

# **Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College**

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APRIL 2005

## Preface

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

To do this QAA carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In England and Northern Ireland this process is known as institutional audit. QAA operates similar but separate processes in Scotland and Wales.

## The purpose of institutional audit

The aims of institutional audit are to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges are:

- providing HE, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard, and
- exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

## Judgements

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

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

These judgements are expressed as either **broad confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence** and are accompanied by examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement.

## Nationally agreed standards

Institutional audit uses a set of nationally agreed reference points, known as the 'Academic Infrastructure', to consider an institution's standards and quality. These are published by QAA and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*, which include descriptions of different HE qualifications
- *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of the what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. They outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the FHEQ.

## **The audit process**

Institutional audits are carried out by teams of academics who review the way in which institutions oversee their academic quality and standards. Because they are evaluating their equals, the process is called 'peer review'.

The main elements of institutional audit are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution nine months before the audit visit
- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the audit visit
- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the audit visit
- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the audit team five weeks before the audit visit
- the audit visit, which lasts five days
- the publication of a report on the audit team's judgements and findings 20 weeks after the audit visit.

## **The evidence for the audit**

In order to obtain the evidence for its judgement, the audit team carries out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, such as regulations, policy statements, codes of practice, recruitment publications and minutes of relevant meetings, as well as the self-evaluation document itself
- reviewing the written submission from students
- asking questions of relevant staff
- talking to students about their experiences
- exploring how the institution uses the Academic Infrastructure.

The audit team also gathers evidence by focusing on examples of the institution's internal quality assurance processes at work using 'audit trails'. These trails may focus on a particular programme or programmes offered at that institution, when they are known as a 'discipline audit trail'. In addition, the audit team may focus on a particular theme that runs throughout the institution's management of its standards and quality. This is known as a 'thematic enquiry'.

From 2004, institutions will be required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The audit team reviews progress towards meeting this requirement.

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## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College (the University College) from 18 to 22 April 2005 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the University College's awards.

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

The words 'academic standards' are used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an academic award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK.

Academic quality is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided for them.

In institutional audit, both academic standards and academic quality are reviewed. Provision and awards offered by both the University College and its collaborative partners were included in the audit.

### Outcome of the audit

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

- there can be broad confidence in the soundness of the University College's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards
- there can be broad confidence in the University College's present and future capacity to manage effectively the

academic standards of its awards offered on its behalf by collaborative partners.

### Features of good practice

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

- the clarity, thoroughness, interrelatedness, management and presentation of documentation that supports the deliberative processes of the University College
- the student retention project, in particular, its multifaceted action lines and use of performance indicators
- the student-focused culture to support the development of students through, for example: representation, consultation and collaboration with the Students' Union, the open-door policy of academic staff, the tutoring system, the proactive institutional support mechanisms, and the extent and usage of the Student Experience Survey
- the culture of enhancement with, for example, benchmarking of the University College performance, the work of the School of Continuing Professional Education, and the extensive uptake of staff development opportunities
- the depth and scope of relationship at all levels with strategic further education college partners that contributes to the management of the quality of learning and securing of standards.

### Recommendations for action

The audit team also recommends that the University College consider taking further action in a number of areas to ensure that the academic quality and standards of the awards offered by it and its collaborative partners are maintained.

The team advises the University College to:

- ensure that the University College's policy on appraisal is consistently applied across the University College
- determine how to speed up the deliberative process without destroying the consensual approach to managing change

- continue to monitor the steps it has taken to ensure the timeliness and accuracy of timetables produced for all students across the University College.

It would also be desirable for the University College to:

- consider ensuring that the peer observation system works in a way that will retain the flexibility of the current system but will enable greater dissemination of good practice within and between faculties
- use the full range of information produced by the Planning Unit and other sources more extensively and consistently across the institution to monitor student progress and achievement and match support appropriately
- ensure greater clarity and consistency (while allowing some measure of diversity) in the rolling out of student Personal Development Planning across the University College
- continue to find appropriate ways of ensuring the timeliness of the appointment of external examiners, the production of annual review and evaluation reports, and the convening of the Joint Combination Panels in validation schedules
- review practice and policy for placement learning to ensure that all placement providers for students undertaking work-based learning required by a programme are suitably prepared, whether or not the placement is arranged by the student or the University College.

### **Outcomes of discipline audit trails**

In the course of the audit, programmes of study leading to academic awards in tourism, transport and travel; furniture studies and fine art; and sociology, criminology and policing were scrutinised. In each case the audit found that the standard of student achievement in the programmes was appropriate to the titles of the relevant awards and their location within *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, and that

the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to those awards.

### **National reference points**

To provide further evidence to support its findings the audit team also investigated the use made by the University College of the Academic Infrastructure which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the audit suggest that the University College's response to all aspects of the Academic Infrastructure has been timely and appropriate.

From 2005, the published information set will include the recommended summaries of external examiners' reports and of feedback from current students for each programme. The evidence provided for the audit shows that the University College has taken the necessary steps to be able to meet the requirements of the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*.



# **Main report**

## **Main report**

1 An institutional audit of the Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College (the University College) was undertaken during the week commencing 18 April 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University College's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility for its awards.

2 The audit was carried out using a process developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and Universities UK (UUK), which has been endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills. For institutions in England, it replaces the previous processes of continuation audit, undertaken by QAA at the request of UUK and SCOP, and universal subject review, undertaken by QAA on behalf of HEFCE, as part of the latter's statutory responsibility for assessing the quality of education that it funds.

3 The audit checked the effectiveness of the University College's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of its academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study leading to those awards; and for publishing reliable information. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, the audit included consideration of examples of institutional processes at work at the level of the programme, through discipline audit trails (DATs), together with examples of those processes operating at the level of the institution as a whole. The scope of the audit encompassed all of the University College's provision, including collaborative arrangements.

## **Section 1: Introduction: Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College**

### **The University College and its mission**

4 The University College is the main provider of higher education (HE) in the Buckinghamshire region and has two sites at High Wycombe and an additional rural campus at Chalfont St Giles about 12 miles from the town centre sites. A fourth site, Missenden Abbey, is the venue for a wide range of management training activities, consultancy and short-course provision.

5 In recent years, the University College has invested in excess of £20 million in developing its estates. This includes provision of new teaching and library facilities, social facilities for students and over 800 new student residences. A major strategic objective of the University College is to consolidate most of its operations and provision on a single campus site in High Wycombe, and planning and negotiations are well advanced with the acquisition of a site and the aim of opening a new campus by 2008.

6 The origins of the University College lie in the School of Art founded in 1893, from which it developed into a college of further education (FE) after the Second World War. In 1975 the then High Wycombe College of Technology and Art amalgamated with Newland Park College of Education in Chalfont St Giles to form the Buckinghamshire College of Higher Education. In 1995 it gained degree-awarding powers having previously had accreditation of awards through the Council for National Academic Awards, BTEC and Brunel University. At the time of the present audit Brunel continued to offer registration for the University College's research degree students. The title of 'University College' was gained in 1999. A principal aim of the institution's strategic plan is to achieve university title. The University College is organised into six teaching faculties: Applied Social Sciences and Humanities (ASSH), Design, Leisure and Tourism, and Technology are based in High Wycombe, and the Buckinghamshire Business School and Health Studies are located at Chalfont St Giles.

7 At present the University College has approximately 8,100 students on full and part-time awards, with a significant concentration of the latter studying for professional or post-experience awards in the faculties of Health Studies, Technology and the Buckinghamshire Business School. Around 7,750 students are registered on undergraduate programmes, about 300 students for postgraduate awards, and the other students are studying on a range of awards (for example, Foundation Degrees (FDs), HNC, HND, Diploma of Higher Education). Approximately 75 students are registered for research degrees with Brunel University. Around 57 per cent and 43 per cent of the student population is female and male respectively, and about 40 per cent are mature students over the age of 25. Growth in student numbers has been modest with approximately a 6 per cent increase in recent years.

### **Mission statement**

8 The mission of the University College is 'Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College offers access to quality teaching and research within a committed regional and international environment which is caring, supportive of scholarship and provides students and staff with the opportunity for personal and professional development'.

9 In pursuing this mission the University College states that it retains a primary emphasis as a teaching institution and seeks to promote social inclusion and widen participation in HE.

### **Collaborative provision**

10 The University College has formed a strategic alliance with four local FE colleges: Amersham and Wycombe College, Aylesbury College, Berkshire College of Agriculture and East Berkshire College. The collaborative awards offered through the partnerships include sub-degree awards, typically HNC, HND and Foundation, and undergraduate degrees. The overall student number on the programmes in 2003-04 was approximately 870 with around 46 per cent of the students at Amersham and

Wycombe. In addition, the University College has small numbers of students on collaborative programmes with Uxbridge College, Bracknell and Wokingham College, Oxford and Cherwell Valley College of Further Education and Reading College of Art and Design; the relationship with the last two is coming to an end and the University College sees an opportunity for strengthening links with the first two. The University College also has overseas collaborative partners: Fachhochschule Osnabrück, Germany; Számalk Open Business School, Budapest, Hungary; and MANCOSA, South Africa. The relationships with the last two are being phased out through an agreed exit strategy and the University College is preparing to phase out the relationship with the Fachhochschule. All the overseas collaborative programmes are in the business and management subject area and the overall student number for 2003-04 was about 400.

### **Background information**

11 The published information available at the time of audit included:

- information available on the institution's website
- the University College prospectus and course information
- QAA continuation audit report of August 2002
- Higher Education Quality Council Academic Audit of May 1996
- academic reviews: Engineering (March 2004); English (March 2004); Law (January 2004)
- QAA subject reviews: Sociology (1996); Agriculture, Forestry and Agricultural Science (1998); Communications and Media, Film and Television Studies (1998); Engineering (1998); Nursing (1999); Psychology (2000); Art and Design (2000); and Hospitality, Leisure, Recreation, Sport and Tourism (2001); Business and Management (2001)
- overseas audit MANCOSA 1999.

12 The University College also provided QAA with:

- an institutional self-evaluation document (SED)
- discipline SEDs (DSEDs), including programme specifications, for furniture studies and fine art; sociology, criminology and policing; tourism, transport and travel; computing and business information technology
- the Strategic Plan 2002-2007
- the application for University Title September 2004
- the Academic Staff Quality Handbook 2004-05
- the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy 2002-05
- minutes of the meetings of senior committees
- annual review and evaluation reports
- student experience surveys 2002-03, 2003-04
- information on staff and student support.

13 During the audit visit the audit team was provided with access to other internal documentation in hardcopy and through the University College's intranet. The team is grateful to the University College for the readiness to provide the information requested.

### **The audit process**

14 Following a meeting at the University College in August 2004, QAA confirmed that four DATs would be conducted during the audit visit. The audit team's final selection of DATs included sub-degree, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in furniture studies and fine art; tourism, transport and travel; and sociology, criminology and policing. Review of the fourth DAT area, computing and business information technology, had to be cancelled owing to sudden and unforeseen circumstances leading to an auditor having to withdraw just prior to the commencement of the audit.

15 QAA received the institutional SED and supporting documentation in December 2004 and the DSEDs, accompanied by programme specifications, in February 2004. The SED was compiled specifically for the audit and DSEDs provided a brief overview as an introduction to existing documentation.

16 The audit team visited the University College from 9 to 11 March 2005 for the purpose of exploring, with the Director, senior members of staff with institutional responsibility and student representatives, matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the SED and other documentation provided for the team. During this briefing visit, the team identified a number of matters for further consideration during the audit visit. At the close of the briefing visit, a programme of meetings for the audit visit was developed by the team and agreed with the University College.

17 At the preliminary meeting for the audit in August 2004, the Students' Union (SU) officers were invited to submit a students' written submission (SWS) expressing views of the student body on their experience at the University College and identifying any matters of concern or commendation with respect to the quality of programmes and the standard of awards. They were also invited to give their views on the level of representation afforded to them and on the extent to which their views were taken into account. In December 2004 the student body submitted a detailed document to QAA. The SWS had been prepared on the basis of a wide range of activities initiated by the SU that included use of the institution's student experience surveys, email surveys, telephone interviews, analysis of concerns raised through the SU Advice and Representation Centre, analysis of concerns raised in institutional committee meetings, focus groups, and a Representation Forum. The final version of the SWS was endorsed by the SU Executive Committee and the SU Council and made available to the student body on the SU website. An amended version of the report, omitting reference through which individual members of staff could be identified, was made

available to University College staff. The audit team is grateful to the students for preparing this valuable document to support the audit.

18 The audit visit took place from 18 to 22 April 2005, and included further meetings with staff and students of the University College who were representative of both institutional constituencies and the selected DATs. The audit team comprised Professor P Luker, Professor J Baldock, Ms J Glasman, Mr P Simpson, auditors, and Ms D Cooper, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor H Colley, an Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

### **Developments since the previous academic quality audit**

19 QAA's continuation audit team, which visited the University College in November 2001, presented a broadly positive report. The audit report commended the University College for its approach to managing quality and standards within its regional partnerships; the effectiveness of its support for students with additional needs; and the use of staff development to support developments in teaching, learning and assessment in the University College and its partners.

20 The report also concluded that the University College might wish to consider the desirability of reflecting before planning a new system of internal reviews; eliminating inconsistencies between policy statements for international provision and collaborative provision; using more challenging comparators against which to benchmark its performance; frequently reviewing its capacity to support information and communication technology (ICT) for teaching and learning; clarifying further the relationship between the SU and the University College's support mechanisms to provide seamless support for students; monitoring support for international students; keeping under review its capacity to deliver appraisal and staff development in a timely fashion to all teaching staff; and satisfying itself that induction operates consistently and effectively.

21 It is clear that the institution has responded seriously to all of these recommendations, as evidenced in the summary in the SED and in Appendix 5 of the SED which contained considerably more analysis and detail. Briefly, the responses were the piloting of a process of periodic subject review (PSR) (see paragraphs 48-50) in 2004-05, which replaced periodic faculty review; review of policies for international and collaborative provision (see paragraphs 51 and 98); the establishment of a Planning Unit and the appointment of an Academic Information Coordinator for Teaching Quality Information (TQI), in part to address performance benchmarking; enhancement of the ICT infrastructure, with the adoption of the virtual learning environment (VLE) giving added stimulus; the introduction of several measures to provide more seamless support for students, while providing additional central support for international students; seeking to remove a bottleneck in the appraisal process; and using an SU survey to capture students' views of the application, enrolment and induction processes which led to the production of a pre-enrolment booklet and an 'induction module' in the VLE.

22 The University College has developed a greater focus on supporting regional and local needs. Linking of widening participation with regional training and collaboration with FE partners has been brought under the responsibility of the Assistant Director for Regional Development. International collaborative activity has been reviewed and, for a variety of reasons, all existing international partnerships are coming to an end.

23 An Academic Year Working Party was established in 2001 to examine the effectiveness of the semester-based academic year. This led to the recommendation in 2003 to move to year-long modules for first-year students which is being implemented in phases. Simultaneously with the review of the academic year, the University College has reviewed its award structure, as a result of which it is moving away from field-based awards towards defined awards. A framework for FDs was developed in 2003 and revised, as a result of an early review, in 2004.

24 In 2003, the University College contracted an external consultancy to conduct an institutional evaluation of the student experience. The exercise was repeated in 2004 and its scope increased to encompass students at partner colleges and new students. The results of these student experience surveys (SEs) were largely positive and were seen by staff and students of the University College as a valuable source of information and diagnostic tool.

25 Overall, the audit team found that the developments since continuation audit, whether instigated by that audit or identified by the institution itself, had been well considered and discussed across the University College before implementation. In addition their impact had been monitored.

## **Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes**

### **The institution's view as expressed in the SED**

26 The SED stated that the University College believes that it has a strong framework and robust procedures for managing its quality and standards. Its strategic approach is outlined in its Quality Policy, the principles of which the SED stated reflect 'a culture of continual review and enhancement; alignment with recognised standards and established codes of practice; engagement with the wider academic and professional community; and partnership between faculties and central services'. The University College publishes a number of documents that support the delivery of its quality policy, which are regularly reviewed to ensure their effectiveness in achieving objectives.

### **The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision**

27 The SED described how Senate has the primary responsibility for establishing and overseeing standards of the University College's awards and the quality of its provision. Much of

the work required to discharge this responsibility is devolved to Senate's subcommittees, and Academic Audit Committee (AAC) in particular. The Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) advises Senate on teaching, learning, assessment and related enhancements.

28 Each faculty is represented on Senate and its subcommittees. Quality and standards at faculty level are the responsibility of Faculty Boards that formally report to Senate. The University College recognises that effective two-way communication between central committees and faculties is essential. Members of central committees are required to report to their Faculty Board as well as representing the views from their faculty on central committees. Central committee members also play a role at faculty level in events such as annual review and evaluation (AR&E), and validation. The key committee on the management side is Planning Board, which is supported by a rich variety of subcommittees that includes the Academic Planning Committee (APC), Staff Development Committee (SDC), Admissions and Recruitment Group and Student Affairs Committee.

29 The University College believes that it has a comprehensive, thorough and well-defined set of clear documentation that define procedures associated with governance, policy, regulation and quality. The Academic Staff Quality Handbook, which summarises all the key processes and references the appropriate documents, is issued annually to all staff. All documentation is available on the University College's intranet. The audit team identified as good practice the clarity, thoroughness, cross-linking, management and presentation of documentation to support the institution's deliberative processes.

30 The SED stated that the Academic Infrastructure is embedded within normal quality procedures. Standards are set at validation and monitored through external examiners and annual monitoring. Consideration of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and subject benchmarks are required during both validation and review,

however, the University College acknowledges that there is some patchiness in application of the FHEQ. Programme specifications are produced for validation and are reviewed and updated during AR&E. Sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, are considered by the relevant institutional committee (or a working group is established where no obvious committee exists) with a view to embedding the precepts in procedures. For some sections of the *Code* (such as *Section 6: Assessment of students*, and *Section 9: Placement learning*), the institutional policy requires further consideration to be determined at the faculty level. An updated mapping against the sections of the *Code* was presented to AAC in February 2005.

31 The framework for quality and standards for collaborative provision is exactly the same as that for campus-based provision. Academic management and oversight of programmes is the responsibility of the appropriate faculty. The Collaborative Provision Unit (CPU) provides support for partner institutions. The University College is currently reviewing its provision against the revised *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published in 2004.

32 Research students are registered with Brunel University, although supervision and support are provided entirely by the University College. The Research Degrees Committee (RDC), which reports to Senate, is responsible for the quality and standards of research degrees. Annual review reports are forwarded to the appropriate committee at Brunel. In addition, reciprocal membership of appropriate committees at Brunel University and the University College is encouraged.

33 The audit team found that the committee structure is appropriate for monitoring quality and standards. The University College acknowledged that there is room for improvement in communication to, from and between committees. Sometimes, the communication between committees takes time, which gives an impression of slowness in

decision-making. The team was told that the level of discussion leads to a consensual approach that increases ownership, which is part of the University College's philosophy. The University College has recognised that there has been a decline in attendance at meetings and the team found that iniquoracy can arise. The team was told that the number of meetings is a problem and that the University College is seeking to reduce this in the next academic year. While recognising the value of consensus building the team advises that, as it considers the operation of committees, the University College seeks to accelerate the decision-making process.

### **The institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards**

34 The audit team heard that the University College believes itself to be a self-critical institution in which all are responsible for the enhancement of provision, informed by a regulatory framework which guides faculties in their implementation of institutional policy.

35 The SED identified as planned enhancements the introduction of a periodic review process with a focus on the 'subject'; greater focus on the 'programme' as a unit of management, rather than the 'field' (a combination of closely related programmes within a subject area), to give a clear focus to student issues; and improvements to the effectiveness of the academic planning process. It also noted plans for changes to the control of collaborative provision, alongside those for improved links with regional schools and colleges to support raising aspirations and participation. Also included in the plans for enhancement were greater accessibility and timeliness of data to assist in the annual review process; improved electronic document management; and improved internal communications to address the issue of information overload. The audit team took particular note of the institution's plans for a range of measures aimed at further developing the comprehensive strategy for student retention, including the implementation of a year-long structure at level 1. The team was also told of the application for University Title, and of major

campus redevelopment intended to enhance the student experience.

36 It was clear from discussions with staff and students that there was widespread institutional agreement on the need for these enhancements. The audit team noted that the plans were the result of a detailed consideration of institutional performance which, in many cases, stemmed from pilot projects already completed. The team noted that the University College undertook extensive monitoring of its performance in relation to externally and internally set benchmarks and used this information to seek improvements. It also supported staff in implementing improvements through a programme of well-attended staff development activities. The team concluded that these instances of practice and planning designed to contribute to quality and standards, together with other cases referred to in this report (for example, paragraphs 40, 63, 64, 82, 87, 108), demonstrated a proactive culture of enhancement, shared widely within the institution, which constitutes an example of good practice.

### **Internal approval, monitoring and review processes**

37 The University College regards validation as 'key in the setting of appropriate standards for programmes of study'. It is a requirement that the documentation for validation address alignment with the appropriate subject benchmark(s), the FHEQ and professional body requirements. The validation process itself was reviewed against the *Code of practice* in 2000 and was revisited in 2003 with a view to reducing the volume of documentation required.

38 The first stage of the approval process is for an outline proposal to be submitted to the appropriate faculty board, which looks at strategic fit, major resource requirements and evidence of demand. Approved proposals are submitted to APC. Proposals approved by APC are referred back to the faculty for the development stage, which is regarded as the most important phase of the approval process. The documentation required at this stage

comprises the submission document, which describes the development process and the external academic and/or professional advice received; use of external reference points; market analysis; staff resources; programme specification; module pro formas; and resources checklist. This documentation is scrutinised by an audit panel prior to a validation event.

39 Validation panels are chaired by a senior member of the University College from a faculty not involved in the proposed programme. The panel also includes a member of AAC, another member of staff from a faculty with no involvement in the programme, and two members external to the University College (at least one of whom must be an academic) who have neither been involved in the development process nor currently serve as external examiners. Successful validations are recommended to AAC (then to Senate) for approval. If a validation panel imposes conditions, those conditions have to be met before submission can be made to AAC.

40 Minutes of validation events show considerable use of independent academic and professional members; for example, membership of a validation panel for a master's programme in furniture conservation included representatives from the National Portrait Gallery and a furniture manufacturer. The audit team noted that many of these events consider the degree of fit with both the Academic Infrastructure and professional standards and this has resulted in the approval of some innovative new programmes. One such programme is the BA (Hons) Air Transport with Commercial Pilot Training which was designed in conjunction with industry representatives and enables students to fulfil the requirements of commercial pilot licence authorities alongside their academic work.

41 For a combination of approved routes into a named award, a Combination Planning Panel is convened to ensure that the rationale is sound, the proposal is coherent and does not entail duplication, and the resource implications have been fully considered.

42 Minor changes are subject to a formal process that is overseen by the appropriate Faculty Board. Where the alterations to a



programme's learning outcomes, assessment regime and structure constitute more than 40 per cent change compared with the original Definitive Documentation a revalidation would be required. The SED did acknowledge that the cumulative effect of a series of minor changes can be difficult to quantify and monitor.

43 The audit team found that there had been a large number of recent validations, which was inevitable given that many programmes had been validated in 1999, when the modular structure was changed, and were now due for revalidation. Also, the institution's decision to move to year-long modules for year one students increased the volume of validations. The team did find examples of approvals for joint awards where it had not been possible to convene the Combination Planning Panel. The institutional 2003-04 annual report on validation and review, prepared for AAC, indicated that the lateness of convening panels was an issue which in some cases led to incomplete panel formation, but no panel met without at least one external member and written feedback from another. The same report made reference to the response to conditions and recommendations as being patchy. It was reported to the team that this referred to actual responses to the panel chair and AAC rather than a failure to fulfil conditions and recommendations. It was also reported that responses had improved significantly with the introduction of a pro forma for recording these. Overall, the team found validation and review to be rigorous and thorough but would recommend the desirability of the University College addressing the problem of incomplete membership and late convening of panels (see paragraph 240).

### **Annual review and monitoring**

44 AR&E is described as 'the mechanism by which the University College undertakes an appraisal of its provision based on genuine critical reflection and evaluation of the operation and delivery of its provision and reports on this reflection and evaluation through the University College Committee structure'. An away day is the common mechanism for ensuring that the review is open and evaluative rather than

mechanistic. Two auditors from AAC are appointed to each faculty to oversee the implementation of the AR&E process.

45 The process begins with reports for each module, which incorporate statistics showing student attainment, observations on issues affecting attainment, student feedback, external examiners' reports and the rationale for any proposed changes. Student feedback is acquired through a variety of approaches. The SED acknowledged the difficulty of getting formal feedback from students who do not view the universal use of questionnaires favourably. Consideration is then given at course or field level where all module reports, together with course level feedback and external examiners' comments, are brought together. The leader of the course or field drafts a detailed response to the external examiner(s) that forms part of the AR&E report.

46 Field and course reports go to faculty boards which summarise and evaluate issues from the individual reports. Faculty board summaries, together with the report of the AAC auditor are presented to AAC, along with reports on some central services that have a close interaction with students. Finally, an institutional AR&E report is submitted to AAC, where institutional issues are discussed and themes identified for focus in the following year.

47 The audit team found the AR&E process to be rigorous, thorough and well conceived, although timeliness of submission of reports was an issue. The lateness of submission of some AR&E reports flagged up in the annual report for 2003-04 triggered a proposal from AAC to Senate that those courses that fail to submit an AR&E should not be permitted to recruit. Following discussion at Senate it was agreed that it would be for Senate to determine how to respond to late submissions. At the time of the audit, Senate had recently established two working parties, one on AR&E and the other on validation. The team was told that the intent is to streamline and reduce the burden of these processes while retaining their rigour. The team recommends the desirability of the University College in finding appropriate ways

of ensuring the timeliness of key events in the approval and monitoring process.

### **Periodic review**

48 Programmes are validated for a period of six years, unless a professional body imposes different requirements. The process of review and revalidation of a programme is essentially the same as that described above for validation. The main difference is that the submission document of validation is replaced by a review document, which reviews the operation of the programme and outlines the rationale for change.

49 As noted above, (see paragraph 20) the continuation audit report recommended that the University College reflect before modifying its periodic faculty review process which had yet to complete its cycle. Following some discussion, PSR was proposed in 2003-04 and was piloted in two subject areas, tourism and furniture, in 2004-05. The intent of the PSR is to complement existing processes by adding value through a more explicit focus on externality, the external engagement of staff and pedagogic developments in the discipline. PSR will inform revalidation and review by being scheduled approximately 18 months beforehand. AAC has already reviewed the process and has proposed amendments for implementation in 2005-06, to provide more focus on the original 'added-value' intent rather than covering the same territory as that of validation.

50 Through the DATs (see paragraph 154) and other information made available to it, the audit team found the periodic review process to be in a state of transition, but moving towards a model that would, indeed, complement the other processes of approval, monitoring and review.

### **Collaborative provision**

51 The above processes are broadly similar for collaborative provision, with Collaborative Provision Management Group (CPMG) maintaining an overview. All collaborative programmes (except for Combined Studies) are based within an appropriate faculty (or in the School of Continuing Professional Education (SCPE) for education awards). Partner college course teams submit proposals through the

appropriate faculty board as described above. AR&E for collaborative provision has the additional step of the partner institution, where there is a range of provision, compiling a self-audit report that identifies the institutional issues. Those reports are considered by the partner, AAC and CPMG.

### **External participation in internal review processes**

52 The University College regards external input as a key component of all its internal review processes. As noted above, external advisers are involved in the development process for validation and review, while different external reviewers are involved in the validation event itself. External examiners, whose reports form a crucial element of AR&E, are not used for validation and review. On professional courses, there is additional external professional involvement.

53 The audit team learned from meetings with staff, and from minutes, that programme-level review often incorporates substantial elements of externality, including the use of external examiner reports and external academic opinion. The reviews also include information on industrial and professional trends and this reflects the concern for ensuring the employability of students that was apparent to the team in meetings with staff and students.

54 Through its analysis of policy documents, meetings with staff, and examples of approval, annual monitoring and periodic review reports, the audit team concluded that external participation is highly valued and is a fundamental element in curriculum development, monitoring and review.

### **External examiners and their reports**

55 The institution's policy is that an external examiner is appointed to every award. A lead examiner is also appointed for a group of awards, for the purposes of summarising a group of external examiner reports for the Higher Education Research Opportunities in the UK (HERO) TQI site. Individual faculties are responsible for sourcing and nominating

external examiners within procedures and guidance set by the University College. The audit team was able to confirm that institutional procedures for the appointment of examiners are generally followed. Although a number of examiners are appointed late the institution is working to resolve the problem. The team found that even where extreme circumstances required the change of examiner mid-year these procedures were carefully followed. The University College has considered its processes and procedures in relation to the recently revised *Code of Practice, Section 4: External examining*. It has also responded to the suggestions made in the 2002 QAA continuation audit report and gives greater emphasis to the briefing and induction of external examiners, which now includes meetings with course team members and, where possible, students. The continuation audit report also noted a problem with the timeliness of reporting by external examiners. The University College has responded to this by improving its communications with examiners, however, in late 2004, the AAC was still noting, in a review of external examiners' comments, that many of the concerns expressed by examiners result from their late appointment.

56 External examiners are also appointed by the University College for franchised awards and, where a programme is taught both at the University College and a partner college, this is usually the same person. The audit team noted evidence of external examiners scrutinising assessment prior to its release and making helpful suggestions. Some external examiners on franchised programmes reported that partners are sometimes less likely to provide them with assessment tasks in time for scrutiny prior to their issue to students.

57 External examiners submit written reports using a well-structured pro forma, although in some cases there is little explanation added to the tick-box statements on this form. The reports seen showed clear external examiner agreement that assessment and student achievement were of a suitable standard when compared to other institutions and when measured against the

FHEQ. Common features in these reports are commendations on staff commitment to students (and support for them) and high standards. Responses to external examiner reports are created by senior departmental or faculty staff and these show due attention to examiners' comments. The team noted that issues raised by examiners are also discussed at departmental and faculty boards and action is taken where possible. The Academic Registry compiles a thorough summary of external examiner reports, identifying common themes requiring action and points of good practice. This is reported to AAC, which takes appropriate action, including entering into discussion with faculties over external examiners' points.

58 Through meetings with staff, and scrutiny of external examiner reports and minutes of meetings across the University College, the audit team was able to confirm that external examiners were valued and that they played an important part, both in the assurance of quality and standards, and in the development of institutional provision. However, the audit team would recommend the desirability of the institution in continuing to seek ways of ensuring the timely appointment of all its external examiners.

### **External reference points**

59 The SED stated that the University College 'has put increasing emphasis on the need for externality and recognition of external guidance in all its processes' and the audit team found many examples of this emphasis in its meetings with staff and scrutiny of documents.

60 The SED noted that the *Code of practice* is 'embedded' in its policies and procedures and minutes of both institutional and faculty committees show awareness of the *Code*. The AAC monitors institutional use of the Academic Infrastructure, including the *Code*, and recommends changes in practice and policy where appropriate. Staff explained that this has led to changes in guidance and procedures, such as working practices for the accreditation of prior learning. The Academic Registry produces clear policy, guideline and procedural documents that reflect the spirit of the *Code*,

although there is opportunity for the placement learning policy to be further developed in this respect (see paragraph 136).

61 Awards are defined in the institution's standard programme specifications and the audit team found that these are appropriately designed and written in a way that students would understand, although not all students seen by the team were familiar with them.

62 Programme specifications make explicit reference to subject benchmarks and the audit team found that programmes within the scope of DATs were clearly designed to reflect the relevant benchmark statements (see paragraphs 135, 148, 164). Minutes of validation meetings showed appropriate discussion of subject benchmark alignment. The specifications for programmes were also found to be consistent with the principles of the FHEQ, although the audit team noted that the terminology used was sometimes inaccurate. However, the University College acknowledged that understanding of the language of the Academic Infrastructure is variable throughout the institution. Responsibility for complying with external referents is devolved to faculties, supported by accurate guidance from the Academic Registry, however, not all new programme proposals reflected the institutional guidance (see paragraph 135).

63 The use of industrial and professional benchmarking is widespread in the institution, with employers and professional bodies contributing to programme design and being involved in the assessment and teaching of some programmes. Professional bodies, including the Nursing and Midwifery Council, General Social Care Council (GSCC), British Psychological Society, and the Law Society also accredit or recognise many University College awards and recent review information confirms that their requirements are carefully considered during validation and updating of programmes. Institutional guidance recommends that sector skills requirements and national occupational standards are also used, where relevant, as external referents, and the audit team found evidence of discussion of these in minutes of validation and faculty meetings.

64 Staff are encouraged to engage with external reference points in other ways, including participation in Higher Education Academy funded projects, consultancy and knowledge transfer activity with local and national organisations, and external examinerships.

65 The audit team concluded that the University College made extensive use of external reference points in its design, development, delivery and review of programmes and the involvement of industry and professional organisations was a notable feature.

### **Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies**

66 The University College has participated in three subject-level academic reviews since the publication of its continuation audit report in 2002. These were positive and it was noted that all reports commended the learning resources available to the programmes and that teaching and learning was generally regarded as being of high quality.

67 The SED noted that reports from subject reviews are considered by the relevant faculty, and reports from faculties to AAC show that action is taken in relation to the recommendations in the reports. A summary report on issues from subject review is compiled by the Academic Registry and considered by AAC and the TLC. This report identifies a number of common themes in the subject review reports and minutes of discussion show a concern for improving the student experience. The University College is progressing with several institution-wide initiatives following consideration of the reports. The change to year-long modules for year one students and the establishment of an institution-wide retention and attendance project are evidence of the institution responding effectively to points regarding student progression. In addition, improvements in students' access to library materials, more effective promotion of the use of the VLE and other actions resulting from the Learning and Information Services Review have led to an increase in information skills training for students.

68 In line with the vocational mission of the institution, a significant number of its programmes are recognised or accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). Programme specifications and validation records enabled the audit team to confirm that the requirements of the PSRBs are clearly understood by faculties and influence resourcing decisions. Relationships with PSRBs are very good and representatives from some of these are involved in validation and review activities. The audit team saw evidence of external evaluations and accreditation visits by the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the GSCC, The British Psychological Society, the Law Society, the Institution of Engineering Designers and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. There was evidence that faculties took the reports of these bodies very seriously and that changes were made to plans for programmes as a result of the feedback from PSRBs. As a result, accreditation or re-accreditation of programmes by PSRBs has been successful.

69 Through scrutiny of institutional and DAT documentation and meetings with staff the audit team was able to confirm that the University College fully engages with external reference points and makes valuable use of the outcomes of this engagement.

### **Student representation at operational and institutional level**

70 The SED identified a student-centred culture which places a strong emphasis on student satisfaction and input. Opportunities for student representation are available at institutional and course levels. The Student Representation Policy sets out key principles including stating the value placed on informal methods for resolution of problems. Care is taken by the institution in its planning to consult with students and this is recognised and commented upon in the SWS. For example, students have recently been involved in revising the complaints procedure and the disciplinary procedures.

71 Research students are represented through the RDC and the faculty boards. The International Students Committee has

representatives on the SU Council. The audit team heard that student representation at the partner colleges has improved recently and action plans are in place to progress this activity.

72 At programme level students have representatives on course committees. Minutes indicate consideration of student matters at this level and also in departmental and faculty boards.

73 The SU is active in representing students and each faculty has appointed an SU liaison person who is responsible, as part of a general liaison and contact role, for informing faculty officers of the names of representatives. This was seen by the students as useful in helping the student representation system to function well. However, the audit team heard that the SU had experienced some problems in identifying student representatives in some faculties.

74 The audit team found that the take up and effectiveness of student representation varies between faculties. Students in Design and Leisure and Tourism reported that they were well represented, however, students in ASSH expressed the view that they were not well informed about student representation opportunities. In this faculty student problems, particularly with student parents, in relation to timetabling had been raised through a petition and highlighted in the SWS, but at the time of the audit there had been no response (see paragraph 168). Overall, although students reported many examples of positive working with staff, for example, through the secondment of an SU officer to the SCPE to work on the retention project addressing attendance.

75 The audit team found that the institution's claim to have a student-centred organisation and culture was confirmed in comments from staff, students and documentation. Good practice was reflected through effective collaboration and consultation with students and the helpfulness and accessibility of academic, administrative and support staff. The one small reservation mentioned by SU officers to the team was the lack of representation on the Planning Board. The view of the team is that this does not adversely affect the representation of students as ample evidence

was provided through documentation and in meetings that students were involved in key planning initiatives (for example, the development of a new campus site).

### **Feedback from students, graduates and employers**

76 The collection of feedback from students take place on an annual basis through the SES, which has been designed by external consultants with input from staff and students from the institution. Two surveys had been completed by the external consultants prior to the audit and in the last survey questionnaires were sent to both University College and collaborative partner students. Survey results are distributed to faculties and administrative departments and the responses are tracked by the Student Satisfaction Steering Group and Planning Board.

77 The University College uses the SES to help review the structure and delivery of courses. Staff in student service roles see the SES as an effective tool in measuring performance at institutional, course and subject levels.

78 The audit team heard that students perceive feedback mechanisms as positive, and in meetings they commented on differing forms of feedback including meetings with staff, student representative meetings and informal contact with academic staff. Students told the team that concerns raised in these ways were commonly resolved rapidly. Students generally felt well informed about module and course changes, although they commented on the different approaches to module and course feedback between faculties. In addition, the team was told that faculty annual monitoring involved student representatives and feedback given at the first faculty board of the year proved useful in understanding any changes.

79 Graduates and employers are involved in curriculum development through validation processes, professional networks and links to courses. In addition, the audit team saw evidence that the work of the Business and Community Working Party shares good practice on working with employers and is developing further employer links. Graduate and employer

contributions were found to be useful in developing teaching, assignments and new courses such as the BA (Hons) Air Transport with Commercial Pilot Training. The team found that involvement with employers was strong in design and tourism in a variety of ways including live projects and the use of part-time visiting lecturers, some of whom were senior managers in larger companies.

80 The audit team was satisfied that feedback from students, graduates and employers was making a positive contribution to the assurance and enhancement of quality and standards.

### **Progression and completion statistics**

81 At the time of the audit visit the University College had significantly strengthened its capacity to generate and disseminate statistical information for academic and managerial purposes. In 2002 the University College established a Planning Unit within its Management Information Services (MIS) Department with line management accountability to the Deputy Director (Planning). In 2003 an Academic Information Coordinator was appointed whose responsibilities include the collection, organisation and presentation of the performance data required for the publication of TQI. These arrangements are consistent with the University College's published Information Strategy 2003-2008 which sets the goal of efficiently producing agreed sets of data reports necessary to support decision-making.

82 The MIS Department collects comprehensive data on student admissions, progression and attainment and makes these available in a variety of ways including the University College's intranet service. Statistics are available on progression within programmes and across year groups for students at the University College and those studying for its qualifications at partner colleges. Regular reports are made to Senate in which student admissions and progression are monitored and profiled in terms of entry qualifications, ethnicity, gender and disability, among other dimensions. Following a suggestion made in the 2002

continuation audit report the Planning Unit also annually reports a range of teaching and learning performance indicators benchmarked against those of a comparator group of six selected universities and against Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) norms. Broadly, these data demonstrate that while the University College awards a lower proportion of First class honours than is typical across the sector, it either matches or betters its comparators, and its HESA benchmarks, in terms of access indicators, continuation rates, the proportion of entrants obtaining degrees, employment indicators and in the recruitment of disabled students.

83 Student progression and attainment data are made available for each level of the AR&E process. The range of data provided to departments and faculties, and available to staff on the MIS website, is substantial and appropriate. However, teaching staff reported to the audit team that data were not always presented to them in forms that they found useful at programme or module level. The SED recognised that there were still concerns about the consistent use of data. The Senior Registrar's report to Senate on the AR&E process for 2003-04 noted instances where the guidance on the use of data in the AR&E process could have been better used, and recommended greater incorporation of MIS data into reports in order to add detail and aid evaluations. The Head of MIS indicated to the team that a key objective was to assist faculties in the manipulation of the data that were available. While noting the excellent range and quality of the statistical information provided by MIS, and its effective use in managing the University College, the team supports the institution's recognition of the desirability of its greater and more explicit use in AR&E reports and in supporting any consequent changes to curriculum or assessment.

84 Notwithstanding the general need to use data more fully, the audit team was able to identify cases where the quality and comprehensive nature of the statistical data available within the University College had enabled it to respond quickly and effectively to

trends or patterns that needed attention. For example, imaginative use of available data played an important part in the initiation of the University College's Student Retention Project in 2003 and will allow it to monitor the effects, particularly following the restructuring of year one of most undergraduate programmes. As the SED pointed out, good statistical information allowed the institution to investigate and continue to monitor an apparent link between ethnicity and progression, and to respond rapidly in 2004 to disappointing retention and progression rates within a new FD. The team is able to confirm that the quality and range of statistics produced by the University College make a significant contribution to the management of quality and the monitoring of standards.

### **Assurance of the quality of teaching staff, appointment, appraisal and reward**

85 The University College has a clearly stated Human Resources (HR) Strategy which is fully consistent with its strategic aims and other policies. The most recent version of the HR Strategy derives from a thorough evaluation of the previous one and shows a strong commitment to recruiting high-quality staff, for instance, through the use of recruitment incentives and selection procedures. The SED stated that 'fitness for purpose' is the main feature of the institution's recruitment policy and, through meetings with staff and scrutiny of HR procedures, the audit team was able to establish that teaching capability is an important feature in the selection and interview process, including a presentation by candidates for teaching positions to existing teaching staff members.

86 On appointment, an induction scheme, which has recently been redesigned, supports new staff and for teaching staff includes an opportunity for peer observation. The most recent Investors in People (IIP) report confirmed that staff regard induction as being of value and high quality. All newly appointed teaching staff who do not hold a teaching qualification, are required to undertake the University

College's Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) in Learning and Teaching in HE. There are also opportunities for staff at partner colleges to undertake this award.

87 A career progression policy has been implemented which is consistent with the University College's strategic aims. The audit team learned that teaching excellence has been used as one of the criteria for the award of a number of teaching fellows, senior teaching fellows and personal professorships. Teaching fellows are able to pursue personal projects that lead to the development of teaching and learning, and the team noted a range of activities undertaken as a result of these posts, including development of content and course materials for the VLE.

88 Arrangements for staff appraisals are clearly laid out in the appraisal handbook and the SED noted that progress has been made in addressing the 2002 continuation audit suggestion that the University College keeps under review its capacity to deliver appraisals to all staff. As a result, two faculties have widened the definition of appraisers to increase the number of staff to potentially act in this role. However, one group of staff told the audit team that they had not been appraised for 20 months (see also paragraph 171), and records showed that in one faculty fewer than half of all staff had an appraisal in 2003-04. The team advises the University College to consider measures to ensure that the policy on appraisal is consistently applied across the institution.

89 The audit team found in procedural documents and minutes of meetings that equality of opportunity is a clearly embedded principle that is promoted through policies and strategies for working with staff. The institution has gained 'exemplar status' for its Race Equality Policy and Action Plan and is also approved under the 'Positive about Disabled People' scheme.

90 The audit team concluded that the policies and systems for appointment, retention and reward were clearly framed and had the support of staff.

## **Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development**

91 There is a comprehensive Staff Development Policy which is informed by and contributes to the HR Strategy. The SED stated that the University College regards as a particular strength its 'provision and uptake of a comprehensive and inclusive range of staff development and support mechanisms'. The SDC is the institution-wide forum for policy setting with regard to staff development, and for monitoring the effectiveness of the development opportunities. The recent liP re-accreditation report noted that 'planning of training and development is very effective'.

92 SCPE is the institution's central service for training and development of all staff. It publishes annually a Staff and Professional Development Handbook which lists a large range of workshops and seminars, such as those to enable teaching staff to make better use of the VLE and to support research student supervisors. The audit team found that take-up of the events arranged by SCPE was extensive. Staff from partner FE colleges are also encouraged to participate in these activities, although there are problems with their availability. In response, the University College has created a fund to enable the 'buying' of teaching cover at FE partners to allow the release of staff. SCPE delivers a PgCert Learning and Teaching in HE which is compulsory for all new staff who do not hold a teaching qualification. This qualification had accreditation from the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHe) and membership of the ILTHE was encouraged. The benefits of membership of the successor organisation to the ILTHE, the Higher Education Academy, are currently being considered by the University College.

93 Faculties and departments also arrange their own, subject-focused, development activities and there is evidence of a strong commitment to the development of staff at all levels. For instance, one faculty sets aside a period in each week to enable staff to engage in development activities.



94 Staff development activity is monitored in great detail by the SDC, and the participation of University College and partner college staff is to be reported in the new PSR process.

95 A peer observation scheme is in place, although the institution has concerns about its current ability, through central administration, to monitor the level of activity. The audit team was told that implementation of peer observation activity varied from faculty to faculty, and from department to department. The team learned of some examples where departments had formulated a policy on peer observation which focused on team teaching activities, and that some of this activity had resulted in enhancements to teaching and learning, through the observation of good practice. However, in other cases, it appeared that staff were left to arrange peer observation in an ad hoc manner and the team was of the view that the present system could not be relied on to support staff in the identification of good practice. Conceivably, it could lead to staff observing and modelling bad practice, and it did not encourage the transfer of good practice from one faculty to another. The team recognises the desirability of the University College ensuring that the peer observation system works in a way that will retain the flexibility of the current system but will enable greater dissemination of demonstrable good practice between faculties.

96 In spite of some concern over peer observation, the audit team concluded that the University College has a strong commitment to enhancing staff capability through support and development activities, and there is good practice in the activities of the SCPE which encourages the extensive take up of staff development opportunities.

### **Assurance of the quality of teaching delivered through distributed and distance methods**

97 At the time of the audit the University College was not teaching significant numbers of students through distance-learning methods. Two students were registered for the part-time distance-learning mode of the MSc Tourism

Development and Management and fewer than a dozen for a programme provided by the Institute of Wood Science. The audit team examined examples of the materials provided to these students and of the assessment of their work and these appeared satisfactory. The University College was about to review this provision in the light of the recently revised *Code of Practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distance learning (including e-learning)*.

98 The 182 part-time students currently registered for elements of the Buckinghamshire Business School's Integrated Management Programme at the Fachhochschule Osnabrück, Germany, and at the Számalk Open Business School, Budapest, Hungary, were being taught by local staff on a franchised programme using learning materials provided by University College staff and supported through regular visits by appropriate Business School staff who were also involved in the assessment of student work. These two links were in the process of being phased out. The University College had conducted a review of this provision in 2003 using an external assessor. A number of recommendations to improve the level of contact and support from the University College had been made including improving access for the overseas students and staff to the institution's on-line library resources. The recommendations had received appropriate formal and practical responses from the Buckinghamshire Business School.

99 The University College has significant numbers of part-time students registered for its programmes and while these involve regular attendance by the students, it was clear that the development of the use of the VLE could provide an important source of support for these students. The growing use of the VLE was well-monitored and supported by 'champions' in each faculty and by the recent appointment of two staff to Senior Teaching Fellowships with responsibility for developing the use of the VLE in teaching, learning and assessment.

100 The audit team concluded that the University College had a strong commitment to assuring the quality of distributed and distance-learning provision.

## **Learning support resources**

101 The provision of learning support resources is complicated by a number of factors. Firstly, the University College is spread across three campus sites: the main campus is in the centre of High Wycombe; the Wellesbourne Campus is a mile away on the edge of the town and the Chalfont St Giles Campus some 12 miles away. Secondly, many of the programmes taught at the University College, particularly those in the Faculties of Design and Technology, and to a lesser extent Health Studies, are resource-intensive, requiring workshop space, complex equipment and machinery as well as the application of rapidly changing computer-based technologies. Thirdly, the University College hopes in the medium term to move much of its provision to an entirely new site in High Wycombe and is, therefore, faced with choices about maintenance and capital investment on current sites. The quality of learning resources had been approved by the 2002 continuation audit, which pointed out that 'measures to safeguard and develop the learning environment are being vigorously pursued', and had been judged commendable in the three most recent subject reviews during 2003-04.

102 The Learning Resources Strategy was developed in 2003 following an internal review of the existing teaching and learning infrastructure that had indicated areas where improvements were desirable. The Learning Resources Strategy is informed by a Collection Development Strategy which provides a framework for the development of library and ICT provision and by the institution's overall Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. In addition, each of the six faculties has its own customised Learning Resources Strategy. Oversight of the implementation of these strategies lies with the Planning Board which receives regular reports from the Learning Resources Consultative Group and the Information Strategy Steering Group (ISSG).

103 Day-to-day provision of learning resources is managed by the Department of Learning and Information Services (LIS) but a good deal of specialist technical and workshop provision is organised within the faculties, particularly the

Faculties of Design and Technology. An annual LIS report is produced, which takes account of student views expressed within the SES, and is considered by AAC as part of its role in the AR&E process. Confirmation of appropriate resource provision is central to the validation of programmes both within the institution and those provided collaboratively by its partners. The audit team was able to confirm from the minutes and other documentation it reviewed, and from what it heard, that these relatively complex arrangements for provision, monitoring and reporting worked well and that the University College was able to respond to any needs or problems that arose.

104 The High Wycombe and Chalfont Campuses each have a Learning Resources Centre (LRC) while the Wellesbourne Campus provides a satellite library open during teaching hours. The LRCs are open for extensive hours during term. These hours are extended further when major assignment or dissertation dates approach. Self-service book borrowing is available in each of the LRCs as are print and reprographic services. Each campus is linked to the computing network from open-access areas and from PCs provided by the faculties. Some network points are provided in student residences, including satellite broadband access to all the student halls at Chalfont St Giles. External access to the University College network is available to all students and staff including those at partner institutions.

105 The annual SES have indicated that a majority of students were satisfied with the LRCs except for design students on the Wellesbourne Campus where there had been dissatisfaction with the range of books available in the satellite library. The SES have also indicated approval of the technical and workshop resources provided by the faculties. However, the SWS described concerns among art and design students about access to, and the quality of, equipment and workshop space and the availability of technicians. These concerns were also expressed by some of the students met by the audit team. The University College indicated it was aware of these criticisms but pointed out that art, design and

photographic resources had recently been upgraded through substantial investment and that access to workshop space was now centrally coordinated. The evidence obtained during the DAT of design programmes supported the University College's view that its physical resources are sufficient and support the highly specialised nature of some of the furniture making and conservation studies.

106 The minutes of the meetings of relevant boards of studies and the most recent AR&E reports demonstrated that the student concerns were heard and considered by the University College, if not always as quickly remedied as the students might wish. To some extent the problems of access to resources voiced by the students reflected a wider ongoing difficulty faced on the main High Wycombe Campus in the timely production of timetables for the use of teaching space (see paragraphs 140,168, and 176). All student groups met by the audit team expressed varying degrees of frustration with the accuracy and timeliness of personal timetables. The University College was aware of these difficulties.

107 While taking into consideration the concerns of students, the audit team is satisfied that the level of learning support resources provided by the University College is appropriate to its provision.

### **Academic guidance, support and supervision**

108 Arrangements for academic support may be carried out by individual personal tutors or combined as part of broader academic tutoring coordinated by lead academic tutors and supported by skills tutors based in each faculty. These arrangements are set out in a series of policy and guidance documents including the Academic Tutor Policy. Staff understanding of these roles is supported by staff development opportunities and by the Academic Tutor Forum which helps to share good practice across the University College. The institutional overview of academic support arrangements is maintained through the TLC which is able to monitor the effectiveness of faculty

arrangements through faculty representatives, as well as reviewing faculty AR&E reports.

109 Academic tutor arrangements have a particular focus on the support of first-year students including the development of study skills and managing the transition to HE through specified tutorial arrangements. Second-year students receive support from a level (year) tutor or personal tutor. Third-year students are supported by their dissertation tutor. Faculties are required to identify their arrangements and these are described in the student handbooks. In Design there is a close link between students and staff through studio-based teaching and learning. In Leisure and Tourism, first-year students have timetabled sessions with their appointed academic tutor. In Health Studies students were aware of their academic tutors and commented on the complications, when on placement, of contacting tutors who are not based at the placement site.

110 The arrangements for academic support and guidance are informed by the work and research on retention which is in progress. This has identified key aspects of support for students including induction, the introduction of year-long modules for first-year students, and the piloting of other new modules designed to improve student attendance and engagement. Students informed the audit team that they were aware of innovations to the curriculum and mentioned that attention to the frequency assessment was helping them to learn better and monitor their academic progress. The team recognised good practice arising from the student retention project, in particular, its multifaceted action lines and use of performance indicators.

111 Research students are supported by supervisors and the Central Research Unit. Research methods seminars during the initial period of registration provide guidance on study and in the Faculty of Leisure and Tourism there is a one-day induction event for all research students. Research students can also request presentation skills training and rehearsals for vivas. The audit team confirmed that arrangements for research students have addressed the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

112 Induction arrangements were found by students to be satisfactory. Students commented on examples of good practice such as initial non-assessed group projects in Design, undertaken by all years, which helped students to make friends across the course and understand the demands of the second and third years of study. Students in Tourism and Health Studies found induction generally helpful as it provided a useful foundation to the first stages of study.

113 The SED suggested that the institution has a 'culture of accessibility' with an open-door policy for staff availability. It was reported to the audit team that this system was under review in view of other changes such as the introduction of year-long modules and skills tutors.

114 The audit team learned that students at all levels of study view these arrangements positively and generally find academic staff helpful in support of their studies. They appreciate the size of the institution and find the open-door arrangements for accessing staff helpful in giving them quick responses to problems on assessment or other aspects of progress. Students' comments indicate that levels of support are not always consistent between faculties but overall support is viewed as appropriate. International students met by the team commented on the friendliness of academic tutors and were positive in their views of academic guidance and support.

115 The audit team observed that many students were encouraged to undertake work placements, and that there were detailed policies and procedures for the management of placements. In meetings with students it was confirmed that these placements commonly conferred many benefits, and some students made links with employers that led to firm offers of employment. However, the team also noted that provision of information for placement providers could be improved (see also paragraph 136). Accordingly, the team recognises the desirability of the University College reviewing practice and policy for placement learning to ensure that all placement providers for students undertaking work-based learning required by a programme are suitably prepared, whether or

not the placement is arranged by the student or the University College.

116 The audit team found that academic guidance is helpful to students, and students also commented on the effectiveness of open days in giving a good understanding of the academic support context.

117 Student Services include the careers service, counselling service, disabilities support services, student money advice and the chaplaincy. Student Services are based at the High Wycombe and Chalfont Campuses and maintain a presence on the Wellesbourne Campus. Information is set out in the Student Handbook which combines University College information with faculty and course information.

118 Students at the partner colleges are entitled to use the support services available to all University College students. The audit team heard that disabilities' advisers visit the partner colleges to make sure appropriate mechanisms are in place for the partnership students. The Careers Service has worked in liaison with partner colleges to support perceived student needs. The careers website provides subject and industry sector-specific advice and links, as well as a Student Curriculum Vitae Service allowing students to register details on-line.

119 Personal support and guidance is also provided by the SU through the Advice and Representation Centre (ARC). The ARC provides a confidential and independent advice service which covers, among other things, concerns relating to finance, health, academic appeals and international support. Students reported that they were well informed of the different roles of ARC and the institution's Student Services. ARC is seen as able to provide quick advice from a student perspective and offers additional representation to students with problems.

120 Research student support includes the faculty research officers and the Central Research Unit which provides additional pastoral care to supplement research supervision. Each faculty has in place an International Tutor who is a member of the International Tutors Group.

121 Staff met by the audit team commented on the approach to student service provision which starts before entry and continues with careers advice after graduation. The pre-enrolment booklet, involvement with schools, and the website advice on job sectors related to faculty subjects support this position. Feedback on open days and discussion of pre-induction summer schools suggests that these are successful mechanisms in supporting students at the start of their study period, helping to give a clear idea of the demands of student life.

122 The Disabilities Steering Group has been set up since the publication of the *Code of Practice, Section 3: Students with disabilities* and this has led to modifications to services to support disabled students. The audit team heard that accessibility of the campus sites is checked through regular inspections from the local authority.

123 The University College regards these arrangements as effective and has used the SES and annual student performance data to establish that the support is enabling student groups with different learning needs to succeed. Results from the SES have led to a number of changes including, for example, amendment of the administration of the hardship fund. In addition, Student Services conducts an AR&E review which engages with national benchmarking and external bodies and it is also reviewed for effectiveness by a member of the AAC. This AAC review process has also led to changes in working practice with partner colleges, the expansion of web services and additional support for staff in dealing with students' mental health difficulties.

124 Arrangements for personal support are provided through a partnership between faculties and central services, mainly through Student Services. The University College also sees these services as being key to the 'student-centred culture' of the institution. The establishment of this culture was confirmed by students in meetings with the audit team with students reporting that most tutors pay close attention to individual needs. This, along with the proactive institutional support listed elsewhere in this section, was regarded by the team as good practice.

125 The University College is progressing implementation of Personal Development Plans (PDP). A decision has been taken that all students will have access to PDP. A number of tools are available but the use and implementation of these is left to the discretion of each of the faculties. The audit team noted some inconsistencies in the understanding of the PDP implementation plans by staff in the DATs. The team recognises the desirability of the University College in ensuring greater clarity and consistency, while allowing some measured diversity, in the rolling out of student PDP across the institution.

### **Collaborative provision**

126 At the time of the audit around 870 students, a little over 10 per cent of the University College's total numbers, were studying at partner institutions in the UK. The majority of these, 492 students, were registered for full-time diplomas or undergraduate degrees, including FDs. The remaining students were registered for part-time diplomas and degrees, or for part-time postgraduate, mainly professional, qualifications. The majority of students were studying at the four FE colleges that the University College regards as its 'strategic partners': Amersham and Wycombe College, Aylesbury College, Berkshire College of Agriculture and East Berkshire College. In addition, 182 mature students were registered part-time at two overseas providers, the Számalk Open Business School in Hungary and the Fachhochschule Osnabrück in Germany for elements of the Buckinghamshire Business School's Integrated Management Programme: the Certificate in Management, the Diploma in Management Studies and the Master's in Business Administration.

127 Historically the University College has established partnerships of three kinds; those with FE colleges in the region and designed to promote access and progression to HE; those with colleges both within the region and beyond it with provision in the disciplinary areas where the University College has a recognised excellence, notably in furniture studies; and thirdly, partnerships with two local colleges and three abroad delivering taught

programmes supported by the Buckinghamshire Business School.

128 The development of the institution's new Strategic Plan (2002-2007) was accompanied by a refinement of its Collaborative Provision Policy that was approved by Senate in November 2004. The primary focus is on building strong relationships within the immediate region of the University College in order to encourage increased participation in HE, to assist structured progression from FE to HE, and to plan and develop new provision. This is the basis of the alliances with the four strategic partners. In addition, the University College is currently developing further regional strategic links with Uxbridge and Bracknell and Wokingham colleges. The institution is withdrawing, or has withdrawn, from collaborative provision previously undertaken with non-regional partners in the UK.

129 The August 2002 the QAA continuation audit report commended the University College's approach to managing quality and safeguarding standards within its regional partnerships, but suggested an inconsistency between the then current international and collaborative provision policy statements. At the time the international policy indicated the possibility of additional overseas partnerships while the collaborative policy limited these to the maintenance of 'long-standing relationships' with overseas providers. Subsequent development of policy has restricted any expansion of overseas collaboration to activities that support the University College's strategic plan. Consequently, although it continues to encourage a variety of international links and contacts short of the provision of its awards, the University College has negotiated the phasing out of its joint teaching of management and business administration in Hungary and Germany. Appropriate exit strategies have been put in place.

130 The policies and procedures that ensure quality and standards where partners provide programmes validated by the University College are detailed and very clearly articulated. Clear policy guidance is supported by detailed

memoranda of agreement, operations manuals and annual schedules governing the approval and revalidation of awards and the monitoring of teaching, resources, and student progress and attainment in the partner institutions. The overarching principle is that quality management arrangements are similar to those applied within the University College. The arrangements in place were consistent with the recently updated *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. Regular overview is provided by the CPMG which has representatives from the partner colleges and faculties and is chaired by the Assistant Director for Regional Development. Strategic issues are considered at annual bilateral joint boards attended by governors and heads of institutions. Detailed management of awards, including external examining, is conducted at faculty level and staff from partner colleges attend departmental and faculty boards. Managers of HE provision from the colleges are also active on other University College committees such as the AAC. The AAC also considers AR&E reports from the faculties on modules and programmes delivered by the partners, and also an annual self-audit report from the HE Manager in each college. University College staff are involved in the annual process of setting assignments for students in the partner colleges and in the moderation of assessed work. Operational day-to-day management of all these links and processes is overseen by the University College's CPU headed by the Collaborative Provision Manager. Staff from the partner colleges confirmed that the CPU provided an accessible source of guidance and support.

131 The formal structure for managing and supporting provision in the partner colleges is augmented by a wide range of other contacts between staff at all levels. In both 2004 and 2003 review workshops for all staff involved in the partnerships were held at Missenden Abbey. These allowed discussion of detailed and minor procedural problems. In addition, the audit team saw and heard evidence of a wide variety of other contacts in areas such as staff development, subject and field level planning meetings, special

lectures attended by students and staff, informal mentoring and inductions of new partner staff focused on resources available in the University College. The team learnt of a number of occasions in recent years where problems had arisen in the teaching of collaborative programmes or in their resourcing. There was evidence that the substantial formal and informal links in place were able to respond quickly and appropriately. Students on collaborative programmes at the partner colleges confirmed to the team that they were aware of being students of the University College, and their entitlements to use its learning resources and welfare systems even though distance and time may prevent them from doing so frequently.

132 The care with which policy and procedure for the management of collaborative provision had been constructed and the strength and effectiveness of links at all levels with strategic partners are regarded by the audit team as features of good practice.

### **Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline audit trails**

#### **Discipline audit trails**

##### **Tourism, transport and travel**

133 The scope of the DAT comprised the following provision in the Faculty of Leisure and Tourism:

BA (Hons) Air Transport with Pilot Training

BA (Hons) Air Transport with Commercial Pilot Training

BA (Hons) Airline and Airport Management

BA (Hons) Air Travel Management

HND Air Travel Management

FD Airline and Airport Operations (from 2004-05)

BA (Hons) International Tourism

BA (Hons) International Tourism with Conference Management

BA (Hons) International Tourism with Air Travel

MSc Tourism Development and Management

BA (Hons) Travel and Tourism Management

BA (Hons) Travel and Tourism Management with Air Travel

BA (Hons) Travel and Tourism Management with Conference Management

HND Travel and Tourism Management.

134 The DSED contained an AR&E report for 2003-04 for the field of tourism and the MSc Tourism Development and Management, the internal SED for a pilot PSR in 2005 in the Department of Tourism and programme specifications for each programme. Progression and completion data supplied by the Planning Unit were incorporated in the AR&E reports with an evaluative commentary. However, the pilot PSR SED was more descriptive in nature.

135 Programme specifications followed the institution's template and were clear and comprehensive, taking account of appropriate external reference points, including the *Subject benchmark statement* for hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism, and for the BA (Hons) Air Transport with Commercial Pilot Training the requirements of the pilot's licence issuing bodies. The audit team noted that they also reflected the principles of the FHEQ and of the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, although the names of these awards and some of the terms were sometimes used incorrectly. The institution required reference to these in programme specifications but the team noted a number of instances where requirements were not followed. The team noted that the design and content of the programmes was consistent with the aim of enhancing student employability.

136 Institution-wide discussions on mapping the *Code of practice* to University College procedures had taken place and the results of this were communicated to departmental staff. The audit team noted that the systems and procedures for programmes generally reflected the precepts of the relevant sections of the *Code*, although there was a possibility that part of the section of the *Code* in relation to placement learning may not necessarily be met

fully. In a meeting institutional staff told the team that students on the BA (Hons) Travel and Tourism Management programme had to find their own placement, with this being approved by the Department prior to commencement, and a student on this programme confirmed that this was the case. However, the institution's own Placement Learning Policy states that 'where a faculty secures a placement on behalf of a student' it is the responsibility of the faculty to ensure that placement providers are aware of their responsibilities. The team was of the view that the policy did not ensure that placement providers would be sufficiently informed of their responsibilities where students on this type of programme find their own placement (see also paragraph 115).

137 The audit team saw evidence of the effective operation of internal mechanisms in the approval of new programmes, although the institutional requirements for the provision of information in validation documentation were not always fully met.

138 The audit team had access to recent external examiners' reports for all programmes. Reports are considered by the Department and a response is sent to each of the external examiners. The reports are also considered at the Departmental Board and reflected in an institutional summary report compiled by the Academic Registry. In general, reports are highly positive and the responses showed that there had been a full engagement with the external examiners' comments. There have been problems with the timely submission of some examiners' reports, but these have been addressed. The team saw several examples of external examiners contributing to discussion of proposed changes to programmes. The minutes of departmental and faculty committees showed that there was serious and detailed discussion of relevant issues. Even where extreme circumstances had necessitated the appointment of a new external examiner very quickly, there was evidence that the institution's published procedures had been followed. Overall, the team was able to confirm the effective operation of the external examiner system.

139 There is a clear assessment policy which is applied in all programmes, articulates with the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* and is appropriate to the nature of the programmes. Examples of assessed work reviewed by the audit team met the standards defined in the programme specifications with clear evidence of internal verification of marks. In all cases, the standard of student achievement was found to be appropriate to the level of the programmes and their position within the FHEQ.

140 The student handbooks for the programmes contained much helpful information and students expressed the view that they were useful. Students were generally satisfied with the information made available to them and felt informed about programme and assessment requirements and their own performance and progress. However, they were dissatisfied with the lateness of provision of timetables and the time taken to gain feedback on some assessments (see also paragraphs 106, 168).

141 Students have access to appropriate learning resources, with library provision at both the Wellesbourne and main campus sites and access to a range of appropriate on-line resources. The information technology resources offered by the Faculty complement those provided by the institution. Some members of staff are using the VLE to support teaching and learning and students value this. The University College has acknowledged that more needs to be done to encourage greater use of the VLE across the institution and in its FE partners.

142 Academic and personal support is provided in a number of ways as students progress through their programmes. Undergraduate students are allocated a personal tutor and in their first year meet with them once a week. Second-year students expressed the view that timetabled tutorials were not a required feature of their programme, but they had access to a personal tutor if requested. Third-year undergraduates are allocated a dissertation tutor. The SU Advice and Representation Centre was appreciated by students as a source of referral to faculties or specialist staff for assistance in academic and non-academic



matters, including counselling, maths support and essay writing skills. The University College's retention project has been supported by the Department with a pilot of the attendance monitoring system positively received by both staff and students. There is evidence that the planned actions are leading to improvement in the retention and progression of students.

143 Approaches to gaining student feedback at module level vary from module to module. Although staff maintain that students prefer a variety of methods to collect feedback, the multiplicity of methods does not appear to be informed by a single set of values and there is a possibility that opportunities for highlighting issues which affect a range of modules may be missed. Students appreciated the approachability of most staff and felt that their concerns could often be dealt with informally. Nevertheless, there is a formal Faculty Student Staff Liaison Committee and evidence of issues raised being addressed effectively. Students are also represented on the Faculty Board. Tourism, travel and transport students felt that participation in the SES was worthwhile, with information being provided to them on changes arising from the survey.

144 Overall, the audit team was satisfied that the standard of student achievement in the programmes covered by the DAT is appropriate to the titles of the programmes and their location within the FHEQ; and the quality of the learning opportunities is suitable for the programmes of study in tourism, transport and travel leading to the named awards.

#### **Furniture studies and fine art**

145 The provision included in the DAT for Furniture Studies and Fine Art is part of the portfolio of courses in the Faculty of Design and included:

MA Furniture Design and Technology

MA Furniture Conservation and Restoration

BA (Hons) Furniture Conservation and Restoration

BA (Hons) Furniture Design and Craftsmanship

BA (Hons) Contemporary Furniture and Related Product Design

BA (Hons) Applied Furniture Studies

HND Furniture Studies

BA (Hons) Fine Art.

146 The BA (Hons) Applied Furniture Studies, which has been available to provide level 3 progression for HND entrants, is closing shortly and has revised the final year of teaching for the remaining students. Other provision is being made available to allow students from HNDs to progress to another appropriate final year of degree study.

147 The DSED was set out as a brief overview document supported by the Faculty AR&E report for 2003-04, course AR&E reports for 2003-04 and the internal SED for a PSR of furniture in 2004-05. The overview document briefly described the aims of the provision and was helpful in providing a very detailed indexing of the supporting reports.

148 Programme specifications were available for all the programmes of study in the DAT and made reference to the FHEQ and *Subject benchmark statement* for art and design. Courses which were developed prior to the subject benchmark have subsequently been modified with learning outcomes confirmed as appropriate. A familiarity with benchmarks was evident in discussion with staff.

149 The main issues identified during subject review in October 1999 have led to the development of a set of core learning outcomes, the Faculty Qualifying Statements. These have been developed through the Faculty Teaching and Learning Working Group and used effectively in recent revalidations. Staff have commented on the usefulness of this structure for developing new modules and establishing parity between courses. Students confirmed a good understanding of the statements.

150 The Faculty Registrar has been active in giving consideration to the *Code of practice*. This had led, for example, to a change in appointing lead external examiners from HE backgrounds to work, as part of small teams, with external examiners from commercial backgrounds.

151 Progression data are reviewed as part of the AR&E process. These show that student progression is generally satisfactory. Evidence from the course committee meetings and the AR&E reports indicated that the statistical analysis of student performance informed decision-making.

152 There are many opportunities for staff and students to offer views on the courses. The course committees are well attended by staff and show that student issues are resolved. Students reported that informal contact with staff was often effective in addressing student concerns in a timely fashion. Course committees and other staff-student contacts are effective in involving students with the quality management of their courses. Students were aware of the SES but were unable to identify changes resulting from the surveys.

153 Staff are familiar with the AR&E process which forms a basis for action planning during the year. Module reports are produced by tutors bringing together analysis of student performance, student feedback and staff perspectives. Student feedback on modules includes qualitative comments which provide additional detail on specific areas for enhancement. For instance, on the BA (Hons) Furniture Design and Craftsmanship students commented on the need for more written feedback and this was then acted upon.

154 The furniture subject area has recently piloted the institution's PSR. Staff reported that this had engendered reflection on the performance of the area and the need for better external promotion of the work of the Department to external audiences. Staff were uncertain that the process as it stands had added value to existing review and evaluation mechanisms. Staff stated that they had not yet had a chance to feedback on the process to other colleagues across the institution.

155 A sample of external examiner reports followed a common format which identified areas for consideration and indicated the degree of improvement recommended. External examiners' reports, which were found to be generally positive, are given consideration

within the AR&E process with responses prepared by course leaders.

156 Examples of assessed work seen by the team matched the programme specification standards. Faculty assessment criteria have been developed alongside the generic learning outcomes and assessment strategies are set out in the handbooks. The students reported that assessment processes are well understood and that additional advice on assessment of their performance was easily accessible to them through contact with tutors. Assessment approaches were explained as part of induction and fine art students had found the discussion of assessment criteria on induction useful to their understanding of marking.

157 Assessment weightings are agreed across courses and these are clearly signalled to students. Marks are given as numbers, percentages or bandings which are then added together to form a single number or letter grade. In the BA (Hons) Furniture Conservation and Restoration a letter grade is given for the work as a whole, broadly derived from the letter grades for each weighted criterion. The Faculty may wish to consider these small variances of practice of using both number and letter grades. For example, the audit team discovered those students receiving letter-based marks are more likely to have marks rounded up or down and this may affect the grade and subsequent level classifications of borderline students.

158 Resources feature regularly in course committee meetings, evaluations and external examiner reports. The audit team formed the view that in the main the courses are effectively run within the resources available. Concerns raised in the past in fine art had been satisfactorily resolved with students. The SWS had drawn attention to the resources for design and there has been some student dissatisfaction evidenced in module feedback questionnaires on the BA (Hons) Furniture Design and Craftsmanship. The Faculty has recently produced a Learning Resources Strategy 2005-08 and has a Faculty Computer Management Group to give additional consideration to computing needs. The Faculty may wish to

consider further how, as part of general resource planning, it engages with students making specific comments on feedback concerning resources.

159 The audit team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for programmes of study leading to the named awards and that the standard of student achievement in the programmes is appropriate to the titles of the awards and to their location within the FHEQ.

### **Sociology, criminology and policing**

160 The scope of the DAT comprised provision within the field of sociology and criminology (including policing), delivered by the Department of Human Sciences, which is situated within the Faculty of ASSH. The modules provided by the field contributed to following honours degrees:

BSc (Hons) Criminology

BSc (Hons) Sociology

BSc (Hons) Policing

BSc (Hons) Criminology and Sociology

BSc (Hons) Sociology with Criminology.

161 Sociology or criminology can also be taken in combination with psychology either as a joint, major or minor subject. Social Policy is also available as a minor subject with criminology or sociology. Programme specifications were provided for single honours degrees in each of the three core disciplines: criminology, sociology and policing, and for criminology or sociology taken as joint, major and minor routes in combined degrees.

162 Together these programmes recruited 62 students in 2003-04. All were taught entirely on the High Wycombe Campus of the University College and none of the programmes was delivered by collaborative partners. In addition, a BA (Hons) Citizenship had recently been approved but had not recruited students at the time of the audit.

163 The DSED produced for the DAT consisted of the most recent AR&E field report of criminology, sociology and policing for the

academic year 2003-04, together with the documentation recently prepared for a periodic review of the programmes in the field which was due to take place early in 2005. The material for the periodic review included a 20-page account and evaluation of the programmes provided. The degrees in criminology and sociology had last been validated in 1998 and the BSc (Hons) Policing in 2001.

164 The programme specifications had all been revised in October 2004 in preparation for the periodic review and included tables that mapped the learning outcomes associated with the 43 modules offered within the field. They were consistent with the FHEQ and had been designed to take account of the relevant benchmark statements, principally those for sociology and for social policy and administration. The BSc (Hons) Policing had also been developed in consultation with the West Mercia Constabulary and the Thames Valley Police Service taking account of their standards for professional training. At the time of the audit a benchmark statement for criminology had not been published by QAA but the specification had been drawn up in the light of a draft statement produced by the British Society of Criminology.

165 A high proportion of the students recruited to these programmes were from the region and many combined their full-time studies with paid employment or had significant family responsibilities. A notable feature of the recent history of these programmes and the modules that comprised them had been changes designed to reduce the numbers of students who withdraw before completing their degrees. While retention rates in the University College compare well with the sector, in 2002-03 12 per cent of students in the Department of Human Sciences withdrew including up to 25 per cent from some of the programmes examined here. The Department had responded by playing a major part in the University College's retention project including using one of its first-year modules as a pilot to test ways of enhancing student progression. The findings of the retention project had pointed to the importance of varied and

appropriate assessment procedures, particularly in the first year of an undergraduate degree. Largely as a consequence, for 2003-04, revised assessment procedures had been approved for 19 of the modules in this field. Additionally, from 2004-05 it was planned to convert all first-year modules to year-long rather than semester-long formats in order to accommodate the more frequent and formative forms of assessment the retention project had recommended. It was clear to the audit team that these innovations reflected a proactive engagement with the enhancement of teaching and learning methods. The documentation showed that the external examiners were aware of and supported the changes being made.

166 The AR&E process was informed by progression data provided by the MIS Department. However, in 2004 these had not been made available until October and it was not clear to the audit team if significant use could have been made of data in the review process. The Faculty had set up a working group to examine the presentation and use of statistical information. The AR&E report for the field included commentaries from convenors of modules which took account of the findings of module feedback questionnaires completed by students. These commentaries varied considerably in length and in the aspects of provision they addressed. The AR&E report also considered comments from external examiners and included responses to any suggestions or criticisms made. The team reviewed the external examiners' reports for the last three years and found in them overwhelming approval of the standards of student attainment and the quality of the curriculum.

167 Examples of student work made available to the audit team confirmed that, on occasion, work of a very high quality is produced, particularly among the student dissertations. Assessment methods were diverse, including on some modules, a significant weighting given to student presentations. Plans for increased emphasis on the development of skills were well advanced as part of the introduction of PDP. From 2005-06 a core first-year module

would focus particularly on group working, time management, independent research, reflection on personal change and other transferable skills.

168 The quality of the programme and module documentation provided to students was high. The students met by the audit team were clear about coursework assignments and examinations and the assessment criteria used. However, the students described some cases where assessment handbooks (in criminology) had been issued so late in a semester that deadlines had to be extended. The students also reported a case where the absence of a lecturer on a level 2 module had meant no teaching was provided for several weeks. However, the most significant concern of students at the time of the audit were delays within the ASSH in issuing correct student timetables at the beginning of the second semester. It was reported that timetables were inaccurate, that times were altered and rooms were changed without notification or had been double-booked. The students of the Faculty had organised a petition with the help of the SU. The academic staff met by the team confirmed this account and indicated that the Faculty had responded by appointing a timetable manager to deal with problems which were mainly attributed to new timetabling software. At the time of the audit it was clear that senior management staff were aware of the problems which had arisen as a consequence of the timetabling delays and inaccuracies. The team recognises the advisability of rapidly progressing solutions that were currently being planned.

169 All the teaching of these programmes took place on the High Wycombe site. The LRC provided sufficient study space and access to computer terminals. A dedicated Faculty Librarian sits on the Board of Studies for these degrees and communicates student concerns to the LRC. Students' views on learning resources were monitored by module-level questionnaires and by the annual institutional SES, and at first-year level by special focus groups as part of the retention initiative. Student representatives were members of the Board of Studies which

met three times a year. The documentation indicated that inadequate library stock had been a regular student complaint. This difficulty had been partly alleviated by specifying core texts for popular modules and the greater use of on-line sources. A significant number of journals was available on-line and the modules within the field were increasingly supported by material available in the VLE. Student concerns about uneven attendance by other students had led to the development of an Attendance Support Strategy which was to be implemented in 2005-06.

170 The documentation and the meetings with students confirmed that the system of academic tutors worked well when needed. Students found the academic staff accessible and were also ready to use the ARC and other support services.

171 Arrangements for mentoring those in their first year of teaching and for peer review among all staff were well-established. New staff were required to take the PgCert in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education and there was evidence that most staff participated in a wide range of development courses. The Department of Human Sciences had just emerged from a lengthy period without a permanent head and, consequently, arrangements for regular staff appraisal had been neglected for at least two years. At the time of the audit a new Head of Department had been appointed and had made the re-introduction of appraisals a priority.

172 Overall, the audit team was satisfied that the standard of student achievement in the programmes covered by the DAT was appropriate to the awards and their location within the FHEQ; and that the quality of the learning opportunities was suitable for the programmes of study leading to awards in sociology, criminology and policing.

## **Section 4: The audit investigations: published information**

### **The students' experience of published information and other information available to them**

173 A distinguishing feature of the University College, described in the SWS and confirmed during the audit team's meetings with students, was the extent to which students expected and received guidance on institutional facilities and procedures, course requirements, assessment feedback and other information personally from academic staff or via email. This was in part a consequence of the workshop-based character of many of the programmes and of the relatively small size of the University College, but also reflected an established culture of accessibility subscribed to by many staff. At the same time the ARCs, run by the SU on both High Wycombe and Chalfont Campuses, which were well linked to the institution's student services provision, were commonly used for a very wide range of information needs. This personal approach to the provision of information had clearly created a pattern of expectations among students which, to some extent, explained the relatively few comments they provided on the quality of information published in hardcopy or on the University College website.

174 The University College had developed an explicit Communications Policy which was regularly reviewed and monitored by the ISSG. This approach to the management and dissemination of information was evident not only in a comprehensive, orderly and accessible structure of policy and procedural documentation available in hardcopy and electronically, but also in the handbooks and course guides available to students. The students commented favourably on the content and clarity of the Student Handbook, available in two forms, one for the University College and the other for students at partner institutions. This is supplemented by separate faculty handbooks and by programme and

module guides. The students met by the audit team were aware of assessment requirements and criteria, communicated to them in variously named assessment 'schedules', 'handbooks' or 'details', although there were a few cases, particularly in ASSH, where these had appeared slightly late in the semester.

175 The students met by the audit team and those whose views were reported in the SWS were overwhelmingly positive about the amount and quality of the written information they had received about their courses and the operation of the University College, both before arrival and once in course. Most were aware of the growing availability of information on the website and particularly on the VLE, but relatively few were as yet using this facility routinely. Some students were aware of the existence of programme specifications but indicated they found the programme guides provided by their faculties fulfilled their needs. The fact that many students said they rarely consulted the University College's range of publications was viewed by the team as a reflection of the thoroughness of the face-to-face guidance provided by staff.

176 A key concern of students, described in the SWS and reported to the audit team at its meetings with students, was timetabling (see paragraphs 106, 140, 168). Students of the University College are provided with personal timetables. New students usually receive these some weeks before arrival but a significant proportion of returning students had on occasion found their timetables were inaccurate or had only been able to obtain them some weeks into a semester. This had led to some confusion and attendance difficulties. Following significant timetable difficulties at the beginning of the second semester in 2005 students in ASSH had organized a petition of complaint. Senior management was well aware of the problem and were taking steps to ensure it did not recur. The team advises the University College to continue to monitor the steps it has taken to produce timetables sufficiently in advance that it allows students to plan work and family commitments.

### **Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information**

177 The University College has adopted a systematic and planned approach to the fulfilment of the requirements of HEFCE's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, for the publication of information on teaching quality on the HERO TQI website. In 2003 an Academic Information Coordinator was appointed, part of whose responsibilities is to ensure that staff are aware of the publication requirements and that the data would be available and appropriately entered onto the TQI site. At the time of the audit the institution had provided entry, progression, achievement and destination data for its programmes together with summaries of external examiners' reports and of quality review events. It was already in a position to provide links to its programme specifications and it was clear that the University College would be able to meet the developing information requirements. The necessity of entering information within the framework of the JAC's subject groupings presented a number of difficulties. For example, lead external examiners had to be selected to write the summaries for groupings of degree programmes, and in other areas the very small numbers on programmes undermined the anonymity and usefulness of the progression data. It was clear to the audit team that the University College's systematic and planned approach to the publication of information had ensured that it was more than meeting HEFCE requirements and that users could rely on the information provided.

# Findings

## Findings

178 An institutional audit of Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College (the University College) was undertaken during the week commencing 18 April 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University College's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility as a UK body awarding taught degrees on its own behalf and that of its collaborative partners. As part of the audit process, according to the protocols agreed with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals and Universities UK, three discipline audit trails (DATs) were carried out. This section of the audit summarises the findings. It concludes by identifying features of good practice revealed by the audit, and in making recommendations to the University College for enhancing current practice.

### **The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes**

179 In the institutional self-evaluation document (SED) the University College outlined its approach to quality assurance and standards. It recognised the professional commitment of all staff as the cornerstone to maintaining high quality and standards. It stated that its quality policy is based around principles which reflect a culture of continual review and enhancement; alignment with recognised standards and established codes of practice; engagement with the wider academic and professional community; and a partnership between its faculties and centrally-provided services. These principles are met through rigorous validation procedures for new programmes and the annual monitoring and periodic review of academic courses and student support areas. Student views and opinion are captured through the annual student experience survey (SES), student evaluation of modules and programmes; focus groups and staff-student liaison meetings; and through representation on committees within faculties and the institution. The framework for

quality and standards for collaborative provision is exactly the same as that for University College-based provision. The Collaborative Provision Management Group maintains an oversight of all collaborative arrangements.

180 The University College has a comprehensive, thorough and well-defined set of clear documentation that defines procedures associated with governance, policy, regulation and quality. The audit team recognised good practice in the clarity, thoroughness, interrelatedness, management and presentation of documentation that supports the deliberative processes of the University College (see paragraph 238).

181 Senate has the primary responsibility for establishing and overseeing standards of the University College's awards and the quality of its provision. Much of the work required to discharge this responsibility is devolved to Senate's subcommittees, and the Academic Audit Committee (AAC) in particular. The Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) advises Senate on teaching, learning, assessment and related enhancements. Each faculty is represented on Senate and its subcommittees. Quality and standards at faculty level are the responsibility of faculty boards that formally report to Senate.

182 The audit team found that the committee structure is appropriate for monitoring quality and standards. Sometimes, the communication between committees takes time, which gives an impression of slowness in decision-making. While recognising the value of consensus building the team recommends acceleration of the decision-making process (see paragraph 239).

183 The University College regards validation as 'key in the setting of appropriate standards for programmes of study'. It is a requirement that the documentation for validation address alignment with the appropriate subject benchmark(s), *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and professional body requirements. The first stage of the approval process is for an outline proposal to be submitted to the appropriate faculty board,



which looks at strategic fit, major resource requirements and evidence of demand. Approved proposals are submitted to the Academic Planning Committee (APC). Proposals approved by APC are referred back to the faculty for the development stage. Supporting documentation is scrutinised by an audit panel prior to a validation event. Validation panels are chaired by a senior member of the University College from a faculty not involved in the proposed programme. The panel also includes a member of AAC, another member of staff from a faculty with no involvement in the programme, and two members external to the University College. Successful validations are recommended to AAC (then to Senate) for approval.

184 The audit team found that there had been a large number of recent validations, which was inevitable, given that many programmes had been validated in 1999 when the modular structure was changed, and were now due for revalidation. Also the institution's decision to move to year-long modules for year one increased the volume of validations. The team did find examples of approvals for joint awards where it had not been possible to convene the Combination Planning Panel. An institutional 2003-04 annual report on validation and review prepared for AAC indicated that the lateness of convening panels was an issue that in some cases led to incomplete panel formation, but no panel met without at least one external member and written feedback from another. Overall, the team found validation and review to be rigorous and thorough but would recommend the desirability of the University College addressing the problem of incomplete membership and late convening of panels (see paragraph 240).

185 The annual review and evaluation (AR&E) process incorporates module reports with statistics showing student attainment, observations on issues affecting attainment, student feedback, external examiners' reports with course or field leader responses and the rationale for any proposed changes to the programme. Reports go to faculty boards which summarise and evaluate issues from the individual reports. Faculty board summaries,

together with the report of the designated independent AAC auditor for the faculty are presented to AAC, along with reports on some central services that have a close interaction with students. Finally, an institutional AR&E report is submitted to AAC, where institutional issues are discussed and themes identified for focus in the following year.

186 The audit team found the AR&E process to be rigorous, thorough and well conceived, although timeliness of submission of some reports was an issue. The lateness of submission of some AR&E reports was flagged up in the institutional AR&E report for 2003-04. The team recommends that the University College continue to find appropriate ways of ensuring the timeliness of key events in the annual monitoring process (see paragraph 240).

187 Periodic subject review (PSR) was proposed in 2003-04 and was piloted in two subject areas, tourism and furniture, in 2004-05. The intent of the PSR is to complement existing processes by adding value through a more explicit focus on externality, the external engagement of staff and pedagogic developments in the discipline. The AAC has already reviewed the process and has proposed an amended process for implementation in 2005-06 to provide more focus on the original 'added-value' intent.

188 Through the DATs and other information made available, the audit team found the periodic review process to be in a state of transition, but moving towards a model that would, indeed, complement the other processes of approval, monitoring and review.

189 The University College regards external input as a key element in its internal review processes. As noted above, external advisers and reviewers are involved in validation and review. The audit team learned from meetings with staff and from minutes that programme level review often incorporates substantial elements of externality, including the use of external examiner reports and external academic opinion. The reviews also include information on trends in industry and professional areas and this reflects a concern for ensuring the

employability of students. Through its analysis of policy documents and many examples of approval, annual and periodic review, the team concluded that external participation is, indeed, fundamental to curriculum development, monitoring and review, and that it is highly valued by the institution.

190 Opportunities for student representation are available at institutional and course levels. The Student Representation Policy sets out key principles including stating the value placed on informal methods for resolution of problems. Care is taken by the institution in its planning to consult with students and this was recognised and commented upon in the students' written submission (SWS). At programme level students have representatives on course committees. Minutes seen by the audit team indicated consideration of student matters at this level and also in departmental and faculty boards.

191 The audit team found that the take up and effectiveness of student representation varies between faculties but, overall, students reported many examples of positive working with staff, for example, through the secondment of a Students' Union (SU) officer to the School of Continuing Professional Education (SCPE) to work on the retention project addressing attendance.

192 Arrangements for collecting feedback from students include the annual SES which has been designed by external consultants with input from staff and students from the institution. Two surveys had been completed by the external consultants prior to the audit, and in the last survey questionnaires were sent to both University College and collaborative partner students. Survey results are distributed to faculties and administrative departments and the responses are tracked by the Student Satisfaction Steering Group and Planning Board.

193 Students perceive feedback mechanisms as positive and in meetings they commented on differing forms of feedback including meetings with staff, student representative meetings and informal contact with academic staff. Student concerns raised in these ways were often resolved rapidly. Students met by the audit team generally felt well informed about module

and course changes, although they commented on the different approaches to module and course feedback between faculties.

194 Graduates and employers are involved in curriculum development through validation processes, professional networks and links to courses. The use of industrial and professional benchmarking is widespread, with employers and professional bodies contributing to programme design and being involved in the assessment and teaching of some programmes. Professional bodies, including the Nursing and Midwifery Council, General Social Care Council, British Psychological Society and the Law Society also accredit or recognise many University College awards, and recent review information confirms that their requirements are carefully considered during validation and updating of programmes. Institutional guidance recommends that sector skills requirements and national occupational standards are also used, where relevant, as external referents, and the audit team found evidence of discussion of these in minutes of validation and faculty meetings.

195 The audit team found that the view of a student-centred organisation and culture was confirmed in comments from staff, students and documentation. Good practice (see paragraph 238) was reflected through effective collaboration and consultation with students and the helpfulness and accessibility of academic, administrative and support staff. The team was satisfied that feedback from students, graduates and employers was making a positive contribution to assurance of quality and standards.

196 At the time of the audit around 870 students, a little over 10 per cent of the University College's total numbers, were studying at partner institutions in the UK. The majority of these, 492 students, were registered for full-time diplomas or undergraduate degrees, including Foundation Degrees (FDs). The remaining students were registered for part-time diplomas and degrees, or for part-time postgraduate, mainly professional, qualifications. The majority of students were studying at the four further education colleges that the University College regards as its

strategic partners: Amersham and Wycombe College, Aylesbury College, Berkshire College of Agriculture and East Berkshire College. In addition, 182 mature students were registered part-time at two overseas providers, the Számalk Open Business School in Hungary and the Fachhochschule Osnabrück in Germany, for elements of the Buckinghamshire Business School's Integrated Management Programme: the Certificate in Management, the Diploma in Management Studies and the Master's in Business Administration.

197 The policies and procedures that ensure quality and standards where partners provide programmes validated by the University College are detailed and very clearly articulated. Clear policy guidance is supported by detailed memoranda of agreement, operations manuals and annual schedules governing the approval and revalidation of awards and the monitoring of teaching, resources, student progress and attainment in the partner institutions. The overarching principle is that quality management arrangements are similar to those applied within the University College. The arrangements in place were consistent with the recently updated *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA. The care with which policy and procedure for the management of collaborative provision had been constructed and the strength and effectiveness of links at all levels with strategic partners are regarded by the audit team as features of good practice (see paragraph 238).

198 A comprehensive Staff Development Policy seeks to ensure that the quality of teaching is maintained through the employment of well-trained and motivated staff. The Staff Development Committee is the institution-wide forum for policy setting with regard to staff development, and for monitoring the effectiveness of the development opportunities offered. SCPE is the institution's central service for training and development of all staff. A large range of workshops and seminars is available to both University College and partner college staff.

SCPE delivers a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education which is compulsory for all new staff who do not hold a teaching qualification. The team found that take-up of the events arranged by SCPE was extensive. Faculties and departments also arrange their own, subject-focused, development activities and there is evidence of a strong commitment to the development of staff at all levels. The team noted the work of the SCPE in promoting staff development as good practice which contributed to the culture of enhancement within the University College (see paragraph 238).

199 Arrangements for staff appraisals are clearly laid out in the institution's appraisal handbook and the SED noted that progress has been made in addressing the 2002 continuation audit suggestion that the University College keeps under review its capacity to deliver appraisals to all staff. As a result, two faculties have widened the definition of appraisers to increase the number of staff to potentially act in this role. However, one group of staff told the audit team that they had not been appraised for 20 months (see also paragraph 171), and records showed that in one faculty less than half of all staff had an appraisal in 2003-04. The audit team recommends the University College to consider measures to ensure that the policy on appraisal is consistently applied across the institution (see paragraph 239).

200 A peer observation scheme is in place, although the institution has concerns about its current ability to monitor the level of activity. The audit team was told that implementation of peer observation activity varied from faculty to faculty, and from department to department. The team learned of departments where peer observation procedures focused on team teaching activities, but in other cases it appeared that staff were left to arrange peer observation in an ad hoc manner. The team recommends the University College ensures that the peer observation system works in a way that will retain the flexibility of the current system but will enable greater dissemination of demonstrable good practice between faculties (see paragraph 240).

201 The findings of the audit suggest that there can be broad confidence in the soundness of the University College's, and its collaborative partners', current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes.

### **The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards**

202 The SED referred to a framework for ensuring standards of provision of the University College which includes the setting of appropriate standards at validation; the monitoring of the achievement of standards by external examiners; the monitoring of standards during the AR&E process; and the annual consideration of student performance by Senate.

203 The SED noted that the *Code of practice* is 'embedded' in its policies and procedures and minutes of both institutional and faculty committees show awareness of the *Code*. The AAC monitors institutional use of the Academic Infrastructure, including the *Code*, and recommends changes in practice and policy where appropriate. Staff met by the audit team explained that this has led to changes in guidance and procedures, such as working practices for the accreditation of prior learning. The Academic Registry produces clear policy, guideline and procedural documents that reflect the spirit of the *Code*.

204 Programme specifications, which are presented at validation, make explicit reference to subject benchmarks and the audit team found examples clearly designed to reflect the relevant benchmark statements. Minutes of validation meetings showed appropriate discussion of subject benchmark alignment. The specifications for programmes were also found to be consistent with the principles of the FHEQ, although the team noted that the terminology used was sometimes inaccurate.

205 The institution's policy is that an external examiner is appointed to every award. A lead examiner is also appointed for a group of awards, for the purposes of summarising a group of external examiner reports for the

Higher Education and Research Opportunities in the UK (HERO) Teaching Quality Information (TQI) site. Individual faculties are responsible for sourcing and nominating external examiners within procedures and guidance set by the University College. The audit team was able to confirm that institutional procedures for the appointment of examiners are complied with although a number are appointed late. The team would recommend continuing attention to ensuring the timely appointment of all its external examiners (see paragraph 240).

206 External examiners submit written reports using a well-structured pro forma and reports seen by the audit team showed clear agreement that assessment and student achievement were of a suitable standard when compared to other institutions and the FHEQ. Responses to external examiner reports are created by senior departmental or faculty staff and these show due attention to examiners' comments. The team noted that issues raised by examiners are also discussed at departmental and faculty boards and action is taken where appropriate. The Academic Registry compiles a thorough summary for AAC of external examiner reports, identifying common themes requiring institutional action and points of good practice. Through meetings with staff, and scrutiny of external examiner reports and minutes of meetings across the University College, the team was able to confirm that external examiners were valued and that they played an important part both in the assurance of quality and maintenance of standards

207 The University College's Planning Unit, part of the Management Information Services Department, provides comprehensive data on student admissions, progression and attainment and makes these available for the AR&E process and in a variety of other ways including the University College's intranet. Statistics are available on progression within programmes and across year groups for students at the University College and those studying for its qualifications at partner colleges. Regular reports are made to Senate in which student admissions and progression are monitored and profiled in terms of entry

qualifications, ethnicity, gender and disability, among other areas. The Planning Unit also annually reports a range of teaching and learning performance indicators benchmarked against those of a comparator group of six selected universities and against Higher Education Statistics Agency norms; a feature contributing to enhancement that the audit team regarded as good practice( see paragraph 238).

208 The audit team is able to confirm that the quality and range of statistics produced by the University College make a significant contribution to the management of quality and the monitoring of standards but would recommend that the University College seek ways to take full advantage of the information provided by the Planning Unit (see paragraph 240).

209 Overall, the audit team has confidence in the current and likely future management of academic standards of the awards of the University College including those delivered by its collaborative partners.

### **The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning**

210 The Learning Resources (LR) Strategy was developed in 2003 following an internal review of the existing teaching and learning infrastructure that had indicated areas where improvements were desirable. In addition, each of the six faculties has its own customised LR Strategy. Overview of the implementation of these strategies lies with the Planning Board which receives regular reports from the Learning Resources Consultative Group and the Information Strategy Steering Group.

211 Day-to-day provision of learning resources is managed by the Department of Learning and Information Services (LIS) but a good deal of specialist technical and workshop provision is organised within the faculties, particularly the Faculties of Design and Technology. An annual LIS Report is produced, which takes account of student views expressed within the SES, and is considered by AAC as part of its role in the AR&E process. The audit team was able to confirm from the committee minutes and other documentation it reviewed, and from the

evidence it heard, that the University College was able to respond to resource needs.

212 Arrangements for academic support to students may be carried out by individual personal tutors or combined as part of broader academic tutoring coordinated by lead academic tutors and supported by skills tutors based in each faculty. These arrangements are set out in a series of policy and guidance documents including the Academic Tutor Policy. The arrangements have a particular focus on the support of first-year students including the development of study skills and managing the transition to HE.

213 Arrangements for academic support and guidance are informed by the work and research on retention that is in progress and which has identified key aspects of support for students, including induction and course design such as the introduction year-long modules for first-year students. The institutional overview of academic support arrangements is maintained through the TLC which is able to monitor the effectiveness of faculty arrangements through faculty representatives, as well as reviewing faculty AR&E reports. The audit team recognised good practice in the student retention project, in particular, its multifaceted action lines and use of performance indicators (see paragraph 238).

214 The audit team heard that students at all levels of study view these arrangements positively and generally find academic staff helpful in support of their studies. They appreciate the size of the institution and find the open door arrangements for accessing staff helpful in giving them quick responses to problems on assessment or other aspects of progress. The team recognised that this contributed to a student-focused culture which embraced a number of features of good practice (see paragraph 238).

215 Arrangements for personal support are provided through a partnership between faculties and central services, mainly through Student Services. These services are also seen as key to the student-centred culture of the institution and include the careers service, counselling service, disabilities support services,

student money advice and the chaplaincy. Student Services are based at the High Wycombe and Chalfont Campuses and maintain a presence on the Wellesbourne Campus. Information is set out in a student handbook combining University College information with faculty and course information.

216 Students at the partner colleges are entitled to use all the support services available to University College students. For example, the disabilities advisers visit the partner colleges to make sure appropriate mechanisms are in place for the partnership students, and the Careers Service has worked in liaison with partner colleges to support perceived student needs.

217 Personal support and guidance is also provided by the SU through the Advice and Representation Centre (ARC). The ARC provides a confidential and independent advice service which includes concerns relating to finance, health, academic appeals and international support. Students reported that they were well informed of the different roles of ARC and the institution's Student Services. ARC is seen as able to provide quick advice from a student perspective and also offers additional representation to students with problems.

218 The University College is progressing implementation of Personal Development Planning (PDP). A decision has been taken that all students will have access to PDP. A number of tools are available but the use and implementation of these is left to the discretion of each of the faculties. The audit team noted some inconsistencies in the understanding of the PDP implementation plans by staff and recommends that the University College ensures greater clarity and consistency, while allowing some measured diversity, in the rolling out of student PDP across the institution (see also paragraph 240).

219 While taking into consideration the concerns of students, the audit team is satisfied that the level of learning support resources provided by the University College is appropriate to its provision.

## **Outcomes of discipline audit trails**

### **Tourism, transport and travel**

220 The Faculty of Leisure and Tourism offers a wide range of provision at differing levels and the audit focused on the following awards: BA (Hons) Air Transport with Pilot Training; BA (Hons) Air Transport with Commercial Pilot Training; BA (Hons) Airline and Airport Management; BA (Hons) Air Travel Management; HND Air Travel Management; FD Airline and Airport Operations; BA (Hons) International Tourism; BA (Hons) International Tourism with Conference Management; BA (Hons) International Tourism with Air Travel; MSc Tourism Development and Management; BA (Hons) Travel and Tourism Management; BA (Hons) Travel and Tourism Management with Air Travel; BA (Hons) Travel and Tourism Management with Conference Management; and HND Travel and Tourism Management. Programme specifications followed the institution's template and were clear and comprehensive, taking account of appropriate external reference points, including the *Subject benchmark statement* for hospitality, sport, leisure and tourism, and for the BA (Hons) Air Transport with Commercial Pilot Training the requirements of the pilot's licence issuing bodies. Overall, the audit team was satisfied that the standard of student achievement in the programmes covered by the DAT is appropriate to the titles of the programmes and their location within the FHEQ; and the quality of the learning opportunities is suitable for the programmes of study in tourism, transport and travel leading to the named programmes.

221 The student handbooks for the programmes contained much helpful information and students expressed the view that they were useful. Generally students felt well informed about programme and assessment requirements and their own performance and progress. They also expressed satisfaction with the effectiveness of representation and the quality of support and feedback from staff at both course and individual levels. The audit team noted that placement arrangements did not

ensure that placement providers would be sufficiently informed of their responsibilities where students find their own placement. The team recommends that the University College review practice and policy for placement learning (see paragraph 240).

222 The audit team had access to recent external examiners' reports for all programmes. In general, reports are highly positive and the institutional responses showed that there had been a full engagement with the external examiners' comments. There have been some problems with the timely submission of some examiners' reports, but these are being addressed.

#### **Furniture studies and fine art**

223 The Faculty of Design has a wide portfolio of courses and the DAT covered programmes leading to the awards of: MA Furniture Design and Technology; MA Furniture Conservation and Restoration; BA (Hons) Furniture Conservation and Restoration; BA (Hons) Furniture Design and Craftmanship; BA (Hons) Contemporary Furniture and Related Product Design; BA (Hons) Applied Furniture Studies; HND Furniture Studies; and BA (Hons) Fine Art. Programme specifications were available for all the programmes of study in the DAT and made reference to the FHEQ and *Subject benchmark statement* for art and design. The audit team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for programmes of study leading to the named awards and that the standard of student achievement in the programmes is appropriate to the titles of the awards and to their location within the FHEQ.

224 There are many opportunities for staff and students to offer views on the courses. The course committees are well attended by staff and show that student issues are resolved. Students reported that informal contact with staff was often effective in resolving student concerns in a timely fashion. Course committees and other staff-student contacts are effective in involving students with the quality management of their courses. Overall, students met by the audit team expressed satisfaction with the support they received, however, there

was some concern over support and resources for the design element in courses. The Faculty has recently produced an Learning Resources Strategy 2005-08 and has a Faculty Computer Management Group to give additional consideration to computing needs. The Faculty may wish to consider further how it engages with students and responds to various student needs in taking forward these developments.

225 A sample of external examiner reports followed a common format which identified areas for consideration by programme teams. The audit team found that external examiners' reports were generally positive and that they were reviewed within the AR&E process with responses prepared by course leaders.

#### **Sociology, criminology and policing**

226 The Department of Human Sciences is situated within the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences and Humanities (ASSH) and the DAT focused on programmes leading to the following awards: BSc (Hons) Criminology; BSc (Hons) Sociology; BSc (Hons) Policing; BSc (Hons) Criminology and Sociology; and the BSc (Hons) Sociology with Criminology. The programme specifications had all been revised in October 2004 in preparation for the periodic review and included tables that mapped the learning outcomes associated with the 43 modules offered within the field. They were consistent with the FHEQ and had been designed to take account of the relevant benchmark statements, principally those for sociology and for social policy and administration. The BSc (Hons) Policing had also been developed in consultation with the West Mercia Constabulary and the Thames Valley Police Service taking account of their standards for professional training. At the time of the audit a benchmark statement for criminology had not been published by QAA, but the specification had been drawn up in the light of a draft statement produced by the British Society of Criminology. Overall, the audit team was satisfied that the standard of student achievement in the programmes covered by the DAT was appropriate to the awards and their

location within the FHEQ; and that the quality of the learning opportunities was suitable for the programmes of study leading to awards in sociology, criminology and policing.

227 A high proportion of the students recruited to these programmes were from the region and many combined their full-time studies with paid employment or had significant family responsibilities. A notable feature of the recent history of these programmes and the modules that comprised them had been changes designed to reduce the numbers of students who withdraw before completing their degrees. The Department had responded by playing a major part in the University College's retention project including using one of its first-year modules as a pilot to test ways of enhancing student progression. It was clear to the audit team that these innovations reflected a proactive engagement with the enhancement of teaching and learning methods.

228 The quality of the programme and module documentation provided to students was high. The students met by the audit team were clear about coursework assignments and examinations and the assessment criteria used. However, the students described some cases where assessment handbooks (in criminology) had been issued so late in a semester that deadlines had had to be extended. However, the most significant concern of students at the time of the audit concerned delay within the ASSH Faculty in issuing correct student timetables at the beginning of the second semester (see paragraph 239). It was reported that timetables were inaccurate, times were altered and rooms were changed without notification or had been double-booked. The team advises the University College to continue to monitor the steps it has taken to produce timetables sufficiently in advance so that it allows students to plan work and family commitments.

229 AR&E reports considered comments from external examiners and included responses to any suggestions or criticisms made. The audit team reviewed the external examiners' reports for the last three years and found in them overwhelming approval of the standards of student attainment and the quality of the curriculum.

### **The use made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure**

230 The audit team found that the University College had been engaging effectively with the Academic Infrastructure. The SED stated that the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, is 'embedded' in its policies and procedures and minutes of both institutional and faculty committees show awareness of the *Code*. The AAC monitors institutional use of the Academic Infrastructure, including the *Code*, and recommends changes in practice and policy where appropriate. Staff explained to the team that this has led to changes in guidance and procedures, such as working practices for the accreditation of prior learning. Responsibility for complying with external referents is devolved to faculties, supported by accurate guidance from the Academic Registry. The Academic Registry produces clear policy, guideline and procedural documents that reflect the spirit of the *Code*, although there is opportunity for the placement learning policy to be further developed in this respect (see paragraph 240).

231 Awards are defined in the institution's standard programme specifications and the audit team found that these are appropriately designed and written in a way that students would understand, although not all students seen by the team were familiar with them. The specifications make explicit reference to subject benchmarks and the team found that programmes within the scope of DATs were clearly designed to reflect the relevant benchmark statements. Minutes of validation meetings showed appropriate discussion of subject benchmark alignment. The specifications for programmes were also found to be consistent with the principles of the FHEQ.

### **The utility of the SED as an illustration of the institution's capacity to reflect upon its own strengths and limitations, and to act on these to enhance quality and standards**

232 The SED prepared for this audit provided a clear, accurate and comprehensive outline of the University College's framework for quality



assurance, maintenance of standards, and support of student learning. The SED stated that the University College believes that it has a strong framework and robust procedures for managing its quality and standards which 'reflect: a culture of continual review and enhancement; alignment with recognised standards and established codes of practice; engagement with the wider academic and professional community; and partnership between faculties and central services'.

233 The audit team's findings support the view expressed in the SED and give rise to overall broad confidence in the way in which quality and standards were being assured by the University College and its capacity for self-evaluation. However, it is the opinion of the team that the SED did not sufficiently emphasise the strengths and good practice of the institution.

### **Commentary on the institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards**

234 The SED identified as planned enhancements the introduction of a PSR process with greater focus on the 'subject'; greater focus on the 'programme' as a unit of management, rather than the 'field', to give a clear focus to student issues; and improvements to the effectiveness of the academic planning process. It also noted plans for changes to the control of collaborative provision, alongside those for improved links with regional schools and colleges to support raising aspirations and participation. Also included in the plans for enhancement were greater accessibility and timeliness of data to assist in the annual review process; improved electronic document management; and improved internal communications to address the issue of information overload. The audit team took particular note of the institution's plans for a range of measures aimed at further developing the comprehensive strategy for student retention, including the implementation of a year-long structure for first-year students. The team was also told of the application for University Title, and of major campus redevelopment intended to enhance the student experience.

235 The audit team noted through the SED that the University College undertook extensive monitoring of its performance in relation to externally and internally set benchmarks and used this information to seek improvements. It also supported staff in implementing improvements through a programme of well-attended staff development activities. The team concluded that the institution's approach represented good practice and exemplified a culture of enhancement and that the planned actions, once implemented, would substantially contribute to enhancing quality and standards (see paragraph 238).

### **Reliability of information**

236 Students met by the audit team commented favourably on the content and clarity of the Student Handbook, available in two forms, one for the University College and the other for students at partner institutions. This is supplemented by separate faculty handbooks and by programme and module guides. Student views reported in the SWS were overwhelmingly positive about the amount and quality of the written information they had received about their courses and the operation of the University College both before arrival and once in course.

237 The University College has adopted a systematic and planned approach to the fulfilment of the requirements of HEFCE 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, for the publication of information on teaching quality on the HERO TQI website. In 2003 an Academic Information Coordinator was appointed, part of whose responsibilities was to ensure that staff within the institution were aware of the publication requirements and that the data would be available and appropriately entered onto the TQI site. At the time of the audit the institution had provided entry, progression, achievement and destination data for its programmes together with summaries of external examiners' reports and of quality review events. It was already in a position to provide links to its programme specifications and it was clear that the University College would be able to meet the developing information requirements. It was

clear to the audit team that the University College's systematic and planned approach to the publication of information had ensured that it was more than meeting HEFCE requirements and that users could rely on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information provided.

### Features of good practice

238 The following features of good practice across the University College were identified during the audit:

- i the clarity, thoroughness, interrelatedness, management and presentation of documentation that supports the deliberative processes of the University College (paragraphs 29, 60, 180)
- ii the student retention project, in particular, its multifaceted action lines and use of performance indicators (paragraphs 84, 110, 142, 165, 213)
- iii the student focused culture to support the development of students through, for example: representation, consultation and collaboration with the Students' Union, the open-door policy of academic staff, the tutoring system, the proactive institutional support mechanisms, and the extent and usage of the Student Experience Survey (paragraphs 75, 77, 103, 114, 123, 124, 195)
- iv the culture of enhancement with, for example, benchmarking of the University College performance, the work of the School of Continuing Professional Education, and the extensive uptake of staff development opportunities (paragraphs 36, 82, 92, 96, 198, 207, 235)
- v the depth and scope of relationship at all levels with strategic further education college partners that contributes to the management of the quality of learning and securing of standards (paragraphs 132, 197).

### Recommendations for action

239 The University College is advised to:

- i ensure that the University College's policy on appraisal is consistently applied across the University College (paragraphs 88, 171, 199)
- ii determine how to speed up the deliberative process without destroying the consensual approach to managing change (paragraphs 33, 182)
- iii continue to monitor the steps it has taken to ensure the timeliness and accuracy of timetables produced for all students across the University College (paragraphs 106, 140, 168, 176, 228).

240 It would also be desirable for the University College to:

- i consider ensuring that the peer observation system works in a way that will retain the flexibility of the current system but will enable greater dissemination of good practice within and between faculties (paragraphs 95, 200)
- ii use the full range of information produced by the Planning Unit and other sources more extensively and consistently across the institution to monitor student progress and achievement and match support appropriately (paragraphs 83, 166, 208)
- iii ensure greater clarity and consistency (while allowing some measure of diversity) in the rolling out of student Personal Development Planning across the University College (paragraphs 125, 218)
- iv continue to find appropriate ways of ensuring the timeliness of the appointment of external examiners; the production of annual review and evaluation reports; and the convening of the Joint Combination Panels in validation schedules (paragraphs 43, 47, 184, 186, 205)
- v review practice and policy for placement learning to ensure that all placement providers for students undertaking work-based learning required by a programme are suitably prepared, whether or not the placement is arranged by the student or the University College (paragraphs 115, 136, 221, 230).

## **Appendix**

### **Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College's response to the audit report**

The University College welcomes QAA's finding that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the current and future management of the quality of the institution's programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

The University College is very pleased by the high number of positive comments within the report. These included: the thorough way in which we had responded to the last audit; our capacity for monitoring the impact of developments; the planned enhancements such as the periodic review process; improvements to the accessibility of data for the annual review process; the appropriateness of the learning support resources; and the comprehensive strategy to improve student retention.

The University College was also very pleased to have a number of areas identified as examples of good practice including: the student-centred culture; the overall culture of enhancement with extensive reference to external benchmarking; the very successful collaboration with FE partner colleges; the clarity and thoroughness of University College documentation; and the student retention project.

The institution fully accepts the findings of the report and will take all appropriate actions on the recommendations, some of which, the report acknowledges, were already being addressed. In a number of areas improvements have already been achieved. These recommendations will be the subject of discussion and action in the University College in 2005/06.

The University College was pleased that the audit team reported that the institution's systematic and planned approach to the publication of information had ensured that it was more than meeting HEFCE requirements and that users could rely on its accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness.

The University College would like to thank the audit team for their professionalism at all stages and for the constructive and courteous atmosphere created for all meetings throughout the conduct of the audit and also for the constructive manner in which all correspondence was conducted.

