



The College of Law

Institutional audit

May 2011

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction	1
Outcomes of the Institutional audit	1
Institutional approach to quality enhancement	1
Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students.....	1
Published information.....	1
Features of good practice.....	1
Recommendations for action.....	2
Section 1: Introduction and background	2
The College and its mission	2
The information base for the audit.....	3
Developments since the grant of taught degree-awarding powers.....	4
Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.....	4
Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards	5
Approval, monitoring and review of award standards.....	5
External examiners.....	7
Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points	8
Assessment policies and regulations	8
Management information - statistics.....	9
Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities	10
Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points	11
Approval, monitoring and review of programmes	11
Management information - feedback from students	12
Role of students in quality assurance.....	13
Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities	13
Other modes of study	14
Resources for learning	15
Admissions policy.....	16
Student support.....	16
Staff support (including staff development)	17

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement	18
Section 5: Collaborative arrangements.....	20
Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students.....	20
Section 7: Published information	21

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited The College of Law (the College) from 3 to 6 May 2011 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the College offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The College of Law is an institution with a range of approaches to quality enhancement, which it does not specifically identify as such; these current approaches provide a good basis for the development of a strategic approach to quality enhancement. The College is building on its new cross-programme perspectives for the performance of quality assurance to create design protocols, which outline an institution-wide approach to enhancement. The audit team considers it desirable that the College establishes a structured institutional approach to quality enhancement, drawing on the range of existing activities, including scholarship, which improve the quality of learning opportunities.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

At the time of the audit, the College did not have any postgraduate research students.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the ways in which the College compiles, analyses and uses management information in quality assurance and enhancement (paragraph 46)
- the considered design of the College's online learning environment, which provides an integrated and comprehensive resource for both staff and students, and thereby promotes a culture of learning throughout the institution (paragraphs 79 and 80)
- the coherence of the approach to the design and delivery of programmes (paragraphs 78 to 80)
- the approach to the provision to students of effective careers and employability support and advice (paragraph 88)

Institutional audit: annex

- the strategic and effective approach to staff support and development (paragraphs 89 to 94).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- establish a systematic institutional framework for assessment and award (paragraph 42).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- define and formalise the relationship between Academic Board, the Innovation, Design and Production Board and the Operations Board in the context of the management of academic standards and quality (paragraph 13)
- give thought to extending the type and range of external involvement in the programme approval process (paragraph 23)
- establish a structured institutional approach to quality enhancement, drawing on the range of existing activities, including scholarship, which improve the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 103).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The College of Law (the College) is an educational charity, which is registered under the Charities Act 1993. It is constituted under a Royal Charter, which it first received in 1975 with the object of the 'advancement of legal education and the study of law in all its branches'. Legal ownership of the College, and ultimate responsibility for ensuring that it achieves its charitable objects, is vested in its Board of Governors. The College was granted taught degree-awarding powers in 2006.

2 The College's mission is to:

- promote access to justice and an awareness of the social and ethical responsibilities of lawyers
- provide market leading legal education that meets the needs of diverse student communities and promotes access to professional careers
- deliver excellent training and professional development for those engaged in the provision of legal services
- encourage innovation and enable lawyers to become self-reliant professionals
- provide thought-leadership within the legal services sector.

3 At the time of the audit, the College offered the following awards:

Undergraduate degrees

- LLB (for completion of a programme which incorporates the GDL and then either the BPTC or LPC)
- LLM in Professional Legal Practice/International Legal Practice

Postgraduate diplomas and certificates

- Postgraduate Diploma in Legal Practice
- Postgraduate Diploma in Bar Vocational Studies

Graduate diplomas and certificates

- Graduate Diploma in Law
- Diploma in Land Registration
- Certificate in Land Registration

4 On 1 October 2010 the following numbers of students were registered on the College's award bearing programmes:

- Full-time BPTC - 281
- Part-time BPTC - 94
- Full-time GDL - 1,425
- Part-time GDL - 648
- S mode GDL - 29
- Full-time LPC - 3,209
- Part-time LPC - 1,417
- S mode LLM - 122
- Land Registry qualification Certificate - 68
- Land Registry qualification Diploma - 95

5 In addition, about 10,000 students each year register for the College's post-qualification modules.

6 The College offers its programmes of study in a variety of full and part-time modes. The programmes are delivered both conventionally, through a national network of eight centres, and, increasingly, also via various forms of multimedia-enabled distance learning. The College's academic provision is characterised by:

- a narrow subject range, confined by the limitation of its Charter objectives to the study of law
- programmes which are integral, or at least closely related, to schemes of professional qualification or continuing education
- delivery to a large and diverse student population through a range of modes and geographically dispersed centres.

The information base for the audit

7 The College provided the audit team with a briefing paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trail selected by the team. The briefing paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the College's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. The team had access to the College's intranet where all of the documentary sources of evidence were available.

8 The students of the College produced a student written submission setting out the students' views on the accuracy of the information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management. The audit team is grateful to the students for an interesting, well-researched and informative submission.

9 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the scrutiny panel for the application for taught degree-awarding powers
- reports produced by other relevant bodies
- the College's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the grant of taught degree-awarding powers

10 Since the grant of taught degree awarding powers, the Academic Quality Council has been replaced by Academic Board 'for the purpose of academic governance'. Day to day management of academic activity is overseen by an Innovation, Design and Production Board and an Operations Board, responsible respectively for learning resources and for delivery of the academic provision.

11 The College has used its degree awarding powers to create: an LLB (for completing the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) and then the Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC) or the Legal Practice Course (LPC)); an LLM (Professional or International Legal Practice); Postgraduate Diplomas in Legal Practice and in Bar Vocational Studies, a Graduate Diploma in Law, and a Diploma and Certificate in Land Registration. At the time of the audit, the College was developing a two-year LLB. The College is considering, through the planning and design process, the implications of this type of programme in terms of learning and teaching, and for its student support provision.

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

12 The College does not have an overarching institutional code of practice or teaching, learning and assessment strategy. These matters are dealt with in the detailed documentation developed for each programme and module. There is also a College Awards Framework that sets out the basis on which modules and programmes are calibrated with the *Higher education credit framework for England* and with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

13 The College's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities lies in the oversight which Academic Board has of the management of academic standards and quality. In practice, an Innovation Design and Production Board (ID&P) and an Operations Board (OB), responsible respectively for learning resources and for programme delivery, and the Registry, undertake the day-to-day management of academic activity. Both of the boards report to Academic Board. There are no formal terms of reference for these boards that reflect the revised structures established after the grant of taught degree-awarding powers. While there was evidence that the boards did report to Academic Board as required, the audit team considered that it would be desirable for the College to define and formalise the relationship between Academic Board, the Innovation, Design and Production Board and the Operations Board in the context of the management of academic standards and quality.

14 Academic Board conducts much of its routine business through its five sub-committees: Course Approval, Routine Business, Honorary Degrees, Professorial Appointments and Degree Boards. The first three of these generally conduct their business by email. Academic Board has an annual cycle through which past activity carried out by the monthly function boards is systematically reviewed and future activity identified. A feature of

Academic Board's constitution is the proportion of external members. It includes at least four external members from academic higher education or professional education, at least two of whom should be from a legal background.

15 Academic standards and quality are thus managed both by deliberative instruments such as annual monitoring reports, which are aggregated in the cycle of Academic Board meetings, and by routine management, which is reported through the hierarchy of boards. The College believes that the revised framework provides for institutional coherence in the management of academic standards and quality, a view endorsed by the audit team on the basis of documentary and oral evidence examined in the course of the audit.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

16 Academic Board is responsible for setting and monitoring academic standards, as defined in its terms of reference. The terms of reference refer explicitly to the Board's responsibility for ensuring that academic standards be aligned with external academic reference points, including the *Subject benchmark statement: Law*, and those set by the professional bodies. The terms of reference also specify how, subject to oversight by the Board of Governors, Academic Board is accountable for the academic standards of College awards. Academic Board is also responsible for ensuring that the quality of academic provision encourages effective teaching and learning, and conforms with all applicable parts of the external Academic Infrastructure.

17 Academic Board fulfils its responsibilities for academic standards through consideration, approval and periodic re-approval of all modules and programmes that lead to College awards, including those where the College also seeks accreditation from external awarding bodies. Academic standards are also managed through the Board's confirmation of the appointment and removal of external examiners and its approval of changes to assessment regulations.

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

18 Academic Board approves and regularly reviews detailed procedures for the approval, re-approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes. It reports annually to the Board of Governors on its exercise of these responsibilities for academic standards and quality through an annual report to the Governors' Academic Audit Committee.

Programme Approval

19 Before obtaining degree awarding powers in 2006, the College delivered courses leading to awards that were regulated and validated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA), the Bar Standards Board (BSB), and the Joint Academic Stage Board (JASB). After obtaining taught degree-awarding powers, the College approved its own awards, some of which were made to students who had successfully completed the professional training courses. Thus, the College developed programme design and approval processes that allow it to align the degrees it awards with the qualifications validated by the professional bodies.

20 The first qualification approved by the College using its new powers was the LLB awarded to students who had successfully completed the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) and either the Legal Practice Course (LPC) or the Bar Vocational Course (BVC). The alignment of the externally validated qualifications with the College's award of the LLB was complicated since both the volumes of credit and the levels at which modules are assessed

in the vocational qualifications do not map easily onto the *Higher education credit framework for England*, which indicates 360 credits at Level 6 for the award of a bachelor's degree. In 2007, when the College approved its first LLB degree, students who successfully completed the combination of GDL and either the LPC or the BVC obtained 450 credits, some of which were at level 7 (master's level). After 2010, the total awarded credits for a revised and revalidated version of the LPC increased the credit total to 480: the College decided to require that students pass the entirety of the component programmes in order to be awarded the LLB. The College wished to maintain the integrity of the constituent programmes which was why it decided not to award the LLB at the point at which students had obtained the threshold of 360 credits.

21 At the time of the audit, the College was planning to introduce an LLB for non-graduates that would comprise 360 credits at Level 6. Approval was to be sought in 2011 for recruitment in 2012. The College recognises that it will need to consider questions of comparability with the current postgraduate LLB and that it will also need to explore ways of distinguishing the two degrees.

22 A detailed Course Approval Protocol sets out the stages and requirements that must be met before Academic Board will allow recruitment of students to a programme or module. The Board delegates authority to act on its behalf to a standing Course Approval Sub-committee, which in turn appoints a panel to carry out the detailed scrutiny of a new proposal. The Course Approval Sub-committee includes up to two external members of Academic Board. The scrutiny panel must include at least one external expert appointed because of particular relevant expertise. Other external experts and internal or external members of Academic Board may be appointed depending on the size and scope of the approval.

23 Records of the course approvals show that there were two external experts on the panels for the initial approvals of the LLB and LLM in 2007, and that, in addition, external members of Academic Board acted as panel chairs. In all other approvals to date, there was at least one external expert on the course approval panel. There was some overlap between external panel membership and individuals who previously or subsequently acted as external examiners. As the College seeks to extend the range of degrees approved to those admitted without a prior degree qualification and, perhaps in some cases, provided in collaboration with overseas institutions, the College may find it useful to include external experts with experience beyond the provision of law degrees. The audit team, therefore, considers it desirable that the College gives thought to extending the type and range of external involvement in the programme approval process. The College may find the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*, in particular precept three, a useful point of reference in this respect.

24 There are systematic arrangements for the annual monitoring of courses at all centres. The processes consider explicitly the management of academic standards and of the quality of the student learning experience. External examiners' reports and responses to them form a significant part of the annual monitoring documentation produced by the Registry, the Innovation Design and Production Board (ID&P) and the Operations Board (OB). A key point in the annual monitoring cycle occurs at the January meeting of Academic Board when the Board considers all the subsidiary documentation and a summative review of key issues prepared by the Registry Head of Quality Assurance. At this meeting, Academic Board explicitly confirms its confidence in the College's academic standards and their application. These conclusions and any issues that have been identified for further action feed into the Board's annual report to the Academic Audit Committee.

25 The College requires that all programmes be re-approved after a period of no longer than six years. The procedures are similar to those for initial programme approval but

with the addition of performance data collected from annual monitoring. The College's protocols specify the contents of a Course Review Document to be prepared by the course directors for presentation to a course review panel, constituted on the same basis as a course approval panel and with similar external membership.

26 At the time of the audit visit, no programmes had yet reached the point of periodic review. The first scheduled is the LLB, first approved in 2007 and due for periodic review in 2012. Nonetheless, the College's interactions with the professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) introduce activities which are on occasion close to periodic review in nature. For example, when the BSB introduced the new Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC) to replace the BVC, the College both internally approved the new programme and submitted it to the BSB for validation. These processes, which were successful, covered matters which would be considered in a Periodic Review.

27 The audit found that the protocols and frameworks published by the College, together with the detailed procedures used to design, approve and monitor its courses, provided a secure foundation for the management of academic standards.

External examiners

28 The approval of external examiners is formally the responsibility of Academic Board, which delegates authority in this respect to the Routine Business Sub-committee, which reports any new appointments to each meeting of the Board. Annually, at its September meeting, Academic Board receives a list of all external examiners to be involved in the assessment of programmes in the current academic year. The audit found that these arrangements allowed Academic Board to fulfil effectively its responsibilities in this area.

29 The criteria for the appointment of external examiners are clearly specified and are closely aligned to the relevant guidance in the *Code of practice*. The processes for nomination and approval are set out in the College protocols. External examiners are required to have appropriate standing, expertise and experience in relation to the relevant subject area and assessment. External examiners are generally appointed for no more than two consecutive three-year terms.

30 Particular characteristics of the selection of external examiners are that many are chosen to examine specific modules in which they have professional expertise, and that a significant proportion is drawn from lawyers in practice as well as from other higher education providers. External examiners for the LPC and the BPTC are initially selected by the SRA and BSB respectively and are subsequently considered through the College's approval mechanisms.

31 The College does not offer training to external examiners other than an initial induction meeting and detailed written guidance. Where external examiners have no previous experience of examining, the College asks them to work alongside an experienced examiner for a period of six months.

32 The audit team was provided with copies of external examiners' reports for all courses as well as a substantial digest, compiled by the Registry for Academic Board, recording all the comments and observations made by the external examiners. The examiners' reports and matters raised in them are set out by IP&D and OB in the annual monitoring documentation they compile for Academic Board together with accounts of the steps that have or will be taken in response. Responses are also reported back to the external examiners and the internal teaching teams.

33 The templates for external examiners reports required by the PSRBs and by the College are comprehensive and consistent with the guidance in the *Code of practice*. The examiners are asked to judge the appropriateness and comparability of the academic standards of assessment, the consistency of marking, and to comment on the quality and design of assessment, the performance of students and the administration of the processes. In the documentation seen by the audit team, the degree of involvement of external examiners at all stages, including the approval of all assessments and marking schemes before use, and the range and comprehensiveness of their comments, were notable, as were the thoroughness and detail of the College's responses. The audit confirmed that the College made strong and scrupulous use of external examiners in summative assessment. In the view of the audit team the external examining processes applied by the College are effective in contributing to the assurance of the academic standards of its awards.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

34 Both in its design of programmes and in the processes of approval that it has followed, the College has engaged explicitly with the Academic Infrastructure, in particular the *Subject benchmark statement: Law*, the H level descriptors in the FHEQ, the *Higher education credit framework for England* and the *Code of practice*. It also takes due account of the requirements of the PSRBs that validate some of its programmes, specifically the requirements of the BSB, SRA and JASB.

35 As already noted, the College does not have a learning and teaching strategy or internal code of practice that specify the academic standards and quality thresholds that it will apply. Rather, the documentation guiding course design and quality management refers directly to the QAA *Code of practice*. For example, the College 'Protocol for approval of new programme proposals, amendments to existing programmes re-approval of existing programmes, monitoring and periodic review of programmes' includes both the QAA *Code of practice* section on programme design, approval monitoring and review and that on collaborative provision. The audit team noted that this approach to external reference points, directing the attention of College staff to the relevant external documents, was the standard method of the College.

36 In 2009, Academic Board approved a College Awards Framework setting out the credit volumes and FHEQ levels of all its programmes. The function of the Framework was to articulate the relationships between the College's programmes, the academic standards in the Academic Infrastructure, and those required by the PSRBs. The PSRBs set classification and grade boundaries, which are not always easily mapped onto those that conventionally govern the award of honours degrees across the higher education sector. As pointed out earlier, a consequence is that some of the College's awards exceed in credit volume and levels the thresholds specified in the relevant external reference points. In the view of the audit team, the documentation available shows that the College has been appropriately careful and explicit in satisfactorily reconciling the various benchmarks with which its awards must comply. The College makes substantial and effective use of the Academic Infrastructure and other relevant external reference points in its management of academic standards.

Assessment policies and regulations

37 Academic Board is responsible for ensuring that assessment policies and procedures are consistent with the College's accountability for the academic standards of its awards. In practice the detailed consideration and approval of assessment regulations is carried out by the Routine Business Sub-committee of the Board.

38 The detail of the College's framework for the management of assessment is to be found in a number of places. There is guidance covering assessment design and the matching of assessment methods to learning outcomes. A college-wide set of protocols covers the conduct of assessments, including matters of procedure such as: submission of work; disruption to examinations; use of computers; candidates with special needs; resits, and other procedural issues. Most assessment regulations are specific to particular programmes and modules.

39 Most of the courses are taught in at least two modes, the A (Attendance) mode and the S (Supervised or distance learning) mode, and these may use different course materials and methods of assessment. In addition, the LPC is taught in modes specific to, and restricted to, the trainees of particular law firms. The GDL is taught and assessed in a range of modes: full-time, part-time, part-time distance learning, and in a part-time distance learning online modular mode. Because of the close links between teaching mode, learning outcomes and course materials, separate assessments are frequently developed for the different modes of study. The College, therefore, faces particular challenges in ensuring consistency of assessment across its eight centres and the variety of modes of learning.

40 The documentation prepared for each course, including the programme specifications, sets out the requirements for successful completion, classification rules, and the procedures for the finalisation of results at module and programme levels. The reasons why each programme has its specific assessment regulations are the need to comply with the requirements of the different PSRBs and because the College delivers its courses in a number of different modes that may require separate assessments. Relevant assessment information is contained in the Student Handbook for each programme.

41 A further assessment issue dealt with by the College is that the PSRBs require particular classification and grade boundaries. The BSB and the SRA set different boundaries: the threshold for the top award of Outstanding on the BTDC was 85 per cent compared with Distinction on the LPC, which was 70 per cent. The College has dealt with these difficulties by conducting extensive statistical modelling of past patterns of performance in the components the various programmes to assure itself of comparability of assessments and consistency in making its awards.

42 In the view of the audit team, the College has tackled appropriately the potential difficulties outlined above and its assessment regulations and procedures are designed to ensure that academic standards be applied consistently across the College and the variety of programmes and modes of delivery and assessment. Nonetheless, in the judgement of the team, it would be advisable for the College to consider establishing a systematic institutional framework for assessment and award that could be used to benchmark assessment across its various programmes and to inform the deliberations of course approval panels when deciding these matters.

Management information - statistics

43 The College collects two main types of statistics. Course statistics are assembled by the Registry from the data recorded on the student data system to monitor students' performance, progress and achievement. The Customer Insight Team conducts an annual student survey and collects teaching quality evaluation data on all programmes and modules. Both sets of information are used by teaching and administrative staff to assist in assuring consistency of academic standards, fairness in the assessment of students and to develop and improve courses.

44 As part of the annual monitoring cycle, Academic Board receives a substantial compendium of student performance and progression ordered by programme, centre and mode of delivery and distinguishing between students by gender, academic background, ethnic origin, disability and age. In addition, the Registry supplies an analysis of the course statistics, drawing attention to highlights, trends, anomalies, and the statistical significance of findings. This data is presented in a variety of formats, including tables, graphs and charts.

45 Academic Board has also regularly commissioned special analyses of the data on subjects such as differences in marking across modes and centres, on the performance of students with disabilities and special learning needs, and on whether the particular marking requirements of PSRBs led to differences in awards for students.

46 In an institution in which most students are attending programmes lasting no more than a year, it is useful if data can contribute to 'in-year' monitoring of progress and trends and so allow speedy assessment of the impact of changes to curricula, teaching or assessment. In its meetings with College staff, the audit team learnt of a number of examples where such effective use of data had been possible. In the opinion of the team, the ways in which the College compiles, analyses and uses management information contribute significantly to the management of academic standards and quality and, as such, are a feature of good practice.

47 There can be confidence in the College's current and likely future management of academic standards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

48 The College operates a distinctive model of learning delivery derived from the concept of 'learning by doing' and provided for students through a centrally managed integrated system of electronic and print-based courseware, the development of which is overseen by the Innovation Design and Production Board (ID&P). In the context of this model, key features are the role of ELITE (the College's virtual learning environment (VLE)) to support student learning, i-tutorials as preparation for workshop sessions and Test and Feedback exercises as tools for students and staff to monitor progress.

49 The College's approach to the design of courses and the production of teaching materials, largely carried out centrally by ID&P, means that its programmes are specified in detail in terms of curriculum, methods of instruction and learning, and standards of assessment. The links between the curriculum, learning outcomes and assessment are explicit in the course documentation and made clear in the materials provided to students.

50 Closely linked with the delivery of the learning model is the provision of a wide range of student support, overseen by the Operations Board. This includes support for students with disabilities, other student support services and extensive employability support. In this regard, the College recognises that the large majority of its students depend upon the College to help them secure post-college employment and is committed to providing a wide range of employability services for students whatever their mode of study.

51 Academic Board's responsibility for the quality of learning opportunities is exercised mainly through its effective oversight of the annual monitoring procedures. In January each year, the Board considers performance and quality reviews for each programme area, including student comments and feedback, and any action plans that arise from these reviews. At its May meeting the Board assesses progress against the action plans approved at the previous January meeting.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

52 The College makes extensive use of the Academic Infrastructure and the applicable sections of the *Code of practice* to benchmark its provision. There was evidence that the College had engaged in detailed and often painstaking work to assure itself that its policies and procedures aligned with the relevant sections of the *Code of practice* and to make this explicit to staff by various means, such as including the relevant precepts as appendices to documents. In this way, the College seeks to ensure that the use of sections of the *Code of practice* is consistent across the institution.

53 The requirements of the professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) represent a further set of external reference points informing the provision of learning opportunities for programmes validated by these bodies. The PSRBs are prescriptive about the level and quality of the learning resources provided for students; the College is confident that it sets its standards of provision in this area above the minimum requirements of the PSRBs. The audit noted that the College benchmarks its library provision against the Statement of Standards for University Law Library Provision, thus providing an additional level of security in relation to the management of learning opportunities.

54 On the basis of its study of documentation and in meetings with staff and students, the audit team formed the view that the College made effective use of the *Code of practice* and other relevant external reference points in its management of learning opportunities. The team noted that the high degree of reliance on the *Code of practice* is an approach which has generally served the College well to date. It has enabled the College to have confidence in the quality of its wider provision of student support and will provide a sound basis for the College to develop further its own policies and procedures for quality management.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

55 There are clearly defined procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes, which are set out in a range of documentation. These procedures are communicated to staff via the Registry website; staff met by the audit team confirmed their awareness of this. Likewise, the College ensures that students and external participants involved in its processes are fully prepared and informed.

56 The procedures allow the College to ensure the continuing availability of appropriate learning opportunities for students at all stages. For example, course and new module approval procedures require consideration of the business case before the proposal is passed to ID&P for detailed development, which will include the production of documentation and any specific courseware required. Documentation is then scrutinised by the Registry's Head of Quality Assurance for compliance with College protocols and alignment with any relevant sections of the *Code of practice* before proceeding to formal approval.

57 The annual monitoring process overseen by Academic Board is intended, among other things, to permit an opportunity to focus on those resources and services, which most directly support student learning. The audit team had the opportunity to study annual monitoring reports and the Registry-level summary reports considering the issues raised. From its conversations with staff and its study of documentation, the team reached the conclusion that the College has in place a comprehensive system for gathering data to inform annual course monitoring.

58 At present the College is conducting its annual monitoring on a programme-by-programme basis but, in the interests of ensuring consistency of practice and of gaining a

college-wide view of the management of learning opportunities, it is in the process of moving towards a cross-programme approach, reflecting the College's wider strategic intention to adopt a more holistic overview of academic standards and quality.

59 In line with this intention, at the second stage of the current annual monitoring cycle, namely its meeting in January 2011, Academic Board also received college-level reports from ID&P and Operations Board along with the programme monitoring reports. These reports were further amplified by a summative review prepared by the Head of Quality Assurance. This data feeds into the review of academic quality included in the Annual Report made by Academic Board to the Academic Audit Committee and into the associated Action Plan. Academic Board receives a further report on progress against the Action Plan at its final meeting of the academic year, representing the third stage of the annual monitoring process.

60 The procedures for annual monitoring have been updated and rationalised partly in response to the comments of the Degree-Awarding Powers Report in 2006, which commented on 'voluminous, not to say excessive, documentation'. The audit team noted that the paperwork produced by the annual monitoring processes and considered by Academic Board at its January meeting, while appropriate and useful, continued to be very substantial and, in the view of the team, potentially difficult to consider effectively at a single meeting.

61 Academic Board has not yet completed a cycle of annual monitoring conducted on the basis of the strengthened procedures but senior staff take the view that the additional monitoring layer at institutional level will provide further assurance to the College that its management of learning opportunities for students enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes of their programmes. The audit team recognised the added value of this new approach and would support the College as it develops its practice and procedures in this area.

62 As noted above, at the time of the audit no programme had reached the stage of periodic review.

Management information - feedback from students

63 To inform its management of learning opportunities, the College collects student feedback through the annual student survey and through Teaching Quality Evaluation Forms (TQEF) distributed to students at the end of each module. The information is collated centrally and used not only as a student-led input into the annual monitoring process, but also as a means of evaluating tutor performance.

64 Student input to the review and approval processes is typically secured by means of focus groups where student views on the operation of the programme in question are used to inform its future development. It is also the practice of the College formally to pilot a new learning method before introducing it across the College, and to secure student feedback in this context. Similarly, new programmes are subject to an additional level of quality monitoring during their first year of operation, including the use of structured focus groups with students.

Student feedback mechanisms

65 Staff Student Liaison Committees (SSLC) are organised in all centres for all programmes and modes of study and represent an opportunity, which is valued by students, to raise matters of concern directly with staff. Such concerns are frequently, although not exclusively, of a minor operational nature or relate to opportunities for social interaction.

Students met by the audit team were fully aware of the existence of the SSLC and its role as a channel for expressing student views, and had made effective use of it in the context of a recent administrative error affecting the processing of examination results. Students were also clear that the responsibility for feeding back on actions taken in response to student views lay with staff and the team saw evidence of effective ways in which staff had done so. SSLC meetings are minuted and the minutes are available on ELITE. The College does not participate in the National Student Survey (NSS) but expects to do so in the context of the new undergraduate LLB.

Briefing, training and support

66 Prospective student representatives receive a short briefing on the requirements of the role but are not otherwise trained or supported to discharge it. In large part, this derives from the fact that the College's current students are all postgraduates and the current student body is generally familiar with the role of a class representative from previous higher education experience. The College does not yet have a formal Students' Union organisation or equivalent; in the context of the plans to introduce an undergraduate LLB, consideration has been given to the possibility of establishing a Students' Union in the future. In these circumstances, it is also recognised by the College that there may also be a need for training for the role of student representative.

Comprehensiveness of feedback mechanisms and institutional oversight

67 In the view of the audit team, the College's arrangements for obtaining and processing student feedback ensure that all sectors of the current student body have opportunities to represent their views on the management of learning opportunities, and to do so in a variety of ways, through questionnaires, surveys and participation in focus groups. While much of this information is gathered at local level in the centres, it is all collated and processed centrally and the College maintains effective oversight at institutional level through the Operations Board.

Overall effectiveness

68 On the basis of its study of documentation and its discussions with students and staff, the audit team reached the view that the College maintains close contact with its student body and that it employs effective mechanisms to ensure that student views are taken into consideration in the management of learning opportunities.

Role of students in quality assurance

69 As outlined above, the College makes extensive use of a range of student feedback in monitoring and course development processes and the SSLC plays a useful role in promoting discussion between staff and students. Beyond that, there is currently no provision for student representation in college-level committees, such as Academic Board. It remains to be decided whether such representation would be considered appropriate when the new undergraduate degree has admitted its first student cohort.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

70 The College's strategic approach to research and scholarly activity is closely aligned with the needs of its distinctive learning model where the primary requirements are to ensure the currency of the syllabi and the efficient production of the learning resources required to deliver them. The College is clear that the support it gives to its designers

ensures that they have access to the legal and pedagogic knowledge which is necessary for these objectives to be achieved. Equally, the College is clear that its staff development programme and associated performance management processes ensure the consistent use of these resources across the College.

71 The College is confident, therefore, that its approach to research and scholarship contributes very effectively to learning opportunities. The audit team saw much evidence to support this contention and likewise recognises that in this area the College engages in update activity designed to ensure that the College's learning materials keep pace with changes in legislation.

72 The audit team was nonetheless interested to know more about the scholarship supporting the design and development of the learning model and the ways in which College staff ensured that their pedagogical knowledge remained as current as their legal knowledge. In this respect, the College has particularly benefitted from its long-standing relationship with the Institute of Learning Technology at the Open University and the contributions it makes to the annual Open University Law School conferences and training days. Further, some College staff present their work at national conferences and the work of the College in e-delivery of legal education has also attracted interest from other law faculties in the UK and abroad.

73 From its discussions with staff, the audit team formed the view that there was a broader spectrum of scholarly activity taking place in the College than was suggested in the briefing paper, and that much of this activity is of interest and relevance to the College's strategic objective of being a leader in legal education. However, as this activity is not taking place within a systematic or formalised framework, the College may be missing a valuable opportunity to contribute to wider debates in this area. In the view of the team, given the contribution of this activity to the management of learning opportunities for students, there could be strategic merit for the College to consider a place for such activity within a broader strategy for learning and teaching.

Other modes of study

74 The College has introduced online distance learning, known as the S (Supervised) mode of study, for some of its programmes, including the Legal Practice Course (LPC) and the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL), which are also available in Attendance mode, and the LLM in International Legal Practice (only available in S mode). Current numbers of students studying in this mode are low but are expected to grow.

75 In line with the College's normal practice, the LPC S mode was piloted by part-time students taking one or two electives and the effectiveness of the learning method and courseware was closely monitored and analysed before the full programme was put forward for validation. Similarly, a special training programme was prepared prior to its introduction, to enable tutors involved in the delivery of the LLM in Professional International Legal Practice to discharge their role as facilitators and supervisors.

76 While the content of the programmes delivered in S mode is identical to those delivered in A mode (where there is an A mode of study available), some special provisions have been made to ensure that the learning opportunities and resources made available to students enable them to achieve the learning outcomes of their programmes. As mentioned below, the provision of employability support is an inherent component of the learning model and the College has put in place a range of e-resources to support S mode students. In addition, UK-based S mode students are formally attached to either the Manchester or the Bloomsbury centre, where they may make use of all of the facilities and resources available

to A mode students. On the basis of its study of documentation and its discussions with students, it was the view of the audit team that the College has made effective arrangements for maintaining the learning opportunities for students studying online and at a distance.

Resources for learning

77 Centre libraries are well-resourced with PCs, statutory materials and texts, study manuals and workshop guides, printing and photocopying facilities. The overall impression from students about library resources and staff was extremely positive, and students told the audit team that they made good use of libraries for studying and for accessing electronic resources. The College strives for consistency and equity of provision across its centres and students may access resources within centres other than their own; students told the audit team that flexibility is such that they can change centre during the course if personal circumstances change. Library resources are considered by the College to be sufficient except for some 'annual pinch points', a view repeated in the student written submission. College-wide silence rules have recently been introduced to remedy the difficulty of noise levels in some centres, partly in response to student feedback.

Electronic Legal Interactive Training Environment (ELITE)

78 The College characterises its approach to learning and teaching as 'learning by doing' which, in aiming to simulate legal practice, requires students to assume responsibility for their own learning, with staff acting as facilitators or supervisors rather than as instructors. This approach is explained in student handbooks. Programmes are designed for delivery through an integrated set of electronic and multimedia 'courseware' available to students and staff through the College's online learning environment, ELITE, regardless of centre or mode of study. Courseware includes i-tutorials (multimedia packages replacing lectures) with Test and Feedback exercises to help students prepare for the workshop sessions, which are the main focus of face-to-face learning; it also includes demonstrations and 'webinars', and development materials and is well understood and embedded throughout the College.

79 Courseware is developed on a college-wide basis by senior staff - 'designers' - working in teams; tutors are involved in updating material, although they can also become involved in design, and designers also carry teaching responsibilities. To date, all College students have been graduates; in designing the new LLB degree, the design team is researching sixth form pedagogy and likely learning backgrounds to ensure that courseware will be fit for the purpose for the stage at which undergraduate students enter the College.

80 The College views ELITE, which was commended in the student written submission, as integral to its learning model and thus to the delivery of its programmes. The audit team heard from students that the College's interactive and participative approach was a distinctive strength, and that they valued ELITE and its comprehensive and user-friendly resources, including academic and support services. The audit found that the library and IT provision were well resourced and much appreciated by students, as was the College's learning model. The team came to the conclusion that the considered design of the College's online learning environment, which provides an integrated and comprehensive resource for both staff and students, and thereby promotes a culture of learning throughout the College, was a feature of good practice. The audit also found the coherence of the approach to the design and delivery of programmes to be a feature of good practice in the College's management of learning opportunities.

Admissions policy

81 The criteria for individual programmes and modes of study, including appeals procedures, are set out in the College's admissions policy and in the information provided for each programme. Decisions are made centrally and are non-selective apart from those for the Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC). Decisions are based on 'objectively determinable and verifiable criteria' of which the most important is the applicant's record of prior achievement; this normally means at least a second class honours degree and automatic offers are made as far as possible. International students are required to have a score of 7.5 in IELTS.

82 Applicants for the BPTC, made through the Bar Standards Board (BSB), must also achieve a threshold pass in the BSB aptitude test; despite heavy over-subscription, interviews are the exception. Students who met the audit team suggested that interviews might, however, be useful to identify any needs for English language or other academic support. They also indicated that, while the admissions process was generally straightforward, more clarity before acceptance about career prospects would have been helpful. At the time of the audit, the full range of admissions criteria for the new LLB degree, including the IELTS score, had still to be confirmed.

83 The College's diversity policy sets out its commitment to assisting the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) and the BSB in their aim of achieving diversity, in its widest sense, in the legal profession, and the audit team saw evidence of regular consideration at Academic Board of statistical analyses of intake and achievement throughout the College.

Student support

84 Students on non legal firm-specific programmes are assigned a personal tutor from the outset, normally one of their academic tutors, and it was very clear to the audit team that students, especially part-time students, appreciated the ongoing contact and support that tutors provide, including through the open door policy. The team learned that the personal tutoring programme was being developed further. Specialist services, such as counselling and learning support, are provided in each centre as required; comprehensive information about disability and learning support is available through ELITE and students who met the team were clear about how to access support services.

85 College policies, and the range of support available, in practice mostly for dyslexia, are set out clearly and students are asked to self-refer as soon as possible in order to agree a personal learning contract and so that teaching staff may be briefed. Demographic data is used initially to plan provision. The College then uses management information to identify, and proactively contact, students who may need support; their subsequent performance is carefully monitored. Staff at all levels who met the audit team were alert to the likely different support needs, both academic and personal, of potential entrants to the undergraduate LLB.

86 The SWS referred to initial difficulties faced by science graduates unused to academic and legal writing. Students who met the audit team also raised the issue of English language support for international students, which is under discussion within the College. The College will no doubt wish to consider further its provision in this area in the light of the introduction of the new LLB degree.

87 As a specialist institution with centres enabling students to study in their home area, the College has a clear focus on employability skills and links to regional employers. Careers and pro bono services are well staffed depending on the number of students without traineeships or pupillages. Once students accept their places, employability support is made

available, including a virtual careers service through ELITE, workshops, a mentoring scheme and one-to-one interviews with specialist consultants; the service is also available to alumni. The SWS expressed some dissatisfaction in the availability, although not the quality, of employability services in some centres, particularly for part-time students, and indicated that pre-acceptance information about employment prospects would be helpful, a view shared by students who met the audit team. In responding to issues raised by its own student survey and by the SWS, the College acknowledged that clearer information should be made available and is developing a policy on minimum levels of careers and pro bono support. The team learned that online careers support for S mode students had been developed and would in future be delivered through ELITE to enable more coherent and consistent provision. The College plans to expand these online resources to form the basis of employability provision for the new LLB students.

88 Based on consideration of available documentation and other material, and on its discussion with staff and students, the audit team found the College's approach to the provision to students of careers and employability support and advice to be a feature of good practice.

Staff support (including staff development)

89 The College considers staff support and development for both academic staff and business professionals to be key aspects of its overall approach to quality enhancement and places great emphasis on its tutors' ability to facilitate student learning. Information about working in the College is publicly available online and detailed information about staff training, development and career progression is accessible through ELITE. Whether full-time or part-time, academic staff ('tutors') are professionally qualified with legal practice experience, are usually recruited from practice and must maintain professional currency. The SWS highlighted the value of practice insights given by tutors, a view reiterated by students who met the audit team.

90 The induction process for tutors, set out in a comprehensive staff handbook, includes a mix of face-to-face and interactive online activities during their first six months; they undertake a course on Teaching in Higher Education in their second year and then apply to become Fellows of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). They are then expected to apply for promotion to Senior Tutor, which is the College's career grade and to progress to further development opportunities and positions of responsibility, always carrying out some teaching. The College supports staff by paying HEA application fees, subscriptions to relevant professional academic bodies, and fees for attendance at external seminars and conferences on legal, practice-related or pedagogic topics. The current policy of staff undertaking an Open University module, and subsequently applying for HEA membership, is well-established.

91 New staff are assigned a mentor for their first two years and ongoing support for staff is provided through tutor notes for workshops, marking guidance, regular team meetings, programme-specific training sessions, peer observation of teaching and observation of classroom practice by senior staff. Reports from these observations form part of annual staff evaluation, as do student evaluations (TQEF); an annual summary of TQEFs is reported to Academic Board and the expectation is that staff will score at least 4 out of 5.

92 The College operates a performance related pay scheme for career grade staff, based partly on teaching quality. This is separate from the annual Career Management Review (CMR), which is regarded as a developmental process and is informed by the tutor's learning development log covering subject knowledge, pedagogic skills and contact with practice. The College holds an annual training week in each centre, attended by all

academic staff, which includes both college-wide and centre-specific dimensions. Topics include academic and pedagogic issues, and tutors have input into topics covered. Staff who met the audit team confirmed that there were regular opportunities to meet within centres and across centres to discuss both teaching and student support issues.

93 At the time of the audit, a new career structure had recently been introduced and explained to staff at centre meetings. It offers career development opportunities in curriculum development and course design (as 'designers') as well as in programme and staff management roles. Multimedia training programmes are available through ELITE, in addition to face-to-face sessions, to support staff taking on new roles. The audit team heard from staff that the introduction of the new LLB degree presents additional staff development opportunities in central courseware design and in course delivery. The team concluded that, by developing online and interactive staff training materials accessed through ELITE, the College was extending, and reinforcing, its 'learning by doing' philosophy.

94 The College stated in its briefing paper that its key academic staff development priorities were: preparing new staff to conduct classes and assessments; enabling them to become confirmed in post and then to become senior tutors; ensuring that they remain equipped to carry out those roles and responsibilities; and to progress within the College's career structure. Through its reading of the documentation available to it, and from discussion with students and with staff at all levels, the audit team considered the College's strategic and effective approach to staff support and development to be a feature of good practice in the management of learning opportunities.

Overall effectiveness

95 Based on its study of documentation and meetings with staff and students, the audit team took the view that the College has effective procedures and systems in place for maintaining the quality of student learning opportunities. The introduction of a college-wide approach to annual monitoring will further strengthen the College's procedures in this area. There can be confidence in the College's current and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Developing an ethos which expects and encourages the enhancement of learning opportunities

96 The College's approach to quality enhancement is implicit, and is currently not explicitly distinguished either from routine procedures such as the updating of learning resources, staff development and the dissemination of good practice, or from one-off projects such as the planning of the new LLB. The College is responsive to student feedback through both informal and formal channels and makes use of management information to take an evidence-based approach to the monitoring of pedagogic effectiveness. Strategic use of focus groups with students and with alumni is a regular part of the development of new programmes. These activities are not captured in the conventional language of enhancement or articulated into an overall strategic approach.

97 Planning and design are central mechanisms in the College's approach to the assurance of standards and quality of learning opportunities, and hence a great deal of what can, with justice, be described as systematic quality enhancement is currently undertaken in this context. A good example of significant investment in the quality of student learning opportunities is the use of the virtual learning environment ELITE as a platform for the online delivery of course content through videocasts (iTutorials) and for feedback to students on

their progress (multiple choice 'test and feedback' tasks), where the technology is harnessed to supporting student learning in ways which students themselves reported to be effective. Students noted some issues with the currency of iTutorials, a drawback of particular costs in this technological platform. Another good example is the centrally-designed face-to-face workshops, with their sequences of tasks and challenges that model aspects of legal practice, a 'learning style' appreciated by the graduate learners currently enrolled in the College.

98 The Innovation Design and Production Board is responsible for the 'development of learning and assessment strategies across new and existing programmes'. The Director of Learning, Quality and Assessment manages seven practice heads, each overseeing design work in specific areas of legal practice, who have additional responsibility for leading 'specific design enhancement initiatives'.

Encouraging, supporting and disseminating good practice

99 The College has effective networks for disseminating good practice between centres, and between staff involved in design and in delivery. The new career development structure, and a new approach to the commissioning and scheduling of design work will formalise these interactions in job descriptions and intermediate management roles. In addition to face-to-face meetings and teleconferencing, the College makes use of ELITE to engage staff in collegial reflection, for example, in the induction programme, 'Talking the College', employing the same learning methodologies as are used to engage the students, including distributed learning methods and multimedia resources.

100 Planned staff development opportunities make a significant contribution to quality enhancement. Staff involvement in pedagogically and content-focused training activity is mandatory. The Summer Training Programme has the scope to draw on external perspectives on legal education. Although the College requires and supports application for individual HEA fellowship, links to the enhancement activities of the relevant HEA subject centre are significant but not systematic.

Identifying opportunities for enhancement

101 The fact that the College does not have a formally documented institutional learning and teaching strategy that sets out the College's educational policy means that there is not an overarching statement of principle to which specific programme teaching methodologies or plans for new programmes can be aligned or tested; examples are 'learning by doing' as a style of instruction, or 'development progression as a feature of the learning methodology'. Nor is it clear what the forum is in the College for a future assessment of the currency of the 'learning by doing' ethos in relation to sector-wide developments in pedagogy, or in relation to the College's own strategic goals as a leader in professional legal education. Elements of such a set of principles are dispersed through the documentation but could usefully be gathered in one place to lend support to the College's desire to achieve a cross-programme approach to academic quality more generally.

102 Enhancement is not recognised in the centres under that description: the idea of 'taking deliberate steps to improve student learning opportunities' was understood as indicating responses to student feedback, for example, the noise policy for libraries, and not as systematic activity to implement and test the principles of strategic approaches to learning and teaching. The redefinition of 'design, update and QA' through the implementation of the 'Future Design' initiative, a reorganisation of the planning, execution and quality control of design work, has significant positive implications for quality assurance and for quality enhancement. The development of career paths for tutors and designers represents an

additional benefit and has the potential to disseminate an institutional understanding of enhancement.

103 The College has a range of approaches to quality enhancement, which it does not specifically identify as such; these current approaches provide a good basis for the development of a strategic approach to quality enhancement. The College is building on new cross-programme perspectives for the performance of quality assurance to create design protocols, which outline an institution-wide approach to enhancement. The audit team considers it desirable that the College establishes a structured institutional approach to quality enhancement, drawing on the range of existing activities, including scholarship, which improve the quality of learning opportunities.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

104 To date, the College's only involvement in collaborative provision has been as a partner of the Open University (OU) through extensive input to its LLB programme, with the OU being responsible for management of academic standards and quality; an annual report on the arrangement is considered by Academic Board. Staff reported that the relationship was very much one of mutual benefit and sharing of expertise both in information technology and in the development of syllabi, assessments and courseware. For example, College staff attend a joint conference with OU staff twice a year to discuss pedagogic research. The experience of working with the OU is informing the planning, design and delivery of the new LLB degree.

105 The College indicated in its briefing paper that, as it was not involved in collaborative arrangements on its own account, it had as yet no formal policies in place. At the time of the audit visit, a Framework for Collaborative Provision, set against the *Code of practice*, was under development, within which any proposed partner and programme could be evaluated against the College's mission and strategic priorities. As, at the time of the audit, the Framework had not been fully drafted for consideration by Academic Board, the audit team considered it would be premature for it to discuss it in any detail.

106 The audit team was told that the College was likely to proceed cautiously in developing collaborative provision, using its own learning model and working with equivalent institutions in other countries. At the time of the audit, the College was developing a London-based programme, with some teaching input from US staff, to enable successful students to apply for the New York Bar examination. It had also concluded an agreement in principle with a European university with a view to providing an undergraduate degree delivered in English and covering both jurisdictions. The College will wish to ensure that it does not use award titles for these developments that are not specified in the FHEQ.

107 Based on its reading of the documentation available to it, and on discussions with senior staff, the audit team would encourage the College in the development of its collaborative provision framework. The framework will enable the College to be ready to evaluate future opportunities and potential partners, and to ensure the effective management of the academic standards and quality of any subsequently approved programmes.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

108 At the time of the audit, the College did not have any postgraduate research students.

Section 7: Published information

109 Information for prospective students available through the College's website is essentially promotional, and its currency is the responsibility of the Marketing Director. Some students referred to a tension between recruitment imperatives and the management of student expectations with respect to future legal employment. There was some evidence of difficulties in acquiring information encountered by prospective applicants to a new centre.

110 Students were able to identify the appropriate information with respect to induction into the College's approach to legal education and into its systems, although some felt this could have been provided at an earlier stage. Communication of this information is carried out by the Admissions team in the Customer Contact Centre, which reports, like the Marketing Director, to a Business Development Board.

111 Student handbooks for each programme are produced by the Innovation Design and Production Board (ID&P). The handbooks contain statements about outcomes, content, structure, learning methods, assessment, including criteria and a guide to regulations, complaints procedures together with a calendar and guidance on student support and the management and monitoring of the course. The course handbooks are points of reference in induction and in the personal tutor system.

112 Students whom the audit team met were generally satisfied with the accuracy of the information provided to them. Some students considered that the material provided could be more emphatic about the intensity of the study programmes and that additional information about the availability of traineeships and pupillages would be helpful to applicants.

113 The audit team found that, overall, reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the academic standards of its awards.

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