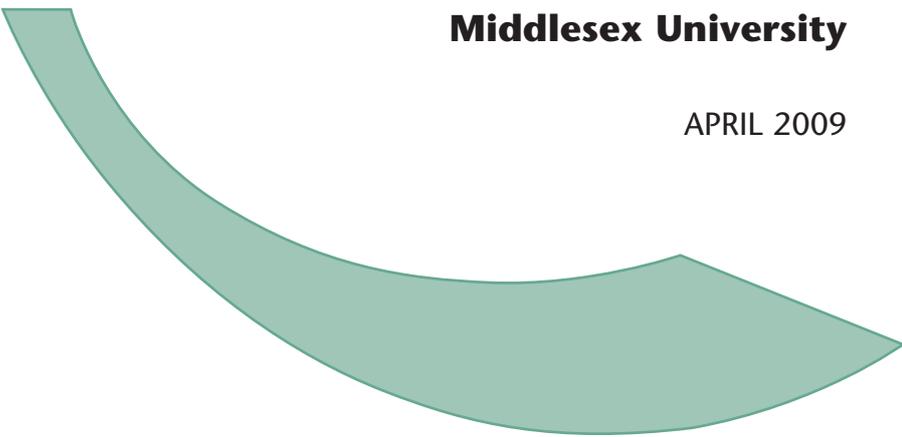


# Institutional audit

**Middlesex University**

APRIL 2009



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## 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 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 Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (now the Department for Business, Innovation 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 approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aims of the revised Institutional audit process are to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges 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
- effective means of providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications
- effective means of enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and 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 quality of its programmes
- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and 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 to collaborative provision, 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 academic 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. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (*Handbook for institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland 2006* - Annexes B and C refer).

## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Middlesex University (the University) from 30 March to 3 April 2009 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.

### 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 adopted a systematic approach to the appraisal and enhancement of the quality of students' learning opportunities across all levels of the institution.

### Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The University has, for the most part, put in place procedures for the management of its research programmes, which meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research students*.

### Published information

The University provides helpful information for staff and for current and potential students, and has in place procedures for ensuring its accuracy and completeness.

### Features of good practice

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

- the meticulous attention given to the establishment, development and integration of the University's Dubai Campus
- the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement's successful implementation of its dual role of audit and support
- the University's initiatives to improve student progression and achievement
- the comprehensive analysis of data contained in the annual report on assessment
- the distinctive contribution of the Institute for Work-Based Learning to the University's portfolio of educational provision
- the contribution made by learning and teaching strategy leaders to implementing a wide range of institutional initiatives.

### **Recommendations for action**

It would be advisable for the University to ensure that:

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

It would be desirable for the University to ensure that:

- the academic review process gives explicit consideration to statistical data
- all external examiners' reports are discussed by programme boards of study, including student representatives
- the evaluation of staff development and its future direction are increasingly guided by relevant statistical data.

### **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 engages constructively with the Academic Infrastructure.

## Report

1 An Institutional audit of Middlesex University (the University) was undertaken in the week commencing 30 March 2009. 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 P Garnsworthy, Mr P Leyland, Dr M Stowell and Professor P Sullivan, auditors, and Ms C Robinson and Miss G Hooper, audit secretaries. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor R Harris, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

## Section 1: Introduction and Background

### The institution and its mission

3 The University is situated on four London campuses and a fifth in Dubai. Excluding students based with collaborative partners, (collaborative provision being the subject of a separate audit), it has some 22,000 students including almost 500 research students; almost two-thirds of all students are full-time.

4 The University's 2003 Institutional audit expressed broad confidence in the soundness of present and likely future management of the quality of programmes and the academic standards of awards. As well as identifying features of good practice, the audit team made several recommendations, all of which the University was found to have conscientiously addressed. Among institutional developments since 2003, the present report will make particular reference to the work of the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement; the Learning Framework; the rationalisation of academic management into five units (four schools and an Institute for Work-Based Learning); and the reduction in the number of London campuses from seven to four.

5 The establishment of the Dubai Campus in 2005 marked a significant departure for the University. While it described the campus as operating on exactly the same basis as London campuses, setting it up presented complex challenges, which the University was found to have addressed in a strategic way, paying particular attention to ensuring comparable student learning opportunities and identical academic standards to those appertaining in London. The audit team found that the meticulous attention the University has given to the establishment, development and integration of the Dubai Campus constitutes a feature of good practice.

6 The Vice-Chancellor, as Chief Executive of the University, is advised by five deputy vice-chancellors who together constitute the University Executive. Academic Board, which is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, is the supreme academic authority; its nine subcommittees include the Academic Programme Planning Group; Assessment and Academic Regulations Committee; Academic Standards and Quality Committee; Teaching and Learning Committee; and Research and Research Degrees Committee. Schools, which are divided into discipline-based departments, are headed by deans, and have designated staff with responsibility for all matters pertinent to this audit; the Institute for Work-Based Learning has similar responsibilities to schools, but operates on a smaller scale.

7 The Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook specifies the University's approach to academic quality and academic standards. Academic standards are defined at programme validation, reflected upon in annual monitoring, and reviewed in detail in six-yearly reviews. The Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement manages and reports on University academic quality and standards processes; the Centre for International Education is responsible for ensuring the coordination of academic matters overseas; the Research and Business Office performs a similar role in relation to research and scholarship.

8 The audit team found that these arrangements constitute an effective framework for managing academic standards and for assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities.

## **Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards**

9 The University describes its approach to programme validation in the Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook. On the basis of detailed scrutiny of the process itself and its monitoring, the audit team found that the procedure is effective, pays due regard to academic standards and external reference points, and makes rigorous use of external experts.

10 The University has replaced annual monitoring with quality monitoring, which it sees as a 'live' process, aiming for flexibility, currency, responsiveness and policy relevance. Quality monitoring involves the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement studying detailed school-level monitoring documents and reporting to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee on emerging issues and areas of good practice. The audit team found quality monitoring constitutes a sound basis for ensuring quality and standards, and that the Centre's annual audit of the process contributes significantly to the effectiveness of the process.

11 Academic review follows a six-yearly cycle, involving review panels with external and student representation. The Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement monitors the implementation of any resultant action plans on behalf of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. The audit team found, on the basis of documentary study and discussion, that the process contributes effectively to enhancing the quality of student learning and assuring the appropriateness of academic standards.

12 The audit team paid close attention to the work of the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement, both in relation to its monitoring and review functions and more generally. The Centre makes a distinctive contribution to the management of the quality of student learning and the assurance of academic standards: in helping, supporting and advising school and departmental staff it has facilitated improved educational delivery, and in advising the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), it has contributed to the assurance of academic standards. This combination of responsibilities can require delicate handling, and the necessary balances have been deftly struck. The Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement's successful implementation of its dual role of audit and support constitutes a feature of good practice.

13 The audit team found that while academic review documentation includes two years' quality monitoring reports with statistical appendices, not all review reports make reference to statistical data trends. It follows that optimal benefit has yet to be gained from the documentation: it is desirable that the University ensure that academic review gives explicit consideration to statistical data.

14 The audit team found programme approval, monitoring and review fit for purpose, conducted in accordance with institutional requirements and contributing to the assurance of academic standards and the quality of academic provision.

15 The audit team found the University's external examining arrangements, overall, to be soundly managed, and contributing to assuring academic standards. Nevertheless, it was noted that some boards of study, by giving scant attention to external examiners' reports, are missing an opportunity for engagement with students: it is, therefore, desirable for the University to ensure that all such reports are discussed by programme boards of study, including student representatives.

16 The University aims to embed the Academic Infrastructure in institutional procedures. The audit team found evidence of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points contributing to programme design, monitoring and review, and confirms that the University makes effective use of such reference points in quality management. Management

of accreditation and review activity by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies is devolved to schools, although reports on accreditation events are relayed to Academic Standards and Quality Committee, with action plans monitored by the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement.

17 The University has undertaken considerable work on assessment, with the main aim of improving progression and achievement. This work is reflected in an explicit institutional strategy for improving progression and achievement; an initiative to improve aspects of the student experience supported by working groups charged with developing and embedding good practice in routine operations; and the Learning Framework, which is central to the University's educational profile: introduced in the academic year 2007-08 following a widespread and inclusive consultation process, it involved a move to year-long modules, permitting in-depth study and greater continuity of learning, supported by a stronger emphasis on formative assessment and feedback in a manner designed to enhance student learning and to improve progression and achievement rates. Data analysed in the course of the audit demonstrate, that the Framework, which has also been well received by staff and students, has thus far achieved these aims. Taken together, the audit team found these initiatives constitute a feature of good practice.

18 Academic Board's Assessment and Academic Regulations Subcommittee is responsible for assessment regulations, and Academic Registry prepares a detailed annual assessment report for the Teaching and Learning Committee. Using six years' data, the most recent such report provides an overview and evaluation of the effectiveness of present arrangements, based on trend and comparative analysis across a range of pertinent variables. The comprehensive analysis of data contained in the annual assessment report constitutes a feature of good practice.

19 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that it makes use of a range of statistical information to inform its management of academic standards, that the Executive and Board of Governors deploy key performance indicators, and that Academic Board receives annual statistical reports on appeals and academic misconduct. The audit team examined the University's use of statistical information; notwithstanding the variable use of such data in academic review (see paragraph 13), it was found that, as a whole, such information contributes to the assurance of academic standards.

20 The audit team found that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

### **Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities**

21 For ease of reference, procedures for the validation, monitoring and review of programmes and institutional engagement with external reference points were described in the previous section. The audit team found the procedures well designed, appropriately implemented and contributing to the management of quality; it is confirmed that the University meets the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points.

22 In its Briefing Paper, the University described the opportunities open to students to provide feedback on their academic study and overall experience, and its approach to addressing the main findings of the National Student Survey. The audit team found, on the basis of documentary study and discussions with students, that module evaluation questionnaires are appropriately discussed and addressed; they inform future programme reviews; and the University makes effective use of feedback to assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities.

23 The University expresses its commitment to student participation in quality assurance mainly through committee representation, involvement in programme review meetings and student evaluations. It is confirmed that students are represented, directly or through elected sabbatical officers, on all bodies germane to this audit. The Students' Union provides

comprehensive training for representatives, although take-up is not universal; nor have all school boards of study succeeded in securing regular student attendance. Nevertheless, students have representation rights across the system, and the University's approach to engaging students in quality assurance enables them to contribute to the assurance and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

24 The University, although it does not aspire to be a research-led institution, has methods of enhancing the links between teaching and research (as broadly defined); these include an expectation that all academic staff undertake research, scholarly activity or professional practice. This expectation is supported by activities such as events offered by the Learning and Teaching Strategy Leaders Team, which contains learning and strategy leaders from each school and institutional experts (teaching fellows, and members of the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement and the Learning Resources Service). In addition, the University's Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (Enhancement Strategy) aims to ensure that all programmes are based on up-to-date research and, where appropriate, professional practice, and commits it to ensuring that all programmes offer 'research-like' learning experiences. The audit team found that: the work of the Learning and Teaching Strategy Leaders Team contributes to pedagogic development; there is evidence of subject-specific and pedagogic research contributing to programme delivery; and research, scholarly activity and professional practice are linked to programmes of study in many areas of the University.

25 The University's long-standing achievements in work-based learning have been publicly recognised, and were taken further in 2007 with the establishment of the Institute for Work-Based Learning. This Institute, which aims to facilitate the University-wide use of work-based learning and to act as a focus for strategic initiatives in employer engagement, has contributed to both strategy and practice in this field. The audit team found the Institute's distinctive contribution to the University's portfolio of educational provision constitutes a feature of good practice.

26 The University has a number of mechanisms for identifying and responding to students' resource needs; at the time of the audit, these were manifest in estate renewal pursuant upon campus rationalisation. The University endorses the appropriate use of educational technology, aiming to integrate e-learning into all educational provision. Nevertheless, while the virtual learning environment makes valuable contributions to classroom-based teaching and students are generally satisfied with it, the audit found some frustration at variability in staff usage; it is confirmed from other enquiries that such frustration is justifiable. Taken as a whole, however, the audit team found the multi-campus virtual learning environment, although yet to be completed, to be broadly effective in meeting students' learning needs.

27 On the basis of documentary study and discussions with staff and students, and noting in particular, that the student written submission was largely complimentary about the physical environment, the audit team found the provision and management of learning resources contribute to the quality of learning opportunities.

28 The University stated that it is increasingly centralising admissions for taught programmes; it has well-developed policies on the accreditation of prior (experiential) learning and credit transfer; and it provides clear online information on requirements. The audit team examined these claims and found them justified. It is also confirmed that online registration has streamlined the process, and that induction is comprehensive and fit for purpose. Students spoke warmly of these arrangements, all of which the University carefully monitors. Overall, the University's admissions policy for taught students, which is defined as including registration and induction, is competently conceived and consistently implemented.

29 The University does not have a personal tutor system, aiming rather to provide students with appropriate academic, financial and pastoral support as required. It is confirmed that students know how to access services and are complimentary about support from programme and module leaders; a personal development planning arrangement is in place, but was about to undergo

review at the time of the audit. The Careers Service attracts favourable student comment; disability support staff are active in ensuring that prospective users are identified and offered help; counselling and financial advice are available centrally; the Students' Union's close collaboration with schools and central teams is a distinctive feature of pastoral support; and for international students, advice is available on visa and immigration issues. At school level, specialist student achievement advisers who work with module leaders to monitor attendance, achievement, progression, engagement and withdrawal, offer a wide range of advice and contribute to strategic initiatives; progression and achievement trends suggest they contribute to improved institutional performance in these areas, thereby contributing to the feature of good practice earlier identified (see paragraph 17). On the basis of documentation and the meetings with staff and students, the audit team found arrangements for student support appropriate and effective.

30 The audit team found that, so far as permanent staff are concerned, institutional staffing policies are clear, coherent, effectively communicated and regularly reviewed; in the case of hourly-paid academic staff, however, certain unresolved issues exist, but are said to be close to resolution. Reference is later made to the preparation of research students for teaching duties (see paragraph 43).

31 All newly appointed staff are assigned individual mentors and, normally, required to take the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education. All academic staff are eligible to apply for a teaching or senior teaching fellowship: the University has appointed 36 teaching fellows and four senior fellows, and two staff members are currently national teaching fellows; accelerated promotion is offered on grounds that can include strength in teaching. The University operates a clear staff appraisal scheme; while there has been some slippage in the current planning period, the short-term nature of this problem was accepted. Since the audit team was, however, unable to identify any formal attempts to integrate appraisal with corporate planning, this is an issue to which the University may wish to give consideration: in particular, the team found take-up of staff development for the virtual learning environment based more on individual interest than institutional strategy.

32 The Staff Development Strategy Group embodies an institutional commitment to embedding staff development in the daily workings of schools and departments. The annual Staff Development Review, complemented by less detailed school plans and reviews, reflects on the previous year's activities, stating and explaining priorities for the coming session. Nevertheless, in that the audit, found scope for the University to make more systematic use of the data contained therein as a basis for formulating key performance indicators, trend analysis and interschool comparisons, it is desirable for the University to ensure that the evaluation of staff development and its future direction are increasingly guided by relevant statistical data. Overall, however, evidence was found of sound approaches, encouraging take-up rates, realistic institutional investment and user satisfaction; the University's approach to the development of teaching staff is, therefore, generally effective.

33 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**

34 The University defines academic quality enhancement as 'explicit processes put in place to improve the student experience over time', operating at both institutional and local levels: accordingly the Academic Quality and Standards Policy expects such enhancement to be planned at University level, integrated into working practices, appropriately incentivised and underpinned by effective staff development. The initiatives particularly identified with enhancement are the Student Experience Group, the brief of which includes addressing significant issues raised in the National Student Survey and, most centrally, the Learning Framework (see paragraph 17), which has involved changes to the structure of programmes to create a stronger cohort identity and

provide for continuity of study, the redesign of assessment, (to emphasise formative feedback), student achievement advisers (see paragraph 29) and improved student support: the contributions of all these initiatives is confirmed. The audit team also identified the Progression and Achievement Strategy, the Learning and Teaching Strategy, the Assessment Group, quality monitoring and the review of student handbooks as systematic institutional-level contributions to enhancing students' learning opportunities.

35 At institutional level, responsibility for quality enhancement rests with the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement: discussions with staff and scrutiny of documents confirm that enhancement is firmly embedded in institutional culture and structures, and that the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement vigilantly oversees progress. Within schools, responsibility lies with the Associate Dean (Learning and Quality Enhancement), although each school also has a learning and teaching strategy leader: such leaders, together with staff of the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement, constitute the Learning and Teaching Strategy Leaders Team, thereby contributing to institutional-level development. The audit team found that learning and teaching strategy leaders and the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement have been influential in developing and implementing the Enhancement Strategy; the contribution of learning and teaching strategy leaders to implementing a wide range of institutional initiatives constitutes a feature of good practice.

36 The University has adopted a systematic approach to the appraisal and enhancement of the quality of students' learning opportunities across all levels of the institution.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

37 The University's collaborative provision will be addressed in a separate audit to be conducted at a later date.

## **Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students**

38 With one-third of academic staff submitted to the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, a further third engaged in research, resulting in less than one quality output annually, and the remaining third not engaged in research but expected to pursue scholarly or professional activities, the University realistically describes itself as a research-informed rather than research-intensive institution. Institutional-level responsibility for research rests with a Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Research and Research Degrees Committee, although the University's approach to research development is a devolved one, with each schools having its own research strategy, overseen by an associate dean.

39 Research students comprise little more than two per cent of the student headcount, and QAA's Review of postgraduate research degree programmes in 2006 accordingly stressed the importance of securing a critical mass to support a stimulating research environment. Accordingly, the University is concentrating funding on nine research centres, recruiting research students only to areas where adequate supervisory teams and support facilities exist, and exploring ways of further developing its research portfolio and research degree provision. The University has recently introduced a mandatory institution-wide supervisors' training programme, which is being further refined to meet the particular needs of the Institute for Work-Based Learning. The audit team found that this arrangement, when fully implemented, should meet a recommendation of QAA's review.

40 The University conducts internal audits of schools, to review research students' experience and to assure itself of the appropriateness of academic standards; a separate survey, conducted by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and focusing on supervisory capacity, training, student progress, monitoring and completion and development plans, made recommendations to Research and

Research Degrees Committee, most of which have been adopted. The audit team found these reports thorough and effective. The selection, admission and induction of research students are school-level responsibilities discharged within an institutional framework. The team found procedures for handling applications, including those for the Doctorate in Professional Studies (DProf) in the Institute for Work-Based Learning where special arrangements apply, to be thorough, consistent and policy-compliant; work is also in hand to ensure greater consistency of school-level induction. School handbooks, while not all of them contain information on admission, provide sound information about the supervisory process; supervisory arrangements are generally adequate in design and clearly articulated, although the absence of requirements as to the frequency of meetings or their monitoring is a matter that the University may wish to address.

41 Skills training for research students is provided principally at school level. A recent internal review of such training found that, while all schools comply with research councils' requirements, careers advice requires further attention: a task group is currently reviewing training provision across the University. The audit team gave detailed consideration to registration and progression arrangements, including arrangements for transfer to doctoral level: it was found that the University expects research students to receive regular formal feedback on their progress, mainly through registration and transfer panel minutes, and decisions made by progression committees: progress and review arrangements for research students are effective. It is confirmed that: research students are represented on committees at all levels; student matters appear in school committee minutes; and immediate responses are minuted and subsequent actions reported at the following meeting. The arrangements for student representation and feedback are adequate and effective.

42 Examination procedures involve high levels of independence and externality. In the case of failed degrees, a panel of enquiry is instituted to investigate and report to Research and Research Degrees Committee. Examiners' report forms are analysed centrally, with a summary of issues raised and comments made being submitted to the same Committee; a post hoc questionnaire is distributed to external examiners to obtain views and suggestions for improvement. Appeals, complaints and grievance procedures for research students are published and widely available. The audit team found all these arrangements satisfactory.

43 Those research students for whom teaching is integral to their study receive formal training in the form of elements of the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education; other such students permitted to undertake limited amounts of teaching have, since 2008, been required to have at least one advisory session with the module leader and to have their teaching observed once and fed back on within four weeks of commencement: the audit team found this arrangement less than thorough. Immediately prior to the audit, however, a draft policy statement expecting research students without previous experience or training to undertake limited training in teaching, (although not directly in assessment), was considered by Academic Board. It is considered that the present situation constitutes a potential risk to academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities, and that the draft policy only goes some way towards remedying this problem. It is advisable for the University to ensure that all research students who teach and/or assess are adequately prepared for these roles.

44 The audit team found that for the most part the University's procedures for managing its research programmes meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

## **Section 7: Published information**

45 The audit team found that students spoke warmly of the materials they had seen, particularly appreciating the scope, detail, accuracy and currency of information provided on the student portal. While the student written submission expressed reservations about the accuracy of some publications, this was found to stem from a misreading of the texts: while the University

may wish to review the clarity and presentation of its information in these areas, the team did not find the misreading justified. Students spoke well of the scope and availability of published information, including the completeness of programme and module handbooks: for the most part the team confirmed this positive view.

46 The audit team confirms that: the University provides the public access to the information specified in HEFCE 06/45, Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes; it provides helpful information for staff and for current and potential students; and it has in place procedures for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of such information.

## **Section 8: Recommendations and features of good practice**

47 As a result of its investigations 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 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.

### **Features of good practice**

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

- the meticulous attention given to the establishment, development and integration of the University's Dubai Campus (paragraph 5)
- the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement's successful implementation of its dual role of audit and support (paragraph 12)
- the University's initiatives to improve student progression and achievement (paragraphs 17 and 29)
- the comprehensive analysis of data contained in the annual report on assessment (paragraph 18)
- the distinctive contribution of the Institute for Work-Based Learning to the University's portfolio of educational provision (paragraph 25)
- the contribution made by learning and teaching strategy leaders to implementing a wide range of University initiatives (paragraph 35).

### **Recommendations for action**

52 It would be advisable for the University to ensure that:

- all research students who teach and/or assess are adequately prepared for these roles (paragraph 43).

53 It would be desirable for the University to ensure that:

- the academic review process gives explicit consideration to statistical data (paragraph 13)
- all external examiners' reports are discussed by programme boards of study, including student representatives (paragraph 15)
- the evaluation of staff development and its future direction are increasingly guided by relevant statistical data (paragraph 32).

## Appendix

### Middlesex University's response to the Institutional audit report

The audit was conducted in a professional and courteous manner, and the report is felt to be a fair and accurate reflection of provision. The University welcomes the judgement of broad confidence in the quality and academic standards of its qualifications. In response to the recommendations of the report, the University will:

- review its requirements for, and staff development of, research students with teaching and/or assessment responsibilities, so as to ensure that such students are adequately prepared for these roles
- review the procedural guidance and related staff development to ensure that there is full consideration of programme statistical data
- similarly, review the procedural guidance and related staff development to ensure that there is full consideration of external examiners' reports by boards of study

review the range of existing sources of statistical data related to staff development, and future staff development data needs, and ensure that there is full consideration of all relevant data in the staff development planning process.

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