

Bell College of Technology

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Report of a follow up to enhancement led
institutional review

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Preface

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

To do this, QAA carries out reviews of individual higher education institutions (HEIs) (universities and colleges of HE). In Scotland this process is known as Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR). QAA operates equivalent but separate processes in Wales, England and Northern Ireland.

Enhancement-led approach

Over the period 2001 to 2003, QAA, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, Universities Scotland and representatives of the student body worked closely together on the development of the enhancement-led approach to quality in Scottish HE. This approach, which was implemented in academic year 2003-04, has five main elements:

- a comprehensive programme of review at the subject level, managed by the institutions
- improved forms of public information about quality, based on addressing the different needs of the users of that information including students and employers
- a greater voice for student representatives in institutional quality systems, supported by a national development service (known as the student participation in quality scotland - sparqs - service);
- a national programme of enhancement themes, aimed at developing and sharing good practice in learning and teaching in HE
- ELIR involving all of the Scottish HEIs over a four-year period, from 2003-04 to 2006-07. The ELIR method embraces a focus on: the strategic management of enhancement; the effectiveness of student learning; and student, employer and international perspectives.

QAA believes that this approach is distinctive in a number of respects: its balance between quality assurance and enhancement; the emphasis it places on the student experience; its focus on learning and not solely teaching; and the spirit of cooperation and partnership which has underpinned all these developments.

Nationally agreed reference points

ELIR includes a focus on institutions' use of a range of reference points, including those published by QAA:

- the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)
- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- *Guidelines on preparing programme specifications*, which are descriptions of what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. Programme specifications outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the SCQF.

Conclusions and judgement within ELIR

ELIR results in a set of commentaries about the institutions being reviewed. These commentaries relate to:

- the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards at the level of the programme or award. This commentary leads to a judgement on the level of confidence which can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The expression of this judgement provides a point of tangency between the ELIR method and other review methods operating in other parts of the UK. The judgement is expressed as one of: broad confidence, limited confidence or no confidence
- the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair
- the effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students
- the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning
- the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement.

The ELIR process

The ELIR process is carried out by teams comprising three academics, one student and one senior administrator drawn from the HE sector.

The main elements of ELIR are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution in advance of the review visit
- a Reflective Analysis document submitted by the institution three months in advance of the second part of the review visit
- a two-part review visit to the institution by the ELIR team; Part 1 taking place five weeks before Part 2, and Part 2 having a variable duration of between three and five days depending on the complexity of matters to be explored
- the publication of a report, 20 weeks after the Part 2 visit, detailing the commentaries agreed by the ELIR team.

The evidence for the ELIR

In order to gather the information on which its commentaries are based, the ELIR team carries out a number of activities including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, as well as the Reflective Analysis institutions prepare especially for ELIR
- asking questions and engaging in discussions with groups of relevant staff
- talking to students about their experiences
- exploring how the institution uses the national reference points.

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Introduction

1 This is the report of a Follow-up Review of Bell College of Technology (the College) undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). QAA is grateful to the College for its willing cooperation.

2 The Follow-up Review results from the judgement contained within the enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) report, June 2004, which stated that limited confidence could be placed in the College's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards it offers. As a consequence, the then Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (now the Scottish Funding Council) requested that QAA should conduct a follow-up review to take place in November 2005.

Method of review

3 The review followed a method agreed between QAA and the College, and approved by the Scottish Funding Council. The scope of the follow-up review was: to conduct a full re-review of matters relating to the internal monitoring and review of quality and standards, and to arrive at a confidence judgement in relation to the College's management of academic standards; and to consider the progress made by the College following its receipt of the ELIR report in relation to its approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students and in relation to its strategic approach to quality enhancement.

4 Following the publication of the 2004 ELIR report the College was required to submit, for approval, an Action Plan to the Funding Council in January 2005. The Action Plan set out the ways in which the College intended to address the shortcomings identified within the ELIR report. For the purposes of the follow-up review, the College submitted a self-evaluation document (SED) which highlighted the progress made in implementing the matters contained within the Action Plan. The process of producing the SED involved wide consultation within the College, with the final

version being approved by the College Academic Council. Other documents made available to the ELIR team included the Institutional Strategic Plan 2005-2009, the Quality Enhancement Strategy, the 2005-06 Prospectus and QAA subject review reports.

5 The ELIR team met to consider the SED, the ELIR Action Plan and related documents on 3 November 2005, as a result of which it agreed a programme for a visit to the College. The visit took place between 28 November and 2 December 2005. The team met a range of staff and students including the Principal, staff with particular responsibilities for managing the quality of provision and securing the academic standards of the awards offered, teaching staff, staff with responsibility for supporting learners, student representatives drawn from across the College and a group of students drawn from two of the schools. In addition to its discussions with staff and students during the visit, the team was able to consider the focused set of documentation that had been identified within the SED.

6 The ELIR team comprised Professor Howard Colley, Professor David Kirk, Dr Alan Davidson, Miss Charlotte Gilfillan (reviewers) and Dr Maggie King (review secretary). The review was coordinated on behalf of QAA by Ms Ailsa Crum, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland.

Background information about the institution

7 The College was established by Lanarkshire County Council in 1972. In 1997 it sought designation as a higher education institution from the [then] Secretary of State for Scotland. As part of the process to establish the College's designation, QAA was commissioned by the [then] Scottish Office Education and Industry Department to undertake an institutional audit in June 1999, and following the successful outcome of that audit, the College became a higher education institution in 2001.

8 The College's mission is to 'provide high quality education, training and advice at higher education level by a variety of modes and in a range of disciplines to cater for local, regional, national and international needs and in support of the economic development of Lanarkshire, South West Scotland and beyond'.

9 Traditionally, the largest single grouping of awards offered by the College was Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNCs and HNDs) awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). The College continues to offer HNCs and HNDs although, since 2002, the College's policy has been to replace these with certificates and diplomas of higher education wherever possible; higher education status having provided the College with the power to award its own certificates and diplomas. At the time of the follow-up review, the College had validated nine diplomas and 10 certificates of higher education.

10 The College collaborates with a number of validating bodies to offer degree-level provision. Currently these bodies include: the Open University, the University of Strathclyde, the University of Paisley, and NHS Education for Scotland (NES). In 2004-05, the majority of the College's provision was validated by the Open University, through the Open University Validation Services (OUVS).

11 In 1999 the College revised its structure from 14 academic departments to four schools: Science and Technology, Social Studies, Health Studies, and Business. More recently there have been a number of significant changes to the College committee structure and its senior management (see below, paragraph 14). In 2005-06, the College had 3,444 full-time equivalent students, of whom 2,636 were full-time and 808 part-time.

Internal monitoring and review of quality and standards and public information

Overview of the institution's internal arrangements for assuring the quality of programmes and maintaining the standards of its academic awards and credit

12 The 2004 ELIR report highlighted a number of areas requiring development including some concern about the ability of cross-College issues to be identified and acted upon within the committee structure; the absence of procedures for internal periodic review of subjects; and weaknesses in the College's management and operation of its external examiner system. The 2004 report also identified matters that were positive, such as the recent introduction of school academic quality committees (SAQCs), the internal arrangements for validation and annual monitoring, and the internal audit process. This section reports on a full review of the College's arrangements for internal monitoring and review. It includes a judgement on the level of confidence which may be placed in the institution's management of the academic standards of the awards it offers.

Management and committee structures

13 The College established an ELIR Action Group to initiate and monitor the implementation of the ELIR Action Plan (see above, paragraph 4). The Action Group is chaired by the Principal and has met regularly, monitoring the work of key staff who have had a responsibility for carrying out the actions identified in the plan.

14 The ELIR Action Plan required that a joint subgroup of the College Academic Council and the Board of Governors should be established to review the academic management structures and academic committee structures. As a result, the structures were revised in 2005-06 with the intention of achieving the correct balance between management and collegiality. One

significant recommendation from the joint sub-group was for a 'streamlining' of the College senior management. Two new posts have been created to replace two previous assistant principal positions and the Director of Administration and Finance. The Vice Principal took up post in September 2005 and has a broad responsibility for academic and related matters and the second new postholder, the College Secretary, began work in August 2005. The College also has a new Principal who has been in post since July 2005. This means that a new senior management team has been created since the 2004 ELIR.

15 Five institution-level committees report to the Academic Council: the Academic Standards Committee (ASC); the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee (AQEC); the Research Committee; the Academic Appeals Committee; and the Student Discipline Committee. The ASC is responsible for ensuring that the College has appropriate procedures for setting and maintaining academic standards. It is also responsible for monitoring the level of student satisfaction and for the introduction of systems to improve the quality of the student experience. The AQEC was established in 2005-06, following the joint subgroup review (see above, paragraph 14), with a role relating to the strategic enhancement of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the College. AQEC is also responsible for advising the Academic Council on the direction of the College's academic development.

16 Following the joint subgroup review (see above, paragraph 14), school boards of study were established in 2005-06 to provide an overview of the business of each school and to seek to drive the quality enhancement agenda at that level. SAQCs had been created in 2003-04 to give schools a formal role in programme monitoring, and this was expanded recently to include consideration of external examiners' reports and responses, internal audit reports and the outcomes of both internal and external subject reviews. SAQCs report to the school boards of study and to the College ASC. Within schools there are also course boards,

which report to the College Academic Council via the relevant SAQC and the College ASC. At programme level, staff-student liaison committees (SSLCs) are in place and report to the relevant course boards.

17 The 2004 ELIR report highlighted that there was some 'filtering out' of matters between levels in the committee structure, notably between the ASC and the SAQCs. The College has reflected on this in its Action Plan, indicating that it considers this will be addressed by a number of changes including: revised terms of reference and memberships of the ASC and SAQCs; the appointment and responsibilities of the Vice Principal; and the provision of guidelines relating to the required involvement of SAQCs and internal auditors. The College has plans to review the effectiveness of its revised committee structure at the end of the 2005-06 academic session, and is encouraged to proceed with this positive measure.

Policies and procedures

18 The College's policies are set out in its Quality Procedures Manual in the form of procedures, forms and comprehensive guidance on implementation. The Manual is available to all staff and students via the College's intranet. The set of policies comprises validation and review, external examining, annual monitoring, internal periodic subject review, and internal audit. The College has made a number of recent changes as part of its ELIR Action Plan including the introduction of internal periodic subject review, updating its procedures for external examining, and updating its annual monitoring arrangements. A number of changes have also been influenced by the College's exercise to map its procedures against the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA.

Validation and review

19 The College currently collaborates with three universities to offer degree-level provision (see above, paragraph 10). The College has delegated powers for validation and review from the Open University. Procedures relating

to awards of the University of Strathclyde are defined in a specific document agreed with that university. The single award which is validated by the University of Paisley was developed using internal College procedures but the validation event was conducted by the University of Paisley using its own procedures.

20 The College has made a number of recent minor changes to its procedures for validation and review, and is considering its future arrangements for validation, including how it could use its relationships with validating organisations to promote enhancement more effectively. The College has scheduled an internal audit of the effectiveness of its validation and review procedures during academic session 2005-06.

External examining

21 The 2004 ELIR report identified a number of weaknesses in the College's management of external examining. These related to the completeness and timeliness of the submission of external examiner reports, and the adequacy of responses by course teams to significant issues raised by external examiners. The ELIR report also identified a specific concern relating to the appointment arrangements in one school where a number of external examiners had been drawn from the same institution.

22 The College's Action Plan identified a programme of work to address these matters. An internal audit of the documentation relating to the 2003-04 external examiner reports was carried out. The internal audit had a broad purpose aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of the external examining arrangements. This exercise included a systematic identification of all external examiners for 2004-05, which was used as a reference to check the timeliness of the submission of the reports, and the completeness of the reports themselves. The internal audit report was submitted to the College's ELIR Action Group (see above, paragraph 13) and to the ASC, with the latter having a remit to oversee ongoing actions.

23 The College also introduced a new procedure requiring monitoring and intervention by the Vice Principal, reporting to the ASC, to deal with three types of issues: late reports; reports considered inadequate for the purpose of quality enhancement; and reports requiring substantial response and action from the relevant course board. External examiner reports are submitted to the Director of Quality who identifies any reports that might require a substantial response; these are highlighted to the relevant course board and also to the Vice Principal who reviews the report and the course team's response.

24 The College has revised the guidance it provides to external examiners and, in May 2005, organised a workshop to which all external examiners and relevant course leaders were invited. Discussion included an emphasis on the importance of course teams addressing concerns raised in external examiner reports. The College also organised an internal workshop on course board reports, which further emphasised the importance of course teams' responses. The external examining process is now formally linked to the annual monitoring arrangements; there is a specific section within the annual course board report relating to external examiners' comments, and both the external examiner's report and the course team's responses must be appended.

25 The ELIR team's scrutiny of the documentation confirmed that the internal audit had been comprehensive and detailed, and had been a valuable and effective part of the College's response to the matters identified in the 2004 ELIR report. The internal audit report concluded that, in general, external examiner reports and responses had been adequate, and went on to make a number of comments that could inform the improvement of the College's approach to external examining, such as: an observation that two schools had given more consideration to external examiner reports than the other two schools; and, in a number of instances, the internal audit team had identified areas for action which were not addressed in course

teams' responses. The ELIR team could not identify any explicit response to these observations from its consideration of ASC and SAQC documentation. The College should, therefore, complete its follow-through of the action relating to the internal audit report, including giving consideration to the ways in which the information could be used at College, school and course levels. This information should also be used to inform the next internal audit of external examining that the College has planned to undertake.

26 The implementation of the College's new procedure requiring monitoring and intervention by the Vice Principal has brought about an improvement in the timeliness, completeness and adequacy of external examiner reports for session 2004-05. The Vice Principal's report to the ASC identified a very small number of late submissions, and noted that appropriate actions had been taken in response to these. No external examiner reports were considered inadequate in terms of their content. The ELIR review team's scrutiny of sample documentation relating to external examining for session 2004-05 indicated one instance of an external examiner's report being submitted before the second examination board in September. The team considered that the College's recent efforts to encourage prompt submission have been generally positive, however, it should ensure that external examiner reports cover all relevant assessment, including assessment results considered at the September examination boards. Documentation indicated that four external examiner reports had been highlighted as requiring a substantial response from the course team. It was clear to the team that actions had been monitored effectively by the Vice Principal, and reported to the ASC.

27 On the detailed matter of appointments (see above, paragraph 21), the College advised that the school in question now draws its external examiners from a wider range of institutions, with guidance from the Director of Quality.

Annual monitoring

28 The College's arrangements for annual monitoring, which are set out in the Quality Procedures Manual, include recent changes influenced by both the ELIR Action Plan and the College's reflection on annual monitoring for academic session 2003-04. The formal procedure starts with the preparation of a module review form (MRF) by the module leader. A subgroup of each course board considers all MRFs associated with the course and prepares an overview report which is submitted to the course board, and is reflected in the annual course board report. Each course board prepares an annual course board report addressing a consistent set of headings covering both assurance and enhancement. Recent changes to the procedure have been aimed at strengthening the linkages between external or internal subject review, external examiner reports and MRFs, and require the explicit allocation of responsibility and deadlines for proposed actions. Annual course board reports are submitted to the relevant SAQC, which is required to produce an annual report for the ASC, and to provide feedback to each course board.

29 The ELIR review team considered samples of documentation and discussed annual monitoring with groups of staff from the College. These confirmed the general effectiveness and impact of the recent changes. Staff demonstrated a sense of ownership of the process and expressed an awareness that annual monitoring was given detailed consideration at all levels. In discussion, staff expressed the view that there had been a shift from a compliance-based approach to one that is more reflective and analytical. The team regarded this as a positive development.

Internal audit

30 The College's internal audit process involves a team of four experienced academic staff, one from each school, undertaking an annual programme to audit the implementation of College policies and procedures. The team also leads a set of focus groups each session to explore student views.

31 The 2004 ELIR report recognised the strengths of the internal audit process and the potential for the College to develop it into a significant enhancement tool by taking a more systematic approach to assigning responsibilities for follow-up actions. The College has revised the procedure, giving the ASC the role of considering the audit reports and assigning responsibility for undertaking follow-up actions. The ELIR team studied reports from a number of recent audits and related ASC's papers, as well as meeting with a group of internal auditors. In discussion, the internal auditors demonstrated a clear understanding of where audit fits within the College's procedures and how it is evolving from a compliance-based process to include a stronger focus on enhancement. The team concluded that the internal audit procedure is a robust and flexible tool within the College's quality management procedures.

Internal periodic subject review

32 The 2004 ELIR report noted that the College had not developed procedures for internal periodic subject review. The College's ELIR Action Plan included a commitment to develop procedures and a schedule of reviews, and to carry out at least two reviews prior to the current follow-up visit in November 2005.

33 The College's approach is set out in its Quality Procedures Manual, and it reflects the Scottish Funding Council guidelines. The process considers both assurance and enhancement and leads to reports that identify a range of matters: strengths of the provision; areas where action could be taken to strengthen the maintenance of standards; and areas where action could be taken to enhance the quality of the student learning experience. The College has defined a five-year schedule of reviews up to 2008-09. The process begins with the preparation of an SED by staff from the course team(s). This is considered by a review panel that includes external subject specialists and a student from the College. The review panel meets with staff and students from the course(s) and submits a report to the ASC. The follow-up procedure requires an action plan to

be submitted to the ASC, with the relevant SAQC having responsibility for ensuring implementation of the action plan.

34 Staff who had been involved in the reviews spoke positively to the ELIR team about the process and its role within the College's wider quality assurance processes, as well as its link with external processes. They considered the process has a clear focus on enhancement, and emphasised the positive opportunity it provides for discussion across subjects. They saw benefits in being a review panel member, including personal development and learning about review practice. They welcomed the involvement of external subject specialists and considered that there would be benefits in the College taking a more consistent approach to ensuring appropriate training or briefing for any external members who are not experienced in undertaking subject reviews. The staff regarded the inclusion of a student on the review panel as a positive development, and were sensitive to the realities of this, including the demand placed on the student's time, and the changing pool of potential student reviewers from year-to-year. Internal members from other subject areas considered that they were able to play a useful role, taking a generic perspective, making use of external reference points including the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, the *Code of practice* and subject benchmark statements, both published by QAA.

35 In discussion with the ELIR team, students were also very positive about their involvement with the reviews. They considered that they had been properly informed about the process. They recognised that the purpose was to improve quality, and believed their views had been given due consideration.

36 The two reports available at the time of the follow-up review, provided evidence of the process being implemented effectively. The reports were structured around three main headings: academic standards; quality and learning opportunities; and quality assurance and enhancement. They included explicit consideration of external reference points and they also included references to other elements

of the College's quality management procedures including engagement with external QAA Academic Review, the role of SAQCs, and recent improvements in annual course board reporting. The reports identified good practice and suggested action points. The ELIR team considered that the process met the Scottish Funding Council guidelines, had been implemented effectively and was well regarded by staff and students.

Overview of the use made of external reference points for assuring quality and standards

Use of the Academic Infrastructure

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

37 The College recognises the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) as a primary reference point for its provision. Since 2003-04, the number of courses provided by the College that do not adhere fully with the SCQF has been reduced. During session 2005-06, this was limited to SQA awards offered by the College which had yet to be revalidated by SQA. The College's validation, revalidation and internal periodic subject review procedures make appropriate reference to the SCQF.

Subject benchmark statements

38 Most of the College's provision is below honours level; as a result, staff interpret and adapt the subject benchmark statements, which relate to the honours level, in order to relate them to the appropriate academic levels. In its SED, the College noted that programme development teams have found benchmark statements to be an aid when devising educational aims and intended learning outcomes. Information considered by the ELIR team indicated that the College's internal periodic subject review procedure was also making appropriate reference to the subject benchmark statements.

Programme specifications

39 College policy requires that programme specifications are prepared for all courses to a standard College template that reflects QAA

guidelines. Programme specifications are made available to all staff and students via the College's intranet. The ELIR team studied a sample of the programme specifications provided by the College. Some, notably those from social sciences, were considered to be examples of good practice, and it was noted that others did not follow the College template, omitting to give sufficient detail on assessment. The College is encouraged to ensure that all programme specifications adhere to its guidelines on content.

Progress files

40 The 2004 ELIR report noted that the College had only recently started to take action on progress files, and urged the College to advance this work. In its SED, the College noted the progress that it has made, including developing registry and administration systems to enable it to provide transcripts that are compatible with QAA guidelines, and would enable the production of European diploma supplements. Sample documents provided to the ELIR team confirmed this and, in discussion with staff, the team learned that the College is continuing to refine these systems.

41 In its SED, the College referred to a pilot personal development planning (PDP) scheme which had operated during session 2004-05. The College's evaluation of the pilot highlighted some benefits, but also identified that students seemed reluctant to engage fully with the system. A group has been established to monitor a number of PDP initiatives at the College during session 2005-06, and will report to the AQEC, with a view to AQEC developing a revised College policy and approach to PDPs.

Code of practice

42 As part of its ELIR Action Plan the College undertook an exercise to map its policies and procedures against the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. This confirmed that the College processes were largely compatible with the *Code*, and also identified a number of areas for improvement. The College has prepared an action plan to address these, which is being implemented and monitored by the ASC.

From the available documentation, the ELIR team considered that this had been a thorough and worthwhile piece of work.

Employer and professional and statutory body concerns

43 The College's programme validation procedures require consideration of the needs of employers in programme design, and normally require an employer representative to be a member of the validation panel. The College's new internal periodic subject review procedure also requires explicit consideration of the role of employers in influencing the curriculum, and the extent to which the curriculum enhances the employability of students. Course boards may co-opt an employer representative as a member, and course teams may involve employers in a variety of ways; this is particularly significant in the School of Health Studies.

44 Professional and statutory body concerns are important in two subject areas: journalism, where there are links with the Broadcast Journalism Training Council; and in the School of Health Studies where the NES plays a very significant role. In discussion with the ELIR team, academic staff emphasised the importance of professional and employer concerns in influencing the College's provision.

45 Students expressed the view that their courses were linked to the needs of employers, referring to a range of activities including placements in some courses, and support such as information sessions and guidance on curriculum vitae preparation and preparing for interviews. The College has recently introduced a placement learning policy which includes a checklist for placement coordinators and handbooks for students and placement providers. Staff informed the ELIR team that students were well prepared for placement and that employers frequently complimented the College on the quality of the students they received for placements. It was clear to the ELIR team that the College has a range of positive and productive links with employers (see below, paragraph 86).

Use of external reference points in the external examining process

46 The College uses three forms of external examiner report reflecting its own requirements and those of its validating universities. All forms request external examiners to consider national qualifications frameworks, relevant subject benchmark statements, and academic standards in other UK higher education institutions. The University of Strathclyde form additionally requests external examiners to consider relevant professional body requirements. The ELIR team was provided with copies of all external examiner reports for sessions 2003-04 and 2004-05; these, and the team's consideration of the College's revised arrangements for managing its external examiner system (see above, paragraphs 21-27), confirmed that the College external examiners were satisfied that the College's provision reflected relevant external reference points.

Commentary on the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards

47 Since the 2004 ELIR report, the College has improved a number of its processes. Its approach to annual monitoring has been strengthened, increasing the emphasis placed on reflection and evaluation. Significant and rapid progress has been made in designing and introducing internal periodic subject review, which incorporates consideration of external reference points and fits well with the College's other assurance and enhancement mechanisms. Internal academic audit continues to be a valuable and flexible process. In order to achieve the full value of the process, the College should consider how it can make more systematic and effective use of the outcomes of the internal audits, in particular the audit relating to external examining.

48 In general the College is making appropriate and effective use of external reference points. The College is encouraged to continue with the implementation of its action plan to address the *Code of practice*, and to

ensure that all programme specifications adhere to the College's guidelines on content, in particular regarding information on assessment.

49 The College makes appropriate reference to professional and statutory body requirements and considerable efforts are made across the institution to meet the needs of employers.

50 Progress has been made to address the previous weaknesses in the College's management of its external examiner system. In particular, procedures are in place to address the completeness and timeliness of the submission of reports. The College should complete the follow-through of its internal audit relating to external examining, including reflecting on how the findings of the audit can be used at institution, school and course levels. The outcomes of this exercise should be used to inform the planned further internal audit of the College's use of external examining.

51 On the basis of these findings, **broad confidence** can be placed in the College's current, and likely future, management of the academic standards of its awards **provided that** the College continues to build on recent progress and achievements. In arriving at the broad confidence judgement, there is recognition of the rapid progress made which has been driven by the College's ELIR Action Plan, and there is an expectation that the College will continue to develop its culture and systems to promote evaluation, reflection and action.

Overview of the institution's approach to ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair

52 The 2004 ELIR report concluded that the College had effective procedures in place to assure the accuracy of the information it publishes. The report noted a limited awareness among College staff of the probable requirements arising from the Scottish Funding Council guidelines on public information, and encouraged the College to take early action to prepare for these national requirements.

53 The College's ELIR Action Plan included a task for senior executive staff to consider the relevant external guidelines and undertake a mapping of information needs, sources, and action points with identification of individuals to be responsible and timescales for completion. This was submitted to the ASC and the College considers that it has taken the necessary actions. A related action was to define a minimum information set to be included in student course handbooks. This was approved by the ASC and issued to all schools for implementation. The College intends that the information content of the course handbooks will be monitored through the internal periodic subject review and internal audit processes.

Commentary on the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair

54 The College has effective procedures in place to assure the accuracy of the information it publishes in both hardcopy and electronically. It has developed its approach to meeting the requirements of the relevant external public information set.

The student experience

55 The 2004 ELIR report drew attention to a number of matters relating to the student experience: the value of encouraging greater student representation; the need to develop the College strategy for student retention; the need to address inconsistencies in the application of the College's assessment policy; and the benefit of developing a more holistic approach to enhancing the student experience and sharing good practice. This section reports on the progress made by the College in addressing these matters since publication of the 2004 report.

Student representation

56 With the introduction of the new committee structure (see above, paragraphs 15 and 16), students now have representation on a range of senior committees including the ASC, the AQEC and school boards of study. In discussion with the ELIR team, students expressed general satisfaction with the level of representation. The team was also given examples of the students having made a significant contribution to discussion, such as the student representatives' involvement with the ASC subgroup to develop generic assessment criteria, and their involvement with the recent redesign of the student satisfaction questionnaire. Staff serving as committee members reported on the value of the student involvement and acknowledged that student participation had not inhibited the business and working practice of senior committees, or the level of debate.

57 The College carried out an internal audit of the operation of course boards in April 2004, which showed that student attendance could be poor. The ELIR team noted that student attendance was generally good for institutional committees but more irregular with school boards of study and course boards. There would be benefit in the College continuing to explore ways of improving student attendance on committees within schools.

58 The students who met the ELIR team considered that SSLCs were the most effective mechanism for making their views known. Further discussion with staff and students indicated that SSLCs with a strong student involvement in the agenda preparation and general management of the committee were usually better attended by students. The internal audit of course boards (see above, paragraph 57) showed that matters arising from SSLCs were carefully considered by course boards with action being identified, but it was not usual for the boards to provide formal feedback to the SSLCs on the action taken. However, students confirmed to the team that oral feedback was usually provided by staff. Given the general success of the SSLCs,

particularly those with significant student involvement, it is likely that there is good practice which the College could extend to other groups across the College.

59 Overall, the ELIR team considered that the College has made positive progress in encouraging greater student representation following the 2004 ELIR report.

Student feedback

60 The 2004 ELIR report states that the College demonstrated some good practice in gathering data on the student view, but was less successful in making use, at the institutional level, of the data to improve the student experience. At the time of the ELIR review, student focus groups were a key mechanism for eliciting student opinion and the current SED confirmed this continues to be the case. The focus groups, which usually consist of five to 10 students, represent a substantial number of courses from across the College and are facilitated by an internal auditor (see above, paragraphs 30 and 31). In discussion with the ELIR team, groups of students did not appear to attach the same level of importance to this approach as did the College. Nevertheless, there is good evidence from the College's internal audit of focus groups that the groups do gather opinion on a wide range of student matters. In discussion with the ELIR team, the internal auditors referred to the difficulty of identifying broad generic themes given the breadth and variability of student opinion. This view had also been recorded in the internal audit report. Staff did, however, identify the potential for the rapid resolution of any matters raised by students through negotiation between the focus group convenor and the relevant course leader.

61 Another regular mechanism for obtaining student feedback at the course level is the course board reporting process, specifically through the MRFs (see above, paragraph 28). MRFs are considered by course boards and the process is monitored by the ASC. It was clear during discussions with the ELIR team that a wide range of staff from across the College

including senior managers and those directly involved in the process, regard the module review mechanism as providing an important foundation for developing an enhancement-led culture because of the requirement for staff to reflect upon their teaching.

62 The College also operates an institution-wide student satisfaction questionnaire, which both academic and support staff regarded as providing useful information. In their discussions with the ELIR team, students were more equivocal about the usefulness of the questionnaire, commenting that it was too long and expressing a dislike for its 'tick-box' design. The College acknowledged that the response rate had been disappointing, 25 per cent in 2005, but considered that the questionnaire nonetheless provided valuable information for improving the student experience. The team noted that the questionnaire did include a large number of questions, but recognised its comprehensive nature, covering all major aspects of academic and support services for students. Given the value the College places on the information generated by the questionnaire, it is encouraged to continue to seek means of improving the response rate.

63 In discussions with the ELIR team, students confirmed that informal face-to-face meetings with staff were widely used because this led to a rapid resolution of matters raised. Staff, including senior managers, and students expressed their support for the 'open door' policy for encouraging student feedback, indicating that this was in keeping with the small and friendly ethos of the College.

64 Students who had taken part in the College internal periodic subject review process (see above, paragraph 33) informed the ELIR team that this had provided an additional mechanism for providing feedback to staff. They commented favourably on the close attention given to student matters as part of the process and recognised the potential of the reviews for enhancing the student experience. The College is encouraged to take full advantage of this positive response from the students by making sure that, following the

reviews, it communicates clear actions and outcomes for the student experience at the subject level.

65 The ELIR team recognised the range of mechanisms in place for gathering student opinion and noted that students, in general, appeared satisfied with the variety of approaches available to them. The team would encourage the College to continue to review the ways in which it gathers student feedback, taking into account students' views on the more effective mechanisms.

Assessment policy

66 The 2004 ELIR report highlighted inconsistencies in the implementation of the College assessment policy, with some schools exhibiting good practice in providing students with feedback on their performance while poorer practice existed elsewhere. Senior managers reported to the ELIR team that the assessment policy had been revised, with the revisions appearing in the Quality Procedures Manual and staff being informed of these by email. Key elements of the policy include the adoption of generic marking criteria, generic feedback pro formas, and a three-week deadline for staff to provide feedback on formative assessment. Staff who met the team indicated that the College-wide assessment policy had been adopted by all schools. The College's internal audit of assessment, carried out in early 2005, found that some inconsistencies remained. The team's consideration of the internal periodic subject review reports and its meetings with students, suggested that there continues to be some variability in the extent to which students are provided with feedback within the three-week period and that oral, rather than written, feedback is occasionally used. Following the College's internal audit of assessment, the ASC decided that, where there are genuine difficulties in meeting the three-week deadline, staff could extend it but must keep students informed. Overall, students expressed satisfaction to the team with the quality of feedback but did acknowledge that this was dependent on individual members of staff.

67 The College has made progress towards establishing greater consistency in the implementation of its assessment policy. Further work is needed to encourage all staff to meet the three-week deadline and to provide written feedback. In addressing this, the ELIR team supports the College's stated intention to continue to review its assessment policy and to audit its implementation.

68 In discussion with the ELIR team, some students expressed concerns relating to the management and assessment of groupwork. They identified difficulties associated with persuading all students to contribute equally to the work of a group, and with allocating marks through peer assessment. Staff made it clear to the team that there were rules in place for managing students' performance in groups, and made a strong academic justification for peer assessment. Staff further indicated that peer assessment did have the support of many students and was being used widely across the College. The team would encourage the College to consider the guidance it provides on the assessment of groupwork, in order to reassure students of the integrity and fairness of this approach to assessment.

Support for learners

69 The 2004 ELIR report strongly encouraged the College to develop further its strategy for improving its student retention rates. A key development, arising from the ELIR Action Plan, has been the creation and implementation of a College student progression and retention strategy. The strategy was approved by the ASC in 2004-05 and the Principal met with the heads of school at the outset of the current academic session to underline the importance of the strategy and emphasise the need for its immediate implementation.

70 The ELIR team's consideration of the range of available documents and its discussions with a number of staff, including senior managers, and students all indicated that the strategy had initiated major developments across the College. The scope of the activity is set out in the College Early Assessment and Swift

Intervention (EASI) policy and includes: improved pre-entry guidance, monitoring of student attendance, the use of guidance tutors, student progress reviews within five weeks of enrolment, the introduction of early formative assessment and feedback, and working to the three-week rule on assessment feedback to students.

71 The EASI policy builds on existing good practice, such as the 'Raising Student Achievement Strategy' introduced by the School of Social Studies, and provides a positive example of good practice being shared across the College. A further example is the dissemination of the 'traffic light' system for monitoring class attendance which had been introduced to the College by the School of Science and Technology. Staff informed the ELIR team that the implementation of the 'traffic light' system had resulted in improved attendance, particularly among younger students. Senior managers also referred to improved retention and the College provided documentary evidence to illustrate a very significant increase in retention of almost 20 per cent in one school, with a cross-College improvement in retention of 8 per cent in 2004-05. In its discussions with students, the team heard a range of informative comments regarding retention, and the team would encourage the College to consult further with students as it progresses its work in this area, perhaps using the focus group mechanism as a means of gathering students' views.

72 A College internal audit of study skills carried out in 2004 was followed, in 2005-06, with comprehensive reports to the ASC on study skills across all schools. The internal audit report indicated that an appropriate range of approaches to developing study skills was in place, including the provision of workshops, study skills modules and skills packs, in line with the requirements of the emerging national PDP framework. Further support for study skills development has been provided by the appointment of an effective learning coordinator to work across the College. Students spoke positively to the ELIR team about the impact this appointment had on

their learning. From the team's discussions with staff, it was clear that the work of the effective learning coordinator was closely linked to 'mainstream' teaching within the College.

73 The ELIR team considered that the College has made substantial progress on developing support for learners since the publication of the 2004 ELIR report. The work undertaken to date on the EASI policy, the implementation of PDP, the appointment of the effective learning coordinator, as well as the work on a placement learning policy (see above, paragraphs 40, 41 and 45) illustrate the emergence of a holistic, College-wide approach to enhancing the student experience. The team considered that the integrated approach provided through the effective learning coordinator post represented particularly good practice. The grouping of student services within the responsibilities of the Vice Principal is also a positive development which is likely to bring about greater integration.

74 The development and implementation of the EASI policy has been rapid and the College is encouraged to monitor its implementation carefully to ensure its consistent application across schools. Although staff and students were generally very positive about its benefits, some inconsistencies emerged, for example some students had not participated in progress reviews.

75 Senior staff informed the ELIR team that a further development in this area would be for the College to integrate its marketing of courses with the institutional retention strategy. It was anticipated that this would provide a better match between student expectations and the programmes of study, and between student needs and the course portfolio. The team would support the College in developing this initiative.

Learning resources

76 In general, students expressed satisfaction to the ELIR team with the resources available to support their learning. Students from the computing courses expressed very strong satisfaction with the information technology (IT)

resources available, in particular the 'Hamilton' portal which gave access to a full range of learning resources. Other students voiced some frustration with the IT resources including difficulties with logging-on and a lack of available IT resources in the evening. These difficulties had been noted during the internal audit of focus groups carried out in 2003-04 and 2004-05. The team learned that the College was responding by introducing a new log-on system and there was a rolling plan to replace ageing IT hardware. The College should consider extending the good practice which exists in computing across the institution.

77 The ELIR team also noted that the College has a variety of virtual learning environment platforms in operation. At present this variation does not appear to impede student learning however, the team would support the intention of senior management to focus on a single, College-wide platform.

Effectiveness of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement

78 The 2004 ELIR report concluded that the College was at an early stage in the implementation of its quality enhancement strategy, highlighting a range of areas for further development. The ELIR Action Plan set out the ways in which the College intended to address the matters raised by the report. This section reports on the progress made by the College in addressing its strategic management of enhancement since 2004.

Leadership for enhancement

79 The lack of strong institutional leadership was identified in the 2004 ELIR report as a significant weakness in the delivery of the College's quality enhancement strategy. Following from work originally identified in the ELIR Action Plan, a new senior management team has been appointed (see above, paragraph 14) with the capacity to discharge effective strategic management. The academic committee structure has also been revised (see above, paragraph 14).

80 The newly created AQEC has the remit to set a strategic direction for quality and enhancement, through monitoring the development of the College quality enhancement strategy and the learning and teaching strategy (see below, paragraphs 90 and 91). AQEC is chaired by the Vice Principal and its membership includes the four heads of school. The SED stated that the Director of Registry and Student Services, the College Librarian and the President of the Students' Union were also included in the AQEC membership to ensure that support departments and the students themselves have a voice in the continuous development of the College quality enhancement strategy.

81 The terms of reference for the school boards of study (see above, paragraph 16) include responsibility for the implementation of the College quality enhancement strategy within each school. The school boards of study are required to report annually to AQEC on the steps taken to enhance the student experience in the previous session. In turn, AQEC will report to the Academic Council. The College considers that this reporting structure will allow it to both effectively monitor quality enhancement and identify good practice at a strategic level.

82 In its SED, the College recognised that close communication will be required among the committees if they are to be effective, and reporting mechanisms to ensure effective communication have been included in their terms of reference. In addition, the memberships of College committees, school boards of study and school academic quality committees have been designed to give key staff membership of several committees to promote communication between the groups.

83 From the ELIR review team's discussions with staff, it was clear that the restructuring of duties, particularly those of the Vice Principal and the heads of school, were already leading to improved communications throughout the College. The minutes of committee meetings have a clearer focus on the identification of staff responsible for action and on timelines for the

action to be completed. The school boards of study minutes demonstrated a clear linkage to both the AQEC and the relevant school academic quality committee.

84 It was clear to the ELIR team that the College has made significant progress towards establishing stronger leadership for the development of good practice through the clear allocation of responsibilities to accountable individuals and through the revised committee structure. The new Vice Principal post, bringing together responsibility for a broad range of academic and support matters, has a pivotal role. There are a number of examples of the new senior management team providing stronger leadership and encouraging the reflective commitment of staff to College policies. For example, in relation to the work on student progression and retention (see above, paragraphs 69-75), where a range of flexible approaches have been adopted within schools to address the institutional strategy.

External links

85 Since 2003-04, individual staff have engaged with the national enhancement themes in a variety of ways, for example by attending workshops, and the final reports from the Assessment and Responding to Student Needs themes have been disseminated to schools. The College acknowledges that, in the past, it has not optimised its involvement with the themes. AQEC now has responsibility for monitoring the College's engagement with the themes and regards the development of external links as essential.

86 The ELIR team noted that AQEC and school board minutes record discussion relating to the enhancement themes. While key staff are familiar with the themes, during meetings with the team, many staff demonstrated a limited engagement with them and some had a limited awareness of their nature or purpose. The College has in place productive links with employers and, in discussion, many staff were aware of the possibilities of making use of those relationships to enhance the student experience. It is central to the creation of an

enhancement-based culture that the College should develop clear links with the external academic community. In progressing this, it is positive that the Vice Principal, as chair of AQEC, has responsibility for leading the College's engagement with the national enhancement themes, and that AQEC has recognised the importance of establishing these external links.

The enhancement role of assurance processes

87 In its SED, the College asserted that its quality assurance processes provide the basis for the enhancement of the student learning experience and there is evidence of the processes being used in that way. The newly developed internal periodic subject review process has a clear enhancement role with the outcomes being focused on the development of action plans. The staff who have been directly involved also regard it as providing an opportunity for their staff development. Revisions to the annual course board reporting process have focused its enhancement role (see above, paragraphs 28, 29 and 61). In discussion with the ELIR team, staff were enthusiastic in their support for the redesigned MRFs which require a much more analytical and reflective approach from staff. Staff identified a further benefit of the forms as important reference points for the Annual Career Review process, which includes consideration of staff development needs and opportunities. The internal audit process is also recognised as having a significant potential for enhancement (see above, paragraphs 30 and 31).

88 Despite the positive enhancement potential of these processes, in their operation and in their consideration within the committee structure, there is a tendency for enhancement-related information to be used less rigorously than is the case with information relating to compliance. For example, the internal audits relating to external examining and the operation of course boards focused on the extent of compliance with particular requirements, rather than considering the role these processes could have in identifying good

practice for wider implementation. In discussion with the ELIR team, senior staff acknowledged possible reasons for this associated with the College's history of problematic outcomes from external reviews.

89 The ELIR team supports the efforts of senior managers in promoting a more confident culture, incorporating an external focus, in which staff reflect on their practice with a view to developing and improving the student experience. There is evidence that the culture of the College is beginning to move towards a greater enhancement emphasis, but this change will take time.

Quality enhancement strategy

90 The 2004 ELIR report highlighted a lack of clarity across the College about the relative purposes of the learning and teaching strategy and the quality enhancement strategy. It is positive that AQEC now has responsibility for monitoring the implementation of both, although it has not been in operation long and the ELIR team noted that some confusion about the interrelationship of the strategies still exists among teaching staff.

91 The College quality enhancement strategy remains focused on the important but narrow issue of improving student progression. As such it is limited in the extent to which it can be used as an effective strategic driver for the range of enhancement work across the institution. The ELIR team would support the intention of AQEC to consider ways in which the quality enhancement strategy, the learning and teaching strategy, and the progression and retention strategy could be aligned and integrated.

Summary

Background to the institution

92 The College was established by Lanarkshire County Council in 1972. In 1997 it sought designation as a higher education institution from the [then] Secretary of State for Scotland. As part of the process to establish the College's designation, QAA was commissioned by the [then] Scottish Office Education and Industry Department to undertake an institutional audit in June 1999, and following the successful outcome of that audit, the College became a higher education institution in 2001.

93 The College collaborates with a number of validating bodies to offer degree-level provision. Currently these bodies include: the Open University, the University of Strathclyde, the University of Paisley, and NHS Education for Scotland (NES). In 2004-05, the majority of the College's provision was validated by the Open University, through the Open University Validation Services (OUVS).

94 In 1999 the College revised its structure from 14 academic units to four schools: Science and Technology, Social Studies, Health Studies, and Business. In 2005-06, the College had 3,444 full-time equivalent students, of whom 2,636 were full-time and 808 part-time.

Follow-up review method

95 The review followed a method agreed between QAA and the College, and approved by the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council. The scope of the follow-up review was: to conduct a full re-review of matters relating to the internal monitoring and review of quality and standards, and to arrive at a confidence judgement in relation to the College management of academic standards; and to consider the progress made following the ELIR report in relation to its approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students and in relation to its strategic approach to quality enhancement.

Commentary on the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards

96 Since the 2004 ELIR report, the College has improved a number of its processes. Its approach to annual monitoring has been strengthened, increasing the emphasis placed on reflection and evaluation. Significant and rapid progress has been made in designing and introducing internal periodic subject review, which incorporates consideration of external reference points and fits well with the College's wider arrangements. Internal academic audit continues to be a valuable and flexible process. In order to achieve the full value of the process, the College should consider how it can make more systematic and effective use of the outcomes of the internal audits, in particular the audit relating to external examining.

97 In general, the College is making appropriate and effective use of external reference points. The College is encouraged to continue with the implementation of its action plan to address the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, and to ensure that all programme specifications adhere to the College's guidelines on content, in particular regarding information on assessment.

98 The College makes appropriate reference to professional and statutory body requirements and considerable efforts are made across the institution to meet the needs of employers.

99 Progress has been made to address the previous weaknesses in the College's management of its external examiner system. In particular, procedures are in place to address the completeness and timeliness of the submission of reports. The College should complete the follow-through of its internal audit relating to external examining, including reflecting on how the findings of the audit can be used at institution, school and course levels. The outcomes of this exercise should be used to inform the planned further internal audit of the College's use of external examining.

100 On the basis of these findings, **broad confidence** can be placed in the College's current, and likely future, management of the academic standards of its awards **provided that** the College continues to build on recent progress and achievements. In arriving at the broad confidence judgement, there is recognition of the rapid progress made which has been driven by the College's ELIR Action Plan, and there is an expectation that the College will continue to develop its culture and systems to promote evaluation, reflection and action.

Commentary on the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair

101 The College has effective procedures in place to assure the accuracy of the information it publishes in both hardcopy and electronically. It has developed its approach to meeting the requirements of the relevant external public information set.

Commentary on the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students

102 The College has made clear progress in encouraging greater student representation, notably through student membership of institutional committees. There remain some difficulties in securing student attendance at course board level and this has been identified through the College's own procedures. There is student involvement in internal periodic subject review both on the panel and in meeting with the reviewers and this is valued by staff and students.

103 A range of mechanisms are in place for gathering student opinion including a College-wide student satisfaction questionnaire and focus groups. Students and staff place particular value on the College's 'open door' policy for encouraging student feedback on an informal basis. The College values the information generated through all of these approaches and, in general, students are satisfied with the

variety of methods available to them. There would be benefit in the College continuing to review the ways in which it gathers student feedback, taking into account students' views on the more effective mechanisms and considering means of improving the response rates, particularly to the student satisfaction questionnaire.

104 The College has developed and implemented an institutional strategy for student progression and retention, building on existing good practice in some schools, for example, in the use of induction programmes and systems for monitoring attendance. Developments in this area have been rapid and the College now needs to ensure that the strategy is implemented consistently across all schools. There would be benefits in pursuing the stated intention of senior managers to align the retention and progression strategy with the institution's marketing strategy to provide a better match between student expectations and the programmes of study, and between student needs and the course portfolio. The College could also make greater use of students' views as a resource for developing and addressing retention, potentially using its student focus group arrangements as a mechanism for gathering the students' views.

105 A College-wide assessment policy is now in place and is being adopted by schools. There is evidence of staff engagement with recent changes in the assessment policy, notably in relation to the arrangements for providing feedback on students' performance. The College's internal periodic subject review process has identified that some aspects of the policy have not been implemented fully, although arrangements are in place to resolve this by the College continuing to review its policy and auditing its implementation. As a related matter, the College should consider the guidance it provides on the assessment of groupwork in order to reassure students of the integrity and fairness of this approach to assessment.

106 In general, students express satisfaction with the range and availability of learning resources, although groups of students identify difficulties in accessing information technology (IT) resources. The College should complete the review of its IT Strategy to ensure that this provision meets the needs of all students. There would also be benefit in the College focusing its resources on one virtual learning platform rather than spreading them across different areas.

107 Overall, there is evidence that the College is seeking to move towards a more holistic approach to enhancing the student experience, although it is still at an early stage in doing so. The integration of strategies and some strands of activity is positive, for example, the links demonstrated through personal development planning between study skills, the student retention strategy and employability. The grouping of student services under the oversight of the Vice Principal is also a positive development which is likely to bring about greater integration.

Commentary on the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning

108 The College has made progress towards establishing stronger leadership for the development of good practice. In particular, the new senior management team is providing stronger leadership to address the previous lack of clarity between central direction and arrangements to secure wider staff commitment and engagement, and there is some evidence of the management team seeking to encourage staff creativity around an institutional framework, as exemplified by the work on student progression and retention. It is clear that the College has recognised the need to balance strong institutional management with the need to support creativity at the programme level.

109 Senior staff have also sought to create a more reflective culture, although more time is

required to effect a culture change from one of compliance to one which is enhancement orientated. Notably through the annual course board reporting and the module review forms, staff are encouraged to reflect on their practice with a view to developing and improving the student experience. The College has established productive links with employers and is now seeking to build links with the higher education community through encouraging staff to participate in external events and initiatives within the sector. It is positive that the Vice Principal is now taking responsibility for the College engagement with the national enhancement themes.

110 The internal periodic subject review process incorporates an explicit focus on enhancement which is positive, but there remains a tendency, notably within the committee structure, for the College to use enhancement related information less rigorously than it does compliance data. For example, the internal audits of external examining documentation and of the operation of course boards focused primarily on matters of compliance without explicitly considering the role that these processes could have in identifying good practice which could be disseminated and implemented more widely across the College. There are indications that senior managers recognise the possible causes for this and are to be supported in their efforts to address this through the wider culture change agenda.

Commentary on the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement

111 The Academic Quality Enhancement Committee now has responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the wider institutional learning and teaching strategy as well as the College quality enhancement strategy, which should be beneficial in establishing the interrelationship of these strategies. The quality enhancement strategy remains limited in its focus and the College should proceed with its intention to review its

strategies, giving consideration to the ways in which the learning and teaching strategy, the progression and retention strategy and the quality enhancement strategy could be aligned and integrated.

Future external review

112 This follow-up review has been carried out relatively close to the original 2004 ELIR exercise. The College's ELIR Action Plan has been an effective driver for managing change, and the new senior management team has made considerable progress in recent months to address the matters raised in the 2004 report. There would be great benefit in the College participating in a full external institutional review early in the next ELIR cycle at which time there will be further evidence available through which the College should be able to demonstrate the level of confidence which may be placed in its management of the academic standards of the awards it offers and in the quality of its provision. Such a review should be a constructive tool to assist the College in asserting its place within the higher education sector.

