



Institutional audit

University of West London

March 2011

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ISBN 978 1 84979 370 4

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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

- 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 University of West London (the University) from 14 to 18 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 University offers.

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

In Institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities 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 University of West London 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 audit team found that the University takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of the student learning experience through the coherence and effective implementation at all levels of its Strategic Plan and the associated strategies for Learning, Teaching and Assessment; Research and Scholarship; and Enterprise and Employer Engagement.

Postgraduate research students

The University's arrangements for its postgraduate research students meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, Section 1: *Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA, and are operating as intended.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

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

- the improvements in institution-wide communication
- the University's promotion of employer engagement and employability across the curriculum
- the high quality of external educational opportunities offered to students
- the collaborative link tutors' active involvement with partner institutions and their students, and the constructive use of tutor reports by the University to enhance its collaborative partnerships.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- ensure consistency in faculty procedures for the annual monitoring of programme reviews, and in the faculty monitoring of external examiners' reports and the responses made to them
- ensure that all transcripts or certificates for collaborative students make reference to the name of the partner institution and location of study, in line with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- respond to students in a more timely, informative and coherent manner on the actions arising from student feedback and consultation
- consider how it might strengthen its existing public information about the management of the quality and standards of its programmes.

Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure, which provides a means of describing academic standards in 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*
- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

The audit found that the University has responded appropriately to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, to subject benchmark statements, programme specifications and, on the whole, to the *Code of practice*.

Report

1 An Institutional audit of the University of West London (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 14 March 2011. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University'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 Professor Alan Bilsborough, Professor David Luke, Dr Clive Marsland, Professor Paul Periton and Ms Kate Wicklow, auditors, and Mr David Batty, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr Peter Findlay, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University of West London has its origins in the merger of a number of London colleges, including the former Ealing College of Higher Education, whose history reached back to 1860. In 1991 the newly merged institution was inaugurated as the Polytechnic of West London, and in the following year full university status was granted as Thames Valley University. The University grew in size with successive institutional mergers in the 1990s. Following a major reappraisal of the identity and strategy of the University in 2008-10, the new title of the University of West London was approved by the Privy Council and adopted in April 2011. The University's mission is 'to raise aspiration through the pursuit of excellence'. The University's strategy prioritises flexible provision for students of all ages and backgrounds, with a strong emphasis on employer engagement and the generation, application and transfer of knowledge.

4 In 2009-10 the University had a total of 10,316 full-time equivalent students, of which 9,370 were studying undergraduate programmes, 896 were following taught postgraduate programmes, and 65 were registered as postgraduate research students. The University had 1,270 undergraduate students following collaborative partnership programmes, with 198 of these being taught overseas. The University has just over 1,000 staff in total, of whom around 550 are full and part-time academic staff. The three faculties of the University offer qualifications in art and design, business, computing, healthcare, hospitality, human sciences, law, nursing, media, midwifery, music and performing arts, psychology, social care, technology, and tourism.

5 The previous QAA Institutional audit in 2005 found that broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The most significant recommendations in the previous audit report concerned committee structures, the University's arrangements for the validation of programmes, the implementation of its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, and collaborative provision. The present audit team found that the University had addressed all of the recommendations from the last audit. The team noted the areas of ongoing development described in the University's mid-cycle follow-up report (2008): the operation of the revised governance structure and committee arrangements, the effect of revisions on the management of quality and standards, and the effectiveness of the Collaborative Partnerships Steering Group. The team also found that the University had responded appropriately to the findings of the QAA review of research degree programmes, July 2006.

6 In its Briefing Paper prepared for the audit, the University acknowledged both the depth and the intensity of institutional change since the last audit in 2005, and in particular the many significant developments in the three years up to 2011. The major changes undertaken included: a review of its multiple-campus organisation, and the disinvestment of

the University's provision based in Reading and in Slough; an organisational restructuring, with the establishment of faculties and schools; new committee structures and new procedures for the review of programmes. These changes took place in a context of severe financial constraint and aimed to achieve a sharpening of the University's business efficiency. In support of the substantial programme for change the University also sought to strengthen its systems for effective communication with staff and students, both with regard to its academic processes and more generally.

7 Meetings held with students and staff supported the University's broad belief that both local and institutional communications had significantly matured, and were now strengthening synergies between individuals, committees, networks and groups. The audit team has found that the streamlining and realignment of governance and executive and deliberative structures, as well as the efficient management of quality and standards within the University, had contributed significantly to improving cross-university dialogue. The team identified as an area of good practice these improvements in institution-wide communication.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

8 The Academic Board is ultimately responsible for the University's academic standards, although it delegates many powers to specialist central committees and to faculty boards and their committees. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee determines and oversees the University's key mechanisms for assuring quality and standards, which are: its academic regulations; programme validation and approval; annual and periodic field review; annual monitoring reports; collaborative provision arrangements; student evaluations and surveys; internal audits; the work of external examiners; other external reviews and accreditation visits; and the role of University assessment boards. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee determines policy and initiatives on learning, teaching and assessment, including employer engagement. It develops, monitors and evaluates the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, and shares good practice. The University's Quality Handbook provides guidance on quality assurance and employer engagement, especially in relation to work-based and placement learning; it also addresses the responsibilities and entitlements of students, with a particular focus on student guidance, support and assessment. An associated University Collaborative Handbook sets out the responsibilities of the University and its partners.

9 Committees acting on behalf of each faculty board scrutinise quality assurance processes and the effectiveness of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy within the faculty. Programme committees monitor programmes, including their academic standards, reporting to school-level boards which in turn report to faculty boards and to the central Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The University views this interplay of central and faculty responsibilities as a strength, as it promotes devolution and local ownership while retaining central oversight, and ensures a consistent framework of requirements across the institution.

10 The Academic Board receives an annual overview report on academic standards with summary information by faculty and mode of delivery, and a subsequent mid-year report on actions taken to address issues identified. The minutes of the Academic Board and its subcommittees' meetings, together with other documentation, provided the audit team with convincing evidence of the effectiveness of the University's policies and procedures for setting, maintaining and assuring academic standards.

11 The focal point for the executive management of the University is the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group. This body meets weekly to oversee the effective day-to-day management of the University and receives reports from faculties and services.

Once a month its membership is expanded to include all heads of Central Units, forming the Senior Management Group. Membership of these groups includes the deputy and pro vice-chancellors, the deans of faculty and managers of the University services. Faculties and schools have their own executive groups.

12 Proposals for new course programmes must be approved in principle by the Head of School, Faculty Executive and the Vice-Chancellor's Executive on the basis of their academic rationale, resource requirements, likely demand and strategic fit. Full programme approval consists of an initial faculty-managed developmental event, followed by formal scrutiny carried out by a panel including at least one external subject specialist and, where appropriate, representatives from business, industry, and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. The validation panel takes account of the proposed curriculum and assessment, resources, and programme currency, validity and design in relation to the QAA *Code of practice* when deciding on approval. The audit team reviewed examples of the programme approval process and concluded that it made an effective contribution to the management of academic standards.

13 The Academic Infrastructure informs the design, development and approval of modules and programmes in the initial validation process, and their annual monitoring and periodic review thereafter. External examiners comment on the suitability and congruence of learning outcomes with reference to national subject benchmarks and the level and qualification descriptors of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. The University has 45 programmes accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, and it works with employer organisations that contribute to programme design, review and work-based learning activities. Again, external examiners comment on students' academic standards in relation to the relevant requirements of these bodies.

14 The academic field is the basic unit for annual monitoring and review of programmes. Fields are clusters of cognate programmes, and contain a small or large number of programmes, according to the subject area. Large fields are subdivided appropriately for the purposes of annual and periodic review. For annual review, module leaders prepare brief reports incorporating tutors' views, student evaluations, assessment results, and external examiners' comments for programme leaders, who use these to compile programme reports for the field leader as the basis for annual field review. This involves heads of school, field and programme leaders, the lead external examiner and student representatives, and is reported through the faculty to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The audit team noted some variation between faculties in the monitoring of the annual field reviews, which could potentially lead to a failure to identify weaknesses in programme provision (see also paragraph 17).

15 Periodic field review and revalidation by the University normally occurs every five years and includes any externally validated components or programmes. The review process is carried out by a panel including an external subject specialist and a student representative. It considers a full range of evidence relating to academic standards, quality of learning and student support. The team read several periodic review reports of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, and judged the process to make an effective contribution to the management of academic standards. In addition to these reviews, the University retains an internal audit capability to give attention to specific concerns as they arise, or to areas of perceived risk.

16 Every undergraduate and postgraduate taught programme has at least one external examiner. An annual central induction event attended by new external examiners acquaints them with University requirements, assessment and quality assurance processes. External examiners attend module assessment boards, award boards and at least one

student progress board each year. Their reports are received centrally and distributed to faculties and relevant collaborative partners; external examiners may also report directly to the Vice-Chancellor on any concerns about standards, performance or the impartiality of the examination process. A sample of external examiners' reports showed them to judge the University's academic standards to be generally comparable to higher education institutions. They also provided evidence of effective and constructive communication between external examiners and academic staff at module, programme and field levels in calibrating and monitoring academic standards. The external examiners' reports are reviewed and summarised by the University's Academic Standards and Quality Office, which provides an annual overview of the reports for the attention of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee and Academic Board.

17 The audit team found that, in general, the University's use of external examiners makes an effective contribution to the management of academic standards. However, it noted that across the faculties there was inconsistency in the approach to the review of the external examiners' reports, which meant that in one faculty the oversight of the reports was less well established. As noted above, similar inconsistencies in practice were observable in the consideration by faculties of annual field reviews. The team therefore concluded that it was advisable for the University to ensure consistency in faculty procedures for the monitoring of programme reviews, and of external examiners' reports and the responses made to them.

18 The University's Academic Regulations and details of the University's modular credit accumulation schemes are provided to students in the Student Handbook and its supplements. Assessment regulations and those covering student complaints and academic offences are scrutinised regularly on behalf of the Academic Board by the Student Academic Regulations Review Group. It is University policy for all examination scripts and, wherever possible, other assignments to be anonymously marked. The University Assessment Policy and Guidance was updated in May 2010 to incorporate revisions to the conduct of examinations, the assessment of students with disabilities and for assessing work-based and placement learning. The policy and guidance on procedures for invigilation, the conduct of examinations and assessment, together with good practice guides to assessment design and marking, are available online to staff and students. The audit team concluded that the University's assessment policies and regulations make an effective contribution to the management of academic standards.

19 The University has recently improved its communication infrastructure and the quality of management information with the introduction of a new database for recording student performance and progression. Student data is readily available to academic staff and informs faculty monitoring and action planning, and data is also provided as the basis for annual overview reports to senior committees considering academic standards and student performance and progress. Module assessment boards review mark distributions and performance indicators when considering results, while individual profiles are available to award boards. Recruitment, assessment, progression and completion data are regularly considered at all levels within faculties and at institutional level. The audit team identified clear instances where such management information had informed policy at programme, field, school, faculty and university levels, and concluded that it made an effective contribution to the management of academic standards.

20 Overall, the audit team found that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

21 The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee determines policy and initiatives on learning, teaching and assessment including employer engagement, and more generally oversees the student learning experience. The committee has responsibility for developing, monitoring and evaluating the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and for sharing good practice within the University.

22 The procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of the programmes are clearly and fully communicated to all parties. All new programmes must be formally validated before students can be enrolled. Consideration of staffing and learning resources is an important part of the approval process for new courses and the criteria for approval used by the validation panel include the appropriateness of resources provision and suitability of the staff, as demonstrated by their qualifications, relevant experience, scholarship and research. The audit team found that the University made good use of external members in course planning, validation and monitoring. The University engages with a wide range of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, which provide important external benchmarks for a number of discipline areas. This engagement is effective in ensuring that relevant professional standards, curricula and requirements inform and enhance programmes of study.

23 The University places a particular emphasis in its policy and strategy on the preparation of students for the workplace, and therefore it seeks actively to ensure that its curriculum offering remains relevant to the industries that it serves. External professional advice informs curriculum development and the review of programmes. The audit team noted instances where the curriculum had been enhanced through the development or modification of modules, so as to offer more active learning and professional skills development. The use of current practitioners teaching parts of a course, the drawing in of alumni, and the quality of staff contacts within relevant industries also contribute to the realisation of the University's enterprise and employer engagement strategy. The team considered that the University's promotion of employer engagement and employability across the curriculum constituted a feature of good practice.

24 Similarly, good practice was identified in the high quality of external educational opportunities offered to students. This was exemplified in the provision and management of placements in the workplace, the graduate internship programme and through educational visits, and the use of external contact with industry professionals. The University has been recognised nationally for its achievements in its employability initiatives, including the award of the Queen's Anniversary Prize.

25 The University has both amended and enhanced its policy and approaches to providing feedback to students on their assessed work assignments. The audit team heard from students and staff that the new feedback policy was working well, and that when student submissions are, exceptionally, returned outside the newly implemented 15-day timescale clear advance warnings and an accompanying rationale are given to students. The University is deploying appropriate levels of diagnostic, formative and summative feedback in its overall approach to improving students' learning experiences.

26 The University's commitment to ensuring that the student voice is heard is explicit, and effectively communicated to the academic community. The University seeks the views of students about their experience on academic programmes and the support they receive. The main mechanisms for seeking student opinion are: through online module questionnaires (recently introduced), university-wide surveys and through student engagement at annual and periodic field reviews. The National Student Survey also provides

valuable information about the student experience; its outcomes are widely considered by senior management and across a range of University committees. This has resulted in regular reports, action plans and, where necessary, interventions that include detailed conversations with student groups. Nevertheless, the audit team found evidence indicating that students were not systematically made aware of actions taken in response to the consideration of student feedback surveys. The team therefore considered that it would be desirable for the University to respond to students in a more timely, informative and coherent manner on the actions arising from student feedback and consultation.

27 Students are represented on all appropriate institutional-level committees and are involved in institutional policy and decision-making processes. The Students' Union President serves on the Governing Body, the Academic Board and its subcommittees. There is representation and full student engagement with the quality assurance processes through student representation on all relevant committees from institutional to programme level. Minutes of these committees indicated a good balance of staff and student members, with students making a full contribution in meetings. The audit team found that student views are widely considered and reported at programme, school, faculty and central levels of the University.

28 The University sees staff research and scholarly activity as essential contributors to the student learning experience. Evidence was seen of a range of activities that aim to link research and teaching, as well as supporting pedagogical research. Overall, the audit team considered that the University was effectively developing and managing the link between teaching and research, knowledge transfer and employer engagement, and there was evidence that these activities have informed the teaching and the student experience within the University's programmes.

29 The University does not deliver any programme entirely online, but it is making increasing use of e-learning technologies, including learning resources provided through its virtual learning environment. The proportion of online learning varies according to the nature of the programme and the mode of attendance. The University has a planned and targeted approach to extending its future use of flexible and distributed learning. Students were generally positive about the use made of the University's virtual learning environment and the support available from technology-enhanced learning.

30 In recent years significant improvements have been made to the learning resources infrastructure through investment in new buildings and new technology and the planned renovation of the existing estate. Improvements have been made in relation to the use of technology to support students' learning. These include: an IT and media services desk in libraries; the introduction of three learning innovation rooms, multimedia suites for new teaching and learning methods; and an extensive provision of new hardware and software for arts, media and music courses. The audit team found that, notwithstanding the financial constraints that it had experienced, the University's arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of learning resources were effective in maintaining the quality of the student experience.

31 The University's admissions policy aims to provide opportunities for students of all ages, including those who might not traditionally have secured entry into higher education. The University gives parity of treatment to vocational and academic qualifications to ensure that all those with the ability to succeed have the opportunity to participate in higher education. The Admissions Office makes formal offers to applicants in straightforward cases, or refers applications to the admissions tutors when more detailed scrutiny of the application is required. The University's current admissions policy takes account of students with disabilities and the latest advice from the UK Border Agency with respect to international

students. The audit team found the University's admissions policy and practice to be effective.

32 The University sees the provision of strong student support as central to its mission. The University has in place a student charter that defines the level of support a student should expect. It has recently introduced a set of student entitlements which further specify the services offered to students. Undergraduate and postgraduate students receive a comprehensive induction to the University and to their programmes, and these activities are supplemented by the Student Handbook, student charter, student entitlement and programme handbook. The needs of part-time students are accommodated in the University's induction processes. The majority of academic programmes have embedded learning support, either delivered within the academic modules or in stand-alone academic skills support, which is also available online. Support and assistance for those whose first language is not English is well regarded and fit for purpose. Through examination of documentation and its meetings with students, the audit team found there to be a generally positive level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and academic support.

33 The audit team nevertheless noted that the students' written submission had highlighted a reduced level of satisfaction with the personal tutor system. New arrangements to structure the relationship between personal tutors and central services had been introduced in the last two years, aiming to provide strengthened support in particular for first-year and part-time students. It was too early for the team to reach a fully informed judgement on the effectiveness of the new system; however, the team did find instances of variability in the implementation of the new personal tutoring policy across the University's three faculties. It would therefore encourage the University to ensure that this policy is fully embedded into the practices of all parts of the University to enable students to have appropriate tutorial support.

34 The University's human resource policies and procedures are clearly communicated to staff. Staff are aware of compulsory induction arrangements and their obligation to attend. The University has a staff mentoring scheme for newly appointed personnel, who confirmed to the audit team that the scheme is operational and effective. Newly appointed academic staff who do not hold a teaching qualification are expected to complete the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning. The team found that this requirement was well understood and taken into account in planning staff workloads. Staff appraisals take place annually and consist of reviewing past performance, setting new objectives for the following year and the identification of any learning and development needs. Comprehensive policies and procedures were found in the University's approach to staff development. A range of development opportunities are provided both centrally and at faculty level.

35 Overall, the audit team found that 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.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

36 The University takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of the student learning experience through the coherence and effective implementation at all levels of the institution of the Strategic Plan and its associated strategies for Learning, Teaching and Assessment; Research and Scholarship; and Enterprise and Employer Engagement. Each of these strategies is well embedded within the faculty academic plans and monitored through the subcommittees of the faculty academic boards. The audit team found many examples of the way in which these strategies had been utilised to enhance the curriculum offering of the University and to ensure realistic objectives. The University uses its quality assurance

processes to identify and remedy areas where improvements can be made. Decisions and actions are monitored against identified strategic priorities. The National Student Survey, as well as other student feedback tools, is regularly used as part of discussions and reports focused on monitoring and enhancement, and it was clear to the team that the student voice was listened to and regularly acted upon.

37 A range of enhancement initiatives has accompanied the period of major change in the University (see paragraph 6). These developments, some of which are outlined elsewhere in this report, have included: improved communication; improvement of the teaching and learning environment; further work on technology-enhanced learning and management information systems; vocational curriculum development and engagement with employers; student engagement; improving feedback to students on assessment; and commitment to environmental sustainability.

38 The enhancement aims are taken forward within each of the faculties through the focused support provided by learning, teaching and assessment coordinators. These staff have responsibility for promoting and supporting developments in learning and teaching, as well as regularly reporting back on faculty progress. They are jointly line-managed by the faculty and by the University's Institute for Teaching, Innovation and Learning. Internal communication of policy initiatives and development strategies has been strengthened through the establishment of University and faculty networks based on the promotion and dissemination of good practice. The audit team was satisfied that the associated work of these three areas of enhancement activity provides for good levels of oversight, communication and dissemination, ensuring that faculty-based action planning serves to implement University strategy.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

39 The University considers its collaborative arrangements to be relatively small, encompassing around 1,200 students spread over 21 partnerships, five of which are overseas. Its strategy is to build partnerships with colleges and employers primarily on a regional basis, exploiting synergies with its existing programmes. The framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities under collaborative arrangements is essentially the same as that for other programmes offered on campus at the University and outlined above. Detailed protocols are provided in a Collaborative Handbook, while the ongoing management of collaborative partnerships is undertaken in the faculties and schools.

40 Prior to validation due diligence is carried out in respect of a potential partner, with the Vice-Chancellor's Executive giving the necessary permission to proceed. The Academic Quality and Standards Office will advise the faculty, which formally approves new partnerships, whether an approval event will be needed or a formal report of the suitability of physical and staff resource will suffice. The University has three partnerships based on articulation agreements, all overseas. For these, the initial approval is based on the mapping of learning outcomes and levels of assessment. Contracts for collaborative partnerships are fit for purpose and clearly outline the processes to be followed if an agreement were to be terminated. In recent years the University has terminated several collaborative contracts as it sought to consolidate its provision. Arrangements to ensure continuing students could complete their programme were thorough and followed carefully.

41 Collaborative link tutors are an integral part of the way in which student views are gathered. They meet with students as part of their role and include the outcomes from this as part of their annual report. The tutors' active involvement with both partners and their

students and the constructive use of tutor reports to enhance the collaborative partnerships of the University was considered a feature of good practice by the audit team.

42 An annual report on collaborative provision is prepared by the Academic Quality and Standards Office for presentation to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee and Academic Board. Collaborative link tutors also produce a report which informs annual monitoring reports and includes both an action plan and consideration of past recommendations. External examining for collaborative partnerships follows the standard University procedures, with reports confirming satisfaction with the performance of students and the arrangements for assessment.

43 The University issues the certificates and transcripts for programmes at partner institutions. The audit team saw samples of these which did not consistently make reference to the location of study on either the certificate or transcript. The team considered it advisable that the University ensure that all certificates or transcripts for collaborative students made reference to the location of study, in line with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

44 Overall, the audit team considered that the University has devised and implemented sound processes in respect of its collaborative arrangements. These are closely related to the more general procedures for quality assurance in place in the University, and the comments on those procedures in this report also apply to the University's collaborative provision. The procedures have enabled the University to strengthen the management of academic standards and learning opportunities for students at its collaborative partners.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

45 The University has a modest amount of postgraduate activity, with 65 students studying for the awards of MPhil/PhD, PhD by Published Work, and Professional Doctorates. The Research Degrees Sub-Committee has delegated authority in matters relating to the management and administration of research degrees. The Graduate School provides the focal point for the quality assurance of postgraduate research degrees and is supported in this task by a comprehensive set of University regulations and policies. The Graduate School also has a central role in establishing a research environment which provides support to postgraduate research students. Research students can participate in regular research seminars as well as an annual MPhil/PhD conference. Compulsory research workshops are run for supervisors. Research groups/centres located in the faculties also provide a focus, contributing to an environment for successful research degree study.

46 Following formal registration, all research students are required to register for the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Research, unless eligible for advanced standing, and write a research proposal for approval by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee. Research students move through a systematic monitoring of their progress towards their awards. Annual progress reports written by the students and agreed with their supervisors clearly indicate research achievements and future plans. Research students met by the audit team confirmed the frequency and usefulness of their meetings with their supervisors. Transfer from MPhil to PhD is approved by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee following submission of a satisfactory report from the principal supervisor. The team considered that the arrangements for progression and review of research students were working satisfactorily.

47 Research students have opportunities to express their views via questionnaires, through the annual progress reports and by membership of faculty and University research

committees. The responsibilities and entitlements of research students are fully outlined in the Research Student Handbook. Training is provided for research students who teach. Student feedback from postgraduate research students on their experience was generally positive.

48 Overall, the audit team considered that the University has an appropriate framework for research students, which provides a positive research environment and experience.

Section 7: Published information

49 The University has clear mechanisms to ensure that the information it publishes is accurate and complete, and students reported that they were satisfied with the accuracy of the information the University provides. The prospectus and University website are monitored centrally by the Marketing, Recruitment and Communications unit, with individual sections of those publications updated by authorised individuals within each of the faculties. The audit team found that the University's public web pages provide only limited information regarding the institutional quality framework and the way in which it works to ensure that the academic standards of awards and the quality of the student learning experience are safeguarded. The team considered that it would be beneficial for the University to provide more public information regarding its internal quality assurance procedures.

50 A general Student Handbook provides all students with details of the University's services. Programme-specific student handbooks are formally approved within faculties, while module guides are circulated to staff and are sent to the responsible external examiner. All external examiners' reports are available to University staff, and the audit team found many instances where external examiners' reports were shared with students through programme committees.

51 The process for providing information to students studying at collaborative partner institutions was in line with the standard University procedures, and the audit team was satisfied that there were appropriate mechanisms for ensuring the accuracy of information published by collaborative partners.

52 As part of the audit process, the audit team investigated the UNISTATS website as well as the UCAS site and judged that the information provided by the University is accurate and complete. The University's public website was also explored and was found to provide useful and accurate information about the University's provision. However, the team finds it desirable that the University consider how it might strengthen existing public information about its management of the quality and standards of its programmes, in accordance with the Higher Education Funding Council for England publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45).

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

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the improvements in institution-wide communication (paragraph 7)
- the University's promotion of employer engagement and employability across the curriculum (paragraph 23)
- the high quality of external educational opportunities offered to students (paragraph 24)
- the collaborative link tutors' active involvement with partner institutions and their students, and the constructive use of tutor reports by the University to enhance its collaborative partnerships (paragraph 41).

Recommendations for action

55 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- ensure consistency in faculty procedures for the annual monitoring of programme reviews, and in the faculty monitoring of external examiners' reports and the responses made to them (paragraph 17)
- ensure that all transcripts or certificates for collaborative students make reference to the name of the partner institution and location of study, in line with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* (paragraph 43).

56 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- respond to students in a more timely, informative and coherent manner on the actions arising from student feedback and consultation (paragraph 26)
- consider how the University might strengthen its existing public information about the management of the quality and standards of its programmes (paragraph 52).

Appendix

The University of West London's response to the Institutional audit report

The University welcomes the 2011 report of the Institutional audit of the University of West London, which was carried out in a professional and diligent manner by the QAA team. We will continue to build upon the features of good practice identified by the team and to maintain the level of confidence expressed in our management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The four specific recommendations are being addressed as follows.

- 1 The reference to the name of the partner institution and location of study on all transcripts or certificates for collaborative students was acted on immediately.
- 2 The recommendation to ensure consistency in the local monitoring of programme reviews and external examiner reports is consistent with our own view that the management and oversight of local quality assurance processes require a stronger set of formal procedures, particularly to assist the recently formed Schools in the scrutiny of their evidence base for the management of quality and standards. All local committees of Academic Board will therefore be serviced by the University Secretariat, Academic Registry or Academic Quality and Standards Office, with an annual programme of business that ensures full attention is paid to all relevant reviews and reports. Furthermore, we have reviewed governance arrangements and have instituted School Academic Quality and Standards Committees, with student representation, to ensure consistency of approach.
- 3 The recommendation to respond to students more effectively about actions arising from student feedback and consultation is also helpful. We believe this recommendation sits within a larger requirement to increase the University's active engagement with its student community, and that improvements to how we respond to students in a timely, informative and coherent way requires further development of the student representative system and other forums, as well as a better use of current electronic means of communication. We are therefore appointing a dedicated Dean of Students; have agreed to share with the Students' Union the administration of, and training for, the student representative system; and we are reviewing that section of our Quality Assurance Handbook which currently deals with student evaluation, to reposition it as a more active approach to student engagement and partnership in the management of quality and standards. West London Students' Union wishes to state that this recommendation creates a strong basis for the University to move forward as the University of West London, and that it is looking forward to working in partnership to develop feedback mechanisms to students regarding the views they express as to their learning experiences.
- 4 We will certainly strengthen our existing public information about the management of the quality and standards of our academic programmes, particularly in view of future national expectations. We have established a University Public Information Working Group, to scope our information sets in relation to future requirements and manage the necessary steps in ensuring that accurate information is presented in the most accessible forms. Our aim is to have in place a fully revised set of public information arrangements by September 2012.

RG 793 09/11

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