QAA

Rose Bruford College

March 2009

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance for Higher Education (QAA) visited Rose Bruford College (the College) from 2 to 6 March 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the College offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the College's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers on behalf of the University of Manchester and London Metropolitan University

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Overall, the audit team found that the College's institutional approach to quality enhancement was informed by clear strategic direction and was leading to systematic improvements in learning opportunities and the exchange of good practice

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

At the time of this audit, the College had no postgraduate research students. It was working with a partner institution to develop its postgraduate research provision and the appropriate support for that provision. The groundwork for this development had made reference to the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the rapid and effective embedding of the College's new academic and committee structure (paragraph 29)

- the system for bi-annual programme monitoring and its contribution to quality assurance and enhancement (paragraphs 48, 90, 163)

- the interrogation and analysis of the dataset of management information at programme and institutional level (paragraph 97)

- the comprehensive and structured arrangements for student feedback for on-campus programmes including the student semester review process (paragraph 100)

- the level of support for sessional staff, including their access to staff development and research opportunities and the provision of a part-time tutors' coordinator and handbook (paragraph 111)

- the College's focused approach and initiatives in support of a diverse student body with particular reference to students with disabilities (paragraph 145)

- the cohesive community of the staff and students (paragraph 163).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- to keep under careful review the capacity of its human and physical resources in the context of its many strategic and operational objectives (paragraph 30).

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- to consider whether the positive contribution of the student community to the College's quality assurance and enhancement processes could be further strengthened by providing appropriate support to the Students' Union (paragraph 104)

- to expedite the implementation of those aspects of its learning and teaching strategy relating to online learning support (paragraph 127)

- to strengthen the proactive management and coordination of College resources with particular reference to the library, information technology, technical support and estates (paragraph 132)

- to reinforce the management and strategic coordination of its Student Services (paragraph 143).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   The College is a specialist institution offering programmes in theatre practice and theatre education within a unified curriculum. Its philosophy continues to be shaped by the inspiration of its founder, which was to further the community of theatre and the role of theatre in the community, and to widen the opportunities for study beyond that of conservatoire education. Undergraduate and post-graduate programmes are validated by the University of Manchester, (the one exception being the Organising Live Arts Foundation degree which is validated by London Metropolitan University). Where appropriate, the College's programmes are accredited by the National Council of Drama Training (NCDT). The College is a member of the Conference of Drama Schools (CDS) and one of eight specialist art, design and performing arts colleges comprising the Consortium of Arts & Design Institutions in Southern England (CADISE).

2   The College now has just over 650 students following full-time BA Hons programmes on campus, with a further 300 students following part-time BA Hons programmes by distance learning. There are 20 students studying for taught master's awards. The College also offers a Foundation Degree and a number of non credit-bearing programmes for youth and the community. The College is located in a variety of buildings, including two theatre spaces, on a single site in Sidcup, Kent.

The information base for the audit

3   The College provided the audit team with a Briefing Paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The index to the briefing paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the institution's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. The team had access to the documents referenced in the briefing paper through files provided on a CD-ROM; in addition, the team had access to the institution's intranet and to its document control centre.

4   The Students' Union produced a student written submission (SWS), setting out the students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management.

5   In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous Institutional audit in 2003

- reports of successful reaccreditation of a range of degrees by the National Council for Drama Training

- report of an Institutional review of the College's link with the University of Manchester

- report of a validation/review by London Metropolitan University of the Foundation Degree and top-up to BA Hons Live Arts

- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

6   A number of key developments have taken place since the College was audited by QAA in May 2003. In acknowledgement of the increasing maturity of the partnership and to support the College in its ambitions in terms of securing degree awarding powers and University College title, the University of Manchester granted the College a measure of devolved responsibility for managing its own academic standards and the quality of its provision, while retaining oversight and overall responsibility.

7   To support this, the College has defined and implemented its own academic infrastructure in collaboration with validating partners, the University of Manchester and London Metropolitan University, and with reference to the national *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), subject benchmark statements, National Council for Drama Training (NCDT) accreditation requirements and the *Code of practice,* published by QAA, so as to ensure that its formal policies and procedures are consistent with those expected in all higher education institutions. Included in the College's academic infrastructure is 'the replacement of the largely document-based annual monitoring cycle with a "continuous" and more interactive cycle of programme monitoring via biannual programme committees', together with 'implementation of the College's own process for periodic programme review'.

8   Around the time of the last audit there was the distinct possibility that the College would enter into a federal relationship with other creative arts providers in the region. However, when it became clear that this development would not proceed, a second Vice-Principal with responsibility for Systems for Quality and Administration (SQA) was appointed in 2007 to address the 2003 audit recommendations 'from the perspective once again of a stand alone institution'. Following the retirement of the Vice-Principal (Academic) in summer 2007, the College chose not to recruit to the post at that time, but instead brought forward 'the planned implementation of three Schools; School of Performance, School of Design, Management & Technical Arts and the School of Graduate & Professional Studies, each led by a Head of School'. These replaced a flat programme management structure, within which 18 programmes had reported, via their respective programme directors, to the Vice-Principal (Academic). The new Schools were intended: to create coherent structures within which to facilitate academic development and collaboration between programmes; to introduce an intermediate layer with a view to ensuring that College policy and procedure were effectively embedded, acted upon and monitored within programmes; and to facilitate effective communication between programmes and College management.

9   After the resignation of the Principal in 2008, the Vice-Principal (SQA) became Acting Principal, supported by a consultant Vice-Principal. In the course of the audit, the Governors appointed a new Principal who took up his appointment in February 2009.

10   New statements of College 'Purpose and Ambition', followed by the full 'Strategic Plan 2008-2013' were approved by Governors in 2007-08. As part of a wider consultative process, Governors and senior staff held the first College annual strategic planning seminars, where consideration was given to a range of benchmark data, in order to locate the College within the sector, identify directions for change and quantify the appropriate scale of that change. To ensure the achievement of objectives, a 'new integrated annual planning, budgeting and monitoring cycle with four-year School and cross-College operating plans' has also been introduced.

11   During the period 2005 to 2007, the College achieved successful reaccreditation of a range of its degrees by the NCDT, a review without conditions of its link with the University of Manchester, and validation/review of programmes, with conditions, by London Metropolitan University.

12   The 2003 audit report identified five advisable recommendations and five features of good practice. The key recommendations were as follows:

- to review the terms of reference of committees, to strengthen their strategic role as [the College] gains operational experience of the new committee structure, and strengthen their use of all the information available to them to support the management of quality and academic standards

- to establish clearer responsibilities for tracking systematically, at institutional level, the timely completion and checking of actions that result from quality assurance and planning processes

- to follow through the processes that it has already begun for setting out its own needs for a quality management framework within the context of the requirements of the University, and ensuring that the framework includes all its staff, full-time and part-time

- to assure itself that its own policies and procedures are systematically mapped against those set out in the *Code of practice*, and the implementation of the outcomes of the mapping process monitored at institutional level

- to establish ways of gathering, and reporting, students' views systematically at a management level, to allow College-wide issues and good practice to be taken into account and monitored, particularly in view of the requirements of *HEFCE's document 02/15*.

13   The audit team learned that, in response to these recommendations, the College has undertaken a complete review, rationalisation and reworking of its committee structures and terms of reference, establishing two stems, academic and management; the former with the introduction of school boards headed by the Academic Board and the latter headed by Senior Management Committee. The College has also redefined the flow of information relating to quality and academic standards. As well as vertical reporting lines, there is cross-referral between the academic and management stems (see paragraph 23). The intention was also to achieve close links between academic committees, exemplified by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) and the Learning and Teaching Development Committee (LTDC).

14   The audit team also established that more effective tracking in quality assurance had been addressed by a major reworking of the College's quality assurance and enhancement cycle. This involved a new four-stage process, which begins with the Board of Governors and Senior Management Committee (SMC) reviewing progress towards strategic aims and objectives using key performance indicators. Subsequent to periodic programme review, a formal response and action plan are prepared, progress being monitored by the Academic Board through QAEC and SMC, with University of Manchester oversight. As part of the biannual monitoring process, programme committees originate, maintain and progress action plans, which are further scrutinised by school boards.

15   The College has sought to assume active responsibility for its own quality management framework, within the parameters of validation, rather than depending on that of its validating and accrediting partners. With approval from its validating Universities, which retain oversight, the College has established a framework which incorporates its own academic regulations, procedures for programme approval, modification and termination, processes for annual monitoring and periodic review of programmes, including the collection of student feedback and policies on assessment, admissions, student appeals, complaints and discipline. Communication and advice to staff on the new policies has been well managed, with dedicated staff development sessions arranged to ensure that staff were conversant with new procedures. The development is ongoing with further activity scheduled for 2008-09. The College has strengthened the specification and communication of its quality assurance procedures through the establishment of a comprehensive online document control centre (see paragraph 170).

16   The audit team found evidence that College has used the *Code of practice* to inform the creation and extension of its own academic infrastructure and in addition, individual committees are charged with monitoring on an annual basis, 'the fit' of College policies and procedures with specific sections of the *Code*. The College now has a comprehensive framework for gathering and reporting student feedback, as discussed in detail (see paragraph 44).

17   The audit team therefore judged that the College had now made substantial progress in addressing the recommendations of the 2003 audit report. However the team observed that the majority of the developments and actions taken were of recent date, and it concluded that the response to the recommendations had been slow between 2003 and 2007. It further noted that there had been a distinct momentum and higher levels of activity thereafter, including the implementation of the new committee structure in January 2008. This most recent period had largely coincided with the appointment of the new Vice-Principal (SQA) with responsibility for quality and standards.

18   The audit team found evidence that the College had built on features of good practice identified by the 2003 audit, in particular, with regard to its focus on students and the attention it that it gives to students' views; the way that the College involves external experts, and the benefits derived from the experience brought to the taught programmes by practitioners in the profession practice and the encouragement that the College gives to reflective practice.

Institutional framework for managing of academic standards and learning opportunities

19   The responsibility for managing academic standards and the quality of provision for learning and the student experience is shared between the College and its validating University partners, the University of Manchester (UoM) and London Metropolitan University (LMU). Final authority for overseeing academic standards and conferring academic awards therefore resides with the Senate of each of the validating universities. Currently the UoM is by far the major partner, validating all but one of the College's degrees: the Foundation/BA degree in Organising Live Arts is validated by LMU. Research degrees are now to be offered through Goldsmiths, with a first intake anticipated in October 2009.

20   The audit team, explored how the College's own academic regulatory framework fitted with the terms of the 2006 institutional agreement with the University of Manchester. It was told the College's relationship with the University was long-standing, and that it had enjoyed a high degree of autonomy within the framework of the University's regulations. Since the 2006 renewal of the partnership agreement, there had been a further evolution in the relationship, so that the University had been supportive of the College developing its own academic procedures, for example, the procedures for biannual programme monitoring and periodic review (see paragraphs 43-53).

21   The partnership with each of the universities validating taught programmes is specified in a memorandum of agreement, as is the partnership with Goldsmiths for research students (see paragraphs 165-169). The partnerships are generally managed at the institutional level rather than programme level, with the Director of Quality acting as the principal link. The main contacts at UoM are the Validation Officer and the academic advisers and at LMU, the Academic Partnerships Leader, the Link Quality Officer and academic liaison advisers.

22   The audit team found evidence that on the side of the College there was a clearly defined relationship with its validating universities. However, there was little reference in the documentation supplied relating to the link with LMU. The staff reported that it had been necessary to make a visit to LMU in December 2008 in order to prompt discussion on how the partnership was working in practice. The team found no compromise in terms of the assurance of academic standards of learning opportunities on the part of the College; nevertheless it believed that communications between the partner institutions could with benefit be more regular.

23   In relation to committee structures through which standards and quality are managed, the College has recently reconfigured its committees, the terms of reference and membership of which are clearly articulated and published on the document control centre. There are two first-tier committees representing the management and academic stems. These are: the Senior Management Committee (SMC), which has responsibility for 'strategic management, planning, monitoring and resource allocation'; and the Academic Board, which 'acts on behalf of Governors and the validating partners in ensuring the effective operation of the institution and the maintenance of appropriate standards'. Membership of the Academic Board comprises representatives from senior management, the heads of school, programme directors, cross-College directors, academic staff, student representatives, the Director of Quality and the Librarian. The College argues that the appointment of heads of school in 2007 and their membership of this committee ensure that strategic and financial decisions are informed by the requirements of maintaining academic standards.

24   In practice, the Academic Board's responsibilities for quality and standards are devolved primarily to two second-tier committees: the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) and the Learning and Teaching Development Committee (LTDC). QAEC's role is 'to develop, maintain, monitor, review and inform about all aspects of quality assurance, validation and enhancement, including all regulations and quality processes'. It is responsible for internal consideration and approval of proposals for new programmes and changes to existing ones, matters arising from annual programme review and the consideration of external examiner reports. Membership comprises representatives from senior management, the heads of school, programme directors, cross-College directors, academic staff, student representatives, the Director of Quality and the Librarian.

25   The Learning and Teaching Development Committee is the other broadly constituted subcommittee of the Academic Board and it 'formulates policy in respect of the learning and teaching strategies of the College and advises the Academic Board in matters relating to all forms of learning and teaching and widening participation'. It also receives specific remits from the Academic Board, SMC and QAEC, for action in areas such as retention, assessment feedback, career education and critical writing. Membership includes representatives from senior management, the Director of Learning and Teaching, the heads of school, programme directors, other cross-College directors, academic staff, student representatives, the Librarian and an external adviser.

26   Programme committees exist for all programmes and 'formulate programme policy in respect of admissions, assessment and examination procedures, matters relating to student progress, teaching and learning methods and academic and pastoral tutorial arrangements'. The College sees them as the means through which it maintains a 'strong dialogue' with its students and provides a forum within which student concerns may be raised. Programme committees

report to the relevant school board and to QAEC, and their membership will comprise the programme director, staff attached to the programme, including, where appropriate, sessional staff, and up to two student representatives from each level in the programme.

27   School boards were created in 2008 and they report directly to the Academic Board. They assure and enhance the quality of provision in their distinct academic fields and ensure college policy is applied consistently across the provision. The College sees them as representing the interests of the specific academic field and acting as a counterweight to the cross-College committees. They receive reports from the programme committees located in each school.

28   Programme assessment boards receive, consider and agree assessment marks for students on the programme and these go forward as recommendations to the relevant school examination board. External examiners do not attend programme assessment boards, but the team was told that external examiners attend the pre-examination and examination board meetings and that the UoM Academic Advisor was always present at the board of examiners. The school examination boards receive results from programme assessment boards, consider these alongside recommendations from the special circumstances committees, and make recommendations for degree classification, which then require final approval from the relevant validating university. Membership of the school examination boards comprises either the Principal or the head of another school as chair, plus the Director of Quality, the head of school, programme directors, University representatives and relevant internal and external examiners. The Entry and Academic Progression Committee is a further second-tier assessment committee that considers applications for admission based on AP(E)L. It also considers appeals from students based on special circumstances.

29   The College has succeeded in introducing, over a relatively short period of time, major changes to its institutional framework for quality and standards, involving new structures, committee relationships and a range of new procedures. This has been supported by good communication and dedicated staff development sessions on the development of quality and standards procedures and policy. The College had adopted an inclusive approach in order to ensure that all staff were conversant with developments. The audit team found good evidence to support the College's claim to 'a coherent and integrated committee structure that involves significant members of staff from different levels of the organisation, thereby ensuring vertical and horizontal alignment for reporting, communication and enhancement'. The team considered the rapid and effective embedding of the new academic deliberative structures to be a feature of good practice.

30   The intensity and speed of activity in the organisational and academic developments over the recent period were clearly to be welcomed in many respects. At the same time, the audit team identified a number of aspects of the College's work where the cumulative effect of operational pressures and strains on its staff and on its systems was becoming evident. These are identified at various points in this report and, taken together, they constitute a significant pattern of evidence which informed the team's evaluation of the current and future organisational capacity of the College (see paragraphs 66, 113, 117, 124, 125, 128, 129, 132). The team considered that, if not carefully monitored and managed, these pressures could have potentially damaging results. Given the additional future ambitions outlined in the College's strategic and operational plans, the team judged that in order to safeguard the quality of learning opportunities in the foreseeable future, it was advisable for the College to keep under careful review the capacity of its human and physical resources in the context of its many strategic and operational objectives.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

31   The College's Briefing Paper acknowledged that final authority for overseeing academic standards and conferring academic awards rests with each of its validating universities. Within the College's structures, the Academic Board has responsibility for overseeing quality and standards, with accountability to the validating universities, but substantial autonomy to manage the College's academic affairs and to check the academic health of its provision.

32   The audit team learned that the College's overarching principles in guiding its management of standards are how it sets standards and how it knows that students are achieving at the correct level. Standards are set for the design, development and validation of new programmes by the defining of appropriate intended learning outcomes taking into account the FHEQ, the relevant subject benchmark, and the *Code of practice*, and by observing any relevant professional requirements. Once approved, internal reports and programme details are then forwarded to the validating university. The College cited as an example the November 2008 'approval in principle' by the UoM Drama Panel of a new suite of MA programmes as evidence of the setting of appropriate standards.

33   In assuring itself that students are achieving at the correct level, the College is informed by external examiner reports, which comment on student achievement set against national standards; academic adviser reports; and professional body reports (NCDT). Programme teams are expected to check annually for adherence to, and alignment with, the relevant benchmark, *Code of practice* and FHEQ and 'if and when appropriate' the College will make necessary adjustments using monitoring, review and management information and assessment.

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

34   The College's processes and procedures for the approval, monitoring, periodic review and re-approval of programmes are of relatively recent origin as the College has moved to develop its own academic infrastructure within the context of its continuing partnership with its validating universities. The procedures are summarised in the College's programme approval, monitoring and review Overview (the PAMR Overview), and detailed in a number of other documents, which are associated by hyperlinks to the PAMR Overview on the College's document control centre. The audit team was told that the College considered this online reference system to be more efficient and user-friendly than the previous approach of having a single standards and quality handbook. The document control centre also included a folder labelled 'Quality Overview' which contained an Academic Standards, Quality Assurance and Enhancement Overview document dated January 2009 in a sub-folder labelled 'draft. The team enquired about the relationship of this document to the PAMR Overview and was told that a previous quality and standards handbook had been replaced by the PAMR Overview, which was in turn to be replaced by the Academic Standards, Quality Assurance and Enhancement Overview.

35   Given the audit team's uncertainties about the relationships between some of the documents on the document control centre, the team enquired about the experiences of staff in understanding and operating the new procedures. Academic staff members whom the team met reported no difficulties in acquiring the appropriate information from the document control centre and were positive about the new procedures. Informative induction arrangements were in place for new staff members explaining the College's academic infrastructure and these were well supplemented by staff development sessions. The team was also told that while quality assurance procedures had become more formalised to ensure their robustness, the small size of the College allowed much informal and supportive contact. The team took the view that while there may be some minor inconsistencies in the organisation of document control centre documentation, those using the system found it an accessible and helpful tool in fulfilling their roles in the assurance of standards and quality for which they were well supported.

36   The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) is formally responsible for checking the College's processes against the *Code of practice, Section 7*: *Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. From its perusal of the PAMR Overview and associated documents, the audit team was able to confirm that the College's processes and procedures for assuring quality and standards take appropriate account of Section 7 of the *Code*.

Programme approval

37   The College ensures external input to its approval and review processes in a number of ways. The College's validating partners nominate members of its academic staff to act as advisers to programme teams. These academic advisers are required to make regular reports on the programmes they advise and specifically to comment on new programme proposals. In addition, the College appoints its own external advisers to comment on new course proposals and to serve on periodic review panels The reports of external examiners are a major input to the process of programme monitoring.

38   According to the Briefing Paper one of the College's guiding principles in programme design and approval is 'to ensure that it will monitor, measure and maintain academic standards in curriculum design, content and management and the delivery of taught pathways'. In terms of standards the College's approval process seeks to map new taught pathways against subject benchmarks and NCDT requirements, and to take into account the FHEQ and vocational requirements in designing learning outcomes.

39   Up until recently all the College's pathways with the exception of programmes in Organising Live Arts, which are validated by London Metropolitan University, had been approved and validated by the University of Manchester using the University's own documentation. The process and procedures have recently been redesigned and University of Manchester documentation has been replaced by College pro formas and guidance for the approval of programmes and for their modification and termination.

40   According to the PAMR Overview, the initial stage of programme approval is for a proposal for a new programme pathway to achieve sufficient support for the head of school to authorise the proposal in principle and enter it into the school operational plan. The proposal then passes through two main stages involving approval at both college and university level of first, the rationale and business plan, and secondly the programme structure. The rationale and business plan are first scrutinised, revised if necessary and approved within the College committee structure with both academic and management stem involvement. The approved rationale is then sent to the University for consideration. If the proposal is approved by the University, the programme director prepares programme structure documentation, which includes information on the programme structure, content, design and delivery; programme and module specifications; information on teaching, learning and assessment methods; and feedback from both external and internal advisers. The structure document is also expected to take into account the level descriptors of the FHEQ published by QAA, and any other appropriate external reference points. This document is again considered at College committees before submission of the final draft to the University for approval. According to the Briefing Paper the minimum lead-in time for a new programme to go through these stages is normally 15 months.

41   The audit team examined the revised documentation and considered that it provided a sound basis for a rigorous examination of proposals for taught programmes. At the time of the audit visit, the only proposals proceeding through the new process were for a portfolio of taught MA programmes: from August 2009, the School plans to offer new MA programmes, in Acting (full-time), and Theatre Studies and Music in Performance (part-time by distance learning), with a further three programmes (Dramatic Writing, Directing and Puppetry and Figurative Theatre) to be offered from Autumn 2010. The proposals had completed the first stage of the approval process and were due to be worked up into programme structure documents. The team had access to the rationales and business plans for the proposals and concluded that they had been

prepared in accordance with the College's procedures and extensively discussed within the appropriate College committees in both the academic and management stems. The Director of Learning and Teaching had also reported on the proposals. External advisers appointed by the College and the University has commented on the proposals. As the result of these discussions, within the College the proposals had been revised before submission to the University, which had responded informally to indicate that they could now proceed to stage two. The team noted that the entire approval process may be completed as a paper exercise without the University requiring a validation event. Nor does the College include within its process any formal preparatory internal validation event at which, for example, external experts can question the programme team about the proposal. The team concluded that as the College continues to develop its academic infrastructure it may wish to consider whether such an event, with its external advisers acting as members of a scrutinising panel, would be a useful adjunct to its new well-documented procedures.

42   The procedures for reapproval of programmes by the University of Manchester are incorporated into the College's new procedures for periodic review of programmes (see paragraphs 49-52).

Programme monitoring

43   The College introduced a new process of programme monitoring in academic year 2007-08. According to the Briefing Paper the previous system, which relied on an annual report generally produced by the programme director, had been replaced by a more interactive rolling monitoring model based on the twice-yearly meetings of programme committees. The new process is outlined in the College's PAMR Overview and associated flowchart while each stage and requirement in the process of programme monitoring is detailed in the College's new biannual programme review guidance, which contains templates and guidance for the meeting agendas. Each validated programme is monitored each semester, with discussion at the programme committee meeting forming the review of the programme, and the resulting outputs of the meeting, the minutes and an action plan, forming the report of that review. The programme committee includes the programme director and other teaching staff, the head of school, and up to two elected student representatives from each level of the programme.

44   One of the main inputs to the programme committee is student feedback, which, for on-campus courses, takes the form of a student semester review form for feedback from students on each module in a range of areas: covering, for example, the extent to which aims, objectives and learning outcomes were met, the clarity and fairness of assessment and marking, the availability of appropriate resources, and whether lectures were well structured. This is completed by the student representatives, who normally first arrange to meet their fellow students to gather their views. For distance-learning courses, student feedback on modules is provided primarily by end of module questionnaires and the comments of those student representatives who can attend the programme committee meetings. Other forms of student feedback are provided by survey data (see paragraphs 93-97). The primary inputs on academic standards are the reports of external examiners and, when available, academic advisers. These are supplemented by statistics on admissions, student demographics, progression awards and employment. There is a set agenda for programme committee meetings and guidance on agenda items. Following each meeting, the minutes and action plan are submitted to the relevant school board and then go forward to QAEC for further consideration. At the end of the process, the Director of Quality forwards the review outcomes for both semesters to the validating university. A representative of the College attends the meeting of the Drama Panel at the University of Manchester, at which the outcomes of monitoring are considered and feeds back any comments to the College.

45   The College intended that this new approach to programme monitoring should be more streamlined and lighter in touch than its previous model. The audit team discussed biannual monitoring with members of staff who reported that while the process was no less time-consuming than its predecessor, it was more effective - 'less writing but more action' - and more streamlined in the sense that issues were more rapidly resolved. Staff also noted an improvement in the management information data available to programme committees with the concomitant requirement to respond to the datasets. Students who met with the team reported that the process was more understandable: agendas were more student-driven and there was greater understanding among students of learning outcomes. Student representatives, particularly those from on-campus courses, also generally responded positively when asked about the biannual programme meetings: monitoring was seen as effective in resolving issues and prompting changes. The team noted these positive evaluations on the effectiveness of the monitoring system.

46   The College had noted in its Briefing Paper that following the introduction of the new monitoring system, QAEC was meeting more frequently than hitherto, to ensure that processes and procedures were properly in place. QAEC was scrutinising in detail the minutes and action plans from programme committee meetings and feeding back to programme committees on the quality of the documentation it received, as well as on emerging issues. Cross-institutional matters were reported to the Academic Board. The audit team questioned members of staff, including QAEC members, about the extent to which, with such a strong student input, monitoring was likely to concentrate on the quality of students' learning experience perhaps at the expense of standards issues. The response was that student input was providing an appropriate balance in monitoring between standards and quality issues, given the consideration of other inputs such as external examiner reports that dealt specifically with standards issues; and that students now had a greater understanding of matters affecting academic standards because of their involvement and investment in the process. On the sustainability of the new system, QAEC members thought that the monitoring-related workload of the committee would lessen as the new procedures bedded in.

47   The Briefing Paper asserted that as part of the College's management of academic standards, programme teams 'annually check for adherence and alignment to the relevant benchmark, *Code of practice* and FHEQ and if and when appropriate, will make any necessary adjustments'. Members of academic staff whom the audit team met thought that this was a new part of the process that had not yet been implemented, but were able to draw the team's attention to a relevant item on the standard programme committee agenda concerning programme documentation. The team looked at the guidance on agendas for programme team meetings in the College's new biannual programme review guidance. This states that at the meeting to review the first semester, a suggested item is: 'programme content and documentation to be compared with the appropriate subject benchmark(s)'. However, the minutes of the relevant programme committee meetings available to the team did not record the results of such a comparison and the team concluded that there was as yet no systematic annual check of programmes against subject benchmark(s) or the FHEQ. Given that the new monitoring process was still bedding in, that most of the College's programme documentation had been reviewed during the 2008 periodic review process (see below) and that a major rewrite of all the full-time undergraduate programmes was planned, the team concluded that this mismatch between the assertion in the Briefing Paper and programme monitoring practice was unlikely to significantly affect the management of academic standards at this stage.

48   In other respects, the audit team took the view that the College had adopted an approach to monitoring which was structured, dynamic, inclusive and responsive, and which made good use of student input, both in terms of representatives' written feedback and their contribution to programme committee meetings. This was particularly marked in on-campus courses, where student representatives had the opportunity to meet and gather directly the views of their fellow students. In its consideration of the monitoring documentation available to it through the audit trails, the team noted the comprehensive and regularly updated action plans produced by

programme committees and the careful and constructive review of, and feedback on, the outcomes of biannual monitoring by school boards and by QAEC. The outcomes of the process were being carefully and constructively monitored at school boards and by QAEC, which was ensuring effective embedding of the new process and identification and discussion of cross-institutional issues. Overall, the team considered that the College's development and analysis of its biannual monitoring process was a feature of good practice.

Periodic review of programmes

49   As part of the process of building its own academic infrastructure, the College had agreed with its validating partners that it would develop and implement its own process for five-yearly periodic review of programmes to replace the previous process of periodic review last conducted by a University of Manchester panel in 2003. The College's approach to periodic review is described in its PAMR Overview supplemented by a flowchart and detailed guidance in related documents on the document control centre. The process is school-based and the taught provision (with a few exceptions) in each of the three schools was reviewed during 2008.

50   According to the introduction to the periodic report form, the review is conducted as part of the College's quality assurance mechanisms, in order to satisfy itself that the school and its constituent programmes have the necessary quality assurance structures in place, and that those structures and processes for quality management and enhancement are effective; and to make a recommendation to the University of Manchester on the renewal of the programmes for a further five years. Each school submits a self-evaluation document and updated programme documentation. The self-evaluation document sections include context; intended learning outcomes; curriculum; assessment; learning and teaching; recruitment, retention, progression and achievement by students; learning resources; and maintenance of standards and enhancement of quality. Accompanying documents include updated programme specifications and programme documents, programme committee minutes and action plans, external examiners' and academic advisers' reports, NCDT reports, student survey data and statistics on admission, demographics, progression, award and employment.

51   The review panel, which scrutinises the documentation submitted by the school and meets staff and students, is chaired by a head of another school and includes an external academic subject specialist, an employer professional and a representative from the validating University; a student and a member of staff, each from another school, complete the panel. The periodic review process includes consideration of whether or not to recommend to the University that the programmes being reviewed should be approved for a further five years. That decision is recorded in the panel's report in terms of whether conditions are, or are not, attached to the continuation of the programmes. The panel's report and the school's response go to QAEC and thence to the Academic Board. The University of Manchester receives the report, the College's response to it and an action plan, in which the reviewed school responds to issues raised by the panel with time-limited actions. All of these are considered by the University's Drama Panel which is also expected to maintain an overview of follow-up actions. For the London Metropolitan University, the partnership office is expected to provide feedback.

52   Each of the three reports examined by the audit team included several commendations and recommendations, but none had conditions attached to the continuation of the programmes. The main body of the reports consist of a record of the questions asked by the panel and the responses by the programme team and students. The University of Manchester has already responded positively to the College's new process of periodic review when recommending in 2008 the renewal of its collaborative link for a further five years. Notwithstanding the reapproval for five years of all its programmes under review by the University, the College has decided to undertake a major rewriting of its full-time undergraduate programmes, to meet its strategic objective to introduce a new common academic framework

and timetable. The rewriting would entail revalidation of most of the College's taught provision through its revised approval process and is provisionally set for 2010.

53   The audit team viewed a sample of the review documentation, reports, and school action plans. The SEDs were generally evaluative and comprehensive, the reports helpfully recorded questions and answers, and the school's responses to recommendations were timely and full. A positive level of externality was evident in the use of student input and the contributions of external members. The team took the view that the process was comprehensive, sufficiently rigorous and fit for purpose.

External examiners

54   The College does not have degree-awarding powers, and therefore external examiners who work on College programmes are appointed by, paid by and report to, the relevant validating university. Although each university has its own documentation for appointment and reporting, the audit team established that, in broad terms, the procedures are similar and working with two validating universities has not created any significant problems for the College. As part of the development of a College academic infrastructure, the team saw a draft college external examiner policy that had been presented to the Academic Board in February 2009, and which would form the basis for the College's future dealings with external examiners on its programmes.

55   Where a new or a replacement external examiner is needed, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) is notified, and the programme director identifies a suitable candidate who is approved in principle by the relevant head of school. The Academic Board then receives a full curriculum vitae and, where it is satisfied with the suitability of the proposed external examiner, it recommends appointment to the validating university. The Director of Quality implements the Academic Board's recommendation by submitting the nomination to the validating university, using the university's appointment pro forma, in order to secure formal appointment by the University. External examiners are normally appointed to at least one programme and for a period of three years, with approval from the validating university being required to extend the term by a further year. College staff with whom the team met had a clear understanding that external examiners acted on behalf of the validating universities.

56   Once appointed, responsibility for briefing and support is divided between the validating university and the College. The validating university has responsibility for providing the external examiner with university information, including its examinations handbook, programme handbook, programme specification and the most recent external examiner report. Detailed information about the role of external examiners is available from validating universities' websites. The College programme director is responsible for briefing and induction of the external examiner on his/her role and responsibilities within the College. It is the programme director's responsibility to contact the external examiner and make arrangements for initial briefing and induction, visits to the College, attendance at examination boards and for the external examiner to receive student work for moderation. The programme director is also required to consult the external examiner about any changes to the programme or assessment regulations during the period of appointment. From the evidence in external examiner reports that the audit team reviewed, external examiners generally seemed satisfied that they were properly briefed about their role.

57   In line with the College's draft external examiner policy (see paragraphs 55-56), the Briefing Paper stated that the core functions of external examiners working within the College are defined in terms of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*. The Briefing Paper described 'typical aspects' of the external examiners' role at the College, which include observing performances/viewing artefacts, moderating scripts and coursework, observing oral exams when required, and attending examination boards. In commenting on standards and attainment, external examiners are enjoined to take into account subject benchmarks and the

FHEQ. The draft external examiner policy does not make an explicit reference to a role for external examiners prior to assessment of the students. However, it was clear to the audit team from their reading of external examiner reports that external examiners are involved in the approval of the assessments used by the College.

58   As part of the terms of their appointment, external examiners are required to provide the validating university with an annual report, using the relevant university report pro forma. After consideration by the validating university, the annual report is forwarded to the College and also copied to the university's academic adviser for the programme. The report is received from the university by the Director of Quality, who copies it to the Vice Principal, Head of School, Registrar, Director of Learning and Teaching and the relevant programme director. The Programme Director makes an initial response to the report, in writing, and responds to any issues raised, with a copy going to the validating university. From its reading of external examiner reports, the audit team concluded that external examiners were generally satisfied that their reports received an appropriate response from the College. The report is then considered by the relevant programme committee within the biannual programme monitoring procedure, with any responses put in the action plan for the programme. The College has expressed concern that, in receiving external examiner reports via the validating universities, delays may occur for the College in gaining access to external examiner comments. The College has discussed a proposal that external examiners should submit their reports concurrently to both the validating universities and to the College, but no formal recommendation on this matter has been put to the validating universities. The University of Manchester institutional review in 2008 recommended that the College should consider developing a mechanism for gathering feedback from its external examiners at the examination boards. However, QAEC took the view that external examiner reports remained the main vehicle for gathering information from external examiners, and that their timely receipt was important.

59   The Briefing Paper stated that QAEC reviews all external examiner reports on an annual basis and issues raised that have College-wide relevance are noted and may be subject to an action plan. The College cited examples showing where external examiner reports had led to specific changes. The QAEC, in receiving the reports of the outcomes from biannual programme monitoring, is informed of any programme-specific external examiner issues. The audit team also saw evidence that QAEC received annual reports on cross-College issues, and these included issues arising from external examiners' and academic advisers' reports. With the reports received for the academic year 2007-08, an overview report was prepared by the Directors of Quality Assurance and of Learning and Teaching summarising each external examiner report and drawing general conclusions. Many positive comments were noted but also some matters for concern. The major issue related to the quality of student critical and reflective writing on a number of programmes. On enquiry, the team learned that this was the first time that such a systematic overview report had been written relating to external examiner reports. The College confirmed that it was its intention for this to become an established part of its quality assurance procedures. Students are made aware of the contents of external examiner reports for their programme and the programme director's response to them, through their representation on programme committees. In addition, all students may read external examiner reports as they are made available on the College's document control centre.

60   In the Briefing Paper, the College indicated that it uses external examiner reports and feedback to enhance quality in a number of ways. As part of its periodic programme review and biannual programme monitoring, external examiner reports form a significant element of the review material. External examiners may also be consulted, ad hoc, on enhancement issues. While the reporting of cross-College issues raised by external examiners, and reported to both QAEC and the Learning and Teaching Development Committee (LTDC), has the potential to initiate enhancement activity. The audit team saw evidence which supported this claim concerning the use of external examiner inputs in quality enhancement.

61   Overall, the audit team formed the view that, working with its validating universities, the College had established effective procedures for appointing, briefing, and using its external examiners and their reports. The College makes strong and scrupulous use of independent external examiners, ensuring that the external examining within the College makes an effective contribution to the assurance of academic standards on College programmes.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

62   The 2003 Audit Report recommended that the College should continue to review how it might make greater use of the academic infrastructure In its Briefing Paper the College stated that it takes cognisance of, and actively engages with external reference points such as the FHEQ, the *Code of practice* and subject benchmarks. The Briefing Paper stated that new programme development and approval, and subsequent review and modifications are informed by the FHEQ and relevant subject benchmarks, and that programme committees undertake an annual audit to ensure programmes continue to align with the latest versions of the FHEQ and subject benchmarks. While staff indicated that this was a new procedure that had not yet been fully implemented, the audit team nevertheless noted that during 2008, the College had engaged in a considerable amount of activity to map its procedures against the various aspects of the Academic Infrastructure publishd by QAA, and to develop new policies which aligned with it.

63   In developing its own internal academic infrastructure, the College stated that it had utilised the *Code of practice* and also QAA's *Outcomes of Audit* reports. In all relevant internal processes, such as external examining and approving and reviewing programmes, the College stated that it is a requirement to consider subject benchmark statements and to match the level descriptors in the FHEQ. The audit team saw evidence of the use of the FHEQ and subject benchmarks in the periodic review process considered in the audit trails. It also noted that external examiners are asked to consider the FHEQ and subject benchmarks when completing their reports. All programmes at the College have a programme specification, the construction of which makes use of the pro forma document from the relevant validating university. These programme specifications are made available to students and potential students through the College's website. The team formed the view that they provided an accurate and effective representation of programme learning outcomes, the curriculum and assessment requirements.

64   The only professional statutory regulatory body (PSRB) with which the College engages is the National Council for Drama Training (NCDT), which accredits five of the College's degrees. The audit team saw evidence of the Academic Board being kept informed of the progress of accreditation by NCDT, and evidence of the outcomes of the accreditation visits in 2006 and 2007 being discussed by the Board although not by QAEC. The team also saw annual programme reports to NCDT relating to responses to the action points identified in the accreditation reports and also identification of developments in the programme since the accreditation. The team did not, however, see any discussion of the NCDT accreditation or the annual reports to NCDT in any of the programme committee minutes for those programmes which were accredited, although PSRB reports are expected to be part of the input to biannual programme monitoring.

65   The Briefing Paper noted that, as a vocational institution, it was important for the learning opportunities the College provided to meet industry needs. In seeking to achieve this, the College benefits from strong links with both the profession and also from its alumni now working in the industry. This is supported by the employment of part-time and sessional academic staff members who are professionally engaged in the industry. Visiting directors and other professionals also work directly with students within the College's production-based curriculum. The College seeks to use industry advisers as part of the biannual monitoring process, particularly in relation to the quality of graduate achievement and employment. In recognition that securing industry feedback is not always straightforward, QAEC was currently considering proposals for strengthening this involvement of industry advisers in biannual monitoring. Industry representatives also sit on periodic review panels.

66   The College is required to operate within the framework set by its validating universities, and it is subject to periodic review by them. Clearly the validating universities provide a major source of external feedback as part of validation and review. For example, such external evaluation was evident in the reports from the institutional reviews of the College's major university partner, the University of Manchester, conducted in 2006 and 2008. These reports were considered at QAEC, which prepared draft responses for ratification by the Academic Board. As an outcome of the 2006 Institutional Review, the University signed a further institutional agreement with the College. This agreement continued to make reference to the use of the University's Manual of Academic Procedures and of the University's procedures for the conduct of assessment. The outcomes of biannual monitoring are presented to the University through its Drama Panel, and key College staff attended the meeting of the panel where the College's report was discussed. The University appointed academic advisers for each programme at the College for which it was the awarding body. The audit team were told that these advisers always attended the examination boards to which the assessment outcomes of their programme were presented. However, the team noted that visit reports to the College from these advisers were somewhat sporadic. The University's 2008 Institutional Review Report had noted that there was a need for the College and the University to work on the clarification of processes, especially with regard to academic advisers. Nevertheless, where academic advisers from the University had visited, there was evidence of the College receiving constructive feedback. For example, in 2006-07, the academic adviser for the large BA Theatre Studies by distance-learning programme raised concerns about the ability of programme staffing to keep pace with the growth in student numbers, and the sufficiency of administrative support for the programme. The team saw evidence of this report being discussed in the programme committee, with a request going forward for additional resourcing in line with the academic adviser's report, but noted that this request had not been approved by the College.

67   Overall, the audit team formed the view that there had been significant development since the time of the last audit in 2003, and that the College was making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure and other relevant external reference points in relation to the maintenance of academic standards on its programmes.

Assessment policies and regulations

68   Taught awards are delivered within a credit-based modular structure and all modules are assessed. The College has a framework for assessment, which consists of a documented set of procedures, the 'Principles and Procedures of Assessment', together with three sets of Academic Regulations (Assessment and Progression) that relate, respectively, to full-time undergraduate, distance-learning undergraduate and masters programmes.

69   Staff with whom the audit team met described the 'Principles and Procedures of Assessment', approved by the Academic Board in July and introduced for 2008-09, as the outcome of a working group that had sought to consolidate assessment policies previously located in several different places. It aimed thereby to ensure consistency of assessment practices cross-college, and also the means through which the College had been able to consider alignment with the *Code of practice: Section 6: Assessment of students*. In discussing the Principles and Procedures document, the Academic Board noted that, once approved, the document would set out the ways in which all assessments in the College would be approached and reflect the requirements of the validating universities. The Principles and Procedures document identifies a wide range of assessment modes, and these include continuous assessment of practical work, practical presentations, reflective journals, portfolios, written assignments, seminar presentations and research projects. Alternative assessment modes are also recognised to accommodate students with disabilities.

70   The 'Principles and Procedures of Assessment' contains guidance on assessment criteria to be used for the marking and grading of assessments. The audit team asked why the criteria were the same for all three levels of undergraduate programmes, and where progression was demonstrated between levels. They were told that progression lay in the definition of learning objectives at

different levels, and the criteria presented in the 'Principles and Procedures' document were guidelines for marking against these objectives. Guidance is provided on the assessment of the work of students with disabilities including dyslexia, and visual and auditory impairment. The policy also contains guidance on marking practices at each level within courses. The stringency of internal moderation and double-marking increases with higher levels. Guidance is also provided on plagiarism. There is no policy on anonymous-marking of written work and, indeed, the College sees this as not being practical in its academic context. It was clear to the team that the 'Principles and Procedures of Assessment' is continuing to be refined by the College. For example, a working group of LTDC was asked to develop a plagiarism policy for the College, and this went forward from the QAEC in April 2008 for formal approval by the Academic Board. The LTDC currently had a working group reviewing the College's late submission of assessments policy, and had also agreed guidelines on assessment feedback that were to be incorporated into College policy.

71   For each assessment students are given an assignment brief and it is intended that a sample of these be scrutinised by the Head of School and Director of Learning and Teaching before publication to students. The College expected a report of this scrutiny process to go to LTDC and QAEC. However, the team was not able to find evidence of this process being in place when it examined the minutes of QAEC and LTDC. The student written submission had confirmed that the assignment brief was a major source of guidance on what is expected within the assessment of a module, but students also identified instances where incremental changes to module assignment briefs had occasionally resulted in confusion as to what was required. It will be helpful to students if the College implements its policy on scrutiny of briefs prior to publication, so as to ensure clarity and currency.

72   Students receive assessment submission dates in an assessment schedule provided at the commencement of each level. The College has a procedure for exacting penalties for late submission, and accompanying mitigating circumstance procedures. These were investigated by the team in discussion with staff and students and the team was satisfied that, while quite complex, they operated effectively and were well understood by the students whom the team met.

73   The 'Principles and Procedures of Assessment' give guidance on providing feedback to students on assessments. This includes the importance of timely feedback given before the next assessment of a similar type is due for completion, the creation of timetabled space within the curriculum for the delivery of feedback, and the role of the personal tutor in ensuring students receive timely feedback. However, the audit team noted that, in the 2008 National Student Survey, 51 per cent of students at the College who responded to the survey indicated they disagreed with the statement that feedback on assessed work had been prompt. The team was told that policy on the distance-learning programmes (where all assessments are written coursework) was that work should be returned to students with feedback normally within 21 days of its submission. The College had systems for tracking the receipt of work from students, its onward transmission to tutors for marking, and its return to the College for distribution to the students. These systems enabled the College to assure itself that the 21 day turnaround was being adhered to, and to identify instances of individual tutors who were not maintaining this standard. The team was told that the College is piloting electronic submission of assessed work and its marking in parallel with the conventional paper-based system, and this had the potential to reduce delays in the transmission of assessed work. Distance-learning students with whom the team met confirmed that they received timely feedback on their assessed work, and that the 21 day turnaround was generally met. The quality of feedback varied between distance-learning tutors, but generally students felt they understood the mark they received.

74   The audit team enquired concerning the College's response to student concerns about the timeliness of feedback, as evidenced in the 2008 National Student Survey. Staff said that this had triggered a staff development programme across schools, seeking to establish parity of practice and to share good practice. However, on-campus students with whom the team met said that there remained variability in the timeliness of feedback, with staff in some programme areas

seeming to be overstretched. In the case of a master's programme that was being delivered for the last time by the College, students indicated that they had only received one piece of feedback on assessed work, though their programme of study was more than halfway towards its completion. On-campus students were not aware of timetabled slots for giving feedback on assessments, but they did confirm that they received personal academic tutorials at which work was discussed. Staff also pointed out that, by the nature of performance-based disciplines, students received a great deal of ongoing verbal feedback, but they tended not to have the same perception of this as they did of written feedback. Overall, students with whom the team met regarded the quality of feedback on assessments as good, and they were able to understand why a particular mark had been given and what was needed to improve the mark. In its reading of external examiner reports, the team noted that the quality of feedback on assessments was uniformly praised by external examiners, with some describing it as the most comprehensive and best feedback that they had seen. It was clear to the team that College staff take a great deal of care in the giving of effective and useful assessment feedback to students, but also that continuing attention to the timeliness of feedback might be appropriate.

75   The College has three sets of progression and assessment regulations (see paragraphs 68-73). The Briefing Paper stated that the College's set of academic regulations promoted equality of treatment and approach in the management of assessment, but the audit team noted that the degree classification rules are different between the on-campus and distance-learning undergraduate regulations. The team asked what was the rationale for this variance, given the statement in the Briefing Paper. It was told that it had been a requirement of the University of Manchester, the College's main validating university, that there should be separate regulations for distance-learning and on-campus programmes. The College indicated that it would be in favour of consolidating these regulations in so far as they affected the classification of awards, although any such decision would need University approval. The team asked for information about the annual review of assessment practice within the College which QAEC was said to conduct. Staff were uncertain of any formal process to which the Briefing Paper had referred, and believed that the annual review referred to was the routine consideration of feedback from external examiners, together with a consideration of cross-college assessment outcomes.

76   The College has a two-tier approach to examination boards. Programme assessment boards recommend marks for individual modules, and they are responsible for making judgements concerning mitigating circumstances, using advice from the College Entry and Academic Progression Committee. The school examination boards then receive recommendations from the programme assessment boards and make award recommendations to the validating university. The school examination boards are a recent innovation, having replaced individual programme examination boards. The audit team noted that at least one external examiner had commended this as a positive change, breaking down the isolation he had felt operating at the programme level. The team established that external examiners are not present at the programme assessment boards, although they do receive student work to moderate and the programme assessment boards only make recommendations of marks that are not finally fixed until the school boards, at which external examiners are present. The College is allowed a high degree of autonomy in its assessment practices by its validating universities, and the boards are run and chaired by College staff, albeit with university academic advisers present at the three school examination boards.

77   Staff awareness of assessment issues and regulations is assured through a range of staff development activities. Each school holds an annual assessment practice workshop, while the Head of School covers assessment practice as part of the induction of new staff. The Registrar provides training on the assessment regulations for administrate staff.

78   Overall, the audit team formed the view that, working with a considerable level of delegation from its validating universities, the College had developed an effective framework, which ensured consistent practice in the assessment of students across the institution. It was also willing to look critically at its current practice and seek to improve it. The team judged that the College's arrangements for the assessment of students made an effective contribution to the maintenance of academic standards on its programmes.

Management information - statistics

79   The 2003 QAA audit had noted the College's acknowledgement that better use could be made of data analysis in its management of academic quality and standards, especially for its distance-learning courses. In its Briefing Paper, the College stated that it now uses a comprehensive set of management information in monitoring standards. Annually updated, five-year data by programme on admissions, demographics, module marks, progression, award and employment, and student satisfaction is available on the College's document control centre and can be accessed by staff and students. Some of these datasets are benchmarked against external reference points: HE sector, sub-sector, subject and key comparator/competitor data. The College provides guidance to programme directors on using these statistics, together with information from student surveys (see paragraphs 93-97) to inform the programme monitoring process. Programme directors' analyses are expected to 'consider the latest data for their programme over time and in relation to other programmes, the College average, and where available, external benchmarks'.

80   An annual overview of data on student demographics, completion, progression, award and employment is prepared by the Vice Principal (Systems for Quality and Administration) for the Academic Board and draws attention to key areas for further consideration by the Board. The VP (SQA) also draws out any key programme-specific messages and relays these to the heads of schools and the relevant programme directors for discussion at programme committees. The management information statistics and survey results are also used by the senior committees in the management stem in measuring the College's performance using key indicators, for example the key performance indicators of student experience.

81   The data available to programme teams on the document control centre are easily accessible and clearly presented, and the overview document sets out a clear agenda of items arising from the management information for discussion at the Academic Board and other committees. The audit team noted how consideration of the data informed programme monitoring and at the institutional level had raised specific issues, for example, that relating to retention and degree classification, which had then been addressed by action in committees in the academic stem. At the institutional level, the team was able to see good evidence of the way in which data has been used to both develop strategic objectives and inform decisions on performance using an overall 'traffic light' verdict on each key performance indicator.

82   The audit team was able to confirm that that the College had developed its management information considerably since the previous QAA audit and was now interrogating and analysing appropriate datasets effectively at both programme and institutional level in managing academic standards and quality. The team considered this to be a feature of good practice.

83   The audit team concluded that confidence could be placed in the soundness of the College's current and likely future management of the academic standards that it delivers on behalf of the University of Manchester and behalf of London Metropolitan University.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

84   The Briefing Paper indicated that, in developing its own academic infrastructure, the College had made use of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*. It cited development of its admissions policy and ongoing development of its work-based and placement learning policy as examples. The audit team noted the recently approved Principles and Procedures of Assessment document, together with the guidance on plagiarism which it incorporated, and found it to follow the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*. It also noted that the draft external examiner policy made appropriate reference to the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*, and that the student complaints, appeals and disciplinary policy was consistent with the *Code, Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters*.

85   The audit team saw recent evidence of the College instituting systematic checks of the alignment of its procedures and polices with relevant sections of the *Code of practice*. Thus, in 2008, the Learning and Teaching Development Committee (LTDC) nominated specific staff members to review particular sections of the *Code* against College policies, and to report back. The team also noted a reminder to committees by the Vice Principal (SQA) at the end of 2008 of their responsibility to conduct audits of College policies for which they had responsibility against the *Code*. The team saw examples of College policies currently undergoing development and review in relation to the *Code*. Thus, the College had redrafted its work-based and placement learning policy in light of the revisions that had been made to the *Code, Section 9: Work-based learning*. It noted that it had been discussed at LTDC at the beginning of 2009 and suggestions made for minor changes prior to approval on the Chair's action. It was clear to the team that the precepts of the *Code, Section 9: Work-based and Placement learning,* had been closely followed.

86   The audit team also saw a draft of the College Career Education Policy, which had been discussed by LTDC at the beginning of 2009. Although this was marked version 3, the team considered that it was clearly in embryonic form and would need considerably more work before it became an effective policy document which took account of the *Code of practice, Section 8: Career education, information and guidance*. Staff with whom the team met confirmed that the College was still developing its policy in relation to careers education, and that it was the subject of 'considerable debate'. Staff also indicated that the intention to appoint a career education, information and guidance (CEIG) officer, mentioned in the Operational Plan for CEIG, had been placed on hold and that the development of a statement of entitlement in relation to careers remained at the formative stage. The team asked why it was taking so long for the College to develop a policy in this area, not least because it clearly related to the strongly vocational emphasis of the College's programmes. It was told that careers advice was seen as specific to, and given within, the framework of specific programmes, and that the College was wary of developing an institutional policy framework that would lack relevance. While appreciating the importance of contextualising CEIG for students in different programme areas, the team considered that the College should have a clear and documented policy at institutional level on CEIG, which should embrace statements of the College's objectives in this area together with student entitlements and responsibilities, if it wished to achieve its intention of securing adherence to the *Code of practice, Section 8*.

87   In relation to other external reference points relevant to the quality of student learning opportunities, the Briefing Paper indicated that the College learning resources centre used the Society of College National and University Libraries (SCONUL) annual library statistics survey data, in order to benchmark its library and information provision against other higher education institutions. The audit team also saw evidence of the College's engagement with the requirements of the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) in the development of its Disability Equality Scheme.

88   Overall, and not withstanding the slow progress in the development of a college-level CEIG policy, the audit team concluded that the College made effective use of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, and other external reference points, in maintaining and enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

89   As noted above, the College has with the agreement of its validating partners recently developed its own process for programme approval, although at the time of the audit, no programme proposals had progressed through the entire process. However, proposals for a suite of master's programmes had completed the first stage of approval; the consideration and approval of rationales and business plans. The rationale pro forma contains spaces for statements on the resource requirements for the programme, including inputs from the information and communication technology manager and Librarian. The audit team asked student support managers about their involvement in the approval process and was told that they would expect to have the opportunity to make their main input when the proposal reached the Academic Board. In the second stage of the approval process the programme structure document is expected to include programme and module specifications to a model specified by the University of Manchester. This includes information on teaching, learning and assessment methods, support for students with additional needs and arrangements for placement/study abroad. In the team's view, the proposal documentation required for the second stage of the programme approval process provides a sound basis for assessing the quality of learning opportunities.

90   The College ensures that learning opportunities in each programme are kept under review through its monitoring arrangements. Programmes are monitored twice a year through discussion of a set agenda at programme committee meetings, as described in paragraphs 26 and 41-42. In addition, there is regular and structured input from students through the process of the student semester review as described in paragraph 95, Staff and students whom the audit team met, testified to the effectiveness of the process in ensuring that issues concerning learning opportunities are discussed and recorded in the programme's regularly updated action plan and, where appropriate, brought to the attention of higher-level committees. Student representatives viewed the changes that had been effected by their input to programme monitoring as evidence of quality enhancement. In the team's view, both the monitoring process and the particular contribution made to it by the student semester review were features of good practice in helping to assure the quality and enhancement of learning opportunities.

91   The College's new periodic review process, which was introduced for the review of the programmes in each of its schools during 2008 and is described in paragraphs 49-52, has a part of the review that focuses on the quality of the student learning experience. Among the programme documentation required for perusal by the review panel are the programme structure document, programme and module specifications, and student handbooks, and the results of biannual monitoring. The review panel, which includes a student and external members, interviews a group of students studying the reviewed programmes during the course of the review. Schools are required to respond to issues raised by the review panel in a monitored action plan. From the evidence that is examined, the audit team considered that the periodic review of programmes makes a significant contribution to the College's management of learning opportunities.

Management information - feedback from students

92   Among the features of good practice noted in the 2003 QAA audit report were the College's focus on students, and the attention that it gave to students' views. However, that report also recommended that the College establish ways of gathering, and reporting students' views systematically at a management level to allow College-wide issues and good practice to be taken into account and monitored. The College has subsequently introduced two institution-wide student surveys: 'first impressions', introduced in the 2007-08 academic year, and an end-of-year student satisfaction survey, introduced in 2006-07.

93   The first impressions survey is administered online to new students in their second semester. It seeks to gauge their initial opinions and satisfaction with the College and their programmes, and to gain more understanding of their reasons for deciding to study at the College. All students are invited to take part in the end-of-year online satisfaction survey to evaluate their experience of the College, their programme and modules, learning resources and information technology, further support, the Rose Bruford Student Union and the campus, accommodation and catering. Students are also asked to identify the three best things about studying at the College and the three that most need improvement, and finally to prioritise from a list of ways in which the College might change. The audit team was told that because some of the original survey questions were less relevant to distance-learning students, a customised version of the survey had been produced for them.

94   The first impressions survey in March 2008 elicited responses from about 25 per cent of full-time undergraduate entrants and around 20 per cent of entrants to distance-learning courses. A summary of the results prepared by the VP (SQA) and considered at both the Academic Board and the Senior Management Committee (SMC) showed that responses were mainly positive but noted some issues for further discussion: for example, a mismatch for about a quarter of the respondents between their expectations as applicants and their experience as students. This finding was fed into the work on retention of the LTDC that eventually led to the development of a retention strategy.

95   The results of the end-of-year student satisfaction survey together with those of the National Student Survey are also summarised by the VP (SQA) for consideration by QAEC and thence the Academic Board, and also by the SMC; 244 students completed the 2008 Student Satisfaction Survey, a 25 per cent response rate and a considerable increase from 2007. There was a higher response rate from distance-learning students (33 per cent) than those on-campus (20 per cent). The 2008 summary reported a high level of overall satisfaction with the core aspects of teaching and programme content, but lower levels of satisfaction with feedback, space and organisation. The paper also summarised the results of the National Student Survey, which was completed by 123 final-year students. Ratings had fallen compared to the previous year across most categories, particularly overall programme satisfaction (79 per cent), assessment and feedback (53 per cent), with promptness of feedback down to just 28 per cent, organisation and management (60 per cent) and learning resources (60 per cent). Arising from the survey results QAEC identifies issues requiring attention and makes recommendations for institutional-level action to the Academic Board. Programme-specific results are extracted and supplied to programme directors for consideration at programme committees; any emergent issues are highlighted and feedback from the committee on these is expected.

96   The audit team noted the comprehensive, evaluative and widely available summaries of survey data produced by the VP (SQA) and the intention that their annual production and consideration should become an embedded feature of the College's management of quality and standards, thus allowing longer-term trend analysis. From the documentation available to it, the team was able to confirm that due consideration was given to programme and module survey results as a standard item on programme committee agendas, that survey data informed consideration of the institutional key performance indicators and that college-wide issues were discussed and action taken at institutional level. Examples of the latter included: consideration by the LTDC of the implications of the 'first impressions' results on applicant expectations in its development of a retention strategy; and the production of first guidelines, and then a policy, on assessment feedback and tutorials.

97   Given the lower rate of response to the satisfaction survey from full-time students at the College compared to those studying at a distance, the audit team asked a group of on-campus students why that should be. A view that was widely supported was that students were constantly being asked to give feedback, that their views would already be well known and that there needed to be a greater incentive to participate. Others pointed out variation in the ways in

which the survey was publicised and its completion facilitated in different programmes, factors which the College may wish to consider in administering the survey in future. However, the team also noted the increase in the end-of-year survey response rate from 2007 to 2008 and the obvious concern of the College to get as representative sample of opinions as possible. Overall, the team took the view that the College had met the recommendation of the 2003 QAA audit report in establishing systematic and effective means of gathering and reporting students' views to raise college-wide issues, and that the analysis of the consequent management information at programme and institutional level was an element of good practice.

98   In addition to its surveys, the College also elicits student feedback from its programme committees, which the College sees as maintaining dialogue with students and a means of discussing any planned changes to the way in which programmes are delivered. Written feedback for on-campus programmes is provided by student year representatives on the student semester review pro forma, which is one of the formal inputs to programme monitoring. The process for obtaining feedback is that the programme director meets the programme's student representatives before the end of the semester, circulates the student review pro forma and answers any questions, after which the student representatives hold meetings with their year group, complete the pro forma, and return it to the programme director. The pro forma covers a range of module-related areas: module aims, objectives and learning outcomes, teaching and learning opportunities, resources and support materials, feedback and guidance, workload, and lectures and lecturers; there is also space for additional comments. The pro formas form a major input to the corresponding programme committees, with results going directly to SMC and via QAEC to the Academic Board with recommendations for college-level action as appropriate.

99   The audit team was told that the process for collecting feedback on distance-learning programmes differed from that for on-campus programmes because student representatives were not able physically to meet their fellow students biannually and collate their views, and because communication between students via private email addresses or post could be difficult. Therefore, instead of the composite semester review report, distance-learning students were asked to complete individual end-of-module questionnaires. For these students 'customised' student questionnaires and student feedback pro-formas have been developed to accommodate the differences arising from the alternative mode of delivery. Despite the team finding some evidence to suggest that the efficacy on the part of the College to communicate responses might be improved, distance-learning students felt 'appreciated' and believed that their voice was heard by the College.

100   Student representatives from on-campus courses explained to members of the audit team how their meetings with fellow students were conducted. They reported that it was important to let individual voices be heard and represented while seeking to draw out shared key points. The team recognised the responsibility assumed by student representatives in collecting and collating the views of their fellow students in such a structured way. The team reviewed a number of completed pro formas and noted the comprehensiveness, quality and robustness of the feedback supplied by the students, the openness of the system, and the care which had been taken by some members of programme teams to answer as fully as possible the points that students were making. In its Briefing Paper, the College claimed that 'students are active participants in the process of managing learning opportunities...'. The team was able to confirm that statement, and it considered that the comprehensive and structured arrangement for student feedback, as exemplified by the Student Semester Review process for on-campus programmes, was a feature of good practice.

Role of students in quality assurance

101   According to the College's student written submission, students are generally 'very satisfied that they have a voice and are heard' and 'believe that systems for hearing the student voice have improved'. Students are represented on the Board of Governors; on every committee within the academic stem, including the Academic Board; periodic review panels; and on some subcommittees of the SMC. Programme committees include up to two representatives from each level of the programme. There is a Students' Union, but no full-time sabbatical officers.

Student Union executive officers, whom the audit team met at the briefing meeting, reported that a training session and associated materials are provided for representatives at programme level. In terms of the selection process, the team was told by student representatives of on-campus programmes that they were elected by fellow students, following an open invitation to self-nominate and a brief 'hustings' session. Student representatives on distance-learning programmes thought they had been approached to serve; they were not aware of any formal training but did receive detailed briefing notes. They were less clear than on-campus representatives about their role in terms of whether they were representing all their fellow students or acting as 'representative students', particularly given the constraints on direct communication. The student written submission reported that the student representative system works well at programme level but was less sure what action had been taken as issues moved 'further up the committee chain'. On-campus student representatives, whom the team met, expressed greater confidence in the effectiveness of the committee structure; for them the programme-level system of regularly updated action points provided evidence of issues that they had raised being discussed and sometimes resolved at higher levels, including the Academic Board.

102   Students are also involved in periodic review. As a part of the review process, review panels meet students from the school's programmes. There is a student member on the review panel drawn from a different school from that under review. The audit team confirmed that students had participated in these ways in each of the three panels it considered as part of the audit trails.

103   The College's Briefing Paper referred to a recently introduced student feedback forum intended 'for direct communication between Students and Senior Management and in order to support students serving in a representative capacity'. The forum, convened by the Director of Quality, was set up partly in response to student survey feedback about communication between management and students. According to the Briefing Paper, the College is 'committed to "closing the loop" on student feedback and has established the Student Feedback Forum specifically to provide direct two-way communication between senior management and all those with a representative capacity in the student body'. The Forum has a further remit to provide support and development to students in representative roles and maximise participation. At the time of the audit the forum had recently been established and had met only once, although it is planned to be a biannual event. Attendance at the first meeting appears to have been low: students reported that it was called at short notice. According to the student written submission, topics discussed at the first meeting were mainly practical and estates-related but academic issues arising from feedback, such as the quality and promptness of assessment feedback were also discussed.

104   The audit team recognised the laudable reasons for the College to set up the student feedback forum, but took the view that it was too soon to assess its effectiveness, or whether it would prove to be a worthwhile addition to the College's means of involving students in quality assurance, and attract reasonable levels of attendance from representatives. The team was told that action points from the first meeting of the forum had been forwarded to the Student's Union; however, officers whom the team met were unsure if they were being asked to disseminate those points to the student body generally, and were concerned about a possible further time commitment. They pointed out that the executive officer role could be very time-consuming for the students concerned in the absence of full-time sabbatical officers, particularly if the College wished to involve the Union more fully in its quality assurance and enhancement processes. The College may wish to consider whether the positive contribution of the student community to those processes could be further strengthened by providing appropriate support to the Students' Union. The student written submission identified the longstanding need for a Student's Union sabbatical officer, an issue raised in the 2003 audit report. The team would support active consideration by the College of such an initiative.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

105   Rose Bruford College website claims a research perspective that is both international and multicultural. Over the last few years, eight research themes have emerged, categorised under three generic areas, namely practical and scholarly; pedagogical and educational and professional and industry. The College argues that these categories provide a useful structure within which to shape its research. Research is promoted and organised by the Research Office and disseminated in the College through the 'Theatres Futures' website and via a wide range of activities and events including the annual research symposium, annual cultural industries fair, conferences, exhibitions, installations and performances.

106   The audit team found a recognition in the College of the importance of research in developing classroom practice. In its Briefing Paper, the College explained that it operates three mechanisms, whereby scholarship and research are used to inform learning opportunities. These are summarised in the Briefing Paper as the Rose Bruford Teaching Fellowship, the key practitioners scheme, and research-informed teaching projects. This approach permits the College to support targeted initiatives. The key practitioners scheme enables professionals from the industry to teach at the College and be observed by established academic staff. A total of 13 key practitioners have been funded since 2006-07 making a contribution to many programmes of study.

107   The audit team sought evidence of the College taking a strategic approach to the use of research and scholarship in the design and delivery of programmes and this was found within the Strategic Plan 2008-2013. The College monitors this activity through the operating plans for learning and teaching and for research and knowledge transfer. The Rose Bruford Teaching Fellowship allows academic staff to engage in pedagogical research activity and disseminate this across the College. The team found a number of examples of teaching fellowship activity including the Palatine research project on assessment. As a direct consequence of this project, a new Principles and Procedures of Assessment document was approved through the committee structure. Both of these mechanisms are targeted at the Colleges' professional standards stream and administered by the Director of Learning and Teaching. Finally the research-informed teaching initiative is administered by the Director of Research and was found by the team to enhance a number of programmes. There have been six projects to date and examples of these include the enhancement of the training in actor musicianship.

108   The audit team found evidence of research and scholarly activity at the College, engaging undergraduate and postgraduate students, part-time and full-time staff, visiting tutors, visiting and honorary professors and collaborators from the professions and industry, both in the UK and abroad. The team also saw evidence of the realisation of the importance of research in developing classroom practice, with staffing policies that supported the link between research and scholarship, and teaching and learning. The team concluded that the College is successful in its strategic approach to creating links between research or scholarly activity and student learning opportunities.

Other modes of study

Distance learning

109   The Briefing Paper provided a short, descriptive overview of the College's distance-learning provision. In addition, references to work-based learning are found throughout the Briefing Paper as this is an element of a number of degree programmes delivered by the College. The College has three programmes that are delivered by distance learning, and they accounted for 32.6 per cent of the College's student numbers. The three programmes include the BA (Hons) Theatre Studies, BA (Hons) in Opera Studies and (now closed to intake) MA Theatre and Performance Studies. All distance-learning material was, at the time of the audit, based on hard-copy distance-learning units prepared by the College; these are carefully screened for compliance with the new CLA licence, and were being transferred on to a CD ROM, for ease of use for those students with computers.

110   The Briefing Paper stated that the distance-learning provision was largely managed within the same quality framework as on-campus provision, while acknowledging that students are subject to separate regulations in relation to their progression and award classification. The audit team found that the adjustments made to the College's academic infrastructure were appropriate to support the provision of distance learning. The Briefing Paper explained that the monitoring of quality for these students is through student survey feedback, external examiner reports and input from University academic advisers. The team explored this and found evidence of the distance-learning programmes being subjected to comparably robust internal quality assurance and quality enhancement processes. The Briefing Paper stated that the provision had taken account of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*. The team explored distance learning in the light of the *Code* and found that the College did adhere to the *Code*. The College acknowledged that it had been difficult for it to gain comprehensive summaries of distance-learning students' opinions, but the team found that this was being addressed and student representatives had been recruited, with a website having been relaunched to support communication between students.

111   The 2003 audit report had agreed with the College that the quality assurance process to support assessment and delivery of distance-learning programmes was vulnerable, and it had recommended that the College should, in strengthening the quality assurance processes for its distance-learning programmes, consider how to achieve greater involvement for part-time staff teaching on them. The audit team found that the College had strengthened the engagement with these staff. A comprehensive distance-learning tutors' handbook has been developed. This handbook provides guidance on all aspects of programme delivery and includes examples of good practice related to the support of students with disabilities and the provision of student feedback. Part-time tutors are also supported by a part-time tutors' coordinator, meet regularly and share experiences across undergraduate programmes; this also takes place through a recently developed online forum. The tutors reported that they were invited to attend annual college staff study days, that they received regular communications by email from the programme directors, signalling particular landmarks in the delivery of the programme and reminding them of their duties towards distance-learning students. They are also able to benefit from the staff development and research opportunities offered by the College. The team considered that the range and level of support now offered to part-time staff delivering distance learning was an example of good practice.

112   Distance-learning students confirmed to the team that they felt well supported and received regular communications from programme directors and from College-based tutors, but that communication from part-time tutors was not always as consistent, a factor possibly due to the management of email addresses. Students also stated that they valued residential events and attending the College for productions and master classes when possible, although they felt that the costs associated with each residential could be made more explicit prior to commencing programmes. Attendance at a residential was perceived by students as a hidden cost. However, staff confirmed that each residential was an enrichment activity and not a requirement essential to the programme of study. The College also makes excellent use of its contacts with industry and students find this aspect of the programmes particularly stimulating. The team concluded that the College, to ensure equity across its provision and to provide a consistent means of communicating, needed to address some outstanding issues concerning the most effective use of email for communication with distance-learning students. The team noted that this was in hand and that a decision would be made by September 2009.

113   The audit team found many examples of good learner support for distance-learning students, including the very recent introduction of a part-time lecturer to provide specific support. Nevertheless it was evident that distance-learning programmes were under pressure from a staffing point of view. This issue had been raised in the Academic Advisor's report in 2007 in relation to the Theatre Studies programme and the Head of School had requested more staffing. The team noted that a decision regarding this request will be made by September 2009.

114   The Briefing Paper stated that the timescale and format for feedback on assessment was overseen by the programme directors. The audit team found robust arrangements in place for the management of assessment. All distance-learning students benefited from formative assessment and feedback. The quality of the feedback had been noted by external examiners. The students confirmed that, in the main, they received timely and good-quality feedback. The College is presently piloting the use of electronic submission of assignments. In the absence of an electronic system it is not yet possible for the College to make use of software for the detection of plagiarism. This has been raised by an external examiner and is being considered as part of the current work being undertaken regarding the implementation of a virtual learning environment.

115   In summary, the audit team concluded that the College has a vibrant distance-learning provision, and a level of experience in supporting which justified the intention to extend it to master's level. Students feel very well supported and in the main receive good feedback on their progress. The need to make a decision on the future use of a virtual learning environment has been recognised by the College as a priority. The team noted aspects of good practice in this context that included the level of support provided for part-time staff and initiatives to support a diverse student body, with particular reference to students with disabilities.

Work-based learning

116   The College has a work-based and placement learning policy that as been informed by the *Code of practice*. There was also evidence to suggest that the College aims in the future to achieve a more coherent relationship between practice and theory in the delivery of its curricula. The audit team found some variability in the way in which the College approached work-based and placement learning. The team identified some examples of placements being formally approved by the College, but it considered that the policy needed to be developed further to provide greater direction and guidance on the selection of placements and the assessment of student learning while on placement.

E-learning

117   As already noted, the College was at the time of the audit considering the introduction of a virtual learning environment, but did not yet have such a system in place and as a consequence there was little provided for students by way of blended learning. The College's distance-learning provision was currently being delivered through the support of paper-based materials that require the student to 'read and respond'. The College student survey and the National Student Survey both indicated that enhanced online and electronic delivery of teaching materials was a priority for students. The team noted that several of the rationales for the new master's programmes included statements on additional information and communication technology resources relating to the purchase or development of a virtual learning environment. One of these programmes was expected to start in the autumn of 2009. Given that at the time of the audit the College had not reached a decision about the purchase and/or development of a virtual learning environment, the team took the view that the College was allowing only a very short period of time for the installation of a virtual learning environment and the associated training that would be required if it was to adhere to the timescale set out in its programme proposal.

118   The audit team believed that, in the light of the substantial number of distance-learning students, and considering also the plan to extend this mode of study at master's level, the College needed to make its decision regarding the introduction a virtual learning environment in as timely a fashion as possible.

Resources for learning

119   The 2003 audit report noted that the College had not established a locus of responsibility for the oversight of all learning resources and encouraged the College to give priority to the establishment of a learning resources strategy. The team found evidence that the setting and delivery of priorities are achieved through the learning resources and information technology operating plans, while the collection development policy sets out parameters for the purchase and disposal of stock. These processes can be considered to meet in part the expectations of a more developed strategy. The SMC takes overall responsibility for the provision and allocation of learning resources. Programme and central services' requests arising from operating plans, periodic review and biannual programme monitoring are considered by the SMC. All budget holders are members of the SMC. A cyclical planning process is in place, whereby bids are submitted and reviewed in a cross-College context.

120   Accommodation is now located on one site grouped around a Grade 2 listed building and comprises an extensive range of specialist studios, workshops, rehearsal, and performance spaces including two theatres. However, pressures in terms of dedicated space, have led the College to seek some off-site rehearsal accommodation nearby, and staff considered that spaces available to meet the needs of Distance Learning students 'may require review if student numbers continue to increase'. Space allocation varies across programmes, with for example Production, having dedicated space while other programmes access cross-college provision. Wider access issues have been addressed in response to disability legislation.

121   The learning resources centre (LRC) team comprises a full-time College Librarian, assistant librarian, two library assistants and two part-time, term-time only librarian assistants. The College Librarian line manages the LRC staff and is in turn line managed by the Head of the School for Graduate and Professional Studies. The LRC is home to the Clive Barker Library and special collections of national and international interest, including The Stanislavski Centre, Clive Barker and David Bolland Archives, information technology facilities and the study support team. The team learned that the library collections are 'highly focused' on theatre and related subjects to support both the curricula and research. The resources include a collection of over 45,000 specialist books, a large collection of periodicals, sound, video and DVD recordings and slides. The Library holds a stock of audiovisual equipment available for loan to staff and students. Students have the opportunity to use the College's unique Special Collections and to access collections at other universities via the SCONUL Access scheme. The LRC subscribes to a wide range of theatre and performance organisations on behalf of the College, many of which provide additional services for registered members of the College. The LRC has strong links with the local community through the sharing of a library management system with Bexley Libraries (public library service), which enables the two libraries to loan books to each other.

122   Library staff provide a range of services, including timetabled induction sessions for all new students, information sessions linked with teaching projects aimed at assisting students in developing critical research methods and a range of printed study guides and information sheets. The Librarian provides individual assistance and advice on carrying out research as required and the LRC communicates with the College community via monthly current awareness bulletins, biannual email newsletters, through LRC User Group and by representation at College committees. The Librarian is a member of the Academic Board and the LTDC.

123   The LRC caters for full-time and part-time undergraduates, a small number of postgraduates, staff and visiting tutors, distance-learning students and visitors to the College. The centre itself is a hub of activity for both learning and, in the absence of other space, social activities. However the National Student Survey of 2008 recorded that 31 per cent of students were dissatisfied with noise levels in the LRC and 21 per cent with temperature levels. Students also raised the issue of noise in the LRC. The College is currently seeking to resolve the problem of alternative social space. In the most recent LRC operating plan statement, the special collections provision was reported as having been severely affected by the creation of the new

study support office in the area that had been intended for researchers using special collections, and it was also stated that there was no dedicated special collections research area or audiovisual facilities, and no room to expand the collections further.

124   The LRC operating plan also draws attention to the 'understaffing for considerable periods of time', which had resulted in irregular opening hours, a point raised by the student written submission and by students and staff. The plan also noted that there were insufficient staff to carry out routine activities such as 'stock weeding' and cataloguing. The College end-of-year survey had also recorded 28 per cent of students as being actively dissatisfied with opening hours. It was reported that students wanted later evening and Saturday opening and were unanimous in their wish for access to computers and printing facilities. In response, the LRC reported that it planned to open for 'a number of Saturday mornings from late February through to early May' to provide computer access, although there would be no information technology support on those occasions. Although students had responded positively to these proposed actions, there was some evidence to suggest that although student feedback suggested the need for extended opening hours, this was not always supported by actual use of facilities.

125   The Academic Board had commissioned a Library report to address the issues raised by students in the internal survey and in the National Student Survey. The LRC Report indicated that 'normal opening' had now been resumed, although students still reported dissatisfaction with limited access, little notice of closures, and no refreshments after 1400 hours. They were also dissatisfied with the number of copies and books, a problem that students claimed had been raised regularly, but to no avail. The LRC Operating Plan provided evidence that staff are overstretched and feel unable to provide desired levels of provision. The team concluded that despite evidence of attempts being made by the College to respond to these various service-related issues, students were not wholly satisfied with the overall provision, and the area needed continuing attention. The team would therefore encourage the College to monitor closely the implementation of the LRC Operating Plan 2007-08 to 2010.

126   The information technology (IT) operating plan 2008-09 to 2012 articulates the ways in which all of the College's strategic aims are addressed by 'providing a stable, secure and reliable communication and technology platform to meet the business aims and needs of the College'. The Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Manager, supported by an ICT Officer (0.7) provides first-line support. The information technology operating plan made no reference to the issue of the development of a virtual learning environment, despite it being a recurrent theme in both institutional and periodic reviews within the College. The 'sector-wide perception' that 'online delivery and the development of an Virtual Learning Environment' is 'an obvious requirement' has been acknowledged, as has the need for 'significantly improved on-line resources', specifically for distance-learning students, particularly in the area of teaching delivery and tutor communication. This is cited as a 'central feature of student feedback for many years', in programme-specific and College-wide surveys, and in student responses at programme committee level. Staff have argued that the current level of IT support 'will cease to be adequate as the distance learning programmes move further towards on-line delivery mechanisms'. Furthermore, in one of the College's periodic reviews it was observed that 'the future development of online learning and teaching support (perhaps in the form of the creation of a VLE, or similar mechanism) will also require additional IT input in the areas of design, management and technical support, which cannot be accommodated within current staffing levels'.

127   Despite these views identified through its own quality processes, the audit team found that the College had no clear plan relating to support through e-learning, although the team found some evidence of consideration of the issues surrounding online delivery. Given the acknowledged potential benefits for distance learners, an area of planned expansion for the College (see paragraphs 109-115), the team considered that was desirable that the College should now address the issue of the development of a virtual learning environment, and expedite the implementation of those aspects of its learning and teaching strategy relating to online learning support.

128   Although there is no formal review of the operation of internal providers of learning resources, this is achieved indirectly through periodic review and biannual programme monitoring. Concerns over the effective management of learning resources were raised in the periodic review of the School of Performance, where it was agreed that timetabling and room assignment was an issue that required attention. It was suggested that the storage of musical instruments needed to be improved, as did the facilities to support musical rehearsal. The review report recommended that 'The School/Institution should ensure that management mechanisms are in place to optimise allocation and sharing of resources between programmes, in relation to student numbers and admissions targets, and to ensure that programmes are not vulnerable in the event of losing key members of staff'. The audit team found evidence to suggest that some of the problems in this area had been identified and responded to, an example being the difficulties surrounding room bookings and timetable clashes. A fractional postholder now takes responsibility for the facilitation of room booking and students reported noticeable improvements. The team would nevertheless encourage the College to monitor the issue of accommodation.

129   There are identifiable mechanisms for gathering and responding to user feedback. This takes place directly via a substantial subsection within the College's main student survey group and through the LRC user group and also through the processes of periodic review, biannual programme review, student semester review, the College end-of-year survey, the NSS and the student feedback forum, introduced in 2008-09. Examples of responses include the provision in 2008 of a silent-study room to address criticism of noise levels, in the main library (although students reported that in practice, they were sometimes moved out in order that meetings could take place), and the purchase of additional equipment for loan from the LRC, in response to poor levels of student satisfaction recorded in the National Student Survey.

130   The College end-of-year survey 2007-08 recorded improved levels of student satisfaction on-campus, with 79 per cent satisfaction with their 'overall experience of the College's learning resources and services', compared with 69 per cent in 2007, with 66 per cent satisfied with their 'overall experience of the College's IT resources and services', compared with 56 per cent in 2007. The majority of full-time respondents were satisfied with the availability and quality of email and internet access, over 60 per cent were actively dissatisfied with the availability of computers and 20 per cent with wireless access. The National Student Survey however, showed a deteriorating trend of student satisfaction with in all areas of learning resources over the last three years to 2007-08 with barely half the final-year students showing satisfaction with information technology and specialist resources. The College's periodic review for the School of Design, Management and Technical Arts reported that 'generally resources are adequate for the work', but that there were 'generally, issues and difficulties in getting sufficient technical support'. The University of Manchester Institutional Review of the partnership with Rose Bruford College was satisfied that 'on the whole, the current space and facilities at the College are fit for purpose', but also noted 'the lack of general IT/AV support' as being a problem for the College '(ie responsible for TVs, videos, projectors and other teaching equipment)'. The Programme Director Overview (Acting) concluded that 'general resourcing continues to be a challenge'.

131   The audit team were informed that SMC was currently considering the report of the Review of the Role of Technicians and Production Staffing, the final version of which was approved by SMC, providing two 'illustrations' of possible staffing structures. However, progress had been slow in view of the hope expressed by staff that the recommendations of the review would have been implemented from September 2008.

132   The team found evidence that the overall provision of resources for learning was adequate for current needs, but concurred with the concern, voiced by staff and implied in a number of reports, that they would not be sufficient to meet the College's needs, should student numbers increase. The team found evidence that the Academic Board and SMC were addressing issues surrounding accommodation, information technology and levels of technical support staff. Furthermore, the team noted the College's intention to seek a 'more efficient deployment of staff

and the optimal use of resources' by means of the introduction of a new common academic framework and timetable, 'to facilitate enhanced collaboration between programmes' and 'the sharing of modules'. It nevertheless recommends that it is desirable for the College to strengthen the proactive management and coordination of resources with particular reference to the Library, information technology, technical support and estates.

Admissions policy

133   Admissions are administered centrally within the Admissions Office of the Registry on the basis of decisions made at programme level. The Registrar assumes overall responsibility for admissions. The College has an admissions policy statement and associated appeals procedures. The policy is comprehensive in its coverage including admissions procedures, criteria for assessing suitability, College requirements for qualifications on entry, interview and audition procedures and AP(E)L, although the last of these simply notes that AP(E)L is a possibility. The Entry and Academic Progression Committee has responsibility for considering applications from individual students for APL and to report recommendations to the Academic Board and relevant examination and assessment boards.

134   All applicants are assessed against common entry requirements with minimum of 160 points for Foundation Degree and 240 points for all BA (Hons) programmes, with the exception of BA (Hons) American Theatre Arts and BA (Hons) European Theatre Arts, which require 280 points. The distance-learning programmes are open-access and encourage applications from students with non-conventional academic backgrounds and those who might have difficulty undertaking study at this level via the more traditional full-time mode. Each programme has specific admissions criteria and takes account of the needs of industry. In exceptional circumstances the head of school/programme director arbitrates over problematic decisions. Master's programmes accept applicants with 'good honours degrees', but will accept 'extensive professional experience'. Applications to extended one-year and flexible delivery MA programmes are encouraged at any time of year for entry in August. Applicants for MPhil, PhD and those applying for research supervision contact the Head of School, Graduate and Professional Studies. The majority of full-time undergraduate courses are processed via Route A, but four courses process via both Routes A and B.

135   International students are required to provide a 5.5 IELTS (International English Language Testing System) entry score. Students are made aware that all marking and assessment is in English. The team found evidence that programmes were keen to encourage overseas students for 'their cultural impact'. The College argues that given its size, it is possible for staff to interview or audition all potential students to make sure that they are admitting the 'right' student before a final place is offered. The College prospectus provides a useful set of questions to guide students in applying to the programme to which they are best suited.

136   The admissions procedures manual is reviewed annually and the Academic Board receives a comprehensive annual admissions report, authored by the Vice-Principal. Last year's report prompted attention being given to the timetable for admissions. Senior staff reported in the audit meeting that 'speed of response' was a key factor for the College and that timing has been 'sharpened up' accordingly in order to respond to applicants within three weeks. The Vice-Principal receives regular updates on applications from programmes and weekly numbers are monitored at SMC.

137   The College aims to 'ensure that we admit students with the greatest potential, regardless of background, so that, in turn, our graduates are employable, entrepreneurial, active and positive contributors to society'. This chimes with the approach promulgated by the College's founder in 'seeking to admit students from a much wider range of social backgrounds and nationalities than had traditionally been the case with conservatoire education'. This emphasis on widening participation does not appear to be reflected in any separate strategy document and it is not very apparent in the College's admissions policy, which is available to prospective students

via the admissions-related section of the website. The only explicit mention in committee terms of reference is for the LTDC, which considers and advises on the College's policies on widening participation. In terms of recruitment, the College has organised 'Roadshows' to attract a wider range of applicants and participation in local, national and international careers fairs. The audit team were informed that staff had received disability training with regard to admissions, and the Disability Officer and the Dyslexia Tutor are involved with admissions.

138   The College website includes a useful set of FAQs and a link to an appeals and complaints procedure for applicants. The admissions policy has an early reference to equal opportunities and a later section relating to disabled applicants, clearly influenced by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), but overall, the audit team did not consider that the policy gives a strong sense of a widening participation agenda. The team observed that this contrasts significantly with the much more positive statements about disability in the student handbook, the careful arrangements made for disabled applicants and the evidence of proactivity, including the College working closely with local FE Colleges, involvement in a drama training course run by GRAEAE and involvement in Lifelong Learning Networks and Aim Higher. The team would suggest that the College could strengthen those parts of it policy relating to widening participation better to reflect its actual practice. Overall, the team concluded that the College's admissions policy and procedures were comprehensive and their implementation and monitoring effective.

Student support

139   Student support services are set and monitored through the student support and administration operating plan. The College stated that 'student support activities are integral to its management of learning opportunities'. The 2001 institutional review by the University of Manchester recommended as a condition that the College formalise the system of pastoral support for students, and the QAA audit report had endorsed this view in 2003. A student support services working party was set up in October 2007 to report to SMC by December 2007, and it made 10 recommendations. These were finally addressed by SMC in June 2008 when it was proposed that revised actions be submitted to SMC and that this paper be incorporated into the operational plan. In March 2008, the Head of School of Graduate and Professional Studies called for a 'small review' of the study support service which was completed March 2008. In November 2008, SMC reported that the 'College's co-ordination of a range of services under student support came into question at the Learning & Teaching Development Committee' and at that point it was decided to 'revisit consideration of student support and study within the College and to arrive at a conclusive review' and to possibly take as 'a starting point the existing papers'. The new review is to be completed by the end of February 2009. The audit team formed the view that while progress in gaining an overview of the development of support services had been slow, there was no evidence to suggest that students' experiences were compromised; indeed the student written submission considered access by students as being 'excellent', a view endorsed by undergraduate students. The team nevertheless would encourage the College to expedite its review.

140   The audit team learned that all students are assigned a personal tutor. According to the College student handbook, prepared by the Registry and supplied in print form to students, each student is assigned a personal tutor who is responsible for monitoring the academic progress and pastoral needs of the student. The role of the Personal Tutor includes: monitoring academic progress and study skills; monitoring personal development; maintaining records on tutorial meetings; writing academic or official references; advice on personal problems and reporting to the programme director and the assessment board'. The student written submission while acknowledging the handbook as being a useful and accurate source of reference, considered it less user-friendly than it might be, given its length of a 100-plus pages.

141   The audit team considered that progress had been slow in terms of formalising some aspects of pastoral support since 2001, despite the reference in the student support and administration operating plan to student services having 'undergone a significant period of change and development since the academic year 2006/07'. Distance-learners were unaware

of the existence and role of personal tutors despite their having access to them in addition to access to module tutors and the programme director. On-campus undergraduates gave a mixed response to the personal tutor system in a meeting with the team. A student survival guide is provided and considered useful by undergraduates, although MA and distance-learning students were unaware of this document.

142   Despite the apparent unevenness of the formal personal tutor system, students considered that they were well supported, and always had a member of academic or administrative staff to whom they could turn if necessary. The audit team concluded that despite the varied practices regarding personal tutoring, there was no evidence to suggest that this was a particular concern for students, since none reported encountering any difficulty in being able to access a tutor when required.

143   The College recognised this general issue in the Briefing Paper, which stated that although analysis of student feedback 'did not identify a specific problem, the College is aware that study and student support services would benefit from a more integrated and coordinated approach; SMC has sought a review of this area and considered proposals for the future of these services'. The audit team welcomed the College's ongoing 2009 review in this area, and would encourage the expediting of findings in order to support further both full-time and distance learners, especially in view of the planned increase in postgraduates, both taught and research. In this respect, the team considered desirable a reinforcement of the management and strategic coordination of the College's student services.

144   The College also provides a number of more specific student support services: study support in the form of a study induction programme at the beginning of each year; study-support web pages; specialist study-support sessions including those for students with dyslexia; open access study support sessions; a student adviser who provides counselling and other advice; a part-time dyslexia adviser; a disability adviser; and ESOL support whereby a specialist tutor offers two sessions each week of two hours length, usually on an individual basis. These support and advice channels are open to distance-learning students, but the College acknowledges that it is not always possible for them to avail themselves of the full range of support offered. However, a dedicated study support tutor for year one distance-learning students is in place.

145   The College has a relatively high percentage of disabled students, and they benefit from a particularly strong range of support initiatives. Specific support is provided by the Disability Coordinator; the College has established a disabled student forum, which meets twice a year. An inclusivity audit of all programme documents was made possible with TEQF funding. Students reported to the team that special attention was paid to dyslexia at an early stage and that this has proved valuable to a number of individuals. The College has formed a collaboration with a theatre company for disabled actors, GRAEAE, made possible through funding from the Consortium of Art & Design Institutions in the South East (CAISE). Support for disability is also reflected in staff development, pedagogic research and publications, arrangements surrounding interview and audition. The audit team noted the involvement of a disabled student in making a user pilot test of the College's website. The Disability and Equality Committee monitors progress in these areas and ensures prompt responses to DDA directives. The team formed the view that the College had adopted a focused approach in support of a diverse student body, particularly in the area of disability. The team considered that the College's support arrangements with regard to disability constituted a feature of good practice.

146   The College student handbook contains a large section on personal development planning (PDP) and students' involvement in it. The handbook indicates that PDP is introduced at induction, and during year one, students have a curriculum vitae workshop, and are introduced to the PDP file and a PDP seminar at the end of each year. Guidance is provided in the handbook on headings for students to reflect on as they develop their PDP file. Undergraduate students recognised PDP, but it was clear that provision varied across programmes. It could form a reflective journal, marked

at the end of each semester, or an iterative process with action points for discussion with tutors, or it could be in the form of end-of-module reflection. The audit team found that distance-learning students had not heard of PDP, and this is an area that might be explored further by the College.

147   The 2003 audit report had encouraged the College to check how its procedures on placements might be aligned with the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. However, the Briefing Paper made no reference to placements, whereas the student written submission reported them as being formal or informal and not always assessed. The audit team found that placements are incorporated into some programme curricula, but not others. Students reported that in those cases where it was not compulsory, it was nevertheless made clear that they were expected to undertake a placement. Documentation provided in the audit trails suggested that there was a satisfactory procedure in place for hosts and students. Although students reported variable practice in terms of support while within the context of their actual placements, there was no evidence of lack of support on the College's side, and tutors were always available if necessary. The team considered that a clearer policy on the inclusion of placements, and College procedures for the quality of assurance of placements, where these were a formal part of a programme, would both be of benefit.

148   The 2003 audit report had noted student concerns about the lack of careers guidance and endorsed the College's intention to establish a set of institutional mechanisms, which would ensure compliance with section the *Code of Practice, Section 8: Career education, information and guidance*. The Briefing Paper set out a range of ways in which the professional and career development aspects of PDP are supplemented at the College, primarily by industry links at the programme level, and suggested that these should now be complemented by a strengthening of careers education, information and guidance (CEIG) as a centralised cross-College service. This was to be documented in a new CEIG policy, currently in draft, along with a career education operating plan. Progress appeared to the audit team to have been slow in this area, which was surprising since equipping students for successful and sustained careers is a key part of the College's mission. The staff reported that CEIG was still 'under considerable debate' and that CEIG operates at programme level rather than as the result of a unified CEIG policy. The team took the view that there is still a need for a greater sense of a clear College policy in terms of student entitlement and a clearer indication of an institutional framework in support of career planning and placements.

Staff support (including staff development)

149   The 2003 audit noted that the higher proportion of staff time earmarked for teaching within the College's staff contract was a disincentive for staff to engage in relevant staff development. The report observed that the College had at that time still to identify how it would meet this challenge, and it had yet to develop an overview of staff development at a strategic level.

150   The College now has a staff development policy in place that covers all permanent and fixed-term employees working under a contract of employment, but does not cover fee-only employees. The Staff Development, Research and Knowledge Transfer Funding Committee (SDRKTFC), chaired by the Head of Human Resources, oversees the policy. This committee meets and examines all training requests, and prioritises training needs. The budget is divided between academic and administrative needs. Funding support is given to staff training and development needs, internal and external training, comprising statutory/mandatory courses, conferences and seminars and skills, information workshops, conferences and seminars. Courses leading to recognised professional qualifications and development activities are considered where it can be established that this is of benefit to the team as well as the individual. The SDRKTFC aims to agree reasonable requests for support and up to 50 per cent of fees to a maximum of £1,000. In the case of fractional staff, where they might be employed elsewhere, funding is pro-rata, but no expenses are paid. Staff cited the example of a sessional member of staff having been supported for a postgraduate qualification. Applications for funding of fees are on an annual basis only.

151   There are now comprehensive procedures for recruitment and selection, staff induction, and a pay-and-reward strategy which, together with details of the annual appraisal scheme in which all staff participate, are posted on the document control centre. The interview process for the recruitment and appointment of full-time staff is managed centrally, and that for part-time academic staff at programme level.

152   The College has drawn up a proposal for a peer observation scheme between academic teaching staff, with forms for completion by observer and observee This was to be piloted by three programmes during semester 2 in 2009. The College supports its experienced academic staff in applying to become Fellows of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The College is working towards meeting the 2010 target for professional teaching qualifications, and has furthermore developed a 20-credit unit, 'Reflecting on Theory & Practice in Higher Education', as part of a continuing professional development framework aligned to professional standards. This was to go forward in April 2009 for accreditation by the HEA. The audit team agreed that this was a very positive initiative.

153   The College is not yet in a position to award sabbatical leave or secondments, although in exceptional cases, unpaid leave can be agreed by the Principal; the issue of 'shorter term sabbaticals' was under consideration in the wake of the Institutional Review of the link with Rose Bruford College undertaken by the University of Manchester in July 2008.

154   The College identifies three mechanisms open to both permanent and sessional staff, whereby scholarship and research are used to inform learning opportunities; the Rose Bruford Fellowships, where TQEF funding is used to 'buy out' staff teaching in order to undertake specific projects; the TQEF Key Practitioner Scheme where experienced external practitioners come into the College and staff have the opportunity to observe them working with students and research-informed teaching, which includes funded projects by College staff .The audit team found evidence of the Rose Bruford Fellowships having a positive impact, an example being the work undertaken resulting in the establishment of a one-year permanent post of part-time tutor coordinator and another being the TQEF-funded inclusivity audit of all programme documents and a further staff development workshop on inclusivity.

155   The audit team noted that a database was under construction, in order to track the pattern of staff development and support and to ensure transparency and equality in deciding on the prioritisation of funding. Records to date showed that only one refusal had been made from 52 applications and that the take-up from administrative staff was slightly higher than that of academic staff. The team concluded that there was a commendable, inclusive approach to staff development and that since 2003 demonstrable progress had been made by the College in the area of staff support. The team considered as good practice the level of support for sessional staff, including the provision of a coordinator and a handbook for part-time tutors' and their opportunity for access to staff development and research funding opportunities.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Management information - quality enhancement

156   The College has adopted a twin-track approach to quality enhancement. Strategic and cross-college initiatives are accompanied and complemented by those that are operational in nature and programme-specific in origin. The Briefing Paper also claimed that the approach represented an incremental process, with momentum being maintained during the lifetime of the strategic plan by the potential for programme-specific issues to cross over and inform existing strategic College initiatives. The audit team found that the former were reflected in the College's strategic plan and its associated learning and teaching operating plan (LTOP), the latter representing the continuous process of monitoring and the production and implementation of action plans at course level. The LTOP was described in the Briefing Paper as an important vehicle for enhancement in the context of the interaction between innovations in learning and teaching

generated within the College, and the changing demands of the industry and the higher education sector. Meetings with staff and students confirmed their understanding and ownership of the overall process of strategic and operational approaches to quality enhancement.

157   The College's strategic plan articulates the aims and objectives for the period 2008-13 and in particular, sets out to provide the highest quality of student experience. The audit team found evidence of effective committee structures overseeing the development and implementation of the strategic and operational approaches to quality enhancement. The Learning and Teaching Development Committee (LTDC) monitors the implementation of the LTOP. The team considered that the revisions in the academic structures and the grouping of programmes into three schools are now providing new opportunities for identifying good practice in individual programmes and sharing it more widely across the institution. Equally, strategic initiatives are being taken as a result of initiatives originating at programme level. Examples of such college-wide enhancement initiatives include the strategy to improve the retention of first-year students and the guidelines for feedback on assessment. The team also saw evidence of college-level guidelines being supported by school-wide workshops on assessment.

158   The LTDC also reviews relevant information including external examiners' reports, degree classifications and teaching fellowship reports. The LTDC can be mandated to investigate an enhancement issue by school boards or other College committees and it may propose enhancement proposals to the Academic Board on an ad hoc basis. The audit team found evidence of this happening, and examples were the inclusion in the strategic plan of objectives concerning student experience and employment and their attendant measures of success.

159   The audit team considered the College's approach to course monitoring in the light of its claim that this represented one of the twin-track approaches to quality enhancement. The team found evidence of a very robust approach involving biannual monitoring of programmes at school level incorporating the maintenance of a rolling action plan for enhancement (see also paragraphs 43-48). Again the appropriate committee arrangements were found by the team to be in place with the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC), scrutinising the outcome of monitoring activity across all three schools. School action plans following periodic review also include enhancement recommendations. These action plans are considered by the QAEC and reported upwards to the Academic Board. The initiation of the debate relating to the introduction of a virtual learning environment was an example of a recommendation from a periodic review that was being taken forward by the College through LTDC.

160   The Briefing Paper claimed that through its arrangements for the representation of students and feedback from them, students play a significant role in quality enhancement activity and the audit team was able to confirm this (see paragraphs 98-100). The team found evidence that the College makes significant use of its own, benchmark higher education institution, and sector management information to inform enhancement objectives. Management information was seen to inform the setting of enhancement objectives by allowing the College to determine its current position and identify realistic directions for enhancement activity (see paragraphs 79-92).

Good practice

161   The College identifies best practice and disseminates enhancement initiatives through a system of regular, ad hoc and project-based staff development activities. The College stated in its Briefing Paper that its approach to staff development and the dissemination of good practice, in the context of quality enhancement, has three streams. These include a rolling programme of in-house development days for all staff, opportunities for individuals to participate in external enhancement activity and project work, whereby external specialists are invited to contribute to quality enhancement at the College or members of staff are funded to undertake applied research in an enhancement context. The audit team found many examples of these three streams in action and making a direct impact on the quality of programmes of study. These examples

included the 'Key Practitioners' scheme for industry professionals to teach at the College, work with and be observed by established academic staff and the Rose Bruford Teaching Fellowship, wherein academic staff are funded to undertake and disseminate research to inform enhancement activity.

162   The audit team heard and read about a research project on assessment feedback that was then used to inform the guidelines for feedback outlined in the College's 'Principles of Assessment'. The team also found many examples of pedagogic research enhancing the student experience. Since 2000 staff on the Actor and Actor Musicianship programmes have been engaging in research that is enhancing practical teaching. In addition, the College has been involved with a number of externally funded projects with an enhancement focus. These include an HEA project on reflective practice; an assessment project funded through Palatine; and the two projects, already mentioned, which are aimed at improving learning opportunities for students with disabilities.

163   The audit team found that the College, through its twin-track approach had developed an ethos and an infrastructure that expects and encourages the enhancement of learning opportunities. The College has been successful in supporting change and development through a range of effective communication initiatives involving staff and students, and also because of its institutional culture, which reflects a close, mutually supportive and inclusive community. Thus the team found that the student community was well and actively represented at all levels of the College's committee structure. Students play a particularly significant role in the programme committees, where their contribution to semester review and their interactions with academic staff are key components of programme monitoring and enhancement. Staff are supported through well-targeted staff development support and the effective communication of key information. The team took the view that the staff and students worked together to create a cohesive academic community, within which open debate and discussion would support enhancement. The team considered that this was a feature of good practice in the College's work.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

164   At the time of the audit, the College had no collaborative arrangements for delivery of higher education provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

165   At the time of the institutional audit visit, the College had no students following postgraduate research degree programmes. However, in its Briefing Paper, the College stated that as part of its expansion of provision for professional development it intended to offer both theoretical and practice-based postgraduate research degrees. A memorandum of agreement has been drawn up to support this development of research degree programmes, through a process of collaboration with Goldsmiths, University of London, on research training, supervision and assessment. The agreement is intended to cover research degree opportunities for MPhil, and PhD levels by full-time, part-time or distance-learning study.

166   The College website stated that the range of creative and technical disciplines offered, combined with its theatre-making resources, will be of particular interest to students wishing to pursue practice-based research. At the time of the audit, research activity at the College engaged students, part-time and full-time staff, visiting tutors, visiting and honorary professors and collaborators from the professions and industry both in the UK and abroad. The College claimed that the collaborative nature of its partnership and the arrangements for joint supervision with Goldsmiths will give students access to the research support facilities of a major, multidisciplinary, arts-based institution. Staff explained that the research partnership development will build on existing professional links with Goldsmiths. The audit team confirmed that it is expected that

students will participate in the academic life of both the College and Goldsmiths, although it is anticipated that they may spend most of their time at the College. The team heard that Goldsmiths and College supervisors will work together to ensure that students are supervised in accordance with best practice at each institution.

167   Applicants for postgraduate research degrees will apply through the College in the first instance and will be selected on the basis of their research focus, to ensure that it aligns with the research interests and strengths of staff. In recent years a number of overlapping and interconnected generic themes have emerged and these are clearly outlined on the College website. The College had received a modest number of applications and it is the intention that any student admitted will be as a result of the agreement of both the partner institutions. The memorandum of agreement states that students will be formally registered with Goldsmiths and bound by that institution's general and research degree regulations.

168   Potential supervisors from Rose Bruford will be drawn from staff holding research degrees who may or may not have had experience of research supervision. The College indicated that a staff development programme for its supervisors was planned in anticipation of students commencing in September 2009. The plans to admit research students were set against the backdrop of an ambitious research strategy, which envisages that in the future all staff will be research-active and will contribute to the Colleges' mission to play a role in the development and regeneration of the theatre and its related industries in the London region, nationally and internationally.

169   The highly creative environment at the College together with the clearly articulated memorandum of agreement with Goldsmiths suggested to the audit team that the College is well positioned to admit students to undertake research degree programmes. All aspects of the *Code of practice* governing postgraduate research programmes are addressed under the memorandum of agreement. In the absence of any students, evidence of meeting the expectations of the *Code, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* was obviously not available for scrutiny. Sensibly, the College intends to limit the number of students admitted initially so as to secure the quality of experience. The team formed the view that the proposed investment in staff development, together with the careful management of facilities and physical resources will be key to the success of this development.

Section 7: Published information

170   The Briefing Paper stated that the College's approach to managing published information is to route it through three 'gatekeepers'. Firstly, the Director of Quality is responsible for definitive programme documents and the College academic infrastructure. Secondly, the prospectus and accompanying DVD are published by the Publicity Coordinator and Marketing Office, with the former also the gatekeeper for the College's external website. Thirdly, the College has established an intranet document control centre, which is a central online repository of key College documentation for staff and students, and which is administered by the Personal Assistant to the Vice Principal.

171   The Director of Quality and the Quality Office are responsible for formal publications relating to the approved curricula and thus maintain the definitive programme specifications and other detailed programme documents. They also control publication of the programme specifications on the College's external-facing website, and the audit team was able to verify that students and potential students are able to access the programme specifications through a link from each course entry on the College website. The Quality Office controls programme approval and modification, and it advises other parts of the College where changes have taken place (admissions, registry and marketing). The Briefing Paper stated that programme committees verify the accuracy of these documents annually, however, the team was not able to find any evidence of this process taking place from its examination of the minutes of programme committees for

2007-08. The Quality Office also controls publication of the College academic infrastructure (regulations and academic policies) once they have been approved by the Academic Board.

172   The College prospectus and accompanying DVD are published by the Publicity Coordinator and the Marketing Office. The draft prospectus is circulated to programme directors and others for initial annual updating, and signed off at proof stage by heads of school and other senior managers. The audit team was able to establish that the ultimate responsibility for signing off the final version of the prospectus lies with the Principal or Vice-Principal. The College also publishes a range of course-specific promotional material, as well as publicity material relating to student performances and graduate guides showcasing graduating students. The team was told that course-specific material is signed off by the relevant programme director.

173   The Publicity Coordinator is also the key gatekeeper for the College's external website, arranging updates from relevant colleagues and inputs from documents controlled by the Quality Office. The audit team established that a new College website had been launched at the beginning of 2009, but that the changes had more to do with 'back-office' functionality than major changes to the forward-facing components of the website. Daily responsibility for the management of the website was vested in the Publicity Coordinator at the time of the audit visit, but the team was told that the post of 'Alumni Database and College Website Co-ordinator' was being advertised to take over this role. The team saw a copy of the job description for this post and was able to confirm that day-to-day management of the website would be vested in the post holder. According to the Briefing Paper, there are links from the website for prospective applicants to access external and independent information about the College and its courses from the UNISTATS and National Student Survey websites. The team was able to verify that this was the case, but did also find that a number of links within the College that would be of relevance to prospective students were not functioning. At the time of the audit visit, these included linkages to accommodation services, disability support and the College's Learning Centre. The College acknowledged that there were parts of the website that were not providing potential students with the information, which the College would wish them to have.

174   The document control centre (DCC) functions as a central online repository for key College documentation. This includes the College's Academic Handbook; committee minutes and action plans; audits, reviews and reports with responses and action plans; survey and statistical data; and policies and procedures. Input is restricted to specific individuals and the approval history of documents is expected to be verified before they appear on the DCC. There is a clearly defined 'document approval log' procedure for uploading material to the DCC with supporting pro forma documentation, and the audit team heard that staff had a clear understanding of this procedure. However, when the team asked about management of content on the DCC, particularly in the context of the removal of material which was obsolete or had been superseded, staff were not able to identify a systematic policy and procedure for doing this. From its examination of the DCC, the team did note that there was still content relating to University of Manchester procedures that had been superseded by the College's own academic infrastructure. The team formed the view that the College would enhance the value of its DCC by developing a systematic approach to content management and deletion. A particular feature of the DCC is that students have full access to the content, apart from material relating to examination boards. Students with whom the team met confirmed they found this facility both useful and informative.

175   The audit team met with two groups of students during its audit visit to the College: students on distance-learning and postgraduate programmes, and students on on-campus undergraduate programmes. For the former group, information about the College and their programme of study was frequently said to have come through personal contacts and recommendations. Additionally, advertising in theatre and opera programmes and trade publications was a frequently cited source of information, reflecting the fact that this was a group of mainly mature students, many of whom indicated they were studying for leisure interest

reasons. This group felt that the information they had been given about their programme had been broadly accurate and their expectations had been met by their experience at the College. The on-campus students cited the website as their most important source of information about the College and its programmes, but they also frequently mentioned word-of-mouth recommendations, for example from teachers. They had found the prospectus very useful, particularly material relating to projects, and they felt it gave a clear insight into what was required by their programme of study. They had found the promptness of information relating to auditions for entry to the College particularly helpful. This group of students were aware of the College 'Student Survival Guide' which they confirmed they had received on entry and which they saw as a genuine survival guide. By contrast, the group with distance-learning students had no knowledge of this survival guide.

176   In their student written submission, students had commented that the prospectus was generally helpful, and that the website was the first port of call for potential students seeking information about the College and its programmes. However, they felt that, while the information provided was accurate, it lacked sufficient depth and they were aware of discrepancies of alignment between the DVD and the prospectus, while the website information on student services was not felt to be up to date. The conclusion reached in the student written submission was that the information given to potential students was accurate and useful, but was sometimes 'shaky' in the level of detail, consistency between sources and in its level of currency. This view was reinforced by students with whom the audit team met, who indicated some of the material for prospective students was out of date or not available. Nevertheless, students saw this as a function of the greater difficulty in updating DVD material, to keep it abreast of changes in the College, and they regarded the College as honest in its portrayal of the student experience.

177   Distance-learning students confirmed that on admission they had received a programme handbook, module guides and an assessment schedule. However, they regarded the programme director as playing the central role in disseminating information to them. The on-campus undergraduate students also confirmed that they received a programme handbook, but indicated that aspects of it were out of date, and this was also true for parts of the College website that they accessed. Some of these students also said that the briefs that informed them of assessment requirements were out of date, but others from different programmes disagreed
with this statement. All students confirmed that tutors spent considerable time giving a verbal exposition of what each assessment required. From its own examination of programme handbooks and module guidance information, the audit team saw evidence of variability in the degree of comprehensiveness of information provided to students. The College could, with advantage, review the consistency and renewal of material that it supplies to all students about their programme of study and assessment requirements.

178   Overall, the audit team found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.