

# **University of London**

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JUNE 2005

## **Preface**

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) exists to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education (HE) qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE.

To do this QAA carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In England and Northern Ireland this process is known as institutional audit. QAA operates similar but separate processes in Scotland and Wales.

### **The purpose of institutional audit**

The aims of institutional audit are to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges are:

- providing HE, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard, and
- exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

### **Judgements**

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

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

These judgements are expressed as either **broad confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence** and are accompanied by examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement.

### **Nationally agreed standards**

Institutional audit uses a set of nationally agreed reference points, known as the 'Academic Infrastructure', to consider an institution's standards and quality. These are published by QAA and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*, which include descriptions of different HE qualifications
- The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of the what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. They outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the FHEQ.

## **The audit process**

Institutional audits are carried out by teams of academics who review the way in which institutions oversee their academic quality and standards. Because they are evaluating their equals, the process is called 'peer review'.

The main elements of institutional audit are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution nine months before the audit visit
- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the audit visit
- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the audit visit
- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the audit team five weeks before the audit visit
- the audit visit, which lasts five days
- the publication of a report on the audit team's judgements and findings 20 weeks after the audit visit.

## **The evidence for the audit**

In order to obtain the evidence for its judgement, the audit team carries out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, such as regulations, policy statements, codes of practice, recruitment publications and minutes of relevant meetings, as well as the self-evaluation document itself
- reviewing the written submission from students
- asking questions of relevant staff
- talking to students about their experiences
- exploring how the institution uses the Academic Infrastructure.

The audit team also gathers evidence by focusing on examples of the institution's internal quality assurance processes at work using 'audit trails'. These trails may focus on a particular programme or programmes offered at that institution, when they are known as a 'discipline audit trail'. In addition, the audit team may focus on a particular theme that runs throughout the institution's management of its standards and quality. This is known as a 'thematic enquiry'.

From 2004, institutions will be required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The audit team reviews progress towards meeting this requirement.

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*Printed copies are available from:*

Linney Direct  
Adamsway  
Mansfield  
NG18 4FN

Tel 01623 450788

Fax 01623 450629

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

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## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of London (the University) between 27 and 29 June 2005 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to enquire into the way in which the University exercised its responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of its degrees, in the light of the particular constitutional arrangements under which it operates.

To arrive at its conclusions the audit team spoke to members of staff of the University and to students, and read a wide range of documents relating to the way the University manages the academic aspects of its provision.

The words 'academic standards' are used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK.

'Academic quality' is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate teaching, support, assessment and learning resources are provided for them.

In institutional audit, both academic standards and academic quality are reviewed.

The University is a 'federal' university comprising a number of autonomous Colleges, which exercise their individual and collective responsibilities for the academic standards of the University's awards and the quality of the programmes of study to which they lead, and also a small number of other institutions whose academic standards and quality are directly managed by central bodies of the University. The federal responsibilities of the Colleges are shared collectively by them. Since the University's awards may be the result of either federal or 'central' arrangements, the audit differentiates where appropriate between the separate policies and procedures attaching to

the two sets of arrangements. It does, however, assume that the University's responsibility as an awarding body covers all its awards wherever and however they are offered. The audit excluded programmes offered through the University of London External Programme, which will be the subject of a future, separate audit.

### Outcome of the audit

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

- on the basis of the results of institutional audits of the University's constituent Colleges carried out between 2003 and June 2005 by QAA, broad confidence can be placed in the management, by the individual constituent Colleges, of the academic standards of awards and the quality of programmes offered in the University's name. However, only limited confidence can be placed in the soundness of the present and likely future management by the University, as a corporate institution, of its specific responsibilities as an awarding body under the current statutes and ordinances.

### Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following area as being good practice:

- the developing role of the Research Degrees Committee in providing a collective view of quality assurance arrangements for research degrees as evidenced by the detailed examination of each precept in the revised section of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 1: Postgraduate Research programmes*, published by QAA

The audit team also recommends that the University should consider further action in a number of areas to ensure that the academic quality and standards of its awards are maintained.

**Recommendation for action that is essential:**

- in respect of provision offered both through Colleges and through its central academic activities, the University should develop means by which it can better demonstrate accountability for the use made of its degree awarding powers.

**Recommendations for action that is advisable:**

- the University should develop a means of assuring itself that the quality assurance procedures and degree regulations implemented in Colleges satisfy the requirements set out in Ordinance 15, paragraph 4
- the University should strengthen the processes by which Colleges discharge their collective responsibility for the quality and standards of the University of London awards
- in respect of provision offered through Colleges and through its central academic activities the University should develop, in the light of Statute 66, more formal means of assessing the comparability of its awards.

**Recommendations for action that is desirable:**

- the University should specify procedures, formally approved by each relevant subject area board, for developing, presenting, considering and approving significant changes to federal programmes with appropriate reference to the QAA Academic Infrastructure
- the University should specify procedures, formally approved by the Board of the School of Advanced Study (SAS), for developing, presenting, considering and approving new programmes with appropriate reference to the QAA Academic Infrastructure
- the University should routinely use independent external advisers to provide

assurance to SAS and the University itself that the standards and quality of proposed programmes are appropriate and meet the requirements of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and any relevant subject benchmark statements.

**National reference points**

The audit team also investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure that QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The audit found that the University was making some use of the Academic Infrastructure to inform its framework for the management of quality and standards, but there were some areas where University is encouraged to undertake further work.

The institutional audit process includes a check on progress toward publication of teaching quality information in the format recommended in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*. The audit found that the University is generally proceeding appropriately with the publication of this information.



# **Main report**

## **Main report**

1 An institutional audit of the University of London (the University) was undertaken between 27 and 29 June 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the way in which the University exercised its responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of its degrees, in the light of the particular constitutional arrangements under which it operates.

2 The audit was carried out using a process developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and Universities UK (UUK), and has been endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills. For institutions in England, it replaces the previous processes of continuation audit, undertaken by QAA at the request of UUK and SCOP, and universal subject review, undertaken by QAA on behalf of HEFCE, as part of the latter's statutory responsibility for assessing the quality of education that it funds.

3 The audit focused on both the federal University and the academic activities of the central University. In respect of the federal University the audit team was mindful of the Ordinance which specifies the responsibilities for the degree awarding powers of the University: 'Each College shall be responsible for the University of London degrees/diplomas/certificates awarded to its Students and shall share with the other Colleges a collective responsibility for the University of London degree/diploma/certificate wherever awarded'. The team took as its starting point that each of the individual College responsibilities had been, or would be, audited by QAA as part of the institutional audit cycle, but that the aim of this audit would be to see how the Colleges fulfilled their collective responsibility for the University degree. The audit excluded programmes offered through the University of London External Programme which will be the subject of a future, separate audit.

4 As in the self-evaluation document (SED) provided for the audit by the University, the definitions of the term 'University' used in this report will vary according to the context, so that it is possible that the term 'University' could refer to the Colleges collectively, or to a federal committee, or to the academic staff and students of the Colleges and the central academic institutes, or indeed to officers in the Senate House. The report aims to differentiate between these different dimensions of the University's identity.

## **Section 1: Introduction: the University of London**

### **The institution and its mission**

5 The University of London is a federation of 19 Colleges which are separately incorporated, self-governing and directly-funded (except for Heythrop College which is currently privately funded), and a range of central academic activities. All award University of London degrees, collectively ensure the standards of the University's degrees, and are research-based higher education institutions committed to undergraduate and postgraduate teaching of the highest quality in a research environment. Some of the member Colleges are large multi-faculty institutions; others are smaller, specialised institutions. Similarly, some offer provision which is predominantly part-time; others predominantly full-time or mixed. Excluding students on the External Programme there are some 125,000 students of the University on either undergraduate or postgraduate taught programmes or pursuing postgraduate research degrees.

6 Services provided centrally and available to the Colleges include the Senate House Library, the Careers Group, the Intercollegiate Halls of Residence, the Accommodation Office and the University of London Union (ULU).

7 The academic activities provided centrally, which are not separately incorporated or funded, are the School of Advanced Study (SAS) whose eight member-institutes support and promote research and advanced study in

the humanities and the social sciences for the benefit of the Colleges and of their subjects nationally and internationally, and the University of London Institute in Paris (ULIP) which engages in research and teaches at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The University Marine Biological Station at Millport (UMBS) provides support for teaching and research in marine biology for the University and other UK universities.

8 The University as a degree-awarding body dates from 1836 when it was granted its first Charter. The governance structure of the University provides for a University Council. It is the governing body for the central activities of the University and the forum in which decisions are taken that affect the federal University. By Statute, it is the governing and executive body of the University, and regulates the affairs of the University, but has no powers or duties in respect of those affairs of the Colleges which are wholly within the remit of the Colleges. Its lay Chairman is designated Pro-Chancellor. Its duties include the making of Statutes, Ordinances and Regulations on such matters as it considers necessary or desirable or as are required by the Statutes.

9 The Statutes provide for the appointment by the University Council of a Vice-Chancellor who is the academic and executive head of the University, and for the appointment of a Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) who undertakes such duties as are assigned by the Vice-Chancellor. In addition, provision is made for the appointment of a Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) for Medicine who has ex officio membership of the Council, Senate and other bodies concerned with Medicine and, in association with the Colleges concerned, provides the interface with the National Health Service (NHS). Other PVCs can be appointed on the recommendation of the Vice-Chancellor. At the time of the audit, there was a PVC for Information Strategy with a primary remit within the central University.

10 The University has two mission statements, one for the federal University, and the other for the University centrally. The federal University's mission states that:

The University:

- is committed to undergraduate and postgraduate teaching in a research environment, which draws on many different traditions, practices and methods in a wide variety of institutions, offering unsurpassed opportunities to students from all countries who are able to benefit from its courses so that they attain the highest academic standards and develop to the most exacting intellectual level
- is dedicated to the prosecution of research across all fields of study at the highest international standards
- seeks to contribute to the public welfare in the work of its graduates and its staff and in the results of its research, enriching and advancing culture, education, the humanities and social sciences, the performing and creative arts, science, engineering, technology, medicine and public affairs
- by its significant presence in London seeks to make a major contribution to the economic, scientific and cultural life of the metropolis
- seeks to represent nationally and internationally the highest standards and enduring values of the university tradition, including academic freedom, intellectual integrity and equality.

11 The Mission Statement of the University centrally is:

- to support and assist the Colleges, their staff and students in their own missions
- to provide a range of services of benefit to the Colleges, their staff and students
- to maintain, through the Colleges collectively, the highest international standards of the University of London degrees and in the appointment of Professors and Readers
- to facilitate cooperation, collaboration and other mutually beneficial links among the Colleges and other parts of the federation

- to achieve the highest international standards in teaching and research in the academic activities centrally - the University of London Institute in Paris, the School of Advanced Study and the University Marine Biological Station
- to serve the academic communities of the federation, region, nation and beyond through the work of the School of Advanced Study and the University of London Research Library Services
- to represent and promote the views and interests of the Colleges and the federation and to articulate and reinforce - regionally, nationally and internationally - the particular kind of higher education to which the University and the Colleges are dedicated
- to make available, in conjunction with the Colleges, awards of the University of the highest academic standards throughout the UK and overseas through the External System, and
- to manage its resources, including the estate, efficiently for the benefit of the federation.

### **Collaborative provision**

12 The SED stated that Colleges of the University can 'award degrees jointly with other higher education institutions; however, to protect the integrity of the University of London degree, franchising and validation of collaborative activity as defined by QAA *Code of practice*, though possible, is not encouraged' (see below, paragraph 121).

### **Background information**

13 The published information available for the audit included:

- the HEQC audit report on the University of London dated 1996
- QAA audit reports on University of London Colleges published since February 2003.

14 The University also provided the audit team with:

- an institutional SED
- a copy of the University Ordinances.

15 In the course of the briefing and audit visits the University provided access for the audit team to its intranet and public website and to individual documents and series of documents on request. The team is grateful to the University for its help throughout the audit process.

### **The audit process**

16 In the period leading up to the audit a series of meetings were held between the QAA and the University during which the nature and scope of the audit process were agreed. Prior to the audit, QAA had undertaken institutional audits of most of the Colleges; the aim of this audit, therefore, was to establish how the Colleges of the University fulfilled their collective responsibility for the University of London degree. It was also agreed that the audit would include the central responsibilities of the University. Following these agreements, the University provided an SED on 1 April 2005. In addition, two student written submission (SWS) documents were provided, one from the students at ULIP which focused on the experience and views of ULIP students, the other from ULU which took a pan-University focus. Both of these were based on questionnaires conducted among the student bodies represented by the documents and neither was confidential. The audit team is grateful to the students for the production of these helpful contributions to the audit process.

17 The audit team visited the University between 23 and 25 May 2005 to conduct briefing discussions with the Vice-Chancellor and his senior colleagues, and with student representatives, to enable the team to confirm that it had properly understood the contents of the SED and SWS documents, and to extend its understanding of the management of the quality of learning opportunity and the academic standards of the University.

18 The audit visit took place between 27 and 29 June 2005. During this visit, the audit team met academic and administrative staff of the University and consulted the documentation provided. The audit team is grateful to all those who made themselves available to discuss the University's quality management and academic standards arrangements.

19 The institutional audit team comprised Professor B S Gower, Mr D M Blaney, Dr D Furneaux, Dr N J Taylor, auditors, and Mr S Appleton, Audit Secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Ms N J Channon, Head of Operations, Institutional Review, Reviews Group.

### **Developments since the previous academic quality audit**

20 The report of the previous quality audit was published in April 1996. In order to encompass both federal and devolved systems for quality assurance across the University and each of its constituent schools, as they were then known, the audit was undertaken in stages during the period October 1992 to July 1994. The audit took place at a time of major changes affecting the nature and operation of the relationship between the schools and the University and which were subsequently reflected in new University Statutes which came into effect in the autumn of 1994, and in University Ordinances which came into effect in October 1995. The final report pointed to 'the absence of clear and explicit principles relating to quality and standards articulated by the University to underpin, and provide a measure of the effectiveness of, the considerable devolution of responsibility which audit teams discerned in the arrangements previously operating at federal University and School levels'. The report went on to identify as a central issue 'the guarantees which are, or can be, provided by the University in respect of the standards of its awards and the quality of educational provision when the Colleges appear, in practice, to be able to act essentially on their own individual responsibility'. The then audit team suggested that this was 'a matter to which the University doubtless has given, and will continue to give, consideration in

the wake of the re-definition and re-organisation of the University'.

21 At the time of the last audit report the implementation of an Academic Framework (the Framework) was in its early stages. The Framework applies to all degrees awarded in the University's name. The key principle underlying the Framework for the award of degrees is that Colleges are authorised to award University of London degrees and share a collective responsibility for those awards. In this respect, the autonomy of the Colleges, which had been identified in the 1996 report, appears to have been more firmly established, despite the responsibility ascribed by the Statutes to the Senate for academic affairs and standards. Reflecting on the matters raised in the previous audit report, and in respect of the federal University, the audit team was interested to explore precisely how the University's responsibility as a degree awarding body was exercised within the terms of the University's Ordinances and the Framework.

## **Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes**

### **The institution's view as expressed in the SED**

22 In its SED the University explained that 'in relation to the exercise of responsibility for quality assurance, the federal University of London is the Colleges; and the Colleges, with the central academic activities, collectively are the University of London. All Colleges award University of London degrees and collectively ensure the standards of the University's degrees'. This means that the University's responsibility for maintaining the academic standards of the degrees and qualifications the Colleges are authorised to award, and for the quality of the educational provision enabling students to acquire those awards, coincides with the collective responsibility which the Colleges have for these matters.

23 Although all the Colleges are authorised to award degrees of the University, some have or wish to obtain their own degree-awarding powers. Following recent discussions about the use of these powers by Colleges, an agreement has been reached that, in order to avoid ambiguity about its status, any College wishing to make use of them would need to put forward a case for being permitted to do so, such as would persuade the Heads of Colleges and the University Council that this was appropriate. Consideration of this matter has led the Vice-Chancellor to initiate a consultation about the future of the federal University.

24 The University has developed an Academic Framework governing the academic standards of its awards and educational quality of all provision made available to students, and requires Colleges to ensure that their procedures, and their academic regulations, adhere to this Framework. The SED stated that the Colleges 'operate within, and have ownership of, the University's enabling Academic Framework in relation to the award of degrees'. All the degrees and qualifications of the University, whether awarded centrally or by the Colleges, are expected to satisfy the requirements of this Framework.

25 According to the SED the nature of the relationship between the Colleges and the University means that it would not be appropriate for the University to approve formally the processes used by the Colleges to assure the standards and quality of their provision. They are required, however, to 'lodge' the procedures they use for quality assurance, and the academic regulations they approve, with the Vice-Chancellor of the University. The repository thus formed is available to all the Colleges and was described in the SED 'as a valued source of good practice'.

26 The SED explained that reports from QAA on the Colleges are received and considered by the University as part of an annual report process and are used as a source of information about features of good practice. All Colleges have provided, or will shortly be able to provide, an institutional audit report, and the

SED indicated that it may be timely to consider whether it is necessary for Colleges to agree any protocols on the action to be taken in the light of significant criticisms, relevant to membership of the University, in these reports. The reports produced by QAA are said to provide a 'safeguard on standards' additional to that provided by adherence to the Academic Framework.

### **Federal degrees**

27 There is a small number of degree programmes which are provided on a federal basis. That is to say, they are the responsibility of, and are regulated by, federal committees rather than the Colleges, although the students registered on these programmes are members of the Colleges and draw on College resources. Senate is responsible for ensuring that the quality assurance procedures for these programmes are approved and monitored. Where appropriate these federal degrees are being transferred to Colleges, but the SED acknowledged that for those that remain there are challenges to address in terms of the management of quality assurance. The SED went on to state that 'the dividing line between centrally undertaken responsibilities and those of the Colleges have not, in some cases, been sufficiently clearly articulated or understood'. For this reason, among others, the SED stated that no further federal programmes will be approved and the process of transfer to Colleges will continue. For any federal programmes that remain, formal agreements will be developed clarifying how all aspects of their quality assurance arrangements will be managed.

### **Central activities**

28 The central academic activities include the SAS, ULIP, and UMBS. There is also a substantial centrally-provided External System providing an opportunity for students who are not members of a College or Institute to obtain degrees of the University. This External System will be the subject of a separate QAA audit report.

### **SAS**

29 The Academic Framework requires that Senate approve appropriate quality assurance

arrangements for SAS. The arrangements that are in place are intended to ensure that the institutes comprising the School retain their identity and exercise their responsibility for their own students. The SED recognised that this can create difficulty in ensuring that all aspects of quality assurance are monitored by the School. It also acknowledged that good practice has not always been identified and shared. The SED described how preparation for this institutional audit had provided an opportunity to give further consideration to ways in which provision might be enhanced.

30 Most of the institutes provide taught programmes leading to postgraduate qualifications of the University. However, training in research skills is an important and extensive aspect of the School's activities and there is cooperation between the institutes in the provision of this training. The School also makes the research training available to students in the Colleges and to students of other universities. It has been successful in its bid to the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) (now the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)) for funding to organise national research training in some of the institute subject areas.

#### **ULIP**

31 The Academic Framework requires that Senate approve appropriate quality assurance arrangements for ULIP. The SED explained that the work of ULIP, which provides undergraduate and taught postgraduate degrees in French Studies and tuition in English for students of Paris universities, has been the subject of a review by the University Council. Following the presentation of interim conclusions to Council, two of the Colleges of the University made a proposal to form an association with ULIP. Council has agreed that this proposal should be taken forward and the SED expressed the view that the students of ULIP would benefit greatly from the proposed new arrangements. Quality assurance arrangements will be articulated in a Memorandum of Agreement between the Institute and the two Colleges. In effect, the

processes for assuring the standards and quality of ULIP'S programmes will be integrated into those of the Colleges. In the meantime, the formal arrangements for quality assurance are those approved by Senate, and monitored by the Subject Area Board (SAB) in the Humanities.

#### **UMBS**

32 UMBS is located on the Isle of Cumbrae in Scotland. It is a national facility for marine biology fieldwork and provides teaching in a field context for visiting students of Colleges of the University, the University of Glasgow, and other UK higher education institutions (HEIs). It has, in addition, a small number of research students, currently 13, who are registered with the University. The SED stated that since the number of students for which the Station is responsible to the University is small, quality assurance procedures have been largely informal. There is no mention of UMBS in those Ordinances relating to the assurance of quality and standards.

#### **The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision**

33 The legal power to grant awards of the University of London, and the responsibility entailed by those powers to ensure that the academic standards of all those awards are secured, rest with the University. The University's governing body - the Council - has however authorised each College to award the degrees and qualifications of the University.

34 The Council has made the Colleges 'individually and collectively' responsible for the University's awards. To assure the Council that this authority and this responsibility are exercised in the way the Council requires, an Academic Framework has been developed and is set out in University Ordinances 12-15. It seeks 'to eliminate as far as possible duplications between local, University and national quality assurance exercises while preserving the appropriate and agreed accountabilities'. The Senate of the University is constituted as a standing committee of Council, with a membership which includes persons

with senior academic management roles in the Colleges. It facilitates the flow of information between the Colleges and the centre, and is a context for the exercise of the collective responsibility of all partners for the University of London degrees. The Statutes of the University allow the Council to delegate powers to the Senate 'in respect of the conduct of the academic affairs of the University and in particular the maintenance of the highest academic standards'.

35 As well as specifying the information to be included in College annual reports, the Academic Framework sets out broad criteria for the named degrees of the University, and the procedures governing the appointment of professors and readers of the University. It also identifies, in broad terms, the essential elements to be included in Colleges' quality assurance arrangements and degree regulations. Ordinance 15, paragraph 4, lists these elements and requires that College quality assurance procedures and degree regulations should have regard to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA. There is, however, no requirement that a College's quality assurance processes and degree regulations should be formally confirmed as incorporating these elements and as thereby meeting the requirements of the Academic Framework.

36 In accordance with the Academic Framework the Colleges are obliged to provide the Vice-Chancellor with their academic quality assurance procedures and regulations, and to provide an annual report including information specified in the Ordinances together with examples of good practice. But in the absence of a requirement that they should be formally approved as meeting the requirements of the Academic Framework, the means available for the University to take any action in the light of this knowledge is limited. It appeared to the audit team therefore that the University does not have a reliable means of assuring itself that the requirements of its Academic Framework are met. Without that assurance, the University's ability to demonstrate its accountability for the use made of its degree

awarding powers is weakened. For this reason, the team advises the University to develop a means of assuring itself that the quality assurance procedures and degree regulations implemented in the Colleges satisfy the requirements set out in Ordinance 15, paragraph 4. As an illustration of this weakness, and as an indication of the need for such an assurance, the team noted that one College had, as required, provided in its annual report the findings of a QAA institutional audit report, which advised the College 'as a matter of priority, to consider...what measures are needed to enable it to engage with, and learn from, and contribute to the academic infrastructure developed by the Agency [QAA] on behalf of the UK HE sector'. The *Code of practice* published by QAA, to which Colleges are required by the Academic Framework to have regard, is part of this Academic Infrastructure. The appended response by the College to this audit report does not explicitly assure the University that this specific recommendation has been addressed and that the College is adhering to this aspect of the Academic Framework.

#### **Annual reports**

37 The annual reports provided by the Colleges are received and considered by a working group of Senate which is made up of the chairmen and deputy chairmen of the SABs. The Ordinances detail what is expected to be in these reports, indicating that they 'should include the following information, with examples of good practice highlighted:

- summary of College procedure for consideration of the reports of External and Intercollegiate Examiners and for taking action on them
- number of reports requested from
  - External, and
  - Intercollegiate Examinersanalysed by level of award (ie first and taught postgraduate)
- number of reports received in each category



- summary of significant issues raised by External and Intercollegiate Examiners and of action taken by the College in response to them (to include issues concerning particular programmes, mark and honours schemes and issues of a more general nature)
- degree award statistics broken down by disciplinary groups
- reports received during the year from the Quality Assurance Agency following its reviews and the College's response to these and these shall be available to any other College of the University'.

The SED explained that, as the annual report requires information about a College's response to significant issues raised by external examiners, the exercise is conducted a year in arrears. The SED also noted that the Senate Working Group decided that it did not wish to see the (unpublished) reports of, or responses to, QAA developmental engagements. The SED explained that the focus of the annual report exercise is 'to focus on the identification of good practice, and of issues that could beneficially be explored on a University-wide basis'. The working group presents a summarised report to Senate based on its consideration of the annual reports, identifying common issues and matters for discussion by Senate. The audit team noted that the SWS, compiled by officers of ULU, was critical of Senate's role in the discussion of College annual reports, arguing that it should debate them 'properly' and 'track any actions taken in the light of these reports to Senate'. In practice, and in accordance with the policy that the locus of responsibility for quality and standards for degrees delivered and awarded by the Colleges resides, under the Ordinances, with the Colleges themselves, the Senate provides a forum where the Colleges can come together to explore issues of common interest and to share good practice. From the minutes of the meetings of Senate made available to the audit team it was clear that the numbers attending were not high and that the meetings did not regularly engender any debate.

38 The audit team considered several of the

annual reports of Colleges. Each provided the required information and drew attention to significant quality assurance issues which had been discussed within the College. The team was able to confirm that the reports have a role in helping the University ensure the continuing relevance and appropriateness of the Academic Framework and that some aspects of the Framework had been modified in the light of the information they provided (see below, paragraph 68). The team noted that the University is also considering whether it is necessary for Colleges to agree any protocols on the action to be taken in the light of significant criticisms, relevant to membership of the University, made by QAA in its institutional audit report on a College (see above, paragraph 26). In the absence of such protocols, and in the light of the nature and content of the reports considered by the team, it would appear that neither the University nor the Colleges collectively are in a good position to know whether relevant criticisms have been addressed in a satisfactory manner.

39 The SED argued that the inclusion of the findings of QAA institutional audit reports, and College responses to them, in annual reports provide an 'additional safeguard' on standards. However, the audit team could not find evidence that the recommendations for action in these reports were considered by the Senate working group, or that they were reported to Senate. From its discussions with members of staff, the team understood it to be the case that such recommendations were a matter for the Colleges, and that the Colleges would be expected to satisfy QAA that appropriate action had been taken. In the meantime, the University was not informed about any such action even though it might be relevant to the College's continuing membership of the University and to the exercise of its part in the collective responsibility that the Colleges have with regard to the standard and quality of the University's awards. The team noted further that, although the relevant Ordinance requires Colleges to refer to QAA reports in general, the focus in the SED, and in discussions with members of the University's staff, was on QAA

institutional audit reports. Developmental engagement reports had been explicitly excluded from the process, and the team could not find evidence that the outcomes of any other QAA processes had been reported to the University.

40 The Senate working group focuses its attention on the opportunity annual reports provide for drawing attention to good practice, and to issues raised by a College which might benefit from wider consideration. The audit team recognised that annual reports were beginning to help the University exercise its responsibility to facilitate the sharing of good practice. It noted, however that, although the University was considering further ways in which the good practice identified in the reports could be shared, it did not appear that the Senate was in a position to know whether the use of annual reports to share good practice and thereby enhance provision was effective.

41 The annual reports have a key role in enabling the Colleges to discharge their collective responsibility for the quality and standards of the University's awards. However, they are not used to monitor the activities of the Colleges and provide regular and reliable independent assurances about quality and standards to the University and to other Colleges. They are not well suited therefore to helping the University demonstrate its accountability for the use made of its degree awarding powers by the Colleges, and each College's responsibility to the other Colleges for the quality and standards of the degrees it awards.

42 The audit team was made aware that QAA had provided to one of the Colleges an adverse report on the provision in that College for a Foundation Degree of the University and that a subsequent follow-up report by QAA had not been able to declare that the action taken by the College to address the reasons for the adverse report was satisfactory. At the time of the audit the reports were not published and, in discussion with senior officers of the University, it did not appear that the University or other Colleges had been made aware of this difficulty. In the view of

the team, the lack of a formal process to provide timely information about an adverse report relating to a Foundation Degree placed the University in an unsatisfactory position with regard to its responsibility for the integrity of the qualification.

#### **Senate subcommittees**

43 Senate is advised by six SABs and by the Research Degrees Committee (RDC). Some of the SABs have a role in implementing the Academic Framework in that they are responsible to Senate for ensuring that the quality assurance arrangements for those federal degrees which are awarded, not by the Colleges but by the University itself, satisfy the requirements of the Framework. In its SED the University explained that the number of such degrees has declined in recent years and is now small (less than 20). Each is overseen by a subject panel with members drawn from the Colleges involved in providing students with teaching and learning opportunities. Subject panels are expected to liaise with Colleges, and they provide their SABs with annual monitoring reports. These reports consider the advice and suggestions of external examiners, and the appropriateness of the responses to them. The team noted that in the case of the federal degrees the University was assured, on the basis of external examiner reports considered by subject panels on behalf of SABs, that as required by Statute, students awarded particular degrees 'will have attained the same academic standard irrespective of mode or place of study or examination'.

44 The SED acknowledged that although the quality and standards of the federal degrees have not caused concern to the University, there are challenges to address regarding their overall management and quality assurance. In particular, the structures which the University has put in place to assure it about the standards and quality of these programmes do not always have a clear relation to the structures used in the Colleges for these purposes. Discussions with the chairs of SABs indicated to the audit team that, although the

Academic Framework called for monitoring and review of the federal programmes, there were no formally approved procedures which those carrying out monitoring and review processes on behalf of Senate were expected to follow. The team formed the view, consequently, that the information available to these Boards, and thus to Senate, to assure them that the standards and quality of the federal degrees meet the requirements of the University, can be limited in its scope. In the case of one academic subject there has been a recent internal periodic review of the federal degree programmes which has informed the University that the standards and quality are appropriate. For other federal degrees, however, the team was not provided with evidence that such reviews were scheduled to take place. In their case, it appeared to the team that even though the views of external examiners were used to assure the University that academic standards were being maintained, the information available to relevant SABs would be insufficient to assure the quality of the learning opportunities made available to students.

45 The RDC has a membership which includes appointees from the Colleges and from SAS with senior academic management responsibility for research degree provision. It acts on Senate's behalf with respect to those aspects of research degrees which most of the Colleges have agreed should remain the responsibility of the University. These include the appointment of examiners and the administration of examinations. There is, as a consequence, demonstrable consistency and objectivity in the examination process for the University's research degrees. The RDC also advises Senate on the development of policy relating to all research degrees, and it reviews the quality assurance procedures used for those aspects of research degrees dealt with centrally on behalf of the Colleges. This committee has recently drawn attention to the lack of information in most College annual reports on the provision for research students, and to the 'desirability of introducing an Annual Report exercise in respect of research degrees'. This exercise will consider quality assurance

procedures and 'enable Colleges to share good practice'. In the audit team's view the introduction of an annual report focusing on provision for research students will strengthen the assurances the RDC is able to provide to Senate that those aspects of the standards and quality of research degrees which fall within the jurisdiction of the University are being maintained. The team noted that the RDC was currently facilitating consideration by the Colleges and the University of the implications of the revised *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. It had analysed this section of the *Code* and determined where, under current arrangements, responsibilities lay for ensuring adherence to the precepts. The team considered the documentary evidence relating to this analysis and formed the view that it provided evidence of good practice.

#### **Central activities**

46 There are governance structures for each of the principal central activities of the University - SAS, ULIP, and UMBS. They are responsible to the Council of the University. The SED stated that each of these three units has, as appropriate, its own quality assurance procedures, strategy for widening participation, and learning and teaching strategy. In the cases of SAS and ULIP the quality assurance procedures have been approved by Senate. These procedures, together with the academic regulations used by SAS and ULIP are expected to satisfy the requirements of the Academic Framework.

#### **SAS**

47 SAS is governed by a Board which is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. The Dean and Deputy Dean of the School are ex officio members of the Board, and there are 6-8 members appointed by the Council of the University. The School comprises eight institutes in the humanities and social sciences, and for students operates entirely at postgraduate level. The Directorate of the School - consisting of the Dean, Deputy Dean and directors of the institutes - is responsible for approving and reviewing, on behalf of Senate, the Quality

Assurance Framework which has been developed to assist the School and its institutes in managing their responsibilities for maintaining standards and enhancing quality. There is an Academic Policy and Standards Committee (APSC) which is responsible for implementing aspects of the Quality Assurance Framework; it has a role in the approval, monitoring and review of taught programmes of study. Most of the institutes have a higher degree committee (HDC) and/or RDC; they have duties specified in the Quality Assurance Framework and report on their work to the APSC. The learning and teaching strategy developed by SAS is published on the Higher Education and Research Opportunities (HERO) teaching quality and information (TQI) website.

#### **ULIP**

48 At the time of the audit visit, plans were being taken forward to restructure ULIP as a partner of two of the Colleges, Queen Mary College and Royal Holloway College. This followed a review by the University of ULIP's activities which took into account a frank assessment of the challenges facing the Institute, including weaknesses in quality management. For the time being ULIP is responsible to the SAB in the Humanities for academic quality and the maintenance of standards, but as the new arrangements are implemented ULIP will become accountable to the Faculty Board of Royal Holloway College in accordance with a Memorandum of Agreement specifying the responsibilities of the partners in the consortium.

49 The evidence provided in the SED and in documents provided to the audit team indicated that new arrangements for quality assurance were needed. It appeared to the team that the University was taking appropriate steps to meet this need, and that improvements in students' experience of learning were taking place. It was also the team's view that the restructuring plans should be implemented as rapidly as possible in the interest of ensuring that the quality assurance of this aspect of the University's central activities is managed effectively, and so that the University can fully demonstrate its

accountability for the use made of its degree awarding powers.

#### **UMBS**

50 UMBS provides, in conjunction with other HEIs, a limited amount of teaching and learning for modules made available to visiting undergraduate and postgraduate students. UMBS is developing a framework for approving, monitoring and reviewing these modules. Such a framework is needed in order to assure the University that the quality of provision for these modules is appropriate. UMBS also provides facilities and supervision for research students, most of whom are registered for degrees of the University. In the SED the University described how the examination arrangements were the same as those for students in the Colleges, but went on to acknowledge that in other respects procedures for ensuring the quality of the provision are largely informal. However, the SED explained that attention is being given to the revised section on research degree programmes of the *Code of practice*. Although the number of research students for which the Station is responsible to the University may be small, it appeared to the audit team that the outcome of this work could be usefully brought to the attention of RDC.

#### **Appeals**

51 For college-awarded degrees, all academic appeals are handled exclusively within Colleges, and there is no mechanism for students whose appeals have been rejected by Colleges to take them to the University. However, the annual reports of the Colleges to the University are not expected to include details of appeals and, even though some annual reports from Colleges may record numbers, the University Senate does not monitor the numbers, nature or outcomes of appeals. For research degrees, the University provides students with guidelines to use when making an appeal against the outcome of an examination. Such appeals are heard by a University Appellate Committee whose decision is final. SAS conducted a survey on the implementation of the section of the Code on Academic Appeals and Student Complaints in June 2000.

52 The audit team formed the view that the University's appeals procedure for MPhil and PhD students was satisfactory, that RDC was monitoring, and reflecting upon, the number and nature of appeals and their outcomes, and the University followed up the implications of appeals where there was reason to believe that practice could be improved. The team noted evidence that the central administration was providing guidance to Colleges in respect of their appeals procedures for specialist doctorates. For undergraduate and taught postgraduate degrees, however, it was not clear that the University had yet developed a mechanism for meeting the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters*, published by QAA in respect of all its students registered for all its awards - in particular, precepts 13 and 14: that institutions should have in place effective arrangements for the regular monitoring, evaluation and review of appeals, and that institutions should keep their monitoring, evaluation and review arrangements under scrutiny, taking into account current good practice. In the view of the team, the University does not enable the Colleges to discharge their collective responsibility regarding appeals against the action they take on behalf of their awarding body, and is also overlooking an opportunity to collect data on the range and type of appeals to assist it in monitoring the standards of its awards.

### **The institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards**

53 The SED identified three aspects of quality enhancement which arose from current activities: the deliberative structure under and including the Senate; the requirement to lodge College quality assurance processes centrally; and the development of the College annual reporting process. No evaluation of the effectiveness of quality enhancement was offered in the SED. In meetings, the audit team was informed of the value of cross-College sharing of good practice arising from the annual reporting process and from debate on other matters. Recent examples of issues explored on a collective basis for which there

was evidence of developmental activity at a College level included the use of a full range of marks in assessment, the handling of assessment offences and anonymity in assessment.

54 Intentions for future development include the adjustment of the annual reports to take account of the TQI to be mounted on the HERO website, and the explicit requirement to include postgraduate research degrees within the ambit of annual reporting with the intention of benefiting from the sharing of good practice and enhancement of quality. While the audit team was persuaded that the federal structures facilitate the identification and dissemination of good practice and provide an opportunity for the collective exploration of issues, it was unable to identify any means by which the implementation and impact of such good practice was monitored at a University level. As such, quality enhancement at the University can be considered to be an unstructured activity and the University might wish to consider whether an opportunity to maximise the benefit of sharing good practice across the federal structure is being lost.

### **Internal approval, monitoring and review processes**

#### **The University awards offered through Colleges**

55 For College awarded degrees, the Colleges themselves are responsible for ensuring that their quality assurance frameworks and regulations are in line with the Academic Framework set out in the University Ordinances. This requires the Colleges to have procedures for considering and approving new programmes of study for University awards, for monitoring the effectiveness of programmes of study, and for systematically reviewing programmes of study on a periodic basis. These procedures are required to have regard to the *Code of practice*. The procedures are lodged with the Vice-Chancellor who has the power to act on behalf of the Colleges collectively if there is any respect in which the procedures of a College do not meet the requirements of the Academic Framework. However, there is no

formal process for monitoring, reviewing or commenting on the Colleges' procedures. In practice the University relies on the undertaking each College gives as a member of the federal University that it will award degrees only in accordance with the University's Ordinances, and on information provided in QAA reports in so far as they are relevant to the University's requirements.

## Approval

### Federal degrees

56 For the federal degrees, the University has taken the decision that no new programmes of study will be approved, and that the process of transferring existing programmes to Colleges will continue (see above, paragraph 27). There are therefore no formally agreed procedures for considering and approving proposals for new federal degree programmes. However, the SED explained that a small number of large and/or complex programmes will continue on a federal basis. The audit team was concerned that there did not appear to be any formally agreed procedures for considering and approving significant changes to curricula or to teaching and learning arrangements, particularly since the approval procedures used in the Colleges contributing to these degrees may not always be consistent with each other. The team considered that, in this respect, the requirement of the Academic Framework that 'Senate shall approve appropriate academic quality assurance procedures for degree programmes organised on a federal basis' had not been satisfied. Furthermore, although it is a formal requirement of the Academic Framework that the quality assurance arrangements for the federal degrees have regard to the *Code of practice*, no evidence was provided in the SED or in discussions with members of staff that other aspects of the QAA Academic Infrastructure - *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), subject benchmark statements, and programme specifications - were taken into account by the responsible SABs or by their subject panels. The team noted, however, that it was the University's

intention to develop agreements between the central University and the relevant Colleges which will set out formally the respective responsibilities. In taking this matter forward, the team considers that it is desirable for there to be specific procedures, formally approved on behalf of Senate by each relevant SAB, for developing, presenting, considering and approving significant changes to federal programmes, with appropriate reference to the QAA Academic Infrastructure.

### SAS

57 In SAS, the Directorate has authority to approve, on the recommendation of APSC, new programmes of study and significant changes to existing programmes of study. There is, however, no formally agreed procedure which APSC uses when it considers proposals. The Quality Assurance Framework used by SAS refers to the University's Academic Framework and draws attention to the requirement that all procedures should have regard to the *Code of practice*. There is, however, no reference in this Quality Assurance Framework to other elements in the QAA Academic Infrastructure, and it did not appear to the audit team that explicit assurances were provided that new programmes of study were appropriately aligned with the FHEQ or that the implications of relevant subject benchmark statements were considered. The team learned that subject specialist advice external to the University was sometimes sought by institutes of the School when they developed new programmes of study. The team concluded that it would be desirable for the School to specify procedures, formally approved by the Board of the School, for developing, presenting, considering and approving new programmes of study, with appropriate reference to the QAA Academic Infrastructure. In the view of the team, it would also be desirable for the School to use independent external advisers to provide assurances to the School and the University that the standards and quality of proposed programmes are appropriate and meet the requirements of the FHEQ and any relevant subject benchmark statements.

### Annual monitoring

58 The Academic Framework states that the Senate shall approve quality assurance procedures for those degree programmes organised on a federal basis, and that they shall include procedures for monitoring the effectiveness of programmes of study. For this purpose, the relevant subject panels provide annual monitoring reports to their SABs following their consideration of examination results, and their response to the views of external examiners. However, the audit team was not made aware of a formally agreed and documented procedure governing this monitoring process. The development of a formal annual monitoring process to be followed by subject panels would, in the view of the audit team, encourage some consideration by SABs of ways in which the scope of the process could be increased so that its effectiveness in judging the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students was more apparent.

59 For programmes of study in SAS, the Quality Assurance Framework indicates that the HDCs of the institutes are responsible for monitoring 'on a regular basis' their effectiveness. The process includes consideration of the outcomes of the use of student questionnaires, and of meetings between academic staff and students. The HDCs are required to provide their monitoring reports to the APSC. The Dean of the School receives the reports of external examiners and forwards them to the directors of the institutes, drawing attention to any matter requiring a response. Where the Dean is not satisfied that the response of an institute is adequate, the matter may be referred to the APSC for resolution. In the view of the audit team, the elements of annual monitoring in the Quality Assurance Framework provide a suitable range of information. There would, however, be merit in coordinating this information so that the views of both students and external examiners could be considered together in judging the effectiveness of programmes.

### Periodic review

#### Federal activity

60 In the case of federal degrees, the Academic Framework calls for Senate-approved quality assurance procedures that include procedures for the systematic periodic review of programmes of study. As a result of a recent review agreements will be developed with the relevant Colleges to set out more formally the respective responsibilities, including those in respect of periodic review. However, at present there are no documented procedures for the conduct of such reviews. The team noted that in the case of the federal degrees in philosophy a periodic review had recently taken place and that its terms of reference were to review the provision for these degrees. This review took as its main point of reference the 2001 QAA subject review reports on philosophy in the four Colleges contributing to these federal degrees. The panel undertaking the internal review did not meet with students although it was informed of the arrangements used to identify the concerns of students and respond to them. The documentation made available to the panel did not appear to include programme specifications. The report made no reference to the *Code of practice* and could not therefore assure the University that it had been taken into account, as required by the Academic Framework. In the case of another federal degree, however, there was no evidence that a periodic review had been scheduled even though in its case there had been no recent internal or external review of the provision. The team was aware that the Colleges had significant responsibilities for federal degrees as well as college-based degrees, and was aware that uncertainties about the future of federally based degrees might inhibit planning for the required periodic reviews. Nevertheless, it concluded that the lack of some relevant information in the report provided for some federal programmes, and the absence of reports for other federal programmes, meant that the information available to SABs and Senate which might enable the University to demonstrate its accountability for the use made of its degree awarding powers was significantly limited in its scope.

### **Central activity**

61 SAS conducts periodic reviews of its institutes, and periodic reviews of its taught master's programmes of study. Institute reviews take place when a Director leaves and at other times as necessary in order to establish an appropriate sequence, although the procedures do not yet ensure that all institutes are periodically reviewed. The purpose of these reviews is to consider and evaluate an institute's activities and achievements, with particular reference to the balance between research, research facilitation and teaching. As well as providing the School with an assessment of the performance of its institutes, these reviews also serve the purpose of informing the heads of Colleges and the wider academic community of development, progress and achievements.

62 Programme reviews take place in accordance with a schedule drawn up by the APSC. They are carried out by the HDCs of the relevant institutes, and their outcome is reported to APSC. The HDC provides a self-evaluation report which is expected to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the programme, and to indicate ways in which weaknesses are being addressed. The aims and objectives of the review process are documented. This self-evaluation report, together with relevant documents including programme specifications, feedback from students, alumni and employers, progression and completion data, and external examiners reports, are submitted to an independent assessor, external to the University, appointed by the Dean of the School on the nomination of the institute concerned. The external assessor provides a report based on these documents to the director of the institute. The institute's self-evaluation report, the external assessor's report and the response of the HDC to this report, are submitted to the APSC.

63 With respect to academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities made available to students, the programme reviews are beginning to play a significant role in providing assurances to the School, and thus to the University, about the taught programmes of

study provided by the institutes. As experience of this procedure grows, and in support of the intention that programme reviews should have an enhancement role, the School might wish to consider whether, in order to encourage the dissemination of good practice identified in these reviews, there would be some advantage in giving opportunities for School staff outside the institute in question to contribute to the review process. It also appeared to the audit team that, in assessing the quality of learning opportunities, there would be merit in considering whether the contribution students are making to the review process could be strengthened.

### **External participation in internal review procedures**

#### **University awards offered through Colleges**

64 For College awarded degrees, the University's Academic Framework does not explicitly require that independent external advice is used in systematic periodic reviews of programmes leading to taught and to research degrees. There is, further, no expectation that Colleges will provide the University with information about the outcomes of their internal periodic review processes. Since Colleges have agreed that they will provide in their annual reports summaries of significant issues raised by external examiners and of action taken in response to them, it appeared to the audit team that it would also be appropriate for issues raised in periodic reviews to which independent external advisers had contributed to be drawn to the attention of the University. Where such issues were relevant to a College's continuing membership of the University, an assurance satisfying the University that appropriate action was being taken would be needed.

#### **Federal degrees**

65 At the time of the audit visit, one SAB had conducted one periodic review of federal degrees for which it was responsible (see above, paragraph 60). The panel conducting this review had included an independent subject specialist external to the University, as



well as internal members from cognate subjects. There had been no opportunity for the external subject specialist to advise the panel and the University on the extent to which the programmes met the relevant subject benchmark statement, and on the extent to which the qualification descriptors of the FHEQ were being satisfied. There was also no opportunity for the external subject specialist to meet students or to consider any views they might wish to express about the quality of the learning opportunities provided to them. The benefit of having external input into the process was limited and, in the view of the audit team, the use of independent persons in the internal periodic review of programmes was not strong and scrupulous.

### Central activities

66 There are, in the first place, two types of review undertaken in SAS. Periodic reviews of the activities and achievements of the institutes in SAS are undertaken by a panel appointed by the Dean of the School. This panel has external membership, includes a director of another School institute and a representative of the relevant subject area from one of the Colleges, and is chaired by a person from outside the School. It is not expected to provide quality assurance of the teaching and learning opportunities provided by institutes except in so far as reference to these matters is referred to in addressing the purposes of the review. Secondly, for periodic reviews of programmes of study, the School requires that peer assessment by a person external to the University is used. The process is intended to ensure that appropriate points of reference are used, including the University's criteria for degrees set out in the Academic Framework and the FHEQ. There are, therefore, opportunities for the external assessor to comment on the position of the programme with respect to these points of reference. However, it would appear that the external assessor does not meet with either students or staff of the institute providing the programme for review. Such meetings are capable of providing useful information about the quality of the learning opportunities available to students,

and the School might wish to give external advisers the opportunity to meet staff and students so that such information can be taken into account when conclusions are presented.

## External examiners and their reports

### Federal University

67 External examiners for University of London awards delivered in the Colleges are appointed by the Colleges as external examiners for the Colleges, and do not report directly to the University. The SED explained that in the past Colleges would submit copies of the reports of their external and intercollegiate examiners to the Vice-Chancellor. However, it had been decided that the collection of these reports was a resource-intensive exercise for both the Colleges and the centre, and revealed little of note and offered no opportunity for the sharing of good practice. The current process, therefore, requires Colleges to provide a summary of issues arising from external examiners' reports in their annual report to the University. These College reports are summarised in a single report before discussion at Senate (see above, paragraph 37). As the main purposes of this summary report are to identify generic issues and good practice, critical comments by an external examiner recorded in a College report would be unlikely to appear in the summary. In the audit team's view this process does not enable the University to take a meaningful overview of the external examiners' reports for this major part of its provision, and an opportunity to monitor the standards of the University of London degree is therefore missed.

### Intercollegiate examiners

68 Within the Colleges of the University there is a system for the appointment of intercollegiate examiners to boards of examiners for first and taught postgraduate degrees. These examiners are appointed from other member Colleges and part of their remit is to make comparisons with standards in their own institution. In the past the appointment of intercollegiate examiners to boards of studies

was an expectation. However, the annual reporting exercise identified that it was proving increasingly difficult to appoint suitable examiners, particularly in specialist subject areas, and so the Academic Framework was modified to recognise that intercollegiate examiners would not necessarily be appointed to every board of examiners. Intercollegiate examiners report only to the College that appoints them and not to the University centrally; as a result the total number of intercollegiate examiners is not known. The audit team's overall assessment of the intercollegiate examiner process is that it has some potential to make a meaningful contribution to the safeguarding of appropriate and equivalent standards across the University in line with the statutory requirement that 'candidates granted degrees and other awards shall have attained the same academic standard irrespective of mode or place of study or examination'. However, as the system is used inconsistently and the University has no means of taking an overview of the reports or of assessing the effectiveness of the process, it is not able fully to realise the potential benefits of the system of intercollegiate examiners.

### **SAS**

69 Within SAS external examiners are proposed by institutes and approved by APSC. Their reports go to the Dean and then to the relevant Director. Within each institute the external examiners' reports are considered by HDC and any action considered necessary is taken. APSC receives a synopsis of external and intercollegiate examiners' reports and makes comparisons over the previous two years. These School arrangements seemed to the audit team to be broadly satisfactory given the numbers of programmes and students involved. However, since the School does not make a formal annual report to Senate, the team was unable to identify any route by which matters raised in these reports would be drawn to the notice of the University.

### **External examiners for federal degrees**

70 External examiners for federal degrees are appointed by the appropriate SAB on the

recommendation of the subject panel. Ordinance 14 requires that external and intercollegiate examiners for these degrees report annually to the Vice-Chancellor. The SED explained that on receipt by the Vice-Chancellor the reports are sent to the appropriate Colleges. The subject panels then make annual reports to their SABs based on the external examiners' reports and the examination processes. SABs do not make regular formal reports to the University so the opportunity to have an oversight of these reports is lost.

71 Overall, the audit team considered that the University as the degree awarding body had not put itself in a position to take a collective view of the assessments being made by external examiners across the Colleges and the central activities. As a result the opportunity to assure itself that comparable standards are being achieved within the University, and that the standards of its awards are maintained, is being lost.

### **Examiners for research degrees**

72 The SED explained that the Colleges 'are authorised to undertake the same role and responsibilities in relation to research degrees as they are for first and taught postgraduate degrees'. When the Academic Framework was put in place it was decided to adopt the pre-existing federal machinery for research degrees, including the administration, and make it available to Colleges that wished to use it. All but two decided to do so and some 70 subject groups were set up by the SABs to receive and consider nominations from supervisors for the appointment of examiners. The Academic Framework requires that advice on the choice of examiners be sought from outside the College of registration, and that this advice should normally come from the relevant SAB or subject panel.

73 The administration of research degrees, for all but one of the Colleges, is undertaken centrally. The SED described the benefits of the system as being 'the achievement of consistency of standards through common procedures and advice to examiners' and 'assisting departments to ensure and

demonstrate objectivity in the examination process'. While the audit team recognised that in this area the University was providing a valuable central service, the audit team noted that there is no mechanism for taking a University-wide overview or analysis of the examiners' reports. It considered that the University is missing an opportunity to take an informed view as to whether equitable standards and treatment of students are being achieved across all Colleges of the University in this significant area of provision.

### External reference points

#### The Academic Infrastructure

74 The University's Academic Framework's only reference to the Academic Infrastructure is that a college's quality assurance procedures 'shall have regard to' the provisions of the *Code of practice*.

#### *Code of practice*

75 In its SED the University stated that the Academic Framework is routinely reviewed as and when QAA publishes a new section of the *Code of practice*. The audit team explored the University's approach to the *Code* during the visit. The process for dealing with the sections of the *Code* is that when new or revised sections of the *Code* are issued they are considered by the Academic Registrar centrally, and issues deemed to directly affect Statutes, Ordinances, or the Academic Framework, are dealt with through central processes, usually at Senate. The team did not find evidence of any collective central discussion of the sections of the *Code* to ensure a consistent approach is taken across the University, nor was it explicitly in the remit of any central committee to discuss such matters.

76 The exception to this is the way in which the revised section of the *Code* relating to research degrees programmes is being considered. Here the RDC is being used as a vehicle for the Colleges collectively to address the expectations of the new code and of HEFCE. The audit team considered this approach to be an example of good practice and would commend the approach to the

University for use more widely where there are issues that affect the collective responsibilities of the Colleges.

#### FHEQ

77 The FHEQ was not discussed in those sections of the SED dealing with the federal University or the central provision, and is not referred to in the Ordinance relating to quality assurance procedures and degree regulations. The audit team was told that when the FHEQ was published it had been considered by Senate to see if changes to the University's policies or procedures were needed. It had been decided that there was no need for any change, although it had been agreed that there was a need to clarify the position of the University's Pass degree, and the Academic Registrar had subsequently issued a guidance note on this matter. In discussions with staff the team was told that for programmes delivered in Colleges the FHEQ was essentially a College matter and that subject panels might engage with it when considering federal degrees, but that SABs had not done so.

78 There does not appear to be a formal University policy that all awards offered in its name should be compatible with the FHEQ. It was not clear to the audit team how the University could be assured that the individual Colleges had considered, and continued to respond to the expectations of the FHEQ, other than by the initial discussion at Senate. The team noted that during the annual reporting process one College had been commended for including a question on their external examiner's report asking for comment on the compatibility of the programme with the FHEQ. The team also noted, however, that this good practice had not been adopted by all other Colleges.

#### Subject benchmark statements

79 For awards offered through the Colleges, the audit team was unable to find any reference to subject benchmark statements in the SED or the Academic Framework and, during the visit, the team was told that they were essentially a College matter. For central provision, the use of

subject benchmark statements has not been included in the formal processes. As with some other elements of the Academic Infrastructure, the University does not seem to have responded proactively or collectively to the development of subject benchmark statements.

### **Programme specifications**

80 The SED did not discuss the University's expectations of the Colleges in relation to programme specifications, and the audit team could find no reference to them in the Ordinance relating to quality assurance procedures. The SED identified federal degrees as a group of awards where programme specifications have 'not been systematically developed as would be the case for a College owned and managed degree'; responsibility for producing these will form part of the agreement with the appropriate College in the future.

81 Overall, the audit team formed the view that, with the possible exception of the *Code of practice*, the University does not appear to have paid much attention to the Academic Infrastructure, either in respect of its central responsibilities or as a means of ensuring that the Colleges are following a broadly consistent line with regard to academic quality and standards. This is particularly relevant in respect of the FHEQ which relates most explicitly to the role of the University in maintaining the integrity of the standards of the University of London degree, whether it is awarded centrally or by a College on the University's behalf. In the absence of an implemented policy regarding the use of the FHEQ in Colleges and in central activities to assist the University in maintaining academic standards, the scope of the information the University can use to demonstrate its accountability for the use made of degree awarding powers is limited.

### **Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies**

82 For college-based degrees, the University regards programme-level reviews and accreditations by external agencies as a matter falling within the scope of the Colleges' responsibilities. Neither QAA developmental

engagement reports nor professional and statutory body reports are available to be shared with the University. It appeared to the audit team, however, that these reports had the potential to provide useful information on the standards and quality of the University's qualifications and, if they were made available to the University, the scope of the information on which the University based its confidence that its degree awarding powers were being used appropriately would be widened and improved. On occasion, the reports of external agencies might draw attention to concerns which, if not effectively addressed by a College, would be relevant to the College's continuing membership of the University. In these circumstances, it was the view of the audit team that there should be some means of providing assurance to the University that the concerns in question had been addressed in a way which would satisfy both the external agency itself and the University. Such an assurance would strengthen the ability of the Colleges to discharge their collective responsibility for the quality and standards of the University's awards.

83 For one subject area in which federal-based degrees are provided, QAA has produced subject review reports for each of the participating Colleges. The reports were generally favourable with few recommendations requiring attention. Where action was suggested, it appeared to be regarded by the University as a matter for the relevant Colleges to deal with. The relevant SAB has subsequently undertaken an internal periodic review of the federal degrees in this subject area. The report of this periodic review indicated that appropriate action had been taken by the Colleges to address the recommendations in QAA reports.

### **Student representation at operational and institutional level**

#### **Federal University**

84 In its SED the University explained that all students in Colleges are automatically members of ULU and that 'in debates in the recent past,

student representatives have made clear that students consider they benefit from the University of London degree and their membership of the federal University'. The student representation on federal bodies derives from ULU's officers and/or elected members of the ULU Council who sit on a wide variety of committees, including Council, Senate and RDC. In the SED, the University claimed that 'students are involved in many federal Committees and make a valuable contribution to the deliberations of all the bodies with which they are involved'.

85 In their SWS the students argued for an increase in student representation on RDC, although the audit team also heard that students believe that the Committee takes student opinions seriously. As an example of this, the Academic Registrar wrote in August 2004 to College registrars calling their attention to a personal report from the ULU Welfare and Student Affairs Vice-President on students' experience of the PhD viva. In February 2005 the RDC considered a survey conducted by students on the issue of independent chairs at viva voce examinations and established a working group to consider setting up a pilot project.

86 While, at the time of the audit visit, only one SAB (the Medical Studies Committee) included student representatives, the audit team was informed that Senate had just agreed to include a student representative on every Board. The team considered that this was a helpful development.

87 The audit team formed the view that, within the federal University, mechanisms for student representation were satisfactory and contributed to the enhancement of that provision.

## Central University

### SAS

88 The SED explained that each institute has one or more student representatives, each institute has staff-student liaison committees or similar forums for discussion with students, and that students serve on the relevant committees in the institutes. The University expressed the

view that 'this structure is generally effective for ensuring students' views are fed into decision-making processes at all levels'.

89 A student representative is elected by and from among the student representatives in the institutes to serve on the Board of the School. The SED described how 'he or she also serves on the APSC and the School's Research Training Sub-Committee' and went on to state that 'discussion has started with students on the way student representation is organised, in order to make it more coherent and effective at every level'. In the ULU SWS, it was stated that most of the SAS students who contributed to the survey undertaken by ULU knew about their staff-student committee and the identity of their student representative.

### ULIP

90 ULIP has a student representative on its Board of Management (though not its Academic Board), a Students' Union and a staff-student committee. However, most ULIP students surveyed for their SWS did not know about their staff-student liaison system and could not name their student representatives. As the revised structure for ULIP starts to be embedded, the University will wish to ensure that the arrangements for student representation are in place and understood by the students studying in Paris.

## Feedback from students, graduates and employers

### Federal degrees

91 In respect of federal degrees, the SED explained that SABs have been asked to keep under review various aspects of the quality assurance of the awards, including student feedback.

### Central University

92 Within SAS, student evaluations of programmes and courses are regularly conducted by the institutes and these evaluations, together with teaching issues brought up in staff-student liaison forums, are considered by each institute's HDC.

93 The audit team was assured at a meeting with SAS staff that student numbers in individual institutes were small enough for it to be possible to speak with confidence of the effectiveness of the evaluation process, in terms of its universal implementation, good take-up rates and effectiveness in leading to responses from staff and, where appropriate, remedial action. It also found evidence that the University listens to and acts upon student feedback. Examples included the response of the Institute for the Study of the Americas to students' concerns about library access, raised at its staff-student liaison committee, which had led to the extension of opening hours. Nevertheless, there was no formal requirement for the outcomes of SAS student evaluations to be reported to its APSC.

94 In the SWS analysis most, but by no means all, SAS students indicated that they regularly completed course evaluation forms, but only a minority could positively say that it was an effective way of getting student opinion across to improve courses or that they were informed about action taken as a result of their evaluation. The audit team was told that the School did not seek employer or graduate feedback, but suggested that, where relevant, this might be done by the institutes.

95 The ULIP Student Handbook 2004-05 states that students complete an anonymous electronic evaluation of each module and are assured that 'in the light of your feedback, points of action are agreed upon and implemented'. However, only a minority of the ULIP students who contributed to the SWS survey regularly completed course evaluation forms and few felt it was an effective way of getting student opinion across or that they were informed about any action taken as a result of their evaluation.

96 While the audit team concluded that on balance, where they exist, central feedback mechanisms were working, there would appear to be no mechanism for monitoring the effectiveness across the University as whole of feedback mechanisms for students, graduates and employers.

### **Progression and completion statistics**

97 It is a requirement for the Colleges' Annual Report to the University that degree award statistics broken down by disciplinary groups are included. The audit team was told that these were looked at by the working group that provides the overview report to Senate, but that they were not analysed and no statistical information was included in the summary report to Senate. The team was told that a more useful standard structure for the report was being introduced and there was potential to make the process more useful. Currently, the statistics required from the Colleges do not appear to be used advantageously to inform Senate, and the team would encourage the University to consider the potential such information could have to contribute to a cross-College comparison of the awards made in its name.

98 The monitoring of progression and completion statistics for SAS is the responsibility of the School's Board and APSC.

### **Assurance of the quality of teaching staff appointment, appraisal and reward**

99 The SED described how the University has responsibility for the appointment, appraisal and reward of teaching staff employed in SAS, ULIP and UMBS, and for other staff employed centrally by the University. Colleges bear this responsibility in respect of their employees. The audit team therefore focused on how the University fulfils this responsibility in respect of the central University.

100 In the course of the audit, the audit team was provided with details of the Human Resources (HR) policies for staff employed by the University, most of which are codified in a Manager's Handbook which is comprehensive and makes reference to a range of further support materials which are readily available on the University intranet. Clear procedures exist for recruitment of staff and a standard pack of induction materials is made available for new staff. In addition, the team was told of a range of induction activities which takes place within the SAS and within the institutes.

101 All centrally employed academic staff are subject to a standard process of annual review and appraisal which includes active consideration of their teaching. The audit team was informed that appraisal outcomes are passed to the Staff Development Office with a view to the identification of generic staff development issues, although it was acknowledged by members of senior staff met by the team that this was a recent development which might not yet be fully embedded.

102 There is a framework for the appointment/promotion of professors and readers. Promotion decisions are the responsibility of an appropriate College committee which is required under the framework to take advice from individuals external to the College. The process includes seeking advice from three external experts and, in discussions with staff, the audit team was told that considerable significance is attached to such advice. The team considered that this was an example of the Colleges taking effective collective responsibility for an aspect of the University's assurance processes.

103 From the evidence available to it, the audit team concluded that the processes and procedures for staff appointment, appraisal and reward were effective and that support for staff development will be enhanced by the systematic identification of generic staff development needs from the appraisal process.

### **Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development**

104 The University explained that the development of staff employed by the Colleges is considered to be a matter for the Colleges. With regard to those staff employed centrally, the SED made reference to the academic staff development programme in the SAS which had recently been relaunched and through which support is provided to new and established staff in support of the various aspects of their role. This includes training in diversity issues, management and administrative skills, and supervision skills. A central Staff Development

Office exists through which provision of this type is coordinated.

105 Although no evaluation of staff development support was offered by the SED, the audit team formed the view that support for staff employed centrally was broadly appropriate.

### **Assurance of the quality of teaching delivered through distributed and distance methods**

106 The SED did not draw attention to any delivery by means of distributed and distance-learning methods; where this is practised in the context of the External System it will be the subject of consideration through a separate audit of that provision. In the context of this audit, no significant provision was delivered through distributed and distance learning.

### **Learning support resources**

#### **Facilities provided by the University centrally**

107 The University provides some central services which are made available to the Colleges. The Senate House Library and an Information Centre are both located in Senate House, and an Information Strategy Board has been established with the strategic objective of bringing the Senate House Library, each of the institute libraries and the University of London Computer Centre together in an integrated organisational structure ('University of London Research Libraries Services' (ULRLS)) to create 'a clearly delineated centre of excellence in support of advanced learning and research at all levels in the humanities and social sciences responsive to the needs of the federal University'. In its guide to Colleges and institutions the University describes its central Library as 'outstanding' and points out that its two million titles are available to all its students. Mechanisms for comments and complaints on library resources include regular reports and reviews across all the University's provision from committees such as the School Directorate and SABs, to the Senate House Library's academic liaison networks with each individual college, a full-scale library survey, and the Library's

website feedback option on its homepage. Although the mechanisms for providing comprehensive and regular evaluations of the Library resources are not yet in place, the audit team considered that once the ULRLS was established it would be able to provide the University with regular reports on, and evaluations of, the appropriateness of its learning resources and book and journal titles to the needs of the different client groups, including different categories of students, it was serving. The SED explained that 'the Computer Centre provides international, national and regional networking facilities, digital preservation and archiving capabilities, facilities management services and website management and development'.

108 The Accommodation Office is funded by all but one of the Colleges to support students in the private rented housing sector and, together with the Intercollegiate Halls of Residence, provides an accommodation service for students in both Colleges and the central University. In their SWS, the students identified the Accommodation Office as an 'excellent example' of a centrally-provided University service which benefits students in the Colleges. The SED described the Careers Group as being 'recognised as an international centre of excellence and is the largest university careers service in the country'. It is a service with eight College offices and a central office for the smaller institutes, and provides advice, guidance, information, events, links and other services for graduate job seekers and for recruiters. In addition, SAS and some of the institutes organise one-off careers events for their students.

109 The audit team considered that the facilities offered to students by the University centrally made a positive contribution to the student experience, and the team recognised that the University appreciated that these services could sometimes be of more benefit to some students than to others. In addition, the team noted that the Information Strategy was an attempt to enhance the extent and standard of such provision.

## **SAS**

110 The SED stated that 'the vast majority' of SAS students were highly satisfied with the quality of library resources available, although there were some pockets of dissatisfaction with the perceived need to compete with undergraduates from Colleges for books in the Senate House Library. SAS makes computer provision for all its students through dedicated student computer rooms in institutes, and a computer room available to all students in the School, but 'a survey conducted by the student representatives in SAS has shown that not all students are aware of the complementary School facility, and students have commented that more information about it should be provided'. The section of the SWS relating to SAS suggested that of the students questioned in this survey, most SAS students thought that the University's central services were easily accessible and library and study facilities lived up to their expectations.

111 The audit team noted that SAS aims to ensure that all research students have training in the skills necessary for successful completion of a research degree and future academic activity. It has appointed a Research Training Development Officer to improve coordination and enhancement of training opportunities for students between institutions, and has been funded by the AHRB (now AHRC) to organise national training in a number of subject areas. There is cooperation between the institutes in the provision of this training and the School makes the research training available to students in the Colleges and to students of other universities.

## **Academic guidance, support and supervision**

### **Federal degrees**

112 Students on federal degree programmes belong to Colleges, even though the programmes themselves are regulated by University bodies and they are therefore subject to College arrangements for academic guidance, support and supervision.



### Central University

113 The SED stated that SAS had addressed all the precepts in the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA in 2000; and that RDC had conducted a separate detailed examination of the revised version of the *Code* published in 2004, asking the Academic Registrar 'on behalf of the Colleges' to prepare a paper comparing the current centrally administered aspects of the research degree procedures with the *Code*. SAS is currently considering the practicalities of identifying supervisory teams for MPhil and PhD students.

114 The audit team learnt from the SWS documents that most SAS and ULIP students had a personal tutor with whom they could discuss their progress, had found the quality of teaching to be of the standard they had expected it to be in order to achieve the academic requirements they had been given, and felt that the feedback from tutors was effective in showing how they had performed and in suggesting improvements. ULIP students cited a questionnaire which had revealed that the majority of those questioned rated the range and quality of teaching as 'high' or 'middling', but first-year students had been much more positive than second years. As for supervision and feedback, the SWS stated that 45 per cent of the students who had taken part in the questionnaire considered that the provision was 'middling', with first-year students responding more positively. The SWS also suggested that the Student Handbook had improved over recent years.

115 The audit team formed the view that the levels of academic guidance, support and supervision provided for students in its central activity were generally satisfactory. The team believed that the University should develop a mechanism for identifying its minimum expectations in respect of the Colleges in relation to academic guidance, support and supervision, and a method of assuring itself that its expectations are being met.

### Personal support and guidance

116 The University explained in its SED that ULU provides 'social, cultural, intellectual and recreational student activities, supplementing the facilities of the individual College unions. It represents all students across the University on University committees and to organisations across the capital'.

117 Although a few students within SAS are registered in a College, most are registered in the institutes, and the institutes have formal and pastoral responsibilities arising from this. The SED stated that 'Students have noted that they find the institute inductions extremely useful, but feel less well integrated into the School, and less aware of the activities of other institutes and the structure of the School in general'. In discussions with the audit team, students confirmed that this was still their position. The SED explained that because interaction between students and with staff is important to the academic life of SAS, the School operates a large common room in Senate House, and the institutes outside Senate House and the Institute of Historical Research have their own common rooms. However, because the Senate common room is underused by students, especially students from institutes located outside Senate House, the Students' Committee was attempting to encourage students to use it for social functions in order to provide an opportunity for cross-institute social interaction. The Committee was also exploring with the ULU how to raise awareness of the Union's services and increase take-up. SAS took note of the *Code of practice, Section 3: Students with disabilities* in respect of students with disabilities in 2000, revised its Disability Statement in 2004-05, and is actively developing practical means of delivering policy commitments in collaboration with the University's HR division. According to the SWS analysis of its survey of students' views, there was a great deal of ignorance among SAS students of the University/institute 'pastoral services (eg counselling, disability support, health advice, money and welfare, general administration)'. The SED recorded the student

comment 'that a more sustained effort should be made to foster a feeling of integration within the School, as well as with the student's own institute'.

118 The ULIP Handbook tells students that they can be directed to English-speaking counselling services in Paris. While most first and second-year ULIP students who took part in the SWS survey responded that they were generally satisfied with welfare provision and student support, third years were generally unsatisfied. Since 2004, however, every ULIP student has been allocated a Personal Adviser for the duration of their studies and they can also consult the Director who supports, advises and overviews their progress.

119 The University Chaplaincy offers pastoral counselling along with 'support and guidance in matters of faith and spiritual development' (*Guide to the Colleges and Institutes 2005-2006*).

120 The audit team formed the view that the University was aware of its responsibilities in relation to personal support and guidance within SAS and its institutes, and at ULIP. It found evidence, not only of the University's provision at work but also of the effectiveness of some of its mechanisms for identifying and pursuing individual cases of need (for example, in the examination arrangements for students with disabilities). However, the team considered that the University could usefully specify its minimum expectations in respect of personal support and guidance across the Colleges, and develop a mechanism providing an overview of the activity.

### **Collaborative provision**

121 The SED stated that 'to protect the integrity of the University of London degree, franchising and validation of collaborative activity...though possible, is not encouraged under the Framework'. In discussion with senior staff the audit team was told that Colleges previously had to seek Senate approval to offer degrees jointly with another higher education institution but, in the light of experience, this requirement has been dropped and Colleges

now report retrospectively to the Academic Registrar. For other collaborative arrangements the Ordinances state that 'except in the case of the foundation degree, a College shall seek approval before entering into a validation or franchising arrangement beyond a foundation year'. Recognising the University's concern to maintain the integrity of the University of London degree, it was the view of the audit team that the University may wish to identify whether the Ordinance could usefully be revised in respect of Foundation Degrees.

## **Section 3: The audit investigations: published information**

### **The students' experience of published information and other information available to them**

#### **Federal University**

122 Students met by the audit team stated that the information they had received from the University was accurate, although not always as clearly expressed as it might have been.

#### **SAS**

123 The Quality Assurance Framework for the SAS requires institutes within SAS to provide 'clear, accurate and up-to-date information to applicants, persons accepted for admission, and students studying in the School'. The SED stated that the School and its institutes intend to continue to provide information 'in the descriptive format of their published prospectuses and course guidelines, sent to students and enquirers, and available on Institute websites. Students express high levels of satisfaction with these sources of information'.

124 A clear majority of the SAS students who completed the questionnaire analysed in the SWS believed the promotional material they had accessed was a reliable guide to facilities; student guides were useful; prospectuses provided clear and accurate information on programmes of study; induction and admission procedures were carried out as advertised and

gave clear information on programmes; the academic regulations were accessible, easy to understand and readily available; and assessment and examination marking/grading criteria were clear and available. The SED described how students found the institutes' inductions extremely useful, but explained that students had noted that they were less aware of the role of SAS and less informed of activities in other institutes than in their own. According to the SED, a survey had shown that not all students were aware of the dedicated SAS computer room, and students had commented that more information about it should be provided.

125 ULIP respondents to the SWS survey were split evenly when asked if they used the Institute's website for information on programmes, and if the induction and admission procedures were clear and carried out as advertised. A minority of respondents were prepared to say positively that promotional material was reliable in relation to facilities, student guides were useful, academic regulations were accessible, easy to understand and readily available, or that prospectuses were clear and accurate about their programme of study.

126 Overall, the audit team formed the view that most students were satisfied with the quality and format of information which they could access, although the revised arrangements at ULIP would need to reflect on the findings of the student survey. At a meeting with senior staff the team was informed that the Information Strategy might be revised to include provision for a mechanism for assuring and monitoring the accuracy of published information, including information supplied by the various parts of the central University. For the moment those publishing information were trusted to check for accuracy themselves. It was the team's view that the Strategy would benefit from addressing this issue.

### **Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information**

127 The University considers that the responsibility for published information relating

to the provision offered by the Colleges rests with the Colleges, whereas that for the provision of SAS, ULIP and UMBS remains with the University. During the visit, the audit team was informed that the University was not experiencing particular difficulties in meeting the expectations specified in HEFCE's document *03/51, Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, information set. The team was able to access the relevant pages and confirm that the expectations were being met appropriately. In addition, the University had arranged with HERO to provide links to the College pages on the HERO website from the University pages on the HERO website.

128 The locus of responsibility for the publication of data on the HERO website for federal degrees was not clear to the audit team. The team was informed the University's position was that the students reading for federal degrees were registered with the Colleges and, consequently, the information on the federal degrees should be the responsibility of the Colleges. The potential difficulty that this would pose in respect of degrees being offered by more than one College was explored by the team. Staff from the University acknowledged that a clear position on this matter had not been established but suggested that all Colleges offering a particular federal degree might mount information on the HERO website. The team was unable to reconcile this stance with the notion that expectations of *HEFCE 03/51* relate to curriculum, which in the case of federal degrees is determined by the University, rather than to students who are registered with Colleges. The University will no doubt wish to resolve this particular matter to ensure that accurate information is available on the website.

129 In the view of the audit team, in general there can be some confidence in the accuracy of published information, but the team noted that the locus of responsibility for publishing information relating to federal degrees has yet to be finalised, and that information relating to ULIP and UMBS required further work.

# Findings

## Findings

130 An institutional audit of the University of London (the University) was undertaken by a team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) between 27 and 29 June 2005. The purpose of the audit was to enquire into the way in which the University exercised its responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of its degrees, in the light of the particular constitutional arrangements under which it operates. This section of the report summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and by making recommendations to the University for enhancing current practice.

131 The audit focused on both the federal University and the academic activities of the central University. In respect of the federal University the audit team was mindful of Ordinance 14 which specifies the responsibilities for the degree awarding powers of the University: 'Each College shall be responsible for the University of London degrees/diplomas/certificates awarded to its Students and shall share with the other Colleges a collective responsibility for the University of London degree/diploma/certificate wherever awarded'. Therefore, the team took as its starting point that each of the individual College responsibilities had been, or will be, audited by QAA as part of its institutional audit cycle, but that the specific aim of this audit would be to see how the Colleges fulfilled their collective responsibility for the University of London degree.

132 The University, in its central role, has responsibility for the University of London Institute in Paris (ULIP), the School of Advanced Study (SAS), and its eight member-institutes, and the University Marine Biological Station at Millport (UMBS). In addition, some central services are provided for those Colleges which wished to purchase them.

133 In its self-evaluation document (SED) the University explained that ULIP had recently been reviewed and that there were a number

of changes in train in respect of the way in which the quality and standards of the awards delivered at ULIP were being managed. The audit team was content that the changes identified by the University had the capacity to resolve the outstanding difficulties but that the process was at such an early stage that the team was not able to judge the effectiveness of the changes.

134 In describing the arrangements at UMBS in its SED, the University acknowledged that 'given the nature and location of the Station and the small number of students, procedures in the past have been largely informal'. The audit team noted that the Ordinances were largely silent on how the staff and students based at Millport would be supported. The team would suggest that the University consider formalising its arrangements in respect of UMBS, so that it can be sure that students receive an equivalent experience to those studying through its other Colleges, institutes or schools.

135 While the audit team recognises the different and distinct roles of the University, it also notes that the University's graduates are awarded a degree of the University of London wherever and however they achieve the award. Therefore, the team's final judgement relates to the ultimate exercise of its degree awarding powers by the University and not to the quality and standards of individual awards or programmes.

### **The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes**

136 To provide a structure for the quality assurance of all its awards, the University has developed an Academic Framework. The SED stated that the components of the Framework were laid down in the University's Ordinances and comprise degree names; the broad criteria for each generic degree; the essential elements to be included in Colleges' quality assurance framework and in degree Regulations; the requirement for an annual report to be submitted and the principles and procedures

governing the appointment of professors and readers of the University. In addition, particular requirements are laid down for the federal and research degrees.

137 The Academic Framework requires Colleges to have procedures for approving, monitoring and reviewing all programmes leading to College awarded degrees of the University. The Framework also requires these procedures for all programmes leading to federal degrees as well as to the taught degree programmes in SAS and ULIP. Since the Colleges are independent self-governing institutions, the University has taken the view that it is not appropriate for their arrangements for programme approval, monitoring and reviewing to be subject to its formal approval. Colleges are, however, required to lodge the procedures they use with the Vice-Chancellor, and to provide annual reports which may draw attention to aspects of good practice in the ways they develop and use them. In the case of federal degrees, and the taught degree programmes in SAS and ULIP, the procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review are approved by, or on behalf of, the Senate of the University.

138 Adherence to the Academic Framework requires that account is taken of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, published by QAA, and in the case of those procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review which are subject to the agreement of Senate, some assurances are provided that this requirement is met. In particular, the procedures Senate has approved ensure that the views of external examiners are taken into account in annual monitoring, and the advice of independent external subject specialists is used in periodic reviews of programmes.

139 With regard to College awarded degrees, the University relies on the Colleges making use of suitable means for obtaining the views of students and other stakeholders on the quality of programmes. The information it receives about the arrangements used by the Colleges

to secure feedback is provided in the statements of their quality assurance procedures they lodge with the Vice-Chancellor, and there may be comments on these arrangements in the Colleges' annual reports.

140 For federal degrees, and for the programmes provided centrally by SAS and ULIP, there is a variety of formal and informal methods for obtaining feedback from students. Questionnaires are used, as are staff-student consultative committees.

141 The majority of the students registered in programmes leading to the University's qualifications are the responsibility of the Colleges. The SED explained that for these students, the University regards the quality of learning opportunities made available to them as a matter for the Colleges. Although the Colleges are expected to operate within the Academic Framework which specifies some general requirements which a College's quality assurance arrangements should satisfy, the SED claimed that it would not be appropriate for those arrangements to be subject to the approval of the University. There is, nevertheless, an acknowledgement in the SED that the integrity of the University of London degree should be protected, and that externally conducted reports of the quality assurance arrangements of a College might identify significant criticisms which would be relevant to continued membership of the University. The view implied by the SED is that the integrity of the University is satisfactorily protected by the procedures currently in use by the Colleges as well as by the central institutions, and that external scrutiny of those Colleges' procedures which have been subject to external review has not given rise to significant criticisms bearing on a College's membership of the University.

142 The audit team acknowledges that the current structure of the University presents challenges for the University in the exercise of its responsibilities as a body with degree-awarding powers, for ensuring that the quality and standards of the programmes provided by the Colleges and leading to those degrees are

appropriate and sufficient. Steps have been taken to provide the University with some assurances about the quality of Colleges' provision. They include the development of the Academic Framework, the requirement that Colleges lodge their own quality assurance procedures with the Vice-Chancellor, and the requirement that they provide annual reports, a year in arrears, focusing on the outcomes and the further development of those procedures. The annual reports are also expected to draw attention to the conclusions of QAA reports and give an indication of the responses to those reports. In the view of the team, however, the University does not receive sufficient reliable or timely information from the Colleges to enable it to show that it is discharging fully its responsibilities for the quality and standards of the Colleges' provision.

143 Some of the information about quality assurance provided by the Colleges is considered and evaluated by the University. In particular, College annual reports are scrutinised on behalf of Senate with a view to identifying good practice and thereby contributing to the enhancement of provision. The audit team noted that as a result of this process, the value to the Colleges of the annual reports, in respect of quality enhancement, was increasing. However, it was the team's view that insufficient attention was being paid in the consideration of College annual reports to indications that the University's requirements regarding quality assurance might not be being met and to recommendations in QAA reports that might have a bearing on a College's continuing membership of the University. It appeared to the team that when such matters had been drawn to the attention of the University in College annual reports, they had been regarded as a matter for the Colleges themselves and there was no expectation that Colleges would provide information to the University sufficient to assure it that concerns and criticisms had been fully addressed and resolved. Putting aside the fact that QAA reports were not written to provide assurance to awarding bodies, the team noted that two Colleges of the University had yet to have an

institutional audit in the current cycle; further, there were no University processes in place to do the work of such reports, bearing in mind that the QAA schedule meant that some ten years had passed since the previous audit. In the view of the team, without these assurances the University was not in a position fully to demonstrate that it was exercising effectively its ultimate responsibility for the quality of provision leading to its awards.

144 For the small and decreasing provision for federal degrees, the audit team noted the difficulties which had been encountered in ensuring effective collaboration between the Colleges and the responsible University bodies in managing all aspects of their quality assurance. The extent of the information available to the University about this provision was, however, limited in certain respects. In particular, for some federal degrees it did not appear that the University had been informed of the outcome of periodic reviews, or that there were plans to provide that information. In the view of the team, therefore, there are limitations in the extent to which the University can demonstrate its accountability for the quality of provision leading to federal awards.

145 With regard to the taught programmes of study provided by the institutes of SAS, the quality assurance procedures in use provide certain assurances to the Board of the School and thus to the University that the quality of the learning opportunities made available to students is appropriate. However, the procedures make only limited use of the views of students and to this extent do not fully inform the Board and the University, and thereby assure it, that the needs of students are met.

### **The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards**

146 The SED explained that the University had authorised Colleges to award University of London degrees whether or not the College had its own degree awarding powers. There is, however, a statutory requirement that candidates granted degrees and other awards

shall have attained the same academic standard irrespective of mode or place of study or examination. According to the SED, the Colleges 'operate within, and have ownership of the University's enabling Academic Framework in relation to the award of degrees'. All the degrees and qualifications of the University, whether awarded centrally or by the Colleges, are expected to satisfy the requirements of this Framework.

147 The University's approach is to place responsibility for the standards of the awards with the Colleges. The annual reports from the Colleges provide some information in relation to the maintenance of standards but, in the audit team's view, the annual report process is not used in a way that can contribute significantly to continuing assurance that appropriate standards are being set and maintained in the Colleges. The team was told of a significant reliance on the QAA institutional audit process as a means of providing the University with assurance that Colleges were meeting the University's requirements. However, the team noted that significant issues raised in QAA reports had not specifically been brought to the attention of the University. In the view of the team the University does not have sufficient monitoring processes to provide it with reasonable assurance that the individual and collective College responsibilities for standards are being met.

148 The University has two types of external examiners, those from outwith the University and intercollegiate examiners from within the University (this latter group being used at the discretion of Colleges). Both types of examiner are appointed by the Colleges as examiners for them; consequently the reports are submitted directly to the Colleges and not to the University. The Colleges are required to provide a summary of significant issues raised in these reports as part of their annual report to the University, but these reports are synthesised into a single summary report for Senate which concentrates primarily on identifying good practice. This lack of direct engagement with the external and intercollegiate examiners'

reports denies the University a valuable continuing opportunity to assess the standards of awards and, to a limited extent, their consistency, across Colleges. The team also considered that the intercollegiate examiner reports in particular could provide some assurance as to the comparability of achievement by students across the University.

149 The audit team concluded that the lack of any effective formal overview of College activities in general and of external examiners' reports in particular, deprived the University of information which would enable it to demonstrate better its accountability for the use made of its degree awarding powers.

150 Each federal degree is overseen by a subject panel that reports on an annual basis to the appropriate subject area board. The annual reports consider the advice and suggestions of external examiners and the appropriateness of the responses to them. In the case of federal degrees the University was able, on the basis of external examiners' reports considered by the subject panels, to be assured that students awarded particular degrees 'will have attained the same academic standard irrespective of mode or place of study or examination'.

151 The Research Degrees Committee (RDC) acts on Senate's behalf with respect to those aspects of research degrees which most of the Colleges have agreed should remain the responsibility of the University. This includes the appointment of examiners and the administration of examinations. The role of RDC provides the University with demonstrable consistency and objectivity in the examination process for the University's research degrees.

152 SAS has established a quality assurance framework to assist the School and its institutes in managing their responsibilities for maintaining standards and enhancing quality. The Academic Policy and Standards Committee has a role in approval, monitoring and review of taught programmes of study.

153 ULIP and UMBS are both undergoing a number of changes in the way that the awards



offered by them are developed, monitored and reviewed. The audit team would encourage the University to ensure that the revised structures are implemented without delay.

154 All academic appeals for awards offered through Colleges are handled exclusively within Colleges. There is no requirement for the Colleges to report on appeals in the annual report. The central administration manages all research degree appeals and there is a University Appellate Committee. The audit team considered that the arrangements for appeals relating to research degrees are satisfactory. However, leaving the final responsibility for appeals with the Colleges does not, in the view of the team, permit the University to fulfil its responsibilities as the awarding body. The lack of involvement in the process means that an opportunity to monitor the standards of its awards is not being taken.

### **The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning**

155 The University provides some central services which are available to the Colleges. The University Library and an Information Centre are both located in Senate House, and an Information Strategy Board has been established with the strategic objective of bringing the University Library, each of the institute libraries and the University Computing Centre together in an integrated organisational structure ('University of London Research Libraries Services') to create 'a clearly delineated centre of excellence in support of advanced learning and research at all levels in the humanities and social sciences responsive to the needs of the federal University'.

156 The Accommodation Office is funded by all but one of the Colleges to support students in the private rented housing sector and, together with the Intercollegiate Halls of Residence, provides an accommodation service for students in both Colleges and the central University. In their written submission, the students identified the Accommodation Office as an 'excellent example' of a centrally-provided University service which benefits students in the Colleges.

157 The audit team considered that the facilities offered to students by the University centrally made a positive contribution to their experience, and the team recognised that the University appreciated that these services could sometimes be of more benefit to some students than to others. In addition, the team noted that the Information Strategy was an attempt to enhance the extent and standard of such provision.

### **The institution's use of the Academic Infrastructure**

158 The University has not adopted a consistent and formal approach to the various aspects of the Academic Infrastructure by, for example, using a central University committee as a forum for discussion.

159 When QAA publishes a new section of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, the Academic Framework of the University is routinely reviewed centrally, and issues directly affecting central processes (for example, Statutes, Ordinances) are dealt with centrally, usually at Senate. All other issues are considered a matter for Colleges, and the expectation is that Colleges will address these through their own internal processes. The exception to this is the recently revised *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, which is being dealt with collectively and centrally by the RDC, a process commended by the audit team.

160 The University's position on *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*, subject benchmark statements, and Guidelines for preparing programme specifications is less clear. There is no formal University policy setting out the University's expectations regarding the compatibility of its awards across Colleges with these elements of the Academic Infrastructure. The audit team became aware of some programmes without programme specifications and of a QAA report identifying a College's lack of engagement with the FHEQ. In the team's view there is a firm reluctance to make policy on such matters at Senate or

Council. Consequently, the University is unable to articulate its collective response to such matters, and has no way of ensuring that any expectations it may have with regard to the various elements of the Academic Infrastructure are being met for the awards bearing its name.

161 The audit team concluded that the University lacked a central policy in this area and was currently unable to be sure that the Colleges were all responding appropriately and equitably to the Academic Infrastructure.

### **The utility of the SED as an illustration of the institution's capacity to reflect upon its own strengths and limitations, and to act on these to enhance quality and standards**

162 The SED was divided into two sections, the first describing the role of the University for awards offered through the University's federal arrangements, the second describing the University's central role, particularly in respect of ULIP, UMBS and SAS. The document provided a clear and full account of the University's perception of the arrangements for quality assurance within the University and addressed the locus of responsibility for these aspects. It identified areas of where it considered that further work was required and provided a good starting point for the audit.

### **Commentary on the institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards**

163 Quality enhancement is identified by the University as representing a key benefit of the federal structure and there is evidence of issues being explored collectively and resultant action being taken within Colleges. Many of these issues arise as a result of the College annual reports and there are plans to adjust the reports in the context of the teaching quality information (TQI) expectations and in order to bring postgraduate research provision within the ambit of annual reporting. While the audit team considers these developments to be appropriate, it believes that quality enhancement at the University is essentially

unstructured, with no systematic attempt to monitor the impact of quality enhancement activity. In this respect, the University might wish to consider whether an opportunity to maximise the benefit of quality enhancement activity is being missed.

### **The reliability of information**

164 In respect of the requirements of TQI, the University has generally made good progress in meeting the expectations for publishing information, although the responsibility for publishing information relating to federal degrees has yet to be determined. Indications from students, both in their written submissions and in discussion, confirm that the promotional material and other course descriptions are accurate. The audit team considers that the information which is published by the University is reliable.

### **Features of good practice**

165 The following features of good practice were noted:

- i the developing role of the Research Degrees Committee in providing a collective view of quality assurance arrangements for research degrees as evidenced by the detailed examination of each precept in the revised *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes* (paragraphs 45, 76).

### **Recommendations for action by the University**

**166 Recommendation for action that is essential:**

- i in respect of provision offered both through Colleges and through its central academic activities, the University should develop means by which it can better demonstrate accountability for the use made of its degree awarding powers (paragraphs 36, 42, 49, 60, 71, 73, 81).

**Recommendations for action that is advisable:**

- ii the University should develop a means of assuring itself that the quality assurance procedures and degree regulations implemented in Colleges satisfy the requirements set out in Ordinance 15, paragraph 4 (paragraphs 36, 44)
- iii the University should strengthen the processes by which Colleges discharge their collective responsibility for the quality and standards of the University of London awards (paragraphs 41, 52, 67, 82)
- iv in respect of provision offered through Colleges and through its central academic activities the University should develop, in the light of Statute 66, more formal means of assessing the comparability of its awards (paragraphs 68, 71, 73).

**Recommendations for action that is desirable:**

- v the University should specify procedures, formally approved by each relevant subject area board for developing, presenting, considering and approving significant changes to federal programmes with appropriate reference to the QAA Academic Infrastructure (paragraph 56)
- vi the University should specify procedures, formally approved by the Board of the School of Advanced Study (SAS), for developing, presenting, considering and approving new programmes with appropriate reference to the QAA Academic Infrastructure (paragraph 57)
- vii the University should routinely use independent external advisers to provide assurance to SAS and the University itself that the standards and quality of proposed programmes are appropriate and meet the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and any relevant subject benchmark statements (paragraphs 57, 66).

## **Appendix**

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

The University of London welcomes the fact that QAA has broad confidence in the standards of the University of London degree as delivered by the 20 Colleges of the University and the External System. To achieve this, all 20 of the University's Colleges and the External System have been subject to separate audits by QAA.

A broad confidence judgement is a clear indication that the degree process is functioning well and that academic standards and academic quality continue to be maintained by the University of London. The University provides high quality education to citizens of the UK, the Commonwealth and the world as it has done since 1836 and will continue to do in the future.

The University of London operates through a unique federal system quite different to the systems which operate in unitary universities. Under our federal system the Colleges and other constituent elements of the University have an individual and collective responsibility for maintaining and guaranteeing the quality and standards of the University of London degree - it is they that constitute the University of London.

The audit has produced a set of recommendations which appear to have been made on the basis of a misunderstanding of these arrangements. The University proposes to respond to the recommendations by amending its relevant Ordinance to emphasise the importance of timeliness in exchanging quality-related information between the Colleges - and will also be taking forward the changes envisaged in its self-evaluation document. However, more extensive implementation would necessitate alteration of the governance arrangements of the University in a way which is unacceptable to the Colleges and which it is beyond the remit of QAA to require. Furthermore, the recommendations would impose an additional costly and unnecessary layer of quality assurance bureaucracy upon the autonomous Colleges which have already demonstrated to the satisfaction of QAA their ability to manage the academic quality and standards of the University of London degree.

