



Institutional audit

London School of Economics and Political Science

March 2011

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2011

ISBN 978 1 84979 327 8

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and the quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes

Institutional audit: report

- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

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

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website.

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the London School of Economics and Political Science (the School) from 7 to 11 March 2011 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the School offers.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the School and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the School manages the academic aspects of its provision.

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

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the London School of Economics and Political Science is that:

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The School is committed to enhancing the learning opportunities of its students. In that its approach to quality enhancement is embedded in the overall framework for quality assurance, its capacity to evaluate the impact of its enhancement activities on the quality of provision is limited.

Postgraduate research students

The School's procedures for postgraduate research students are soundly based, supervision and support arrangements are satisfactory, and the School has in place effective procedures for the management of its research programmes which meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

Reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the School publishes about its educational provision.

Features of good practice

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

- the integrated and proactive contribution of the services providing support for staff, graduate teaching assistants and students to the furtherance of student learning
- the quality and availability of information for staff and students.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the School to:

- establish a systematic means of assuring itself that departmental practices are fully aligned with its regulatory and other requirements
- ensure that the course and programme approval system addresses more explicitly, both in the information presented and in the consideration given to it, institutional expectations as to the levels, progression and academic standards of any proposed provision
- ensure the systematic inclusion of external assessors in periodic programme review
- ensure that the newly-adopted framework for monitoring and review includes a specification of, and a clear procedure for addressing, the evaluative outcomes it requires from departments
- develop further its utilisation of management information, the better to support its evaluation of award standards and the quality of learning opportunities
- require partnership agreements to specify procedures which enable it to assure itself of the academic standards of, and the quality of learning opportunities appertaining to, all programmes delivered as collaborative provision.

It would be desirable for the School to:

- adapt its external examiner report form to ensure that it elicits evaluative responses from all examiners
- develop a systematic procedure for both identifying and disseminating good practice and for evaluating the impact of its quality enhancement activities generally.

Reference points

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

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

The audit team found that overall the School takes a selective approach to its engagement with the Academic Infrastructure.

Report

1 An Institutional audit of the London School of Economics and Finance (the School) was undertaken during the week commencing 7 March 2011. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the School's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Mr A Bagshaw, Professor A Cryer, Dr K Elliott, Dr J Fry, Professor M Howarth, auditors, and Dr K Hodgson, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor R Harris, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The London School of Economics and Political Science is a leading international centre for social science research. It operates on the basis of a decentralised academic structure consisting of 23 departments, institutes and major teaching centres, and 18 research centres, the heads of which report directly to the Director. It employs almost 900 full-time equivalent academic staff and has a student population of 10,300, of which 1,175 are research students, the remainder being almost equally divided between undergraduates and taught postgraduates; two-thirds of all students are from overseas.

4 The School's previous Institutional audit identified three features of good practice, all of which have been sustained or enhanced; it made 10 recommendations, all of which have been addressed, at least in part; four of them are, however, the subjects of related recommendations in the present report. In 2007 the School established a Teaching Task Force in response to concerns about the results of the National Student Survey and for the purpose of quality enhancement. Developments initiated by the Task Force include a compulsory cross-disciplinary course (module) for first-year undergraduates, LSE100, which became fully operational shortly before the present audit (see paragraph 25). It should also be noted that, immediately prior to audit, concerns arising from aspects of the School's international activities led to the resignation of the Director and the establishment of an external board of enquiry. These concerns are not addressed in the present report.

5 Academic Board, comprising almost all academic staff, is the final authority on academic matters: it is supported by a range of sub-committees and consultative forums for undergraduates, taught postgraduates and research students (see also paragraph 23) on which students have majority representation. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee, supported by the Teaching and Learning Innovation Sub-Committee, has responsibility for policy and strategy development, and for reviewing assessment outcomes, investigating courses with high failure rates, and receiving digests of reports from external examiners and other external bodies.

6 The School's approach to quality assurance is based on the principle that whereas Academic Board has collective authority and responsibility for the standard of academic awards, all quality assurance responsibilities rest with departments. The School acknowledges that this approach, which entails leaving arrangements for course monitoring and periodic programme review to departmental discretion, is not wholly aligned with the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

7 For ease of reference, all aspects of external examining, programme approval, monitoring and review and institutional engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points are described and discussed in this section.

8 External examiners are central to the institutional approach to the assurance of academic standards, and the attention paid by the School to all aspects of their nomination, appointment, induction, training and support is generally meticulous. Nevertheless, while external examiners invariably confirm the academic standard of awards, with the exception of the evaluative responses provided for students the depth of their responses to the prompts of the report template is variable, some being restricted to a single word. It is desirable that the School adapt its external examiner report form to ensure that it elicits evaluative responses from all examiners. In addition, while clear procedures exist for consideration to be given to external examiners' reports, departmental responses to issues raised are not invariably timely or well-presented, and it is uncertain that the requirements which the School visits on departments are invariably met. It is advisable that the School establish a systematic means of assuring itself that departmental practices are fully aligned with its regulatory and other requirements.

9 The audit found that the external examiner system meets the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*, and contributes effectively to the management of academic standards.

10 In relation to programme approval, monitoring and review the course proposal template requires the presentation of extensive information, but this does not include internal or external reference points (including the Academic Infrastructure), how teaching will support specified learning outcomes or what assessment criteria will be used. While proposals respond conscientiously, the nature of the template means that the information provided gives only limited opportunity for the School to be assured of the level of the proposed provision or the standard of achievement required. The audit found that, while the procedure as a whole is basically sound, firstly it should involve consistent and active engagement with external assessors' reports, and secondly the programme proposal template should require the academic standard of the proposed provision and progression between levels to be addressed. It is advisable that the School ensure that the course and programme approval system addresses more explicitly, both in the information presented and in the consideration given to it, institutional expectations as to the levels, progression and academic standards of any proposed provision.

11 As noted previously (see paragraph 6), departments themselves are responsible for developing and operating procedures in line with minimum specified requirements. Successive reviews of this process have led the School to acknowledge that in a minority of areas procedures are not effective in offering an overview of the quality and standards of academic provision. The audit also found that the School does not have a systematic approach to the use of management information and that external involvement is not a routine feature of periodic programme review. It is advisable that the School ensure the systematic inclusion of external assessors in periodic programme review.

12 Henceforth all departments will be required to undertake annual monitoring of courses and at least quinquennial reviews of programmes. This requirement as presently structured, however, may still not be adequate to assure the School as to the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities of all provision. It is advisable that the School ensure that the newly-adopted framework for monitoring and review includes a specification

of, and a clear procedure for addressing, the evaluative outcomes it requires from departments.

13 The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee also undertakes quinquennial thematic reviews of teaching provision on the basis of specified documentation. The audit found that: this documentation is variably analytic; there is overlap between the objectives of this review process and those of its departmental counterparts; the level of departmental engagement is variable; and the periodicity of the reviews and the nature of the quantitative data used together restrict the value of their contribution to the assurance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. In respect of this final point, the Committee is working to identify the data required. It is advisable that the School develop further its utilisation of management information, the better to support its evaluation of award standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

14 The audit found that course and programme approval, monitoring and review procedures go a considerable way towards being able to assure the School as to the academic standards of its awards and the quality of student learning opportunities.

15 The School's approach to the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points involves making use of those elements which it considers complement its quality assurance and enhancement activities. Hence: positioning against *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* is required at programme approval and in external examiners' reports; programme approval requires confirmation that proposed provision is at an appropriate level for the relevant benchmark, but such confirmation is not invariably explicit and the opportunity to use subject benchmarks as an external reference point is not invariably taken; the School publishes programme specifications in full on the Teaching Quality Assurance and Review Office web pages, and more accessibly and flexibly in its online calendar: both versions were found to be satisfactory, but would be improved were the link between learning and assessment clearer; the School gives consideration to successive sections of the *Code of practice*, brings changes to the attention of relevant parties, and states that it finds current practice generally but not wholly in line with the precepts. The School is, however, instituting changes designed to increase alignment.

16 The audit found that the School takes a selective approach to its engagement with the Academic Infrastructure.

17 In relation to assessment policies, the School has developed comprehensive regulations to support its exercise of degree-awarding powers: these were found to be rigorous, equitable and coherent. It operates not on the basis of an overarching assessment strategy but on that of a policy framework, bye-laws and operational instructions.

18 In general, students speak positively about assessment information but less so about the transparency of marking criteria, which are perceived as contributing to inconsistencies. The School acknowledges the issue, and has endorsed the view that marking practices in all departments should be made transparent. The regulations also include a requirement for the double-blind marking of summative assessments. Acknowledging that a minority of departments were non-compliant with this policy, some four months prior to audit the School introduced a system authorising specified deviations from this norm. While this change is too recent for further comment, the School will doubtless take steps to ensure that it is systematically and effectively built into its quality assurance mechanisms. Thirdly, the audit found departmental variations in late submission penalties. It is advisable that the School establish a systematic means of assuring itself that departmental practices are fully aligned with its regulatory and other requirements.

19 The School has a two-tier examination board system for taught provision, with sub-boards of examiners responsible for local-level assessment, and institutional-level Undergraduate and Graduate School Boards of Examiners overseeing their work and ratifying award classifications. Subject only to certain limitations in the quality of student-related management information (see paragraph 20), the audit found the system fit for the purpose of assuring the probity and consistency of decision-making.

20 In terms of management information (statistics), extensive and often usefully cross-tabulated student-related data is made available by the Academic Registrar's Division. Although the audit found clear evidence of statistical information being used effectively to inform internal monitoring and review processes, the facts that they are put to variable use across the institution, and the School lacks any transparent mechanism whereby, as a corporate body, it can reliably and systematically assure itself that this is indeed happening, make it advisable that the School develop further its utilisation of management information, the better to support its evaluation of award standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

21 Overall confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its programmes and awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

22 The School takes a systematic approach to gathering student opinion from internal and external surveys. It is clear, both from committee minutes and meetings with students, that feedback is welcomed and generally acted upon, albeit not always as speedily as students would wish. Overall, the audit found that arrangements for student feedback contribute effectively to the quality of students' learning opportunities.

23 At School level, students' contribute to quality assurance through membership of all relevant senior committees, key quality management processes, membership of the Teaching Task Force and the consultative forums (see paragraph 5); at some of these bodies, however, student attendance is low. With a membership consisting of Students' Union sabbatical officers and elected student representatives from each department, the forums are broadly representative and provide extensive opportunities for students' views to be expressed on a wide range of topics. At departmental level, students' formal contribution to quality assurance takes place through membership of staff-student liaison committees, which, like the forums, operate separately for undergraduates, taught postgraduates and research students. In a devolved structure such as that appertaining at the School, these committees deal with a wide range of significant quality management issues: while the audit found them generally effective, senior managers acknowledged that they work rather variably, and questioned whether the relevant section of external examiners' reports is universally discussed. The School will wish to assure itself that liaison committees take any necessary action in this regard.

24 Overall, the School takes its commitment to involving students in quality management seriously, going to considerable lengths to gather opinion on any aspect of the student experience.

25 The School's research strengths are a dominant reason for its attractiveness to students. Nevertheless, while generally aware of their lecturers' research specialisms, in the course of audit students reported variable experiences as to their influence on the curriculum. The School is aware of these varying perceptions, and its response has taken two main forms: firstly, the development of LSE100 (see paragraph 4), which aims to expose

students to multidisciplinary perspectives on broad topics and hence different epistemologies, and enable them to acquire critical skills beyond those developed within their own degree programmes. Secondly the Teaching and Learning Innovation Sub-Committee has been preparing a strategy for research-led teaching. Both these initiatives were at an early stage of development at the time of the audit.

26 The School recognises that the extent to which its research excellence infuses teaching and learning is variable and insufficiently apparent to students. It is in the early stages of identifying how best to communicate its research-teaching linkages.

27 The School regards the Library, IT Services and the Centre for Learning Technology as central features of an integrated approach to learning resources. The Library enjoys high international standing for the quality and range of its collections, and has worked steadily to improve both its responsiveness and its services. IT Services (responsible for information technology) has similarly responded to feedback that there is pressure on workstations and printers at peak usage periods by increasing the number of printers and introducing a laptop loan service for use in the Library. The Centre for Learning Technology provides a range of services for students and staff, some of them quite innovative, and has been particularly helpful in encouraging the use of the virtual learning environment in delivering teaching. Like the Library and IT Services, the Centre makes extensive use of survey data to inform service development. The audit found that the claims made by members of the services that individually and collectively they contribute directly to the School's strategic framework are justified.

28 Overall, the School provides an extensive range of high-quality learning resources and services, and does so on a rational and strategic basis. Performance is systematically monitored and evaluated, and survey satisfaction ratings confirm the success of the approach taken. The integrated and proactive contribution of the services providing support for staff, graduate teaching assistants and students to the furtherance of student learning constitutes a feature of good practice (see also paragraph 30).

29 The School has clearly articulated, integrated and well-managed admissions policies. It provides clear and concise information for applicants about entry requirements (which are set by departments), application procedures and the process as a whole. In a highly selective context, the School aims to admit students who can benefit from and contribute to the School community, based on principles of fairness, transparency and consistency, and on a commitment to diversity and equality of opportunity. It takes practical steps to ensure that these principles and commitment are effectively put into practice. The audit found the School's admissions procedures consistent and effective.

30 For student support, all undergraduates and taught postgraduates are assigned an academic adviser, who is supported by comprehensive and high-quality formal guidance. At institutional level students have access to an extensive and well-coordinated network of central services designed to meet their health, social and spiritual needs; it is noteworthy that hall wardens are increasingly encouraged to offer pastoral support to students. Students speak well of all aspects of these services. The audit found again that the integrated and proactive contribution of the services providing support for staff, graduate teaching assistants and students to the furtherance of student learning constitutes a feature of good practice.

31 For staff support the Teaching and Learning Centre delivers: a well-regarded postgraduate certificate programme, of which new staff are normally required to take specified elements; a staff induction programme; an extensive programme of targeted developmental courses; and annual surveys of students' perceptions of teaching performance, which the School uses for performance management purposes, and which, in

aggregated form, it places on its website. The Academic Career Development Scheme requires all academic staff to have mentors: the audit found this Scheme effective in identifying and responding to a range of development needs. A teaching observation policy applies to all staff and is a prerequisite for interim and major review; it is supported by a prize scheme acknowledging exceptional performance.

32 Confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of students' learning opportunities.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

33 The School regards quality enhancement as a natural outcome of quality assurance; its commitment to devoting greater energy and resource to it is reflected in: a range of policy documents; the mandate of the Teaching and Learning Innovation Sub-Committee to explore, encourage and disseminate good practice; the work of the Teaching and Learning Centre (see paragraph 31); the manner in which the implications of satisfaction data are addressed; the identification of areas of potential good practice in Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee's reviews; and the work of the Teaching Task Force, which is leading to greater recognition for teaching in promotion, improvement in student support through academic advisers, the development of LSE100 and reductions in master's-level class sizes.

34 The audit found the School's approach to quality enhancement has developed since the previous Institutional audit, but remains characterised more by positive structures and activities than an overall strategic approach: its impact is also diminished because the School has yet to mount a systematic evaluation of its effectiveness or to explore optimal methods of dissemination. It is desirable that the School develop a systematic procedure for both identifying and disseminating good practice and for evaluating the impact of its quality enhancement activities generally.

35 The School is committed to enhancing the learning opportunities of its students, but in that its approach to quality enhancement is embedded in the overall framework for quality assurance, its capacity to evaluate the impact of its enhancement activities on the quality of provision is limited.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

36 The School's collaborative strategy involves forming partnerships with a small number (currently five) of high-quality institutions in globally significant cities. While institutional-level procedures were found to be sound, Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee reviews of aspects of collaborative provision have identified shortcomings in some areas devolved to departments. While the School is aware of these shortcomings and is considering how to address them, two concerns remain: first the delay of more than four years between the previous audit identifying shortcomings and the first of these reviews, and second the fact that the audit found the School's central management system not wholly fit for the purpose of ensuring that operational deficiencies are reliably addressed at departmental level. It is advisable that the School require partnership agreements to specify procedures which enable it to assure itself of the academic standards of, and the quality of learning opportunities appertaining to, all programmes delivered as collaborative provision.

37 The audit team found that while the School is belatedly taking steps to address the shortcomings in collaborative arrangements identified in the previous audit, it is not yet in a position wholly to assure itself of the effectiveness of its approach.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

38 The School maintains a challenging but supportive intellectual environment for research students, who have access to outstanding learning resources, well-developed programmes of research seminars and external events, and supervisors with, in many cases, a global reputation. The Research Degrees Sub-Committee has wide-ranging quality management responsibilities which, the audit team found, it discharges in a careful and conscientious manner. Overall, the aim of providing high-quality learning support which will enable all research students to maximise their potential appears realistic.

39 Comprehensive advice for both potential applicants and newly-arrived students is available on the School website. Supervisors are normally assigned to students when a formal offer is made; registration and orientation are centrally managed. Students spoke positively about their induction, and the audit confirms that it is well-conceived and well-delivered. Regulations and procedures are well-established, clearly-written and easily-accessible; institutional web pages contain information on academic, administrative and financial matters, and provide links to relevant internal resources and external websites. Again, the quality and availability of information for staff and students constitute a feature of good practice.

40 Supervisory arrangements are well-described and satisfactory; each department has a doctoral programme director, with responsibility for overseeing the arrangements: their obligations and responsibilities are clearly specified, as are those of both students and supervisors. Research students, while not clear about all details of these arrangements, described their supervisors as readily available and expressed satisfaction with the quality of support and guidance received. Arrangements for the selection, learning support, training, supervision and assessment of research students were found to be exemplary.

41 Research students sit on both the Research Degrees Sub-Committee and Student Affairs Committee; they have majority membership of the Consultative Forum for Research Students (see paragraph 23) and are members of their departmental staff-student liaison committee. They confirmed that these arrangements function satisfactorily and are augmented by informal contacts with supervisors and other members of academic staff.

42 Approximately 90 per cent of PhD students have contracts as graduate teaching assistants. For such students both departmental-level mentoring and a mandatory training programme are in place. Student opinion surveys demonstrate a consistently high level of satisfaction with graduate teaching assistants' performance.

43 The School's procedures for postgraduate research students are soundly based, supervision and support arrangements are satisfactory, and the School has in place effective procedures for the management of its research programmes which meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1*.

Section 7: Published information

44 The School is committed to maximising the transparency of its approach to published information. Its website was redesigned in 2010 following careful planning and wide consultation, and a detailed policy and code of practice for its use, supported by a comprehensive web editors' handbook, are in place. The website is well-managed, with responsibilities for maintaining and enhancing it, and for ensuring its currency, clearly designated. The public pages contain all major strategies and policies relevant to this audit, and extensive, up-to-date and well-presented information for internal and external

audiences; password-protected areas contain additional information, including full programme specifications (see paragraph 15). The website was found, with very limited exceptions, to be clear, well-maintained and user-friendly, and to attract extremely positive comments from staff and students. The quality and availability of information for staff and students are together identified as a feature of good practice.

45 Students confirmed that they find admission and induction information full and accurate, and programme and departmental handbooks predominantly so (their main reservation here relating to the reliability of information on the availability of optional courses). Checking the accuracy of handbooks is a departmental responsibility, the discharge of which has been monitored in Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee reviews (see paragraph 13). The School is also aiming to reduce the variability in form and content of departmental handbooks by introducing a core set of information for universal use.

46 It is confirmed that the externally available information required by the Higher Education Funding Council for England guidelines is published on the School's website, and that the teaching quality information on the Unistats appears accurate and complete.

47 Reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the School publishes about its educational provision.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

48 The audit team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the integrated and proactive contribution of the services providing support for staff, graduate teaching assistants and students to the furtherance of student learning (paragraphs 28, 30)
- the quality and availability of information for staff and students (paragraphs 39, 44).

Recommendations for action

49 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- establish a systematic means of assuring itself that departmental practices are fully aligned with its regulatory and other requirements (paragraphs 8, 18)
- ensure that the course and programme approval system addresses more explicitly, both in the information presented and in the consideration given to it, institutional expectations as to the levels, progression and academic standards of any proposed provision (paragraph 10)
- ensure the systematic inclusion of external assessors in periodic programme review (paragraph 11)
- ensure that the newly-adopted framework for monitoring and review includes a specification of, and a clear procedure for addressing, the evaluative outcomes it requires from departments (paragraph 12)
- develop further its utilisation of management information, the better to support its evaluation of award standards and the quality of learning opportunities (paragraphs 13, 20)
- require partnership agreements to specify procedures which enable it to assure itself of the academic standards of, and the quality of learning opportunities appertaining to, all programmes delivered as collaborative provision (paragraph 36).

50 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- adapt its external examiner report form to ensure that it elicits evaluative responses from all examiners (paragraph 8)
- develop a systematic procedure for both identifying and disseminating good practice and for evaluating the impact of its quality enhancement activities generally (paragraph 34).

RG 756 07/11

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
Email comms@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk