



Institutional audit

St Mary's University College

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Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

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

Institutional audit: report

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

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

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

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

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

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited St Mary's University College, Twickenham (the University College) from 6 to 10 December 2010 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards both of its own awards and of those it delivers on behalf of the University of Surrey.

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

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

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the University College is that:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University College's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its own awards and those it delivers on behalf of the University of Surrey
- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University College's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University College has an enhancement framework through which it takes deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. Although some aspects of the framework are new or need further development, the introduction of annual enhancement themes was found to be effective.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The University College has a sound basis for the current and future management of research degrees, which it delivers on behalf of the University of Surrey; its procedures meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (the Code of practice)*, Section 1: *Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA.

Published information

For the most part, reliance can reasonably be placed in the integrity and reliability of the extensive and accessible information that the University College publishes about its educational provision.

Features of good practice

The following areas were identified as good practice:

- the use of the Principal's Dashboard of College indicators which provides easily accessible, key management data
- the activity of the Centre for Workplace Learning in enhancing student employability
- staff development activities such as learning lunches
- the University College's promotion of selected enhancement themes, which encourage discussion and change at programme level.

Recommendations for action

It would be advisable for the University College to:

- rebalance quality and standards committee work to achieve: (i) a more analytical and influential role for school committees and Validation and Review Committee; and (ii) the involvement of a wider pool of academic staff
- develop institutional validation requirements and protocols for the delivery of flexible, blended and distributed learning
- strengthen its monitoring of the student learning opportunities on joint honours programmes
- review its validation and revalidation processes in order to improve their effectiveness, encourage the production of more analytical, self-evaluative documentation, and foster enhancement
- ensure that its engagement with potential academic partners is managed in a clear, formal, documented, comprehensive and measured fashion, with strengthened due-diligence scrutiny
- develop a clear procedure for managing the termination of programmes and partnerships in order both to secure the student experience and to ensure effective institutional oversight of the process
- revise its procedures for monitoring collaborative programmes, clarify individual and committee responsibilities and make greater use of disinterested internal advice
- respond thoroughly and in a timely manner to external reports
- develop a more secure process, with clearer internal and partner responsibilities, for checking and approving information published by itself and its partners
- take steps to ensure that the admissions requirements of partner institutions and organisations offering programmes leading to its awards are consistent with its own
- take steps to ensure that the *Code of practice's* advice concerning serial franchising of collaborative programmes is given due consideration
- clarify and strengthen mechanisms for the review, approval and re-approval of learning resources in the institutional approval of collaborative partners
- ensure that all certificates and/or transcripts issued to graduates on the basis of work undertaken in collaborative provision record the name and location of the partner organisation concerned.

It would be desirable for the University College to:

- strengthen its use of student data and opinion in programme development
- strengthen its procedures for informing students of its response to module-level feedback
- incorporate more systematically within programmes staff research and scholarly activity
- strengthen induction and support mechanisms for collaborative provision students
- strengthen its oversight of summative reports of student complaints and academic appeals
- strengthen collective feedback mechanisms for research degree students
- ensure that partner institutions publish full programme specifications in a manner accessible to potential as well as current students.

Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by the University College 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, overall, the University College takes due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students; however, the audit also made recommendations concerning the *Code of practice*.

Report

1 An Institutional audit of St Mary's University College, Twickenham (the University College) was undertaken during the week commencing 6 December 2010. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University College's management of the academic standards of its own awards and those it delivers on behalf of the University of Surrey, and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised: Professor R Allen, Dr C Baxter, Mr R Farmer, Mrs B Howell, Mr M Kitching and Mrs J Taylor, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mr A Bradshaw, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University College is a long-established Roman Catholic higher education institution: a Christian ethos reflects its origins as a teacher training college, permeates its culture and informs its mission, which involves contributing to the creation of new knowledge and inspiring both social cohesion and economic development. The University College is organised academically around five schools; around 70 per cent of its student population of over 5,000 are undergraduates; its 18 research degree students are registered with the University of Surrey, since the University College, which has exercised taught degree awarding powers since 2007, does not have research degree awarding powers.

4 The Principal delegates executive responsibility for the management of quality and standards to the Vice Principal (Students and External Relations); heads of school are responsible for assuring quality and standards in their areas. Academic Board, as the principal academic decision-making body, discharges its formal responsibility for all matters covered by Institutional audit mainly through five standing committees (Knowledge Transfer; Planning and Resources; Research and Scholarship; Teaching and Learning; and Validation and Review). In working to ensure that institutional policies are understood and implemented, the Quality Assurance Office informs, advises and supports programme directors and other staff.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

5 Clear procedures exist for the appointment and induction of external examiners, whose duties are clearly specified. Their reports are carefully addressed at all institutional levels, and discussed with student representatives. The audit found that external examiners contribute effectively to the management of academic standards, and that all procedures are aligned with the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), *Section 4: External examining*.

6 The University College adopts an elaborate programme validation procedure: academic standards, learning opportunities and the Academic Infrastructure feature throughout. While the process is broadly sound, the audit found first, that it does not reflect the institutional emphasis on joint honours degrees (see also paragraph 8), and secondly that the quality and depth of Validation and Review Committee's discussions of proposals are affected by factors which include the number and length of documents the Committee receives and the limited involvement of school-based members of academic staff: these factors lead the University College to place undue weight of the advice of external validation panel members in the setting of academic standards. It is advisable that the University College rebalance quality and standards committee work to achieve: (i) a more analytical and influential role for school committees and Validation and Review Committee; and (ii) the involvement of a wider pool of academic staff.

7 While the University College identifies collaborative activity, international partnerships and distance learning technologies as increasingly important, guidance on validation, although dated 2010, does not prompt proposers to consider possible collaborative use when designing their programmes. It is advisable that the University College develop institutional validation requirements and protocols for the delivery of flexible, blended and distributed learning (see also paragraph 18).

8 Programme directors submit an annual monitoring statement to the head of school (where it contributes to the annual school overview report) and thence to Validation and Review Committee. The statements embrace both standards and quality in a thorough and competent manner. Again, however, the process pays little attention to the teaching and assessment challenges of joint degrees. It is advisable that the University College strengthen its monitoring of student learning opportunities on joint honours programmes learning (see also paragraph 24).

9 All programmes are subject to quinquennial revalidation. The audit found that the quality of both submissions and discussion is variable, and therefore that the University College has yet to take full advantage of the opportunity for systematic reflection that revalidation offers. It is advisable that the University College review its validation and revalidation processes in order to improve their effectiveness, encourage the production of more analytical, self-evaluative documentation, and foster enhancement.

10 The audit found that the University College, in good part through the thorough work of the Quality Assurance Office, takes account of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

11 In terms of assessment, while programme boards exercise responsibilities for module assessment, the institutional approach is predominantly centralised. This has a clear advantage in terms of consistency, draws no criticism from students, attracts positive comment from external examiners and is properly and effectively implemented. The audit found that assessment policies and regulations contribute effectively to the management of both quality and standards, and meet the expectations of relevant sections of the *Code of practice*.

12 The Quality Assurance Office collects and disseminates management information on quality and academic standards: this duty is properly discharged, although programme teams make variable use of the data. At institutional level, the University College is increasingly able to take a strategic approach to data analysis, in part through its use of the Principal's Dashboard, a developmental initiative designed to provide easy access to management information. The audit identifies the use of the Principal's Dashboard of College indicators, which provides easily accessible, key management data, as a feature of good practice.

13 Overall, confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University College's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its own awards and those it delivers on behalf of the University of Surrey.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

14 The University College augments its participation in national surveys of student opinion with its own surveys; it also requires programme teams to engage with student feedback in annual monitoring. While the audit found instances of survey findings being

translated into policy development, the programme-level attention given to the National Student Survey outcomes in particular is variable: accordingly, the University College has yet to derive optimal benefit from them. Since this variability extends to the consideration of the areas of good practice identified in the Survey, a significant enhancement opportunity is being missed. It is desirable that the University College strengthen its use of student data and opinion (see also paragraph 16) in programme development.

15 Responsibility for developing, administering and analysing module-level evaluation rests with programme teams. Arrangements for distributing and collecting feedback forms vary, and the audit found that not all students receive (or are aware that they receive) information on the use of feedback. It is desirable that the University College strengthen its procedures for informing students of its response to module-level feedback.

16 Students are represented on most institutional-level bodies other than Validation and Review Committee; they do not sit on (re-)validation panels. At programme level they are represented on programme boards, a role for which helpful training is provided: this enables students to participate in deliberations of immediate relevance to them. At school level, representation is less developed: hence, at a time of increased devolution, significant decisions may be being taken without student participation. It is again desirable that the University College strengthen its use of student data (see paragraph 14) and opinion in programme development.

17 Since the University College's research ethos is a developing one, the influence of staff research on the curriculum is not uniform. While the institution expects academic staff to engage in scholarly activity to the extent of being abreast of, and communicating, state-of-the-art research in their field, no undergraduate met in the course of the audit could cite an instance of research or scholarship having influenced the curriculum, and staff members confirmed that this influence is variable across schools. Notwithstanding the progress currently being made, it is desirable that the University College incorporate more systematically within programmes staff research and scholarly activity.

18 The University College's requirements for flexible and distributed learning are widely available and aligned with the *Code of practice*. While they feature strongly at validation, explicit criteria against which validation panels can assess proposals are lacking. It is advisable that the University College develop institutional validation requirements and protocols for the delivery of flexible, blended and distributed learning (see paragraph 7).

19 Employability is an institutional priority, and the University College consistently achieves employability rates above benchmark. Workplace learning, all aspects of which are managed by the Centre for Workplace Learning, is an important aspect of provision. The audit found the Centre's approach comprehensive in design, operationally effective and valued by students. The activity of the Centre for Workplace Learning in enhancing student employability is identified as a feature of good practice.

20 The University College encourages student exchange. The International Office provides support during selection, but only limited support to students in situ. The audit also noted other as yet unmet challenges, including credit transfer. While the University College has recently constructed a more rigorous process, this process has yet to be fully tested in practice: the University College will doubtless take the opportunity offered by mid-cycle review to report more fully on its effectiveness.

21 The University College is investing heavily in the learning resources managed by the Department of Information Services and Systems. Students spoke warmly of the contribution to learning support made by these investments, as they did of the support offered by the Skills Centre, the academic liaison librarian system, and off-site electronic

access; they confirmed that, overall, they are content with their access to resources. The mechanisms deployed to gather feedback about these services were the most responsive and innovative encountered in the course of the audit.

22 The University College's centralised admissions process is transparent, adheres to the institutional Admissions Policy, is aligned with the relevant section of the *Code of practice*, and reviewed annually.

23 The University College is currently giving further consideration to registration and induction. The audit found that induction in particular, while well received by on-campus students, does not meet all expectations of collaborative provision students: while some such students reported an excellent experience, others remained uncertain about aspects of their situation and entitlements. It is desirable that the University College strengthens induction and support mechanisms for collaborative provision students.

24 Undergraduates are allocated an academic tutor, who has access to all parts of their online profile. In the case of joint honours students, however, academic monitoring takes place separately until the point of consideration by the examination board: this board, while processing students academically, does not routinely review the quality of learning opportunities. Again (see paragraph 8), it is advisable that the University College strengthens its monitoring of student learning opportunities on joint honours programmes.

25 Students have access to a range of support services. Support for disabled students is coordinated and provided centrally, but each school has a disability champion; equality and diversity issues have high priority. The arrangements are generally well regarded. Nevertheless, while student services are effectively coordinated with other institutional facilities, the audit found weaknesses in the central oversight of complaints and appeals. It is desirable that the University College strengthens its oversight of summative reports of student complaints and academic appeals.

26 The University College has well-publicised procedures for appointment, induction, probation, mentoring, appraisal and staff development. The Staff Development Policy covers all staff and visiting lecturers, and was found to be both accessible and aligned with institutional priorities. Innovation is encouraged in ways which include prizes, study days with invited speakers (the most recent of which focused on enhancement) and learning lunches, which have addressed a variety of topics, including employment destinations and international students. The audit identifies staff development activities such as learning lunches as a feature of good practice.

27 Overall, confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University College's current and likely future management of students' learning opportunities.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

28 The University College's Enhancement Framework identifies the Teaching and Learning Committee as the focal point for enhancement, with the Research and Scholarship Committee responsible for strengthening the contribution of research and scholarly activity to the curriculum. The two interconnected strands to the institutional approach are, first, (in integrated form) teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and knowledge transfer; and, second, the quality assurance system.

29 The University College selects an annual enhancement theme for institution-wide discussion and policy development. Assessment was selected for academic year 2009-2010: this theme, which was examined in detail in the audit, engendered discussion at

all institutional levels and triggered changes in policy and practice. The University College's promotion of selected enhancement themes, which encourage discussion and change at programme level, is identified as a feature of good practice.

30 The University College has an Enhancement Framework through which it takes deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. Although some aspects of the Framework are new or need further development, the introduction of annual enhancement themes was found to be effective.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

31 Prior to achieving taught degree awarding powers the (then) College had few collaborative arrangements; subsequently it has expanded provision to the extent that, at the time of the audit, almost 13 per cent of higher education students were studying in partner institutions. This expansion, involving also a diversification into validation and franchise agreements, was predominantly reactive, leading on occasion to decisions being made in advance of policy development. It is advisable that the University College ensures that its engagement with potential academic partners is managed in a clear, formal, documented, comprehensive and measured fashion, with strengthened due-diligence scrutiny.

32 After some two years of expanded collaborative provision, work on a Collaborative Handbook, to draw institutional policies and guidance together in one place, was completed in time for publication in September 2010. In contrast to the Memorandum of Cooperation, however, the Handbook makes no reference to termination arrangements, and, in the one termination thus far initiated by the University College, the decision was made by the Principal, acting on the advice of the Vice Principal and other senior staff. This involved bypassing both Academic Board (in spite of that body having formal overall responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning) and Validation and Review Committee (which is formally responsible for monitoring programme quality), both of which learned of the termination only retrospectively. It is advisable that the University College develops a clear procedure for managing the termination of programmes and partnerships in order both to secure the student experience and to ensure effective institutional oversight of the process.

33 Although the University College states that the Board of Governors is regularly updated on progress in collaborative provision, no report on the decision to withdraw from this partnership was made to the Board, nor were records found of any subsequent internal discussion to review the event, identify pressure points and potential learning points, or reflect on whether greater use of available expertise might have been helpful. It is advisable that the University College revise its procedures for monitoring collaborative programmes, clarify individual and committee responsibilities and make greater use of disinterested internal advice.

34 In March 2009, QAA published a report on a further education college in partnership with the University College. This report confirmed the finding of an earlier QAA report which had identified a retention problem on some higher education programmes. The audit found that annual programme monitoring statements and school overview reports made only passing reference to this problem: the University College therefore recorded the publication of the reports without reference to retention. It is advisable that the University College respond thoroughly and in a timely manner to external reports.

35 The University College applies the same quality assurance procedures to collaborative partnerships as to on-campus provision, with appropriate augmentation. Partnership approval is a two-stage process, involving the appointment of a moderator to

provide independent oversight of the partnership, and a signed memorandum of cooperation. The first stage involves a submission of specified documentation to the Planning and Resources Committee, on the basis of which approval in principle may be given. This triggers more detailed consideration by the Validation and Review Committee, which instigates and deliberates on a detailed investigation of physical location and educational provision, including a site visit to the potential partner organisation.

36 The audit identified operational departures from the protocol. For example, while verification of the quality of accommodation and available resources is the responsibility of the University College's programme director, on one occasion, while it is true that the institution was to be the subject to a due-diligence visit as a condition of approval, the form was completed by the proposed partner, apparently without endorsement; secondly, the fact that the provision of an independent moderator is now unusual (the role almost always being assumed by the head of school or programme director concerned) means that the moderator can seldom provide the independent oversight originally envisaged.

37 The audit explored in detail the approval of an international partnership permitting a USA higher education institution to deliver a postgraduate certificate leading to an MBA in three locations. This process identified three issues of initial concern. First, the overseas partner had an agreement with a third-party university in Thailand for the provision of learning resources for postgraduate students registered on the collaborative programme: this constitutes a serial franchise, but the audit found that the University College has not given detailed consideration to the possible implications of this arrangement: it is advisable that the University College take steps to ensure that the *Code of practice's* advice concerning serial franchising of collaborative programmes is given due consideration. Secondly, the United States partner's website incorrectly stated that graduands qualify for an academic award of the Thai institution: it is advisable that the University College develops a more secure process, with clearer internal and partner responsibilities, for checking and approving information published by itself and its partners. Thirdly, following the validation process, no report was presented to any committee on the approval visit to the Thai venue (though a visit had been made and a report written) and no visit was made to the London venue, where teaching takes place in rooms rented from another higher education institution. A report on the visit to the United States venue was, however, submitted to the Planning and Resources Committee, though not to the Validation and Review Committee.

38 On receiving the validation report, Validation and Review Committee recommended approval and forwarded it to Academic Board. At this point, two further issues of concern arose. Firstly, Academic Board met on the same day as Validation and Review Committee and received the validation report as a tabled item. While the report was discussed by Validation and Review Committee, it was not possible to confirm the extent or level of discussion at Academic Board or the basis on which the Board made the decision to approve the arrangement. Nevertheless, that it should have done so on the basis of an oral report and a tabled paper is surprising given that the new programme led to the only MBA award made by the University College, and the group of over 500 students taking the postgraduate certificate or the MBA was by far the largest in the institution. Secondly, although the Board of Governors had been advised that the University College would require the partner institution to adhere to United Kingdom equalities legislation, the partnership imposed restrictions in terms of both age and, on the ground of the availability of suitable accommodation, marital/domestic status. Again, no record could be found of any discussion with the Board of Governors about these points. Given the institution's commitment to equality and inclusiveness and its policy that admissions policies are consistent wherever programmes are delivered, it is advisable that the University College takes steps to ensure that the admissions requirements of partner institutions and organisations offering programmes leading to its awards are consistent with its own.

39 In another validation, the approval visit was made by the Vice Principal, who chairs Validation and Review Committee, and a delegation of senior staff, two of whom were also members of the Committee. While the timetable for the visit to the partner and the validation event was delayed by factors beyond the University College's control, the reports concerned were only presented to Academic Board three months later, immediately before programme commencement.

40 The audit found varied experiences of learning resources among collaborative provision students. In one case induction arrangements lacked a clear focus on academic matters such as study skills and learning resources; in another students found it difficult to access hard copy library resources, found they were required to provide their own information technology and web access, and commented critically on the quality of available information on significant issues. It is advisable that the University College clarify and strengthen mechanisms for the review, approval and re-approval of learning resources in the institutional approval of collaborative partners.

41 The *Code of practice* expects degree certificates and/or transcripts to include the name of the collaborative organisation and its location. The audit found that the draft degree certificates and diploma supplement proposed for new collaborative provision do not meet this expectation. It is advisable that the University College ensure that all certificates and/or transcripts issued to graduates on the basis of work undertaken in collaborative provision record the name and location of the partner organisation concerned.

42 Overall, the University College is taking a developmental and active approach to managing its collaborative provision, and has already recognised the need for further work to be completed to review and embed its arrangements. Evidence was found of strengthened arrangements being put in place, including improvements in the presentation of formal reports to committees. It was found that the University College has developed a Collaborative Handbook that has the potential to meet its needs and that, notwithstanding the recommendations contained in this section, the quality and standards of provision are not currently at risk.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

43 The University College does not have research degree awarding powers: its 18 research degree students are reading for degrees of the University of Surrey, and its research degree programmes therefore operate in accordance with, and subject to, University of Surrey regulations.

44 Within the University College, responsibility for overseeing all matters relating to research degree students rests with Research and Scholarship Committee, supported by its Sub-Committee for Research Students Progress. The University College provides clear and comprehensive information and advice concerning all aspects of study, from admission through induction, registration, training, progression, reporting and examination to graduation. The responsibilities of supervisory teams, headed by a director of studies and including at least one co-supervisor (who may be external to the University College), are equally clear. The University College takes proper steps to ensure the adequacy of supervision, offering training (mandatory for all new supervisors), a research forum and events with external speakers.

45 Research degree students have regular opportunities to provide formal and informal feedback on their academic experience, although such feedback does not feature prominently on the Sub-Committee's agenda; students are represented on Research and

Scholarship Committee, though their attendance is generally low; a Research Students' Forum provides events where issues relating to the student experience can be raised. The institutional Code of Practice also specifies representation rights for research degree students on any school research group. Since the audit found that this operates only variably effectively, however, it is desirable that the University College strengthens collective feedback mechanisms for research degree students.

46 While opportunities for research degree students to contribute to teaching are rare, any such student assuming more than a marginal and supporting teaching role is expected to register for the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice.

47 The University College has a sound basis for the current and future management of research degrees, which it delivers on behalf of the University of Surrey; its procedures meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 7: Published information

48 Responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of all published information rests with the school or service department concerned; the Marketing Department oversees the website and prospectus, ensuring they are correct and aligned with the Communication Strategy. The University College has recently developed a protocol designed to ensure the continuing accuracy of the website and recruitment information: this requires contact staff in schools and support departments to undertake a biannual check of the accuracy of the publications for which they are responsible.

49 While overall the audit found published information accurate and accessible, an internal review of partner institutions' publications and a study undertaken by the Marketing Manager identified a number of detailed inaccuracies, relating largely to a failure to update material regularly. Although a private provider's website was found to have made incorrect claims about possible exemptions, the International Office had disabled the web page concerned. The recent publication of guidelines for the use of the corporate identity by collaborative partners, together with a checklist for published information, had also led to the identification of errors: these have been raised with partners and the University College reported that rectification is in hand.

50 On-campus students said they were content with the accuracy and completeness of published information, though the experience of students at partner institutions appears considerably more variable: it is advisable that the University College develops a more secure process, with clearer internal and partner responsibilities, for checking and approving information published by itself and its partners.

51 Programme specifications for the University College's higher education programmes are not uniformly available on partner websites: while students receive such specifications in handbooks, they are not always available to possible applicants. It is desirable that the University College ensures that partner institutions publish full programme specifications in a manner accessible to potential as well as current students.

52 It is confirmed that the externally available information required by HEFCE guidelines is published on the University College's website, and that the teaching quality information on the Unistats website appears accurate and complete.

53 For the most part, reliance can reasonably be placed in the integrity and reliability of the extensive and accessible information that the University College publishes about its educational provision.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the use of the Principal's Dashboard of College indicators which provides easily accessible, key management data (paragraph 12)
- the activity of the Centre for Workplace Learning in enhancing student employability (paragraph 19)
- staff development activities such as learning lunches (paragraph 26)
- the University College's promotion of selected enhancement themes, which encourage discussion and change at programme level (paragraph 29).

Recommendations for action

55 It is advisable that the University College:

- rebalances quality and standards committee work to achieve: (i) a more analytical and influential role for school committees and Validation and Review Committee; and (ii) the involvement of a wider pool of academic staff (paragraph 6)
- develops institutional validation requirements and protocols for the delivery of flexible, blended and distributed learning (paragraphs 7, 18)
- strengthens its monitoring of the student learning opportunities on joint honours programmes (paragraphs 8, 24)
- reviews its validation and revalidation processes in order to improve their effectiveness, encourage the production of more analytical, self-evaluative documentation, and foster enhancement (paragraph 9)
- ensures that its engagement with potential academic partners is managed in a clear, formal, documented, comprehensive and measured fashion, with strengthened due-diligence scrutiny (paragraph 31)
- develops a clear procedure for managing the termination of programmes and partnerships in order both to secure the student experience and to ensure effective institutional oversight of the process (paragraph 32)
- revises its procedures for monitoring collaborative programmes, clarify individual and committee responsibilities and make greater use of disinterested internal advice (paragraph 33)
- responds thoroughly and in a timely manner to external reports (paragraph 34)
- takes steps to ensure that the *Code of practice's* advice concerning serial franchising of collaborative programmes is given due consideration (paragraph 37)
- develops a more secure process, with clearer internal and partner responsibilities, for checking and approving information published by itself and its partners (paragraphs 37, 50).
- takes steps to ensure that the admissions requirements of partner institutions and organisations offering programmes leading to its awards are consistent with its own (paragraph 38)
- clarifies and strengthens mechanisms for the review, approval and re-approval of learning resources in the institutional approval of collaborative partners (paragraph 40)
- ensures that all certificates and/or transcripts issued to graduates on the basis of work undertaken in collaborative provision record the name and location of the partner organisation concerned (paragraph 41).

56 It is desirable that the University College:

- strengthens its use of student data and opinion in programme development (paragraphs 14, 16)
- strengthens its procedures for informing students of its response to module-level feedback (paragraph 15)
- incorporates more systematically within programmes staff research and scholarly activity (paragraph 17)
- strengthens induction and support mechanisms for collaborative provision students (paragraph 23)
- strengthens its oversight of summative reports of student complaints and academic appeals (paragraph 25)
- strengthens collective feedback mechanisms for research degree students (paragraph 45)
- ensures that partner institutions publish full programme specifications in a manner accessible to potential as well as current students (paragraph 51).

Appendix

St Mary's University College's response to the Institutional audit report

The University College welcomes QAA's judgement that confidence can be placed in the present and future management of both the academic standards of its awards and of those it delivers on behalf of the University of Surrey, and the judgement that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University College's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. We believe that this is an acknowledgement of the maturity of St Mary's in terms of the management of the standards of its awards and the quality of the learning opportunities, and in particular the work that has taken place since the University College was granted taught degree awarding powers in 2006.

The University College is pleased to note how the report has identified its Enhancement Framework as taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. The report also identifies that there is a sound basis for the current and future management of research degrees, which it delivers on behalf of the University of Surrey, and that the University College's procedures meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

The University College notes that, for the most part, reliance can reasonably be placed in the integrity and reliability of the extensive and accessible information that the University College publishes about its educational provision.

The University College is particularly pleased that the audit team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the use of the Principal's Dashboard of College indicators which provides easily accessible, key management data
- the activity of the Centre for Workplace Learning in enhancing student employability
- staff development activities such as learning lunches
- the University College's promotion of selected enhancement themes, which encourage discussion and change at programme level.

It is the intention of the University College to respond positively to the advisable and desirable recommendations put forward in the report.

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