory teams and examiners. The London College of Communication provides an exception to this model because the functions of both committees are performed by a single College Research Committee.

135 College Research Committees report to College Academic Committees and provide an annual report to Academic Standards and Development Committee. Information also passes from college to University committees through College Annual Research Reports.

136 The University has two cross-college working groups to support the quality assurance of its research degrees: the Research Directors' Group, which gives advice on all matters relating to the provision, support and quality for research students; and the Research Administrators' Group, which enables the sharing of good practice, supports new members of staff and links the colleges with the central University Research Support Office.

137 A small number of research students who were studying at the former Wimbledon School of Art before the School's merger with the University continued to be registered for degrees with Wimbledon's previous awarding body at the time of the audit. Wimbledon provides an annual report to that awarding body with respect to these students and copies it to the University's Academic and Standards Development Committee. The joint Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon Research Degrees Subcommittee also monitors and supports these students, and reports both to the Research Degrees Subcommittee and the awarding body. The audit team regarded these arrangements as satisfactory.

Selection, admission and induction

138 Prospective research students apply to individual colleges through College research administrators, rather than to the University centrally. College research directors oversee admissions. 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 beyond the supervisory team was a positive feature of the application process.

139 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.

The University regards the involvement of an external member as '...central to the confirmation stage'. A recommendation for the formal confirmation of the registration is then made by the supervisory team to the College Research Committee.

140 The University issues its Research Degrees Handbook and Regulations to all research students at enrolment. In its briefing paper, the University described the Handbook as '...a comprehensive source of information, containing advice on the nature of research degrees, what it means to be a research student, the conduct of research, sources of help and guidance, how to establish links with other researchers, studentship and regulations and procedures, and plagiarism'.

141 The University provides induction for research students in a one-week block run by its Research Network University of the Arts London. The induction takes place once a year for a single cohort of students in September. Induction is not mandatory. Newly enrolled students may also take a five-week course on academic writing and presentation skills.

Progress and review

142 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, based on its analysis of the minutes of some College research committees, the audit team found that this was not the case in all colleges.

143 In the spring term, every student and his or her supervisory team produces an annual report, describing the progress made during the preceding year and including details of attendance at conferences, supervisory arrangements and a training needs analysis. The report is presented to the College Research Committee. Where these reports raise concerns, the Committee forwards them to the Research Degrees Subcommittee.

Development of research and other skills

144 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 (though not required) to attend three one-week blocks of training spread across the academic year, covering, inter alia, research techniques and the University's requirements and expectations of research students. Thereafter, the University expects students to receive a minimum of two weeks' training per year, though such training need not be provided by the Research Network University and could, for example, take the form of conference attendance. Directors of studies are responsible for ensuring that students receive appropriate training, informed by the Training Needs Analysis.

145 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.

Feedback mechanisms

146 Research students provide feedback to the University through their representation on relevant committees and via the Research Degree Student Survey, administered by the Research Support Office. A summary of their feedback is received and discussed by the Research Degrees Subcommittee. In its briefing paper the University stated that the summary was '...sent to all students annually accompanied by an explanation of how student feedback has informed improvements'. The audit team examined the material issued to students and noted that while some examples made the link between feedback and the University's response clear, other examples did not indicate the nature of the feedback to which the University was responding. The team formed the view that, without this contextual information, research students may not understand how their feedback informed the University's management of their courses. The team encourages the University to make more explicit the relationship between the issues raised by research students and the University's responses.

Supervision

147 Research students are supervised by a team comprising at least two members of academic staff, one of whom is designated Director of Studies. The University expects the supervisory team as a whole to have had experience of successful supervision at or above the level of the award which its supervisee is registered for as well as expertise in work related to the research project.

148 The frequency and duration of meetings between students and supervisors are determined according to individual students' needs. In its Briefing Paper, the University indicated that there is normally 45 hours' contact time per year for full-time students and 23 hours for part-time students. A formal record of these meetings is maintained through Supervision Record Sheets which form part of the annual report on the students' progress. A code of practice for supervisors and research students sets out the responsibilities of both parties and is part of the Research Degrees Handbook and Regulations. The code 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 own 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 153).

149 Formal training for supervisors is provided through a course entitled 'Supervising Research Degrees for Professionals in Art, Design and Communication', which is run 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 several colleges have introduced mentoring schemes for new supervisors.

150 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 minority of supervisors was supervising more than six students, although in each of these cases the supervisor was supervising as his or her main teaching duty.

Assessment

151 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 as external examiners are given in the Research Degrees Handbook and Regulations.

Representations

152 Detailed procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals are described in the Research Degrees Handbook and Regulations.

Conclusion

153 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 did identify 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

154 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.

155 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.

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