



# Norwich University College of the Arts

## Institutional audit

November 2010

## Annex to the report

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## Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Norwich University College of the Arts (the University College) from 22 to 26 November 2010 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards the University College offers.

## Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

## Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit found that the University College had a strategic approach both to the enhancement of learning opportunities and to the identification and dissemination of good practice, which was not only systematic, active and embedded, but also inclusive in that it involved staff at all levels and in all areas.

## Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Since 2008, the University College's research degrees have been conferred by the University of the Arts London. The audit found that the arrangements for postgraduate research students, including those for support, supervision and assessment, with the exception of the lack of information to students on appeals, complaints and research misconduct, were effective and met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

## Published information

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

## Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the simplicity, clarity and flexibility of the frameworks for the design of the undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum (paragraph 28)
- the active engagement of staff with management information across the University College and the way in which this is used to inform planning and decision-making (paragraph 65)
- the integrated approach, involving both academic and support staff, to the identification and support of students with additional needs from their point of

- application to the University College through to the completion of their studies (paragraph 101 and 102)
- the strategic approach both to the enhancement of learning opportunities and to the identification and dissemination of good practice, which is not only systematic, active and embedded, but also inclusive in that it involves staff at all levels and in all areas (paragraph 118)
- the comprehensive support provided to postgraduate research students throughout their programme (paragraph 131).

## Recommendations for action

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

A recommendation for action that the team considers advisable:

- make information on research misconduct and student appeals and complaints procedures readily accessible to postgraduate research students by including these procedures in, for example, the Research Student Handbook (paragraph 134).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- consider ways in which it can ensure that minutes across all school and course committees are a meaningful record of the committees' deliberations (paragraphs 40 and 45)
- ensure that full external examiner reports are shared with student representatives (paragraph 77)
- produce guidance on the different forms of work-related learning it offers and the institutional procedures relating to these, including when learning agreements are required (paragraph 88)
- clarify who is responsible for providing personal/pastoral support to individual students, and to make this explicit to students in the documentation they receive (paragraph 104).

## Section 1: Introduction and background

### The institution and its mission

1 The Norwich University College of the Arts is a specialist higher education institution offering awards in the creative arts at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The origins of the University College can be traced back to 1845 when the Norwich School of Art and Design was established to provide designers for local industries. Degree-level provision has been offered since 1965. In 1989, the School merged with Great Yarmouth College of Art to form the Norfolk Institute of Art and Design and became an Associate College of the new Anglia Polytechnic (now Anglia Ruskin University), which validated the Institute's undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. In 1994, the Institute was incorporated as a higher education institution and renamed the Norwich School of Art and Design. The institution was granted its University College title by the Privy Council in 2008, after obtaining taught degree awarding powers in 2007. Research degrees are conferred by the University of the Arts London.

2 The campus is divided between seven buildings in the centre of Norwich. While offering a full range of programmes from Foundation Degrees to PhDs, the University

College is comparatively small with 1,520 full-time equivalent (FTEs) students in September 2010, although student numbers have grown significantly by 115 per cent since the last Institutional audit in 2003. At the time of this audit, there were 15 postgraduate research students. The University College's strategy has been to increase its critical mass, broaden its portfolio and meet increasing demand from applicants.

3 Following the appointment of a new Principal in 2009, Professor John Last, the University College reviewed its mission and developed a new strategic plan for 2009-14. The Strategic Plan sets out the institution's mission, vision, core values and strategic priorities. The University College's vision is to 'become the best specialist Higher Education Institution of art, design and media in the UK, with a contemporary industry focus and an international reputation for excellence'; and that 'through the growth and development of our teaching, research and knowledge transfer, we will become Norwich University of the Arts.'

4 The Strategic Plan identifies five strategic priorities as key commitments to the delivery of the mission and core values.

- The Student Experience focuses on the high quality that is expected of a specialist University College.
- Our Academic Portfolio foregrounds the need for provision that has contemporary industry relevance and reflects demand for new areas of knowledge and skill as well as more traditional practices.
- Professional Practice and External Engagement sets out the approach to high quality research, consultancy and professional practice.
- Expertise and Resources highlights commitments to developing the quality of staff, the estate and physical resources.
- Financial Sustainability and the Management of Risk.

5 At the time of the audit, the University College was structured into two schools; the School of Art and Media and the School of Design. The University College has, since 2007, embarked on a major refurbishment of its estates and specialist resources to create a discipline focus for its buildings and a greater sense of identity for the two schools.

## **The information base for the audit**

6 The University College provided the audit team with a Briefing Paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The index to the Briefing Paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the University College's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. The audit team had access to the University College's intranet and electronic access to all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper; in addition, the team was provided with paper copies of the sampling trails and main committee papers.

7 The Students' Union produced a student written submission (SWS) setting out the students' views on four areas: on the accuracy of the information provided to them; whether they know what is expected of them in order to succeed; the experience of students as learners; and their role in quality management. The audit team is grateful for the students' engagement with the process.

8 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous Institutional audit (May 2003)
- the follow-up report to the previous Institutional audit (November 2004)

- the report for the Review of postgraduate research degree programmes (July 2006)
- mid-cycle follow-up briefing paper (October 2007) and final report (February 2008)
- the Institutional Assessors' Final Report for the application for taught degree-awarding powers (September 2007)
- the University College's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

## Developments since the last audit

9 The previous Institutional audit took place in May 2003 and concluded that broad confidence could be placed in the School's management of both the quality of its programmes and the standards of awards it offered on behalf of the Anglia Polytechnic University. A number of features of good practice were identified.

10 The present audit team found that the University College had addressed all of the recommendations from the audit report. The recommendations and the University College's response are detailed below.

11 Recommendations for action considered in the last audit to be advisable were to:

- clarify student entitlements to learning support resources and consider further how their expectations about such resources might be managed
- make more effective use of all relevant external examiner reports in evaluating the quality of the whole course experience
- undertake a more comprehensive collection and rigorous analysis of student data at school and course level.

12 The University College acknowledges the importance of clear, accurate and up-to-date information to the delivery of a high quality student experience in its Quality Enhancement Policy. The quality of information it provides to students, both at programme and institution level, has, and continues to be, enhanced through collaboration between academic and support staff, with the intranet and the virtual learning environment (VLE) being used increasingly as a source of information. The University College's Student Agreement clarifies what students can expect from the institution and vice versa, and clearly conveys the partnership arrangement between the University College and its student body. Although the SWS expressed the view that few students knew about the Student Agreement, the audit team found in its meetings with students, including postgraduate research students, that they were aware of it and found it to be useful.

13 Procedures for the dissemination and use of external examiner reports have been strengthened since the last audit. A pro forma for providing responses to external examiner reports was developed to ensure a consistent approach across the institution to responding to issues raised by external examiners, to monitor action taken in response to comments and to ensure that examiners receive feedback. Responses to reports are made by course teams and heads of schools, the Director of Studies and other staff, as appropriate. Responses are sent to the external examiners by the Academic Registrar after they have been considered and approved by the Quality and Standards Committee.

14 With respect to the use of management information at both institution and course level, the use of student data has been significantly enhanced through the work of Registry, with data being used as part of the annual monitoring procedures. Annual Monitoring Reports present an analysis, supported by comprehensive data relating to student applications, offers, enrolment, progression and achievement for the previous year and consider three-year trends.

15 Matters from the last audit where the institution might benefit from taking further action were to:

- the further development of ownership of the external reference points at course level
- making more effective use of the school system for the dissemination of aspects of good practice.

16 In response to the 2003 audit report, the University College has put in place mechanisms to ensure that external reference points fully inform programme development through clear articulation of the Academic Infrastructure in the Staff Handbook on Quality Management and Enhancement, the undergraduate and postgraduate frameworks, the intranet and bespoke staff development events. The University College has developed a QAA Code of Practice Guidance, which signposts institutional reference points relevant to each precept. Measures taken to embed the Academic Infrastructure at programme level are described in Section 2.

17 Good practice is identified and disseminated through the annual monitoring process, programme approval and periodic review as well as through the annual Learning and Teaching Innovation Day. The University College has developed a template as part of the Annual Monitoring Report, which is considered by the Learning and Teaching Committee, and then reported to the Quality and Standards Committee and Academic Board. While the University College has put in place a more structured and visible approach to the dissemination of good practice, the need to put in place mechanisms to ensure that the impact of good practice is considered at a strategic level was acknowledged.

18 The audit team concluded that the University College has addressed effectively the recommendations of the 2003 audit report.

19 The 2006 QAA Review of postgraduate research degree programmes confirmed the University College's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programme provision as being appropriate and satisfactory, and three aspects of provision were cited as examples of good practice. Two recommendations were made; one concerning the support of staff involved in admission and selection procedures and one on the timescales for appeals. The audit team was able to confirm that the University College has responded satisfactorily to addressing these recommendations.

## **Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities**

20 The University College describes how it manages the academic standards of its awards and the quality of learning opportunities it provides in two documents: Student Regulations and Procedures and the Staff Handbook on Quality Management and Enhancement (Staff Handbook). In September 2010, it had implemented a common Undergraduate Framework and a common Postgraduate Framework for its portfolio of taught programmes, and at the time of the audit had in place a policy for Quality Enhancement, along with two related strategies: Student Experience, and Research and Consultancy.

21 Formal responsibility for standards and quality rests ultimately with the Academic Board, but because of the centrally focused structure of the University College's deliberative committees and the convergent patterns of presence of key officers on those committees, operational responsibility not only extends to the schools and the teaching staff in general,

but is effectively shared and unified. The audit team concluded from its meetings with staff that this was borne out in practice.

22 Of the key officers responsible for standards and quality - the Principal, the Deputy Principal (Academic Affairs and Research) (referred to as the Deputy Principal throughout the rest of this document), the Academic Registrar, the Director of Studies, the two heads of school, and the course leaders - all but the course leaders are members of the Senior Management Team (SMT). SMT reports to the Strategic Management Group (SMG), which has overall responsibility for the strategic and operational management of the University College. The Course Leaders Group, which considers matters relating to the management and development of academic provision and resources, reports to the SMT through the Director of Studies, who chairs the Group.

23 The relevant key committees, whose chairs are drawn from these key officers, are the Academic Board and its Learning and Teaching Committee, Research and Consultancy Committee and Quality and Standards Committee (QSC). QSC is itself the parent committee of the schools board of study, to which course committees are answerable, along with the undergraduate and postgraduate Awards and Resubmission Boards (all chaired by the Director of Studies) and the Appeals Committee (chaired by the Deputy Principal). The Deputy Principal also chairs all external course approval panels, while the Director of Studies chairs all internal approval events. The University College is responsible for postgraduate research students' learning provision through its Research Degrees Committee (chaired by the Deputy Principal), but these students are registered for awards of the University of the Arts London and, therefore, subject to the University's academic regulations (see Section 6).

24 QSC, which oversees all annual monitoring and evaluation on behalf of Academic Board, reports to the Board on institutional strengths and innovative practice and any perceived risks to institutional quality in an annual Institutional Overview Report.

25 There is a Course Assessment Board for each named undergraduate award and a single Final Award Board. Unit grades and final awards for taught postgraduate courses are agreed and ratified by a single MA Assessment and Award Board.

26 Periodic review of programmes normally takes place every five years, and those support areas judged to have the most significant student interface - Library, technical workshops, and Student Support - are also required to undertake periodic reviews.

## **Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards**

27 The University College identified, in its Briefing Paper, a number of mechanisms by which it assures the academic standards of its awards, namely course approval procedures, annual monitoring of provision, periodic reviews of provision, external examiners, its undergraduate and postgraduate frameworks and student feedback.

### **Approval, monitoring and review of award standards**

28 In September 2010, the University College revised and updated its undergraduate and postgraduate frameworks. The frameworks comprise of generic unit outlines with programme-specific project briefs, helping to guide students through specific areas of study and their assessment. Studio Practice, Business and Professional Studies, Contextual Studies and Personal Development Planning (PDP) are integrated within the generic



undergraduate units. The assessment structure at undergraduate level has been simplified to reduce the assessment load and produce a more coordinated approach to submission and assessment deadlines. Staff the audit team met had been involved in the development of the new Undergraduate Framework and were very supportive of it. While the team found that a more limited number of staff had been consulted on the Postgraduate Framework, the team considered the simplicity, clarity and flexibility of the frameworks for the design of the undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum to be a feature of good practice.

## **Programme approval and review**

29 Initial proposals for new course developments are discussed at schools board of study. Once initial planning approval has been given by the Strategic Management Group, the Senior Finance Manager and Director of Studies complete a Resource Planning Template for approval by the Senior Management Team (SMT). Course proposals are then reported to and approved by the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) to go forward for approval.

30 There is a three-stage process for both approval and periodic review. The first stage involves document verification by a panel, which normally comprises the Deputy Principal, Academic Registrar, and Director of Studies. The second stage is an internal approval or review event to set conditions and/or recommendations and amendments. Panels may include a member of support staff. With effect from 2010-11, students have been included as members of both course approval and periodic review panels. Since September 2009, all internal events have been chaired by the Director of Studies to ensure consistency. The Briefing Paper noted that different arrangements were put in place for the migration of awards to the new Undergraduate Framework. These consisted of additional internal staff members. The audit team noted that these arrangements were endorsed by the external and student panel members. The third and final stage of the approval process is an external event with external membership that can lay down conditions and recommendations. The panel includes an external academic member and an external member from the creative and cultural sector.

31 The audit team noted that the Staff Handbook on Quality Management and Enhancement (Staff Handbook) laid down detailed criteria for external panel members, which are approved by the Deputy Principal on behalf of QSC. There is a list of documentation required and agendas for meetings. These included the relevant elements of the Academic Infrastructure.

32 The Staff Handbook stated that if more than three conditions are set, the panel should review whether the proposal should be approved. The audit team saw evidence that in at least one situation this had been the case.

33 The team's responses to conditions and recommendations are written to a template. It is the responsibility of the Chair, Director of Studies, Head of School and Course Leader to ensure conditions and recommendations are met. The Deputy Principal, as chair of QSC, has responsibility for final approval before reporting on each event to QSC and Academic Board.

34 After the approval event, it is the responsibility of the Director of Studies to ensure programme specifications are prepared for the course to a template. Approval is indefinite, subject to periodic review.

35 The audit team was interested in how amendments to programmes occurred and how the University College prevented 'curriculum drift'. The team was told that, since the

introduction of the common frameworks, units could not be amended by programmes as they are generic. Amendments to project briefs may be made by course leaders in consultation with heads of schools and signed off by the Chair of QSC.

36 There is a procedure for programme withdrawal. It has to be approved by the Strategic Management Group (SMG) and is overseen by the Deputy Principal to guarantee the learning experience of the students on the programme as it is withdrawn.

37 Programmes are approved indefinitely but are subject to periodic review, normally every five years. The process described above for course approval is the same for the periodic review of provision, but there are additional documentation requirements for the panel; namely, a critical review by the course team and annual course evaluations and external examiner reports for the previous three years. In addition, external periodic review events have a different itinerary, with opportunities for the panel to view and discuss student work.

38 After meeting with the University College and studying the documentation provided, the audit team reached the conclusion that the process for course approval and periodic review was very rigorous.

## **Programme monitoring**

39 Annual monitoring is overseen by QSC on behalf of Academic Board. It includes both assurance and enhancement. Each programme undertakes an annual course evaluation (ACE). Detailed requirements for ACEs, which include the identification of risks and proposals for enhancement, are outlined in the Staff Handbook. The Staff Handbook gives details of evidence teams should consider when preparing their annual reports, which includes consideration of external examiners' reports, unit evaluations, annual student questionnaires, including the National Student Survey, and student data. ACEs feed into School Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs). ACEs are peer reviewed within the school and the reports from peer review were originally part of the AMR. The audit team observed that while the most recent AMRs did not contain a specific heading on peer review, comments from peer monitoring reports were discussed in the QSC monitoring meeting in January 2009, where the strengths and weaknesses of the ACEs reviewed were discussed, and actions decided to initiate improvements. Schools board of study have annual monitoring meetings where the ACEs are considered in some depth. QSC has an Annual Monitoring and Evaluation meeting that discusses the school AMRs in some depth. It was confirmed to the team that staff felt that responsibility for quality assurance was shared between all staff at the course level, with reporting upwards via the schools.

40 The Staff Handbook states that ACEs should be considered throughout the year with their enhancement plan. It states that review of the enhancement plan is a standard agenda item on course committee agendas; however this was not the case in the course committee minutes seen by the audit team. The team also considered that the minutes of course committees that they saw were lacking in detail of discussions that had taken place. The team considered it desirable for the University College to consider ways in which it can ensure that minutes across all schools and course committees are a meaningful record of the committees' deliberations.

41 While the audit team noted the rigour of both the ACEs and the school AMRs, both contained a great deal of information, and the school AMRs, with appendices, often amounted to in excess of 100 pages. The team was told that the University College was moving towards a more risk-based reporting system in the area of annual monitoring and there was a move towards relieving the burden on staff and to reporting by exception.

The team would encourage the University College in this streamlining of the annual monitoring process.

42 The final step in the annual reporting process is the preparation of an institutional overview report that is, along with an enhancement plan, reported to Academic Board. The effectiveness of annual monitoring is evaluated annually by the Academic Registrar in a report that goes before QSC. The audit team concluded that the process of annual monitoring of provision was rigorous and effective.

## External examiners

43 The Briefing Paper stated that there are robust procedures for the appointment of external examiners that reflect the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*). External examiners are nominated by school boards and approved by QSC and Academic Board. The Staff Handbook lays down very detailed processes for appointment, induction and the process of external examining.

44 Each award has one external examiner who attends course assessment boards (CABs). External examiners used to attend mid-session CABs but these were replaced in January 2010 by progress review panels that externals do not attend. As such, external examiners only attend an assessment board at the end of year. The success of this change will be monitored. A lead external is appointed from the University College's cohort of examiners to attend the single undergraduate Final Award Board. From September 2010, a single assessment and award board was introduced for all taught master's provision with an external examiner from each school.

45 External examiner reports go to the Principal, who forwards them, with comments, to the Course Leader, Head of School, Director of Studies and Deputy Principal. The Deputy Principal provides heads of school and course leaders with detailed commentary using a template. Reports are circulated to staff to include in annual monitoring. The audit team was told that external examiner reports were discussed at course committees and thus would be shared with student representatives on those committees. However, in the course committee minutes made available to the team, none showed a discussion of external examiner reports (see paragraph 77).

46 External examiner issues are considered by QSC and key matters are contained in the Institutional Overview Report, which is considered by Academic Board and governors. Completed responses to external examiner reports templates are circulated to externals with ACEs. The Briefing Paper stated that the University College recognises this had not always happened and is working to ensure that this is resolved.

47 The audit team concluded that the external examiner system was well-managed and operated effectively, such that it contributed to the security of the academic standards of the University College's awards.

## Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

48 The University College considers that the Academic Infrastructure is firmly embedded in the institutional framework for the management of standards, reflected in the Staff Handbook, the curriculum frameworks and the Student Regulations and Procedures. It was clear to the audit team that at institutional level, the University College engages with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. The Briefing Paper further stated that, during 2008-9 and 2009-10, course-level ownership of *The framework for higher*

*education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)* and subject benchmark statements was strengthened due to course leader and team involvement in the introduction of revised frameworks and the review of taught undergraduate and postgraduate provision. The audit team was able to verify this claim in its scrutiny of documentation and concluded that aspects of the Academic Infrastructure had been embedded within generic learning outcomes in the undergraduate and postgraduate frameworks. The team also found that course guides contain an articulation of subject and generic skills outlined in the appropriate subject benchmark statements.

49 Responsibility for monitoring and responding to the *Code of practice* lies with the Academic Registrar who produces the Norwich University College of the Arts QAA Code of Practice Guidance, which is updated every two years. In addition, external developments on the Academic Infrastructure are monitored by the Deputy Principal and discussed and implemented at QSC along with discussion of other external publications, such as those from HEFCE and QAA. The Briefing Paper stated that regular staff updates 'will continue to be provided on such developments'.

50 The audit team concluded that the University has responded appropriately to the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points to establish and maintain the academic standards of its awards.

## **Assessment policies and regulations**

51 All undergraduate and postgraduate programmes work within Assessment Procedures and Regulations. There is a Staff Handbook on Assessment and Feedback that complements the Student Regulations and Procedures and is supplemented by a University College Policy on Feedback to Students.

52 The Briefing Paper stated that a common undergraduate and postgraduate framework, generic unit outlines, common aims and learning outcomes, set of standardised pro formas for project briefs and assessment records are all designed to strengthen parity between awards. In addition, the audit team considered the Student Regulations to give clear guidance on progression, referral and resubmission. Any changes to student regulations are discussed at QSC and approved by Academic Board. The students who met the team said that they welcomed the new frameworks and felt that they had helped them to understand programme information more easily.

53 From September 2010, grading matrices were introduced for each level of undergraduate provision. Some students that the audit team met felt that they knew what they had to do to achieve particular grades and that the new grading matrices had helped with this awareness. However, others seemed unclear about what they needed to do to achieve certain grades, although they felt that this did not present a problem. The team would encourage the University College to raise the awareness of the grading matrices so that all students are aware of them. The team noted that the institution plans to introduce equivalent grading matrices for its taught postgraduate provision.

54 There is a four-page Policy on Feedback to Students that was written with the Student Unions' President and Student Representatives Group, and approved by QSC, Academic Board and the Student Representatives Group. It sets out timeframes for feedback. The students met by the team were positive about the feedback they received, stating that they received both formative and summative feedback, normally within two weeks of completing the work. Moderation and double marking is built into the process.

55 The audit team considered that the University College's arrangements for the assessment of students make an effective contribution to the management of academic standards.

## **Management information - statistics**

56 The Academic Registry has a full and well-defined annual cycle for the production, analysis and distribution of statistical data. Admissions data is monitored weekly using the UCAS Applications Tracker and senior management also consider monthly reports on withdrawals and intermissions, which include comparisons with the previous two years. Comparisons are also regularly made with the performance of relevant competitor institutions.

57 Most of these reports go for consideration to the University College's Senior Management Team and Strategic Management Group. In addition, Academic Board receives annual reports on student numbers, broken down to include age, gender, ethnicity, disability and areas of low participation, and on the University College's final awards. The latter also goes to QSC. Reports are, where appropriate, sent to course leaders. Registry also produces the data sets for annual monitoring at college, school and programme level and statistics on the performance of under-represented groups for the Equality and Diversity Committee.

58 Staff the audit team met were familiar with the datasets that were relevant to their responsibilities and there was good evidence that these datasets provided effective information that was being used to guide evaluations, planning and decision making both in Annual Monitoring Reports and by individuals and committees at all levels.

59 Overall, the team found that the University College was making good use of statistical information at unit, programme and institutional levels, enabling it to make comparisons and highlight trends in student performance and progression data as a basis for operational and strategic decision making.

## **Conclusion**

60 From the documentation that it reviewed and from its meetings with members of the institution, the audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University College's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

## **Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities**

### **Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points**

61 The audit team discussed with staff the use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in relation to course approval. It was told that the new Undergraduate Framework had been developed in line with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and that the Framework made the development process much easier. It was also told that there had been staff development days on the Academic Infrastructure and that information was available on the virtual learning environment (VLE).

62 The audit team noted that, at institutional level, the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points were discussed and implemented (see Section 2). The team also noted that the use of the FHEQ as a reference point in the development of aims and learning outcomes was commended in the report of the external approval event of the migration of the undergraduate curriculum in the School of Art and Media. Furthermore, the team noted that the report made a number of other recommendations relating to making more explicit reference to other elements of the Academic Infrastructure, namely, subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*). The team was able to confirm that these recommendations had been acted on. The team also noted the University College's use of other external reference points through, for example, the work of the schools' industry liaison groups.

63 The audit team came to the conclusion that the University College's use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points was well embedded at institutional level and was understood by staff who engaged with it.

## **Approval, monitoring and review of programmes**

64 The procedures for approval monitoring and review of programmes are well documented in the Staff Handbook on Quality Management and Enhancement (Staff Handbook) and were understood by the staff the audit team met. The process of course approval and periodic review involves an appropriate use of externality and the recommendations and conditions arising from such processes are monitored by the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC). The team found the processes for approval and review rigorous and effective with appropriate oversight by the institutional committees.

65 Programme monitoring involves an appropriate use of data, as clearly specified in the Staff Handbook. Annual course evaluations are discussed in the schools' boards of study annual monitoring meeting and feed into the School Annual Monitoring Report, which is considered in detail at the QSC annual monitoring meeting. All monitoring reports examined by the audit team recorded detailed discussions of the data and plans arising from such. Data was also discussed and responded to according to an annual timetable. The team found active engagement of staff with management information across the institution and the way this is used to inform planning and decision making to be a feature of good practice. School Annual Monitoring Reports feed into the Institutional Overview Report and Enhancement Plan, which is discussed at QSC and approved by Academic Board. In addition, the Academic Registrar produces an annual report on the effectiveness of the annual monitoring and evaluation processes for QSC and any amendments will be discussed by that committee.

66 Support areas also have annual evaluation reports. These are received by a working group of QSC and an overview report is prepared by the Academic Registrar, which is presented at the annual monitoring and evaluation meeting of QSC, alongside the two School Annual Monitoring Reports, the Research and Consultancy Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) and the Institutional Overview Report.

67 The University College has clear processes for programme withdrawal and amendments to programmes, which are subject to the approval of the Deputy Principal as chair of QSC.

68 The team concluded that, in relation to maintaining the quality of the students' learning opportunities, the University College's processes for programme approval, monitoring and review were effective.

## **Management information - feedback from students**

69 The central mechanism the University College uses for monitoring student views is the National Student Survey, which is given to first and second-year students as well as to the third year. This is subject to a careful analysis at all levels, with areas needing consideration being effectively identified and responded to. Response rates from students in the first two years have been relatively low, but are increasing and work is continuing, through course leaders and general publicity, to increase them further.

70 There is good student representation at all levels and there was evidence that their views are responded to and lead to change. In addition to communicating through their representatives, research postgraduate students complete the Higher Education Academy's Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), whose results are considered by the Research Degrees Committee. Taught postgraduate students' views are currently collected through representation and unit evaluations. From the current year, they will also be asked to complete the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey.

71 Students' views on units are collected using a standard Course Unit Evaluation Form. These are processed by the Academic Registry and returned to course leaders. Issues raised are addressed by course leaders and in the annual course monitoring process. While there was good evidence that students the audit team met were aware of changes generated by other forms of feedback, they were not clear about the outcomes of unit evaluation. The University College has made the decision, in consultation with the Students' Union President, to move to an online unit evaluation survey during 2010-11. The institution is aware of the difficulty of obtaining sufficiently large response rates with online surveys and is addressing the issue.

72 The audit team was told that student feedback on workshops is collected through workshop session evaluations, with matters raised being taken forward by the Resources Manager who reports to the Director of Studies, and who can respond if necessary. However, the students the audit team met were not aware of this process.

73 The audit team concluded that there was extensive and effective use made of management information collected from students in maintaining the quality of learning opportunities, but would encourage the University College to continue to develop ways of enhancing response rates, of feeding back to the general student body changes made in response to their input, particularly at unit level, and of increasing student involvement in the workshop session evaluations.

## **Role of students in quality assurance**

74 The University College values its close relationship with its student body and this is clearly articulated in the Quality Enhancement Policy and the institution's strategic priorities. The small and specialist nature of the University College facilitates a very close dialogue between staff and students on a day-to-day basis on issues relating to quality assurance and enhancement. This was clearly evident to the audit team in its meetings with staff and students. At a formal level, students are engaged in quality assurance through membership of course committees, schools board of study, the Student Representatives Group and other committees within the University College's deliberative framework. Students are involved in institutional policy and decision-making processes through representation by the Students' Union President on the Governing Body, Academic Board and its subcommittees, as well as the Appeals Committee and Student Conduct Committee. The Students' Union President is invited to the Principal's staff meetings and, less formally, there are regular meetings

between the Students' Union President and the Deputy Principal. In 2008, the University College took the decision to reduce the number of student representatives sitting on its committees for reasons of efficiency and with the full support of the Students' Union.

75 Students have been members of course approval panels and periodic review panels since 2009-10. The audit team was able to confirm that there was a student member on the migration events to the new frameworks and the course approval events in that year. Student representatives contribute to discussions about new course proposals and amendments to courses through their membership of course committees and schools board of study, and through meetings between approval or periodic review panels and groups of students. Students are members of admissions panels and have been members of selection panels for the appointment of staff.

76 At programme level, there are nominated student representatives on course committees and schools board of study. Students receive training from the Students' Union President and through the student representatives' guide. In their meeting with the audit team, students confirmed that the student representation system worked effectively, that students understood the representative role, and that training for student representatives, incorporating the provision of feedback to peers, was available through the Students' Union. Documentary evidence also confirmed to the team that student representation operated at all levels within the institution, allowing students to participate in quality management processes.

77 The audit team was informed at its meetings with students that, with the exception of the Students' Union President, they do not see external examiner reports, and the team confirmed from the evidence presented to it that these are not considered by course committees, at which student representatives are present. As a consequence, the team considers it desirable for the University College to ensure that full external examiner reports are shared with student representatives.

78 The University College acknowledged in its Briefing Paper the need to improve the way in which it provides feedback to students on actions that have been taken to address issues and concerns raised through committee meetings. Although this concern was also expressed by students to the audit team during the briefing visit, it was not confirmed when the team met students during the audit visit. The Staff Handbook provides details of a range of mechanisms for providing feedback to students. Specific actions the University College is taking in relation to communication with students are contained within the annual Enhancement Plan, which forms part of the Institutional Overview Report to Academic Board. It was apparent to the team that the institution is taking a strategic approach to actively addressing the provision of feedback to students.

79 Overall, the audit team formed the view that the University College's arrangements for student involvement in the management of the quality of learning opportunities were appropriate and effective.

## **Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities**

80 The University College is committed to supporting and promoting research, professional practice and consultancy, which underpins learning, teaching and professional development, and this is captured in the Research and Consultancy Strategy 2009-14. The definition of research at the University College is broad and encompasses research, professional practice, scholarly activity and consultancy. All staff have a contractual allocation of time for research and consultancy, the outputs from which are monitored



through the Research and Consultancy Review and summarised in the Research and Consultancy Annual Monitoring Report. This is completed by all staff and updated twice a year. It provides the University College with a record of staff activity and includes information on the impact of the research and professional practice of staff on the students' learning experience.

81 The Postgraduate Framework recognises the importance of providing students with the opportunity to engage in research and creative practice through a focus on learning about others' research, learning to do research and enquiry-based learning. There is a core unit, Research into Practice, which is mandatory for all awards. Similarly, the Undergraduate Framework requires course teams to ensure that the learning environment is informed by staff research and consultancy, and that students are equipped with appropriate research, reflection and study skills.

82 The links between research and scholarly activity and learning opportunities are described by course teams as part of programme approval and considered by internal and external panels. The audit team found no explicit reference in reports from periodic review panels on the links between research and learning and teaching, but this was evident in the critical reflection prepared by course teams. The University College is, therefore, encouraged to consider how it can ensure that the formal reports from periodic review panels fully articulate the debate and discussion that took place.

83 The impact of research and professional activities on the student experience is considered in the School Annual Monitoring Reports. The audit team noted that although Annual Monitoring Reports describe staff research activities in the preceding year, they are limited in the extent to which they consider how these enhance the student learning experience. The University College is encouraged to review how the impact of staff research and related activities on learning and teaching, captured in Annual Monitoring Reports, is more fully considered and articulated to both staff and students.

84 The audit team reviewed evidence, and heard from a range of staff, of the extensive engagement of course teams and students with industry and how this informs all aspects of the curriculum. The University College's students have won a wide range of prizes and awards at a national level and engage with industry through, among others, guest lectures, work-related learning, live project briefs and the newly created creative industry liaison groups within schools. The Ideas Factory, a new concept launched by the University College in 2010, focuses on the commercialisation of ideas, knowledge and creativity generated in the institution. The team formed the opinion that these activities, some of which are relatively new, have the potential to contribute significantly to the quality of the student learning experience in the future and help to equip students for their chosen profession.

85 The audit team concluded that the University College has effective arrangements for maintaining and advancing the link between research and scholarly activity with teaching and with students' learning opportunities.

## **Other modes of study**

86 Blended learning is used in some programmes at the University College to facilitate student engagement and online dialogue and debate. Students and staff are trained in the use of the VLE, with usage by students monitored by course leaders. Content at programme level is the responsibility of the respective course leaders.

87 The University College makes extensive use of work-related learning at undergraduate and postgraduate levels to provide students with insights into professional

practice and to give them the opportunity of gaining experience in their chosen profession. The framework used for work-related learning at the University College is defined in the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Framework documents and encompasses 'live' or simulated projects, workshops led by visiting artists and designers, work placements and guest lectures. External examiners are required in their reports to explicitly comment on the preparation of students for professional life, including work-related aspects of the curriculum and work placements. The University College has mapped its policies and procedures with respect to work-related learning against the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*, and the audit team confirmed that these aligned with the precepts. Work placements are considered as part of each course annual evaluation, with external examiners commenting on the value of these to the students' professional practice training. The team was able to confirm that the University College's close relationship with the creative industries significantly enhances both the student experience and their employability.

88 Learning agreements are used in work-related learning activities within particular units and, for work placements, where the responsibilities of relevant parties, including employers, are articulated and agreed. The audit team saw some evidence of guidance provided to employers in relation to work placements, but these focused on health and safety aspects of the placement, with very limited information on the responsibilities of the employer. In its meetings with a range of staff, the team heard conflicting views as to when learning agreements were required, although requirements are outlined in certain units. Details of learning agreements and a template are provided in the Undergraduate Framework, the Postgraduate Framework and course guides. This template is generic to all independent projects undertaken by students and not specific to work-related or placement learning. It is negotiated between the student and tutor with respect to the content, approach and outcome of the work and does not involve the respective responsibilities of the employer, if relevant. The team found that no guidance is given as to when a learning agreement should be completed. In the team's view, the lack of a consistent approach to and guidance on the use of learning agreements could result in students not fulfilling the requirements of the unit, and students and employers, where relevant, being unclear as to their respective responsibilities. The team, therefore, considered it desirable for the University College to produce guidance on the different forms of work-related learning it offers and the institutional procedures relating to these, including when learning agreements are required.

## **Resources for learning**

89 Estates and learning resources are the responsibility of the Deputy Principal (Finance and Resources) and the Principal has also taken the initiative in developing strategy in this area since his appointment in January 2009. In the last few years the University College has invested considerable time and money into improving both the physical structure and the use of its buildings in order to give them a clearer discipline focus. This has generally been appreciated by the students the audit team met. The only issue raised by students was the short-term difficulty in meeting the demands on existing workshop space of rapidly expanding courses.

90 Day-to-day running of the workshops is the responsibility of the Resources Manager, and his team of workshop managers, who reports to the Director of Studies. An annual report on the workshops is produced and considered by QSC as part of the annual monitoring process. Management of these is, therefore, well integrated into the learning and teaching needs of the institution. Short-term issues can be dealt with by the Director of Studies. Longer-term resource needs are fed into the annual planning cycle and decisions on whether to fund these are taken centrally by the Strategic Management Group.

91 When a new programme is proposed, the necessary resources are identified before approval is granted, and a three-year planning timeline is developed so that these are introduced as they are needed. Similarly, the expected needs of research students are identified before they are accepted to ensure that they can be met. The audit team agreed with the view of staff that the recent restructuring of taught programmes to align the taught postgraduate programmes with the undergraduate programmes has meant that the necessary learning resources can also be aligned more efficiently.

92 The library produces an annual report with an action plan and objectives set for the following year that goes forward to QSC. These will also feed into the current review of the Library Strategy 2005-10 with a view to incorporating the strategy within the relevant sections of the new Student Experience Strategy. Research students have access to other higher education institution libraries through the Society of College, National, and University Libraries and have full access to University of the Arts London libraries, including their online resources.

93 There is recognition by the University College that their intranet has not been very user friendly and this has hindered communications with students. This problem is being addressed and students the audit team met agreed that it had now improved. Students were also generally happy with the use of the VLE. The use of this by staff is variable with the sites being either course or unit based. The University College has no general overview of its usage and content, but leaves monitoring to course leaders.

94 The University College's view is that its learning resources compare well with other specialist institutions and, with the possible exception of the intranet, the evidence gathered by the audit team and the recent National Student Survey results confirm this view. The strategic planning of the development and use of the estate to meet the changing needs of the programmes has been particularly successful. Examples are the creation of a new media lab in the Monastery Building and the development of the gallery and digital resources in the Guntons Building.

95 The audit team, therefore, concluded that the University College's arrangements for the provision, allocation, and management of its learning resources were effective and fully met the needs of its students.

## **Admissions policy**

96 Admissions procedures are laid down in the University College's Student Regulations and Procedures, which are formulated by the Academic Registry in consultation with the Strategic Management Group. They are managed by the Academic Registry and the heads of schools, guided by a Marketing and Recruitment Strategy 2010-15. The Marketing and Recruitment Team coordinates a range of outreach and AimHigher activities with schools in low participation neighbourhoods and has established progression agreements with a number of schools and further education colleges. Applications for the 2010 entry rose by 30 per cent, well above the sector average for art and design.

97 Applicants are normally invited for interview and assessed on their academic qualifications and/or their portfolio of work. Admissions panels include more than one member of staff with relevant expertise. This, together with a centrally produced checklist of questions to be asked, ensures consistency. The panels also include a student to act as a critical friend. Applicants are given the opportunity to discuss any specific support needs with the interview panel, who forward this information on to the Student Support Office and, if necessary, for discussion by the Disability Support Group. The Student Support Office and

the course leader will meet the student prior to enrolment, involving the Health and Safety Officer if there are specific physical needs. Students may be admitted on the basis of both the accreditation of prior certificated learning and prior experiential learning, and there is a well-formulated policy for this procedure.

98 The audit team concluded that the University has in place appropriate and well-documented procedures for ensuring the effective implementation of an appropriate admissions policy, with a particular strength in identifying and responding to students' learning needs at an early stage.

## **Student support**

99 Student support is the responsibility of the Academic Registrar and the Academic Registry and is subdivided into student support and academic support.

100 There is a Student Support Office that operates a drop-in service. Counselling is contracted out to a local organisation, the Norwich Centre, with which the University College has a long-term relationship and, through the Student Support Manager, has regular liaison meetings. Support areas produce an annual report that includes data on monitoring of usage.

101 Academic support is the responsibility of an Assistant Registrar (Academic Support) and the Academic Support Office and refers to extenuating circumstances, intermissions, complaints, appeals, and disciplinary procedures. The Assistant Registrar (Academic Support) chairs the Co-ordinated Support Group, which includes the Student Support Manager and heads of school. This considers individual cases with academic and progression problems. These may be referred by course leaders, student support staff or the Registry. As with the Extenuating Circumstance Panel, having a single institutional committee dealing with these issues ensures that students receive consistency of treatment. It meets regularly during the year and considers students with ongoing problems, as well as those that have final assessment problems, to ensure that they are receiving all necessary support. It may be included in the discussions of the Disability Support Group on ways to meet the needs of applicants after they have been accepted (see paragraph 97). It also deals with general issues over procedures for dealing with students with academic difficulties.

102 The University College has a relatively high proportion of students with additional needs. The audit team found strong evidence from its meetings with students and staff and from the documentation it saw that the University College has very effective procedures for identifying and supporting these students. The team considered that the integrated approach, involving both academic and support staff, to the identification and support of students with additional needs from their point of application to the University College through to the completion of their studies, to be a feature of good practice.

103 There is a dedicated careers adviser, based in the library, who is proactive in contacting students and is readily available for students seeking advice. He also assists students in finding work-related learning opportunities and work experience. There is no formal institution-wide personal development planning system but personal development planning is embedded in many of the units, for example through the use of reflective journals. The University College is using its Teaching Enhancement and Student Success (TESS) funding from HEFCE to run one-off teaching projects to enhance the students' experience and career prospects, for example by increasing their contact with other artists and institutions.

104 Students do not have individual personal tutors. However, they do have clearly identified academic tutors, linked to units, with whom they work closely and who may act as personal tutors, if needed. Course administrators and year tutors, which larger programmes have, can also fulfil a pastoral role. While the students the audit team met felt well supported by this system, it was also apparent that there was some confusion among both students and staff about who was responsible for providing pastoral support. The team concluded that this lack of clarity might disadvantage students and that it would be desirable for the University College to clarify who is responsible for providing personal/pastoral support to individual students, and to make this explicit to students in the documentation they receive.

105 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University College's student support arrangements were comprehensive and very well integrated and, with the exception of a lack of clarity about responsibility for pastoral support by academic staff, fully met the students' needs.

### **Staff support (including staff development)**

106 Processes for staff support and development are outlined in the Human Resources Strategy 2007-10. A review of this to incorporate recent changes, for example, clearer guidance on promotion criteria, induction, mentoring and probation, developments of the staff development programme and the collection of data on staff continual professional development (CPD), is planned for completion in spring 2011. There have been a number of recent significant changes in staffing structure. Since August 2010, all staff have been assimilated onto the nationally agreed single pay spine. New lecturer and professorial levels have been introduced to enhance the career structure of academic staff. Previously, all staff were at senior lecturer level. Several new staff have been appointed at the lecturer level and two internal appointments to chairs have been made. There is also a new policy, introduced partly in response to student representation, to shift the staffing balance from part-time to more full-time staff. Part-time hourly paid staff are now in a tiered structure depending on the number of hours they work and linked to the single pay spine. There are no discretionary increments, but teaching quality is recognised through a Teaching Excellence Award for academic staff and a separate award for support staff, both of which are awarded at the graduation ceremony.

107 The University College's Strategic Plan 2009-14 includes a focus on the postgraduate qualifications, both discipline and teaching based, of staff, and on leadership and management training of appropriate staff. All new staff, if they do not already have a teaching qualification, are required to take a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching. Existing staff are also encouraged, with support, to take a Postgraduate Certificate or to become Fellows of the Higher Education Academy. All staff in substantive posts are expected to have a postgraduate qualification in a relevant discipline.

108 Staff development is the responsibility of the Director of Human Resources. There is an annual training programme, three staff development days, a Learning and Teaching Day and a Managers' Awayday. Full-time and fractional staff, but not hourly paid staff, unless they request it, have a well-structured Annual Development Review (ADR) with their line manager in which training needs are identified. These are passed to Human Resources for collation and to feed into the planning of Learning and Teaching Days and other forms of CPD. All staff that the audit team met felt that the ADR process was beneficial and they gave a number of good examples of how this had helped them. Staff, including hourly paid staff, also felt they had good access to training and general CPD resources. They receive an allocation of time for research and scholarly activity that also covers the Postgraduate Certificates being taken by new staff. TESS funds, in addition to direct teaching activities,

are also used to support staff attendance at academic conferences. A Research and Consultancy Coordinator was appointed in 2005 to facilitate staff activities in these areas.

109 New full-time and fractional staff have a rigorous induction process. Hourly paid staff have until recently had a less structured induction, largely dependent on contact with their course leader, but a new more formal process has now been introduced. New staff are allocated a mentor. Their six-month probation period does not currently include peer observation of their teaching, although it can include shadowing of teaching. It is formally structured with assessment interviews with their line manager at one, three and six months, which are reported to the Director of Human Resources when a recommendation for transfer to the established staff is made.

110 The University College is committed to using peer observation of teaching as a way of helping staff develop their teaching skills. The present procedure was introduced in 2008 and was very fully specified. It is currently not active and no observations will be undertaken in 2010-11 while a review of its value is being undertaken. The audit team would encourage the University College to develop a process that is accepted by the academic staff as a helpful way of developing their teaching skills.

## **Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement**

111 The University College not only claims that it proactively manages and continuously enhances the quality of the student experience, but includes in its Student Agreement the statement that a principle underpinning the partnership between the University College and the Students' Union is 'Enhancing the student experience'. To this end, the University College introduced a Quality Enhancement Policy in 2006, which focused on enhancement of the overall student experience provided collectively by all academic, support and other services. This Policy, which is still in force, involves the use of annual enhancement plans, through which the University College sets out to implement 'clear and measurable enhancements to the quality of the student experience'.

112 Enhancement planning involves a set of quality management procedures, such as annual monitoring, through which staff are required to reflect on performance and feedback and then plan future enhancements accordingly. An annual Institutional Overview Report, which the Quality and Standards Committee submits to Academic Board, provides an overview of performance during the reporting period and sets the enhancement agenda for the coming year. In order to reinforce the agenda, the term 'enhancement' is foregrounded, wherever possible. In 2010, the University College decided to replace its Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Student Support Strategy with a single Student Experience Strategy, which also foregrounds enhancement planning. Periodic reviews employ a common template in which the Recommendations section has a rubric beginning 'The following recommendations for quality enhancement were made by the panel...', and a section on Quality Assurance and Enhancement, which requires the panel to say whether or not it was satisfied that the course team was 'engaging in a programme of continuous enhancement'.

113 There is considerable evidence of an effective structure of mechanisms for the identification of enhancement opportunities and plans. The audit team identified the implementation in September 2010 of the new undergraduate and postgraduate frameworks as a typical and significant example of a deliberate institutional step designed to improve the student experience (the Framework Proposal included within its rationale a reduction of assessment load, a more coordinated approach to submission and assessment deadlines, greater potential for collaboration between programmes and students, and a structure suitable for part-time as well as full-time students). Other examples of deliberate

enhancement steps at institutional level were provided to the team in meetings with University College staff, who made cases for (a) the incorporation of contextual studies, and of business and professional practice into the Undergraduate Framework, (b) the ongoing development and enhancement of the virtual learning environment, and (c) the ongoing investment in and development of the estate in response to changes in the student population and their academic and social needs.

114 One element in the University College's regular and ongoing commitment to enhancement is its structure of procedures for identifying and disseminating items of good practice. Annual monitoring is one such procedure. The audit team consulted the School of Art and Media Annual Monitoring Report to Academic Board 2007-08 and found that the template required a review of the Undergraduate Enhancement Plan, including sections on 'Action' and 'Action taken'. The School was also required to propose items for the Institutional Enhancement Plan, and this included an item on 'Staff development on innovative practice in teaching, learning and assessment for all MA Course Leaders', as well as Annexes on 'Innovative Practice' (examples by programme identified by external examiners) and 'Course teams' responses to external examiner reports'. Similarly, when the team consulted the MA Film and Moving Image Course Committee minutes for 27 October 2010 it found a requirement to review of the Quality Enhancement Plan.

115 During 2006-07, the Learning and Teaching Committee agreed to change its focus from 'good' to 'innovative' practice and the audit team read the Institutional Overview Report to Academic Board 2008-09 and Enhancement Plan 2010. The latter had a section on 'Innovative practice identified through the annual monitoring and evaluation process' (section 4), which began with a definition of innovative practice ('the development and implementation of enhancements in learning, teaching and support for students; practice which has led to, or has the potential to lead to, measurable enhancement of the quality of the student experience'). It then listed 20 examples of innovative practice from across the Schools and support areas. A review of the 2010 Enhancement Plan recorded the fact that of the 23 items in the 2009 Enhancement Plan, which had resulted from the 2007-08 evaluation and monitoring process, 17 had been achieved and the others were brought forward into the 2010 Enhancement Plan.

116 Staff whom the audit team met provided them with many examples of internal good or innovative practice in particular areas, which had been identified, either by annual monitoring and review or by the use of external examiner reports, and which had then led on to affect improvements of the student experience in other areas. The means of dissemination was not restricted to the formal, committee-based procedures generated by annual monitoring, but included discussion at the Course Leaders Group, the publication of continual professional development events via the newsfeed on the intranet, and Learning and Teaching Days (the means by which peer assisted learning, for example, had been brought to the attention of all programmes).

117 At the time of the audit, the University College had established a robust framework and set of mechanisms for identifying and disseminating good practice but, as yet, no institution-wide follow-up procedures for logging their take-up and evaluating their impact. However, the University College routinely reviews progress with the delivery of its enhancement plans at certain moments. For example, at the beginning of the 2009-10 academic year, the Academic Registrar submitted an analysis of the National Student Survey to the Academic Board and reported that 'The scores for Organisation and Management remain disappointing (3.6) and below the sector mean. This was identified as a theme for enhancement during 2009-10 and initiatives to improve aspects of organisation and management have been developed for implementation in 2010-11. It is recommended that the University College continues to focus on course organisation and management as a key area for enhancement'. The Board called for a progress report in spring 2011.

118 The audit team concluded that it had found sufficient evidence to substantiate the University College's claim that its approach to enhancement was an integrated one, involving both a pervasive and inclusive culture of self-reflection in the interests of enhancement and an institutional system of deliberate planning and implementation of actions designed to improve the student experience. Indeed, the team identified as a feature of good practice the strategic approach both to the enhancement of learning opportunities and to the identification and dissemination of good practice, which is not only systematic, active and embedded, but also inclusive in that it involves staff at all levels and in all areas.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

119 At the time of the audit visit, the University College did not have, and had no plans to have, any collaborative partnerships leading to awards. It had, nevertheless, approved a comprehensive Collaborative Provision Policy and Procedures in 2008, and the audit team was informed that 'These procedures will be implemented at such time that the University College enters into developmental discussions with potential partners concerning formal collaborative arrangements'. The Policy and Procedures are written with reference to both the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*) and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and cover procedures for approval, monitoring and review of all types of collaboration provision, including validation, franchising, accreditation, dual award and articulation agreements. The team was confident that this document was sufficiently comprehensive to establish appropriate procedures if the University College decides to enter into any collaborative provision agreements in the near future.

## **Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students**

120 The University College has a validation arrangement with the University of the Arts London (UAL) to award its research degrees that commenced in 2008, which is formally articulated in a Memorandum of Agreement. Students undertake their programme of study at the University College.

### **The institution's processes for managing postgraduate research**

121 The University College's Research Degrees Committee monitors the management of research degrees, including admissions and student progress and ensures that its policies and procedures are aligned with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. The Research Degrees Committee reports to the Quality and Standards Committee and through this to Academic Board, as well as to the Research Degrees Sub-Committee at the UAL. Research students are represented on the Research Degrees Committee through a nominated student representative. Matters relating to research degree students are also considered in detail each year in a discrete section of the Research and Consultancy Annual Monitoring Report.

### **Research environment**

122 The University College provides support and training for supervisors of research students internally and through the UAL. Directors of Studies all are members of the University College Research Degrees Committee. Support and training for supervisors



feature in the Research and Consultancy Strategy and are reviewed each year in the Research and Consultancy Annual Monitoring Report. Informal support is provided to staff engaged in research by the University College's Research Coordinator.

123 One of the objectives of the University College's Research and Consultancy Strategy is to increase their research supervisory capacity and, concomitant with this, their number of research students, and progress in this is considered in the Research and Consultancy Annual Monitoring Report. The University College also acknowledges the need to enhance the research culture to support research students as a result of the outcomes of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise.

124 The audit team noted that research students are members of the University College's Research and Consultancy Network. The Network brings together staff and students engaged in not only research, but also professional practice, scholarly activity and consultancy through a series of research events and seminars throughout the year, involving both internal and external parties.

## **Selection, admission and induction of students**

125 Prospective research students submit a preliminary application to the University College, which is considered by the Research Degrees Committee. Guidance for applicants is provided in the application pack that is issued to applicants on request. If approved, applicants are invited to interview. Subject to a satisfactory interview, students then enrol as a research student at the University College at which point they are assigned a Director of Studies. Students then submit an application to register for a research degree, which is accompanied by a comprehensive training needs analysis to the University College Research Degrees Committee for consideration. The application for registration is then forwarded to the UAL Research Degrees Sub Committee for approval. Students are then registered as a research degree student at the UAL.

126 The University College's Student Agreement provides details of what research students can expect from the University College, and what it expects of the students. The University College has a comprehensive system of support for its research students, details of which are contained in the Research Student Handbook and the University College's Research Training Guide. Research students undergo induction by the University College and are also expected to attend three one-week training events in their first year at the UAL. In their meeting with the audit team, research students expressed that they felt very well supported in the early stages of and throughout their research degree programme.

127 On enrolment at the University College, at least two supervisors are appointed, one of whom acts as Director of Studies. The student's supervisory team is approved by the Research Degrees Committee when it considers the student's application to register and confirmed by the UAL Research Degrees Sub Committee. The University College has clear criteria for the appointment of supervisors based on those from UAL. Initial registration is for an unspecified research degree with the intention to complete an MPhil or PhD.

## **Progress and review**

128 At the end of the probation period, the degree for which the student is ultimately registered, an MPhil or PhD, is confirmed through the confirmation meeting. This includes the supervisory team and an appropriately experienced member of UAL academic staff. The report is considered by the University College's Research Degrees Committee and then forwarded to the UAL Research Degrees Sub-Committee for final approval.

129 Students have the right to appeal against the Committee's decision through UAL's procedures for appeals. The audit team noted, however, that the University College Research Student Handbook does not contain any information of the complaints or appeals process for research students.

130 The progress of research students is monitored formally through the annual report, which not only looks at progress and training throughout the year, but also agrees objectives for the forthcoming year. The annual report is prepared by the student's supervisory team and is considered by the University College's Research Degrees Committee. Any reports that indicate there are issues relating to student progress are forwarded to the UAL Research Degrees Sub-Committee.

## **Development of research and other skills**

131 The University College offers a diverse range of training opportunities to support its research students, both internally and through the UAL and links with GuildHE members through its Centre for Research Excellence, Support and Training. Comprehensive details of mandatory and optional training and related activities are provided in the Research Training Guide and the annual calendar of research events. Students complete the UAL Training Needs Analysis as part of the registration process, which identifies at an early stage key training needs and enables the student and their supervisor to review and update needs. New students attend three mandatory intensive research events at UAL and normally also complete the University College's master's level Research into Practice unit. Students may also attend research and consultancy events at the University College, research group meetings, research seminars and a range of other relevant events and activities both at the University College and through UAL. Students are required to complete, on an ongoing basis, a Research Development Portfolio, which serves as a form of personal development planning and provides a forum through which they can reflect on their progress and development needs. The audit team considered the comprehensive support provided by the University College to postgraduate research students throughout their programme to be a feature of good practice.

## **Feedback mechanisms**

132 The University College has both formal and informal means of gathering feedback from its community of research students. Each year students are asked to complete the University College's Postgraduate Research Survey, which is aligned with the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, the results from which are analysed and presented in the Research and Consultancy Annual Monitoring Report. This includes comprehensive responses by the Research Coordinator to issues raised by students. Feedback is also obtained from students through the Postgraduate Research Forum, at which results from the Postgraduate Research Survey are also discussed. At an informal level, students can discuss areas of concern with their supervisor and/or the University College's Research Coordinator as they arise.

## **Assessment**

133 Arrangements for the viva voce examination are made by the University College Academic Registry, the Research Coordinator and the students' Director of Studies in accordance with the UAL examination of research degree procedures. Students normally have two examiners; one of whom should be external to the University College and UAL, and an internal chair. Examiners are considered by the University College's Research Degrees Committee and approved by the UAL Research Degrees Sub-Committee. Students may request the presence of one of their supervisors as an observer if they wish. UAL has

special examination arrangements for students with specific learning difficulties that provide guidance for examiners on the conduct of the examination. Recommendations from the examination are submitted to the UAL Research Degrees Sub-Committee for approval.

## Representation, complaints and appeals

134 The University College follows the regulations of UAL with respect to appeals that are detailed in the UAL Research Degree Handbook and Regulations. Complaints are considered under the University College's complaints procedures. However, although the audit team noted the comprehensive nature of the University College's Research Student Handbook, this did not contain information for students on the process they should follow for complaints and appeals, nor did it contain information on research misconduct, including plagiarism. To ensure alignment with the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, the team considers it advisable that the institution makes information on research misconduct, and student appeals and complaints procedures, readily accessible to postgraduate research students by including these procedures in, for example, the Research Student Handbook.

## Conclusion

135 The audit team found that the arrangements for postgraduate research students, including those for support, supervision and assessment, with the exception of the lack of information to students on appeals, complaints and research misconduct, were effective and met the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

## Section 7: Published information

136 The University College believes that the accuracy and completeness of published information 'enhances transparency, promotes independent study, and helps with the management of student expectations'. When the Information Strategy ran out in 2010, its content fed into the new Student Experience Strategy and Student Agreement (both operative from September 2010). There is now no written document articulating an institutional policy on what information is published, but both the Strategy and the Agreement assure students that it will endeavour to provide 'accurate information before and during your course, with clear signposting to sources of additional information about the University College and its courses, services and procedures'. This is supplemented by more detailed assurances about the regular provision of accurate and helpful information on the academic framework, regulations, programme content, teaching methods, assessment, availability of staff, and up-to-date information of timetables.

137 The University College has in place an authorisation framework to ensure, as far as is possible, that the information it communicates to all stakeholders is accurate and up-to-date. Ultimately, the responsibility for the accuracy of published information rests with the Principal. The accuracy of the institution's prospectus, external website and marketing literature is the responsibility of the Director of Marketing, advised as necessary by other staff: academic content is overseen by the Director of Studies and support area content is overseen by the relevant member of the Senior Management Team. Programme specifications are prepared by the Director of Studies and signed off by the Deputy Principal.

138 Once registered, students' access to most information is via the intranet, and programme material is made available within it on the virtual learning environment. The accuracy of information published internally on the intranet or in the form of school or course guides (updated annually) is the responsibility of the relevant head of school and course

leaders, overseen by the Director of Studies, while information about support areas is maintained by the relevant support area manager. Management information is the responsibility of the Academic Registrar.

139 The University College regularly monitors students' views on the accuracy, accessibility and usefulness of the information it publishes. It conducted a survey of first year students in 2008-09 and found that, while 93 per cent of BA respondents rated the prospectus as good or excellent, only 74 per cent rated the website at this high level. The website was, therefore, redesigned and its control brought in-house for 2009-10 so that the speed of updating could be accelerated. The University College intends to survey new students again in 2010-11 to assess the impact of these changes.

140 In June 2010, the Academic Registrar provided the Academic Board with a report on the internal Annual Student Questionnaire and recommended that, while students felt that communication of amendments to programme information had improved over the previous year, there was a need for the University College to 'Publish clear guidance on methods of communication to students'. All students who took part in the focus groups that informed the student written submission reported that they had been largely satisfied with the information they had received before they had begun their programmes, although some students in one school felt that changes to programmes once they had started their programmes could have been communicated more effectively. Some students cited in the student written submission had believed that the intranet needed more regular updating and could be made easier to navigate.

141 Students told the audit team that the information they received when visiting and then applying to the University College had been accurate and that they had no criticisms of the ways in which the University College had described its programmes, but the team found that some students in recent years had been critical of the information received after registration. The 2008-09 periodic review of the BA (Hons) Textiles programme noted that 'students have commented that in previous years they had found the course handbook to be generally unhelpful'. Students told the team that, while some had found the Course Guide rather confusing and difficult to follow, the Postgraduate Handbook was felt to be clear and helpfully indexed. The University College has responded to student feedback by revising the Guide and reorganising its content into a navigable electronic document. The University College also publishes a student planner (Academic Diary 2010-2011), which not only provides a calendar for the academic year, including key dates for submitting work, and so on, but includes a range of important information on such things as academic and student support, and academic regulations in a brief but helpful form.

142 The audit team consulted a range of staff, students and published information, including the website, undergraduate prospectus, postgraduate prospectus, regulations and procedures, student planner, Research Student Handbook 2010-11, and sample course guides. It concluded that the University College had a comprehensive procedure for validating its externally and internally published information and it found no significant evidence that the procedure was not working or sound. Overall, the team concluded that reliance can be reasonably placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University College publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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