QAA

Institutional audit

University of East London

MARCH 2010

Preface

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

In England and Northern Ireland QAA conducts Institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector, to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and the assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council in England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations, to assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the 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 East London (the University) from 22 to 26 March 2010 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. On this occasion the team carried out a hybrid Institutional audit. The hybrid process is used where QAA considers that it is not practicable to consider an institution's collaborative provision as part of standard Institutional audit, or that a separate audit activity focusing solely on this provision is not necessary.

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. As part of the process, the team visited two of the University's partner organisations in the United Kingdom (UK), where it met with staff and students.

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 is that:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its provision;

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University has a planned, integrated and strategic approach to quality enhancement which underpins and brings cohesion to a broad range of enhancement activities.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The University has put in place procedures for the management of its postgraduate research programmes which 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 programme*s.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

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

- the University's planned, integrated and strategic approach to quality enhancement, which both underpins and brings cohesion to a broad range of enhancement activities.

Recommendations for action

The audit team considers it would be advisable for the University to:

- strengthen the provision, analysis and utilisation of data on student retention and achievement at programme level

- strengthen the oversight of postgraduate research degree programmes at both institutional and school levels by improving the quality of its progression and completion data

- strengthen the institutional-level oversight of external examiner appointment procedures.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- ensure that all research students who teach and/or assess are formally prepared for these roles.

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*

- 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 engages constructively with the Academic Infrastructure.

Report

1   An Institutional audit of the University of East London (the University) was undertaken in the week commencing 22 March 2010. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2   The audit team comprised Professor J Feather, Dr P Harris, Professor K Hurst, Professor H McKenzie and Professor D Meehan, auditors, and Miss G Hooper, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor R Harris, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   The University, situated on a modern campus in Docklands and two older campuses in Stratford, defines itself in terms which reflect its history, aspirations and location: diversity; inclusiveness; pedagogic innovation; employability; regionality; and engagement with social, cultural and economic development. Over two-thirds of campus-based students are from ethnic minorities, and half are from social classes traditionally under-represented in higher education; one-third of the 27,000 student population is located in partner institutions.

4   The University underwent separate institutional and collaborative provision audits in 2005-06: together these identified 12 features of good practice emphasising particularly its support for staff and students; and made eight recommendations, of which three were suggested enhancements. The University has generally built upon its good practice and addressed the recommendations of both audits.

5   Ultimate responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement, and for setting and managing academic standards, lies with Academic Board, which exercises it through a range of committees (including Quality and Standards, and Learning and Teaching) and subcommittees (notably Collaborations Monitoring, External Examiners, Validation and Review, and Research Degrees); although much operational responsibility is delegated to the eight academic schools around which, in addition to the Graduate School, the University is academically structured. The committee structure is supported by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team which, as well as monitoring implementation, advises schools on relevant aspects of procedures and requirements.

6   The keys to the maintenance and assurance of academic quality and standards are: programme approval and validation; the review and enhancement process, conducted annually at school level; and academic (periodic) review, a six-yearly institutional-level procedure with external involvement. These and other quality management procedures are themselves subject to a system of institution-wide audit.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

7   The University appoints external examiners for taught programmes at field level (fields are clusters of cognate modules), with one award-level external examiner in each school to confirm the award of credit and the eligibility of students for awards. Clear and appropriate procedures exist for the management of external examiners' appointment, induction, support and reporting. External examiners' reports are responded to very professionally, are used in monitoring and review, and are readily available to students.

8   The audit did, however, identify two issues to which the University's attention should be drawn. First, school-level inconsistencies exist in the methods deployed to track external examiner appointments: while the process requires a nomination form to be signed off by both the dean and the chair of the relevant school quality standing committee, in some schools the absence of any reference to the matter in minutes suggests that some nominations are submitted to the External Examiners Subcommittee without formal school approval. Secondly, the Subcommittee has met only four times since November 2007, and normally considers nominations by email: this restricts its capacity to oversee the effectiveness and timeliness of school nomination

procedures. For example, it failed to address the fact that two external examinerships for one field lay vacant between September 2008 and April 2009. It is advisable for the University to strengthen the institutional-level oversight of external examiner appointment procedures.

9   Programme approval involves preliminary proposals being given in-principle consideration by the Corporate Management Team, which heads the executive structure. Detailed validation documents, including programme specifications, are then, following school-level scrutiny, submitted to Validation and Review Subcommittee. The annual school-level review and enhancement process involves detailed field and programme-level reports, from which are derived school-level overview reports identifying general themes and specific concerns: again these are submitted to the Validation and Review Subcommittee. The six-yearly academic review involves a self-evaluation document being considered by a panel consisting of institutional staff external to the area under review, external advisers, and (where appropriate) professional body representatives: it is envisaged that next academic year panel membership will be extended to students. Review reports, with conditions or recommendations where applicable, are considered at institutional level, both individually and, for quality enhancement purposes, thematically.

10   The audit found that programme approval, monitoring and review are generally thorough in design and execution, and contribute to the assurance and management of academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities.

11   In respect of the Academic Infrastructure, the audit found that:

●   the University makes effective use of relevant components in approval, monitoring and review

●   it ensures that programme specifications are published in the current format

●   such specifications are well-understood by students

●   the University prepares diploma supplements for all graduates

●   the University oversees and supports school-level engagement with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

12   Overall, the audit found that:

●   the University is an outward-facing institution which makes consistent use of expert external academic opinion

●   existing procedures enable it to assure itself that full account is taken of external requirements and advice

●   its use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points contributes to assuring academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities.

13   The Assessment Policy, introduced in 2007, involves a framework which aspires to be student-friendly, transparent and equitable. Members of academic staff spoke warmly about the more imaginative approach to assessment it facilitates; it received a slightly more mixed, but still predominantly positive, response from partner organisation staff. The audit team found the policy clear, accessible, well-supported by a Good Practice Guide and widely understood; the two-tier system of field and award assessment boards operates effectively and consistently. From the student perspective assessment requirements are clear and explicit, but they experience intermittent problems of deadline bunching and the late return of assessed work. Notwithstanding these concerns, the team found assessment procedures satisfactory.

14   The institutional approach to awards is based on credit accumulation, and the University claims to have no concept of progression. The audit team noted that, while module completion data are well-used and widely understood, programme retention data is, in practice, assigned lower priority. The lack of routinely available programme-level data led the team to conclude that the University cannot readily and systematically identify, and therefore address,

programme-specific issues affecting student achievement. Overall, the team found that the University's use of management information to assure itself of the academic standards of programmes (as opposed to fields) is limited. It is advisable that the University strengthen the analysis and utilisation of data on student retention and achievement at programme level.

15   The institutional-level postgraduate research and taught doctorate statistical data made available to the audit team were insufficiently detailed for the school-level retention of postgraduate students to be accurately determined by cohort. Nevertheless, an overview report for academic year 2008-09 identified significant anomalies between centrally available and school-level data on doctoral completions. Any reliance on incomplete or inaccurate data would inevitably restrict the University's capacity to identify issues potentially impinging on the quality of learning opportunities or the academic standards of awards. It is advisable that the University strengthen the oversight of postgraduate research degree programmes at both institutional and school levels by improving the quality of its progression and completion data (see paragraph 54).

16   Overall, confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

17   The University identifies levels of student satisfaction mainly by means of an institution-wide student satisfaction survey, module evaluation questionnaires, comment boxes in public spaces, the National Student Survey (NSS), and the representative system (see next paragraph). The audit found that procedures to ensure that findings of significance are addressed are appropriate and widely understood.

18   Student representation exists at all levels of the committee structure. A distinctive feature is the influential Joint Student-Staff Committee, the membership of which includes staff and students from each school, Union sabbatical officers and a Library representative. At institutional level, where representation is through the Students' Union, attendance and engagement are good; at school and programme levels the system is considerably less effective. While some school and programme-level representatives are fully involved, not all representatives engage fully with their constituents and attendance is often poor.

19   The University, which acknowledges the challenges it faces in this area, continues to work with the Students' Union to encourage and support student involvement in quality assurance. The audit acknowledges the University's continuing attempts to increase student engagement in the quality assurance process.

20   The University's commitment to linking research and scholarship to learning and teaching has led, in the last three academic years, to a near doubling of the proportion of academic staff with a doctorate. The University is particularly committed to pedagogical research, in support of which it has encouraged the institution of school and service-level learning and teaching research groups (see paragraph 30) as loci for the discussion and promotion of academic practice. Academic staff cited examples of the pedagogical use of their own research and professional practice, in module and programme development as well as teaching. The audit found that the University has taken steps towards integrating staff research, scholarly activity and professional engagement and programme development and delivery.

21   The University is committed to the development of blended learning in on-campus provision, and increasingly expects all modules to have a presence in the virtual learning environment. The Quality Manual and the Manual of General Regulations explain the regulatory framework for distance learning: all programmes delivered through flexible and distributed learning are subject to the same processes of approval, monitoring and review as on-campus programmes. The virtual learning environment is also the principal mechanism for the delivery of distance learning, its managers being centrally involved from the first in programme design and planning. The audit found that the University is generally in a position to assure itself of the quality of learning opportunities for distance learning students.

22   The University offers library and computing facilities on all three campuses. All learning resources are reviewed annually and are included in the student satisfaction and other surveys. Students, while generally satisfied with learning resources and particularly appreciative of the virtual learning environment, drew attention to problems with noise and disruptive behaviour in one library and cramped conditions in another: the audit found that the University is appropriately addressing these concerns.

23   The University's approach to admissions reflects its commitment to providing routes into higher education for non-traditional entrants; its Admissions Policy is complemented by another on the accreditation of prior learning, with potential candidates supported by a website providing an information portal and application forms with associated guidance. Each school has an accreditation of experiential learning panel to advise the assessment board on specific cases. Students spoke highly of the efficiency and effectiveness of the process, all aspects of which were found to be effectively implemented.

24   The University provides extensive systems and services to support its diverse student body, covering academic, financial, health, employment and personal needs. These systems are centrally coordinated, well-publicised, regularly monitored at a senior level, and designed to be offered in a flexible and student-centred manner. The services particularly include: a strong commitment to induction; a Student Charter; integrated employability advice; and tailored support for students with special needs, international students, and those requiring help with English language skills. Students were generally appreciative of the services available, drawing attention, however, to some difficulties in accessing services in the evenings and being less persuaded than University officers of the value added by the Student Charter. Students similarly spoke broadly positively about the personal tutor system, noting, however, a degree of cross-school variability in delivery.

25   The audit found that the University provides comprehensive support in a manner generally appropriate to a diverse student body, and is able, through the review and enhancement process in both central services and schools, to maintain an appropriate oversight of this provision.

26   The University's staff development programme, designed to address the needs of all categories of staff, is widely publicised. Teaching achievements are recognised by means which include enhancement-oriented teaching fellowships, a range of discussion forums, and annual learning and teaching conferences. Newly-appointed lecturers lacking two years' prior experience in higher education are normally required to undertake, as a minimum, the concise and focused lecturers' development programme. This programme is available also to staff with a more limited teaching role, including doctoral students hired as part-time teaching assistants. The audit found that it is possible for some teaching assistants to rely on local mentoring by experienced members of staff, and that it is normal for the programme to run concurrently with teaching. It is desirable that the University ensure that all research students who teach and/or assess are formally prepared for these roles (see paragraph 53).

27   The University has comprehensive policies for staff recruitment, appointment, induction, probation and promotion, and procedures to oversee their implementation; responsibilities relating to these functions are largely addressed in the staff development programme. The audit found the integrated nature of these policies supports an institutional commitment to enhancing the staff experience, and that the University's approach to staff development is well-conceived and appropriate to an institution which describes itself as a learning community in the widest sense.

28   In the wake of variable participation in the peer review of teaching, the University has recently introduced a new system, which aims to increase involvement, partly by taking a more inclusive and enhancement-oriented approach. It would be premature to gauge the success of this approach.

29   The audit found that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the learning opportunities available to its students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

30   The University's aim of providing reliable and demonstrable improvements in the quality of learning opportunities is systematically monitored. The audit identified valuable institutional activities which, though not necessarily distinctive in themselves, collectively bring an enhancement focus to the academic environment. These include:

- the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, which encourages the promotion of good practice and championship of enhancement and innovation

- significant developments in e-learning practice

- learning and teaching research groups (see paragraph 20)

- the learning enhancement opportunities system, which supports mainly pedagogic research

- the development of the role of leaders in learning and teaching, placed in all schools to lead enhancement and support the implementation of institutional policies

- the thoughtful way in which student academic difficulties (including poor literacy, poor referencing skills and academic dishonesty) are addressed

- the annual Field and Programme Leaders' Event, designed to facilitate enhancement in areas which include retention, employer engagement and inclusive practice

- a range of discussion forums and targeted training events

- the partner enhancement review system in collaborative provision.

The University's planned, integrated and strategic approach to quality enhancement, which both underpins and brings cohesion to a broad range of enhancement activities, is a feature of good practice.

31   The review and enhancement process, involving in particular an institutional overview report prepared by the Validation and Review Subcommittee, identifies common themes, areas of good practice for dissemination and matters for consideration by Academic Board. The audit found the process (in particular the use of external examiners' comments, both individually and as synthesised in the annual external examiner overview report) a useful vehicle for embedding enhancement in the quality management system.

32   The audit found that the University has a planned, integrated and strategic approach to quality enhancement, which underpins and brings cohesion to a broad range of enhancement activities.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

33   In spite of having, as yet, no overarching collaborative strategy, the University is heavily involved in collaborative provision. Its development of such provision as an extension of its widening participation agenda was identified as a feature of good practice in its collaborative provision audit, and the present audit found that this commitment has been maintained at all institutional levels. A memorandum of cooperation signed on behalf of the University and the partner organisation is required for each partnership: the audit found that these meet all relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*.

34   All aspects of collaborative partnership and its management are explained in the Quality Manual. Responsibility for managing partnership establishment lies with the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team; once established, operational responsibility for managing the partnership passes to the school concerned. As with on-campus provision, responsibility for overseeing quality and standards rests with the Quality and Standards Committee: it is largely discharged by the Validation and Review Subcommittee, and the Collaborations Monitoring

Subcommittee. The latter Subcommittee, which was instituted (with partner organisation representation) following the collaborative provision audit, oversees the review and enhancement process for collaborative programmes and considers termination proposals. The Subcommittee was considered a useful addition to the committee structure.

35   The nature of the University's association with a large National Health Service Trust (through which it offers programmes to over 800 students) is such that it approved the institution of the Trust's own quality management structure (on all elements of which it has ex officio representation), regarding the Trust as broadly akin to a school: hence it is subject to academic review, and its procedures are required to be approved by the University prior to implementation. Following careful investigation, the audit found this devolution appropriately conceived and responsibly managed.

36   Procedures for the appointment, induction and reporting of external examiners largely replicate those for on-campus provision. Where possible, a common examiner is appointed to oversee identical or cognate modules offered in multiple locations, and the audit found evidence of such examiners commenting on student performance on modules and programmes delivered across centres. The University has only one partnership where a language other than English is used: in accordance with requirements it is overseen by a bilingual external examiner. All transcripts and diploma supplements meet the expectations of the *Code of practice*.

37   Partner organisation staff members speak in complimentary terms about the system itself, the support and information they receive from the University, and their involvement with the University through committee membership and attendance at staff development events. They understand and are confident in implementing assessment requirements and procedures. Students are equally clear about the assessment criteria, which are readily available, and most are content with the timeliness and usefulness of markers' feedback.

38   Approval arrangements distinguish between the approval of a partner organisation and of programmes, although in both cases the criteria involved emphasise the integrity of academic quality and standards, requiring evidence that the candidate organisation is of appropriate standing and not prepared to place quality and standards at risk for financial gain. All aspects of the approval procedure, which includes external contributions, are monitored by Validation and Review Subcommittee, conducted in a professional manner, and meet all relevant expectations of the *Code of practice*.

39   At the end of the first year of a partnership, an institutional-level partner enhancement review monitors the effectiveness of existing procedures in the light of experience, and identifies areas where remedial action is necessary or enhancement possible. The audit found this process both supportive and incisive; it contributes to assuring and enhancing the operational integrity of the collaboration.

40   The review and enhancement process broadly mirrors that for on-campus provision, subject largely to such necessary modifications as involving partner organisation staff and ensuring that reports are reviewed by the Collaborations Monitoring Subcommittee. While a number of review and enhancement reports largely replicate the previous year's report (a matter which should be identified in the Validation and Review Subcommittee's triennial review), the audit found that procedures are competent and characterised by partner involvement, the monitoring role of the Collaborations Monitoring Subcommittee is an active one, and partner organisations value the process.

41   Collaborative review also broadly follows the academic review procedure (see paragraph 9), but involves review of both the partnership itself and all programmes offered by the organisation concerned. While generally the process operates in accordance with expectations, the University acknowledges that the system is not as yet fully embedded. This is consistent with the audit finding that a condition relating to strengthening moderation prior to assessments being sent to

external examiners appeared both in a 2004 and 2009 review, in spite of
ostensibly having been addressed in the 2004 action plan. The University should review its
procedures accordingly.

42   Requirements for meeting the expectations of external reference points match those for
on-campus provision, and the same quality management procedures are in operation. The audit
also found that partner organisations are conversant with, and consistently address, all relevant
external reference points.

43   The University's integrated admissions system includes all collaborative provision
students. Link tutors are responsible for ensuring that admissions are conducted in accordance
with the criteria specified in the memorandum of cooperation: this procedure is well understood.
The University also requires partner organisations to have a procedure for the accreditation of
prior certificated and experiential learning equivalent to its own; responsibility for overseeing
arrangements and awarding credit is devolved to the school assessment board concerned.
These arrangements operate satisfactorily.

44   Partner organisations' main operational responsibilities involve providing direct support for
staff and students, specified programme-related information, mechanisms for collecting module-
level feedback, programme committees, and specified levels of learning resources. Students
confirmed their general satisfaction with these dimensions of their learning environment. They
also spoke broadly positively about the student representative system,
and although their awareness and utilisation of the Students' Union's online training package
for student representatives was variable, some cited issues addressed in programme committees
(with consequential actions posted on notice-boards), while others said that the accessibility of
staff is such that most issues are addressed quickly and informally.

45   While the University is encouraged to monitor the take-up of training for programme
representatives, the audit confirms the satisfactory nature of the personal support and learning
resources for students in collaborative provision.

46   Staff development in collaborative provision is largely devolved to schools. While tailored
to individual needs, it must include teaching and learning strategies, assessment strategies and
requirements, and University policies and procedures. The University also organises institutional-
level partner development conferences in support of major policy changes, and invites partner
organisation staff to a number of internal events. The audit found that appropriate development
opportunities are available to (and in some cases required of) partner organisation staff.

47   The University requires partner organisations to institute a peer review of teaching
system during the first year of a partnership. While this requirement is monitored in partner
enhancement review, the audit found that not all partners comply with it. The University is
encouraged to keep the issue under active review.

48   Overall, the audit found that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of
the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards and quality of
learning opportunities in programmes delivered by collaborative partners.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

49   The University recruits postgraduate research students to all schools, boosting numbers
by the provision of 30 studentships. At institutional level, responsibility for overseeing provision
is vested in Research Degrees Subcommittee. At school level, school research degrees
subcommittees monitor the quality of learning opportunities; day-to-day management
responsibility is vested in a director of studies. The audit found the quality management
framework appropriate in conception and clearly explained.

50   The University has procedures governing the selection, admission, induction, training,

supervision, review and examination of postgraduate research students. Admissions decisions for research degrees are made by the Research Degrees Subcommittee. Induction, an institutional-level responsibility, is normally supplemented by school-based provision which students found particularly useful. The University responds appropriately to the results of internal and external surveys, and formal procedures govern all aspects of assessment. Students expressed general satisfaction with these activities, including the learning environment, the experience and helpfulness of their supervisors, and assessment, appeals and complaints procedures. The audit found all these procedures fit for purpose.

51   Criteria exist both for approval as supervisor and for assuring the collective experience of supervisory teams. In a policy being refined to address, as far as currently possible, the differential responsibilities of directors of studies and other supervisors, the University specifies a maximum supervisory load. New supervisors are required to take a day-long staff development programme within six months of commencement, and continuing support is available. Supervisors confirmed the effectiveness of these procedures. The audit found arrangements for the supervision of research students satisfactory.

52   Responsibility for delivering the researcher development programme is shared between the Graduate School and the academic school concerned. While the Graduate School's generic contribution is well-understood and efficiently delivered, evidence was found that not all schools provide students with a skills audit: the University should ensure that this institutional commitment is invariably met.

53   Some postgraduate research students serve as teaching assistants, and all those lacking two years' teaching experience are required as a minimum to take the newly-constituted lecturers' development programme (see paragraph 26), although this requirement is not universally enforced. It is desirable for the University to ensure that all research students who teach and/or assess are formally prepared for these roles.

54   The recently instituted Research Degrees Subcommittee has among its terms of reference monitoring and evaluating the success of research degree programmes on the basis of relevant data: it was found to have discharged this responsibility competently. It was noted that the Subcommittee's predecessor body had, on several occasions, noted concern about the quality, quantity, accuracy, accessibility and utilisation of data in institutional review reports. The audit found that the University had begun responding to these problems by the start of the present academic year, and that the Graduate School had initiated an analysis of completion data but that the Subcommittee considered a 'culture of completion...must be given time to mature'. After five months' existence the Subcommittee had still, however, to report to Quality and Standards Committee: while a presentation on progression and completion was made to Academic Board shortly before the audit it remains uncertain either that the University can generate routine analysis of statistical data on postgraduate research progression and completion or that Quality and Standards Committee is fully apprised of the concerns surrounding this issue. It is advisable that the University strengthen the oversight of postgraduate research degree programmes at both institutional and school levels by improving the quality of its progression and completion data.

55   Notwithstanding this reservation, the audit found that the University has put in place procedures for the management of its research programmes which meet the expectations of the *Code of practice.*

Section 7: Published information

56   The University intends the extensive information it publishes in hard copy and online to be timely, accurate, complete and accessible. It identifies four main information sources: the institutional website; programme specifications; prospectuses; and programme leaflets. Centrally managed sign-off procedures exist for all these categories other than programme leaflets, which,

like school and service web pages are a local responsibility, which is discharged with the aid of central guidance. In addition, a Publications Forum has been instituted to bring together the Publications team and school and service representatives. Overall, the audit found the University's published information clear, current and helpful to students.

57   Consistency of format and accuracy in programme specifications are achieved by bespoke templates combined with clear and systematic monitoring arrangements. The audit found programme specifications clearly expressed and consistent in format.

58   For collaborative provision, marketing and communications guidelines are detailed in the memorandum of cooperation and the Collaborations Handbook. The audit found that all publicity and marketing materials are monitored annually prior to approval and that partner organisations' websites are monitored on a monthly basis.

59   Students commented generally favourably on the information provided. They appreciated the virtual learning environment and had received both the Student Charter (with the contents of which, however, they were only variably familiar) and what they considered a detailed, accurate and clear handbook for each module. This view is not, however, wholly consistent with the comment in the student written submission that more detailed module information would be appreciated.

60   It is confirmed that the externally available information required by the Higher Education Funding Council for England guidelines is published on the University's website and that the Teaching Quality Information on the Unistats website appears accurate and complete.

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

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the University's planned, integrated and strategic approach to quality enhancement, which both underpins and brings cohesion to a broad range of enhancement activities (paragraph 30).

Recommendations for action

63   It would be advisable for the University to:

- strengthen the institutional-level oversight of external examiner appointment procedures (paragraph 8)

- strengthen the provision, analysis and utilisation of data on student retention and achievement at programme level (paragraph 14)

- strengthen the oversight of postgraduate research degree programmes at both institutional and school levels by improving the quality of its progression and completion data (paragraphs 15, 54).

64   It would be desirable for the University to:

- ensure that all research students who teach and/or assess are formally prepared for these roles (paragraphs 26, 53).

Appendix

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

The University welcomes the outcome of the Institutional audit and its judgement that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of both the academic standards of its awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to its students, which confirms our own assessment of the integrity and robustness of our academic standards and awards.

We are pleased that the team found our planned, integrated and strategic approach to quality enhancement a feature of good practice, but are disappointed that the team were unable to unpack this into further points of good practice. We note however the 10 items comprising this element listed in the report (paragraph 30).

The University will be putting in place mechanisms via its external examiner committee to strengthen the institutional-level oversight of external examiner appointment procedures. We are reviewing the data provided to enable us to strengthen the provision, analysis and utilisation of data on student retention and achievement at programme level and the data to evaluate progression and completion in postgraduate research degree programmes. We will review mechanisms to support the preparation of research students who teach and/or assess.

Finally, the University wishes to place on record its appreciation for the courteous and professional way in which the audit was conducted and welcoming manner in which the audit team handled the meetings with staff.