University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester

OCTOBER 2007

Preface

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

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

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

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

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner

- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications

- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and feedback from stakeholders.

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

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of awards

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

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

- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research

- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

- the **Summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students

- the **Report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences

- a separate **Annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary and the report, without the annex, are published in hard copy. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (*Institutional audit handbook: England and Northern Ireland 2006* - Annexes B and C refer).

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester (University College), from 15-19 October 2007 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University College offers.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the University College and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University College manages the academic aspects of its provision. In institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK. The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for the students.

Outcomes of the institutional audit

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

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University College has firmly grasped the occasion of merger to take deliberate steps and to seize opportunities, through a process of organisational change and development, to review systematically and revise operations with a view to enhancement. The audit team was impressed by the volume and calibre of activity that had been undertaken. Staff have embraced the opportunity to review practice across the five Colleges and have used economies of scale resulting from the merger to develop new approaches to service delivery and strategic development of learning, teaching and research. This approach began pre-merger and reflects the deliberate intention to plan, sequence and prioritise the harmonisation process, and the audit team concluded that the University College's holistic approach to enhancement is a feature of good practice.

Postgraduate research students

The audit team concluded that the University College's arrangements for its postgraduate research students met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published QAA, and were operating as intended.

Published information

The audit found that, overall, reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University 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 as being good practice:

- the University College's considered and measured approach to managing the process of merger which has, through the careful management of risk and judicious prioritisation of action, ensured the maintenance of standards and quality

- the pre-meetings held between committee chairs and student representatives to brief the representative on forthcoming agenda items in order to encourage informed participation

- the University College's commitment to create links between research and teaching by supporting pedagogic research, research clusters and projects that are open to student support and technical staff as well as academic staff

- developments in English language support that focus on specific needs at different academic levels and that relate to English for the Creative Arts

- the deliberate and systematic approach to fostering of enhancement across the University College.

Recommendations for action

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- develop a robust process for managing the discontinuation of courses. The institution might find the *Code of practice: Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* a point of reference in this respect

- develop robust processes for ensuring that professional body requirements and reports are considered fully at appropriate points in the approval, monitoring, and review of courses

- ensure that a more systematic and robust procedure is put in place for the approval of regulatory documentation that is produced locally by partner institutions under the terms of the current and potential future collaborative agreements.

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- review the arrangements for access to resources in support of learning, in particular the opening hours of Library and Learning Centres

- reflect upon the complexity of its current arrangements in terms of roles, responsibilities and deliberative structures relating to the research support function to enhance further the postgraduate research student experience.

Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by the University College of the Academic Infrastructure which provides a means of describing academic standards in UK higher education. It allows for diversity and innovation within academic programmes offered by higher education. QAA worked with the higher education sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure which are:

- the *Code of practice*

- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland

- subject benchmark statements

- programme specifications.

The audit found that the University College took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Report

Preface

1   An institutional audit of the University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester (the University College) was undertaken during the week commencing 15 October 2007. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University College's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2   The audit team comprised Ms A Christou, Professor A Dean, Mr D Ferney, Dr S Gilroy, auditors, and Ms C Reid, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mrs E Harries Jenkins, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   The University College was formed through the merger of two predecessor institutions; The Surrey Institute of Art and Design, University College (The Surrey Institute) and the Kent Institute of Art and Design (KIAD) in August 2005. The Surrey Institute had held taught degree awarding powers since 1992 and KIAD had been accredited by the University of Kent to award its degrees in the same year. At the point of merger, KIAD was dissolved and The Surrey Institute remained the legal entity, renamed as the University College. The University College retains the taught degree awarding powers conferred upon The Surrey Institute. Quality assurance and other academic policies and procedures have been predicated largely upon those of The Surrey Institute in order to preserve the regulatory basis on which taught degree awarding powers have historically been exercised.

4   The University College is led by an Executive team comprising the Rector; Deputy Rector (Quality and the Student Experience); Deputy Rector (Strategic Planning); Pro-Rector, Corporate Resources; Pro-Rector, Research and Development; University Secretary/Clerk to Governors. This Group is complemented by a Senior Management Team made up of heads of colleges and heads of departments.

5   Upon merger, the previous academic structures of faculties (The Surrey Institute) and schools (KIAD) were reorganised so that the five Colleges (Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester) became the principal academic units. The Heads of College report to the Deputy Rector (Strategic Planning) and each Head of College has a deputy (Farnham, as a larger scale unit, having two), a Resource Manager and a College Registrar. The key academic managers of taught provision are the directors of studies who manage academic groupings within each College organised on the basis of cognate subjects and courses. A Research Co-ordinator, at professorial or readership level, oversees staff and student research activities in each College. Academic-related and professional services departments are managed centrally, with heads reporting either to the Deputy Rector (Quality and the Student Experience) or to one of the Pro-Rectors.

6   At the time of the audit, the University College operated a collaborative arrangement relationship with one other higher education institution and a small number of articulation arrangements that recognised specific qualifications offered by a partner institution for advanced entry to specified University College courses.

7   The mission of the University College is 'to excel as a university for the arts which fosters creativity through local connections and global aspirations'. The University College provides over 80 specialist programmes in the area of the creative arts and, at the time of the audit, there were approximately 5,000 undergraduate and 1,400 further education students enrolled across a

range of programmes in the broad subject areas of art, design, architecture, media and communication. At postgraduate level there were approximately 150 postgraduate taught and 30 postgraduate research students. The portfolio of programmes enables student progression from access and further education courses through to foundation, bachelor's and postgraduate degrees and on to doctoral study. A high proportion of students progress to further study, employment and/or practice in the creative and cultural industries. The University College is ambitious in its research intentions and aims to achieve recognition of national to international research excellence.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

8   The University College's Board of Governors has ultimate responsibility for the academic standards; however, it is the University College's Academic Board which is the over-arching academic body responsible for standards. Three central subcommittees support Academic Board in fulfilling this responsibility. Academic Policy, Quality and Standards is responsible for ensuring that the academic provision and the academic environment are in accordance with the University College's mission and strategic aims, and compliant with relevant internal and external regulations and requirements. It plays a key role in managing the quality of collaborative provision and is supported in its work by the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee which oversees and encourages good teaching, learning and assessment practices. The Research Policy and Development Committee is responsible for developing research policy, strategy and activities, as well as monitoring and evaluating all research activities. The Research Degrees Committee has overall responsibility for regulations, policy and procedures relating to research degrees (Section 6 refers). Below this centralised structure a college structure operates to manage standards at a local level and ensures that the University College's framework for standards operates consistently across the five colleges and the accredited partner. College committees mirror those of the University College with responsibility for academic matters and provide an important link between the Colleges and the centre.

9   The University College has been through considerable institutional change as a result of the merger of the predecessor institutions. The management of the change process, which began more than a year prior to merger, was central to the maintenance of academic standards throughout such a period of significant organisational change. The implementation of the Business Plan for Merger and the staged harmonisation of regulations and practice across the five Colleges demonstrated a careful and considered approach which was informed by an assessment of the potential risk to academic standards.

10   The University College's framework for managing academic standards is detailed in the Quality Assurance Handbook, which is published annually and complemented by an electronic document store populated with the academic policies and procedures, guidance and templates. The Quality Assurance Handbook is central to the University College's commitment to embed and implement its quality systems consistently across all five constituent Colleges and its partners.

11   Validation is the key process used by the University College to assure itself that the standards set for the awards are appropriate and that there are sufficient resources (human and capital) to secure the quality of provision. Quinquennial periodic review enables the University College to review critically the provision and confirm its continued appropriateness. Having read a range of documents relating to validation and periodic review, the audit team was able to confirm that the processes are fit for the intended purpose and have an appropriate degree of externality. The University College overview reports of annual monitoring and external examiners' reports provided evidence of the University College's approach to gaining an institutional oversight of academic standards across the five constituent colleges. The audit team read a range of documentation related to the production and consideration of the overview reports and found that the reports were effective in ensuring that key issues and actions relating to academic standards were considered at institutional University College level.

12   The Quality Assurance Handbook (2007-08) details the conditions under which a course can be deemed to be lapsed and the process through which Academic Policy Quality and Standards Committee could decide to discontinue the validated status of a course. The University College does not have an explicit procedure or exit strategy for maintaining the quality of the student experience following closure of a course and it is not clear where responsibility for oversight of such closures lies within the deliberative structure. The team would recommend as advisable, therefore, that the University College develops a robust process for managing the discontinuation of courses and suggests that the *Code of practice: Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* might provide a useful a point of reference in this respect.

13   The University College generally makes good use of external reference points in its management of academic standards. The audit team found an instance where the required procedures were not followed at course level when a professional, statutory and regulatory body accreditation report had not been scrutinised as part of the annual monitoring process. The report was satisfactory and did not raise any cause for concern; however, its omission from the information on which the annual monitoring was based meant that the University College was not able to gain best value from such an external report. The team would recommend as advisable that the University College develops robust processes for ensuring that professional body requirements and reports are considered fully at appropriate points in the approval, monitoring and review of courses.

14   The University College's external examining system as detailed in the Quality Assurance Handbook (2007-08) was consistent with the precepts in the *Code of practice: Section 4: External examining*. Notwithstanding the University College's view that it was too early post-harmonisation to judge the effectiveness of the changes to the management of the external examining system, it was the audit team's view that the system was operating appropriately. The use of external examiners in summative assessment, and the careful consideration of the undergraduate and postgraduate overview reports about issues raised by external examiners within the deliberative structures, provided evidence of robust processes regarding quality and standards and contributed to the judgement below.

15   Through what it heard in meetings and learnt through reading, the audit team formed the view that the University College had developed a strategic and measured approach to merger. The business planning process has informed a carefully phased implementation plan, which, through the careful management of risk and judicious prioritisation of action, has ensured the maintenance of academic standards and quality.

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

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

17   The University College inherited from its predecessor institutions a range of processes and mechanisms which it has harmonised progressively to ensure consistent and effective use of the Academic Infrastructure in managing the learning opportunities of its students. The process of harmonisation had not been fully concluded at the time of the audit but on the basis of its scrutiny of a range of procedures such as annual academic monitoring and initial approval and periodic review of courses, the audit team found that the University College was making appropriate and consistent use of the Academic Infrastructure and a range of other external reference points, and that it was generally communicating effectively to staff the procedures serving to implement them.

18   These procedures are working effectively, with effective use of independent external participants and appropriate institutional oversight. The use of independent external participants in periodic review is effective and supports a judgement of confidence in the institutional management of the quality of student learning opportunities. In addition the team found that

annual monitoring and periodic review were making a contribution to the enhancement of the student learning experience on taught courses, and that this applied equally to the annual monitoring of research degrees.

19   The University College uses a number of formal mechanisms to obtain feedback from students. These include an internal student satisfaction survey (SSS), the National Student Survey and unit feedback questionnaires. Annual monitoring reports and the minutes of relevant committees demonstrate that appropriate use is made of SSS outcomes to advise action planning at course, college and institutional level. The Briefing Paper stated that the University College has identified that it could make better use of the National Student Survey within its own processes and intends to facilitate this through closer alignment between the two surveys in order to permit more direct comparisons to be made. With regard to unit feedback there is some variation between the University College's intentions, as stated in its Student Representation Policy, and current practices at course and college level; the University College staff stated that its intention was to address this variation as soon as possible. Overall, the University College's arrangements for obtaining and using management information provided by feedback from undergraduate and postgraduate students are satisfactory and will be enhanced through implementation of the University College's intention to optimise the utility of student surveys and to standardise methods of collecting unit-level feedback.

20   The University College's Student Representation Policy also identifies student membership of relevant course, college and institutional committees. At college level, students are represented on a number of committees including course boards of study and college student fora. The latter go beyond the boundaries of individual courses to cover a wide range of campus-specific issues relevant to the overall student experience. At institutional level, students are represented on a number of committees, including academic board, and there are regular meetings between the President of the Students' Union and the Deputy Rector. Committee chairs hold pre-meetings with student representatives to brief them on forthcoming agenda items and the audit team identified this as a feature of good practice in promoting effective student representation.

21   The audit team found that course, college and institutional level meetings provide appropriate opportunities for students to provide feedback to the University College about the quality of learning opportunities and to participate in its policy and decision-making.

22   The University College aims to integrate both discipline-based and pedagogic research into the development of learning and teaching for the creative arts. Its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy provides clear direction for the achievement of this aim through a range of activities, including the creation of learning and teaching research clusters and related funding opportunities for staff, annual teaching and learning conferences, and a teaching fellowship scheme. There are high levels of staff involvement in the activities of the Higher Education Academy and its subject centres. The audit team identified the University College's support for pedagogic research, research clusters and projects that are open to student support and technical staff, as well as academic staff, as a feature of good practice in its management of the quality of learning opportunities.

23   The Briefing Paper stated that a number of innovative, if uncoordinated, e-learning projects had been undertaken prior to merger, and the audit team learnt from the students it met that the virtual learning environment was being used with varying degrees of success. The development of e-learning was at a relatively early stage at the time of the audit, but the e-learning strategy published in early 2007 has served to clarify the University College's aspirations regarding e-learning, and to give due consideration to ways of achieving them.

24   The institution has a clearly defined policy that sets out threshold standards for academic guidance and support for students. Undergraduate and postgraduate students are allocated a personal tutor to help them to review their progress and students reported that this system works well. Student Services is responsible for a range of support, including advice centres, disability

support, counselling, financial advice, a chaplaincy and support for international students including English for speakers of other languages. The Library and Learning Services is responsible for the management of the Careers Service which has recently been awarded Matrix accreditation, a national quality standard for organisations that deliver information, advice and/or guidance on learning and work. Responsibilities for student support are delegated to the collaborative partner under its accreditation arrangement with the University College. The audit confirmed that the University College maintains appropriate oversight of the management, planning, delivery and review of services to students. Strengths and areas for improvement are identified in annual service reviews, student satisfaction surveys, annual course monitoring reports, validation reports, and college-level annual reporting. To establish personal development planning and to improve its support for student employment, the University College has provided advice to staff to encourage embedding of personal development planning within course activities and has invested in research to identify models of good practice. A particular strength is provision for students whose first language is not English, with courses being tailored to meet the needs of students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels with an emphasis on development of English for the Creative Arts.

25   The Library and Learning Centres Policy and Strategy Group which includes staff from the Library and Learning Centres, ensures that the learning, teaching and research needs of the University College are met. This group benchmarks nationally and internationally and monitors user feedback which informs the annual report on Library and Learning Services. The student written submission confirmed that students were satisfied with the overall library provision, as corroborated by students in meetings with the audit team. However, in feedback from undergraduate, postgraduate and part-time students, concern was expressed about accessibility of learning resources, including studio space for different categories of students, with inadequate access both during and out of term-time. The audit team would recommend as desirable that the University College reviews the arrangements for access to resources in support of learning, in particular the opening hours of Library and Learning Centres.

26   Admission procedures are fair, clear and explicit and are supported by a formal policy that aligns well with sector-wide expectations of good practice, internal policy on equality and diversity and the institution's strategic priorities. The University College maintains appropriate oversight and review of policy and practice at institutional and college level and its implementation is both consistent and effective. Staff are trained to provide an appropriate level of information and support to students in the admission process to meet their varying needs. The University College has taken particular care to provide additional guidance and support to applicants who declare a disability. There are clear procedures in place for responding to instances where an applicant believes that procedures have been inconsistently or incorrectly applied.

27   The University College's Academic Strategy recognises that the quality and commitment of academic staff are crucial to promote change, support achievement of immediate and longer-term aims, maintain academic excellence and enhance quality. Meetings with students and scrutiny of annual academic monitoring reports and external examiners' reports provided evidence that student achievement was supported by staff who were committed to their professional and academic currency.

28   A range of networks and development opportunities have been put in place to encourage new and experienced staff to engage with research and further qualification to improve pedagogic and professional effectiveness and the overall student experience. In a few areas this has meant some increased pressure on staff at the point of delivery as the University College attempts to rebalance resources across the institution as a whole. The University College has maintained a transparent approach to resource allocation and engaged directly with issues raised by staff through the Senior Planning Group and in response to the staff satisfaction survey.

29   Staff development takes place in the context of the Learning and Development Policy, with an annual summary report being considered by Academic Policy Quality and Standards Committee. Professional Development Review for academic and support staff establishes objectives for development in a personal and institutional context. Peer observation of teaching, predominantly for academic staff, feeds into the review process. There is a good range of activities currently engaged by sessional and technical staff, including an exhibition of technicians' creative practice. Technical staff at Farnham have also participated in peer observation of teaching. Collaborative arrangements with the accredited partner and with the University of Brighton, as the validating institution for research degrees, provide further opportunities for staff development.

30   At the time of the audit, the University College had not secured the full confidence of staff in its recognition and reward of good performance, and 'solution finding groups' have been established to explore those areas of dissatisfaction identified by the staff satisfaction survey of 2007. The team also saw evidence of the development of specific rewards for staff ranging from a substantial number of professorial appointments and readerships to the Teaching Excellence Awards and four annual teaching fellowships.

31   The audit team concluded that all categories of staff had opportunities to support and develop their practice. Staff avail themselves of opportunities to work collaboratively across central services and academic departments and it is significant that distinctions are not made between staff groups in terms of reward and recognition.

32   The audit team found that confidence could reasonably be placed in the University College's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

33   The University College has firmly grasped the occasion of merger to take deliberate steps, through a process of organisational change and development, to review systematically and revise operations with a view to enhancement. The audit team was impressed by the volume and calibre of activity that had been undertaken. Staff have embraced the opportunity to review practice across the five Colleges and have used economies of scale resulting from the merger to develop new approaches to service delivery and strategic development of learning, teaching and research. This approach began pre-merger and reflects the deliberate intention to plan, sequence and prioritise the harmonisation process, and the audit team concluded that the University College's holistic approach to enhancement is a feature of good practice.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

34   Current procedures for the management and oversight of collaborative provision are set out in the Quality Assurance Handbook. A separate and more extensive draft Academic Collaborative Provision: Policy and Procedures Handbook has been developed and is being finalised by the Academic Policy Quality and Standards Committee for operation. This document sets out the principles, approval and monitoring processes and quality assurance arrangements that the University College seeks to apply to all collaborative arrangements.

35   The Academic Policy Quality and Standards Committee is responsible for monitoring and reviewing collaborative arrangements of the University College. The specific terms of the collaborative arrangement with the accredited partner are set out in a Memorandum of Cooperation and this was last revised in October 2005. A detailed report on the operation of the Memorandum of Cooperation was received by the Academic Board in March 2007 and confirmed that the provisions contained in the Memorandum of Cooperation were generally being fulfilled effectively.

36   There is significant discrepancy and omission in the requirements pertaining to the sampling of assessed work for external moderation between the procedures set out in the accredited partner's documentation and the University College's expectations, notwithstanding that briefing materials and guidance are supposed to be provided jointly by the partner institution and the University College. This discrepancy in the documentation contravenes the requirement that external examiners appointed to monitor collaborative provision must operate in full accordance with University College policy and procedures. Although not yet put into practice, it is the view of the audit team that this deviation in the approved role and remit of external examiners represents a potential risk in the University College's ability to assure standards within the provision of collaborative arrangements. The team advises the University College to ensure that a more systematic and robust procedure is put in place for the approval of regulatory documentation that is produced locally by partners, under the terms of its own collaborative arrangements.

37   Contact between representatives from the University College and the accredited partner takes place on a regular and frequent basis and formal meetings are held bi-annually between senior managers responsible for quality assurance. University College representatives attend annual academic monitoring meetings and examination boards at the accredited partner and report back to Academic Policy Quality and Standards Committee on the operation of these. There is cross-institutional membership of the key committees responsible for quality and standards.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

38   At the time of the audit, the University College offered research degrees under validation arrangements with both the University of Kent and the University of Brighton. There were 24 full-time students registered on research degrees and seven part-time. Following merger, the institution chose to extend the Memorandum of Cooperation with the University of Brighton to cover all of its provision and all postgraduate research students are registered under the University of Brighton's regulations. The remaining University of Kent registrations are being phased out as students complete their studies.

39   Under the terms of the Memorandum of Cooperation between the University of Brighton and the University College, applications for admission to postgraduate research study are made directly to the University College. Regulations, policy and procedures relating to research degrees are overseen by the Research Degree Committee which is responsible to Academic Board for approving the appointment of supervisors and supervisory teams, monitoring research degree provision and individual student progress, nominating examiners and considering their reports. A subcommittee of the Research Degree Committee has delegated responsibility to oversee the delivery of those research degrees that remain subject to University of Kent regulations.

40   The application process and criteria for MPhil/PhD admissions are set out in the Research Student Handbook. All research students are issued with the Research Degree Student Handbook containing information on policies and procedures. They are also required to attend research methods training, and the University of Brighton registered students are required to pass a Postgraduate Certificate in Advanced Research Methods. Regular training sessions for research students are run by the library and these cover both general skills as well as the exploitation of subject specific resources. International students are able to access English language support provided by the University College's Student Services.

41   The Research Office has responsibility for the central administration of research degree programmes in liaison with College research coordinators, and at Farnham, the Research Degrees Leader. These post-holders are responsible for the local management and coordination of research degrees within each College. The College research committees are responsible to the College board of studies for overseeing the implementation of University College policies and

procedures relating to research degree students. Matters pertaining to research students that need to be brought to the attention of the University College are forwarded through a reporting line to Academic Board. Evidence seen by the audit team indicates that a degree of confusion exists with regard to the various roles and responsibilities of the different staff posts and committees with a direct interest in research degrees. There is unnecessary complexity in the current arrangement of roles, responsibilities and deliberative structures in the oversight of the postgraduate research student experience, and the team considers it desirable that the University College clarifies and streamlines the reporting lines on the operation of research degrees within the institution.

42   In the light of the special Review of research degree programmes in 2005, the University of Brighton subsequently undertook a review of research degree provision arrangements, and confirmed comparability of provision and that the appropriate structures and resources were in place across the five Colleges.

43   The annual monitoring of research degree provision is carried out in accordance with the regulations of the validating universities. An annual report to the University of Brighton, is approved by the Research Degree Committee and considered by Academic Policy Quality and Standards Committee. The Academic Board receives the Research Degrees Action Plan that is produced in response to the issues raised in the annual report.

44   Research students are encouraged to engage with the wider research community within and beyond the University College. Research students benefit from opportunities to attend Staff Research Seminars and programme of events organised by the Research Centres and clusters. Well-resourced research student base rooms are provided at all five Colleges and students can also access archives, collections and galleries of national and international standing.

45   Research students are invited to give feedback annually through a research student survey. The results of this survey are considered by the Research Degree Committee and inform the annual monitoring report. Postgraduate research students are represented on the College research committees, and the agendas of these meetings include a student issues item. Students also have opportunities to feed back through their supervisors and via the Research Office.

46   The audit team concluded that the University College's arrangements for postgraduate research students met the expectation of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes* and were operating as intended.

Section 7: Published information

47   The institution manages the accuracy and integrity of published information through a protocol with clearly identified responsibilities. Students have access to a comprehensive range of materials, available on the internet and through the student portal. Students confirmed that they were satisfied with the quality and quantity of information provided. The audit concluded that, overall, reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University College publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

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

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers

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

Features of good practice

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

- the University College's considered and measured approach to managing the process of merger which has, through the careful management of risk and judicious prioritisation of action, ensured the maintenance of standards and quality (paragraph 15)

- the pre-meetings held between committee chairs and student representatives to brief the representative on forthcoming agenda items in order to encourage informed participation (paragraph 20)

- the University College's commitment to create links between research and teaching by supporting pedagogic research, research clusters and projects that are open to student support and technical staff as well as academic staff (paragraph 22)

- developments in English language support that focus on specific needs at different academic levels and which relate to English for the Creative Arts (paragraph 24)

- the deliberate and systematic approach to fostering of enhancement across the University College (paragraph 33).

Recommendations for action

50   Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- develop a robust process for managing the discontinuation of courses. The institution might find the *Code of practice: Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* a point of reference in this respect (paragraph 12)

- develop robust processes for ensuring that professional body requirements and reports are considered fully at appropriate points in the approval, monitoring, and review of courses (paragraph 13)

- ensure that a more systematic and robust procedure is put in place for the approval of regulatory documentation that is produced locally by partner institutions under the terms of the current and potential future collaborative agreements (paragraph 36).

51   Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- review the arrangements for access to resources in support of learning, in particular the opening hours of Library and Learning Centres (paragraph 25)

- reflect upon the complexity of its current arrangements in terms of roles, responsibilities and deliberative structures relating to the research support function to enhance further the postgraduate research student experience (paragraph 41).

Appendix

The University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester response to the institutional audit report

The University College for the Creative Arts welcomes the very positive findings of the Quality Assurance Agency institutional audit report, of confidence in the soundness of present and likely future management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available for University College students.

Thanks are also conveyed to the QAA and institutional audit team for the professional and meticulous conduct of the audit and the incisive documentation of audit findings within the report and report annex which further support our quality enhancement strategies.

Features of good practice identified within the audit report which further acknowledge the University College's commitment to the quality and excellence of our course provision and of the learning opportunities provided for students are also noted, including: the considered and measured approach to managing the process of merger, which through the careful management of risk and judicious prioritisation of action, ensured the maintenance of standards and quality; and the deliberate and systematic approach to fostering enhancement across the University College.

Careful consideration has been given by the University College Academic Policy, Quality and Standards Committee and Academic Board to the recommendations identified within the report. Appropriate action has been determined and is in progress to respond to these issues.