



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

**October 2007**

## **Annex to the report**

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## Introduction

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

### Outcomes of the institutional audit

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

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

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement

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

### Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

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

### Published information

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

### Features of good practice

- the University College's considered and measured approach to managing the process of merger which has, through the careful management of risk and judicious prioritisation of action, ensured the maintenance of standards and quality (paragraph 61)
- the pre-meetings held between committee chairs and student representatives to brief the representative on forthcoming agenda items in order to encourage informed participation (paragraph 91)
- the University College's commitment to create links between research and teaching by supporting pedagogic research, research clusters and projects that are open to student support and technical staff as well as academic staff (paragraph 95)

- developments in English language support that focus on specific needs at different academic levels and that relate to English for the Creative Arts (paragraph 117)
- the deliberate and systematic approach to fostering of enhancement across the University College (paragraph 138).

### Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- develop a robust process for managing the discontinuation of courses. The institution might find the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*, published by QAA, a point of reference in this respect (paragraph 33)
- develop robust processes for ensuring that professional body requirements and reports are considered fully at appropriate points in the approval, monitoring, and review of courses (paragraphs 49 and 50)
- ensure that a more systematic and robust procedure is put in place for the approval of regulatory documentation that is locally produced by partner institutions under the terms of the current and potential future collaborative agreements (paragraph 145).

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- review the arrangements for access to resources in support of learning, in particular the opening hours of the Library and Learning Centres (paragraph 100)
- reflect upon the complexity of its current arrangements in terms of roles, responsibilities and deliberative structures relating to the research support function to enhance further the postgraduate research student experience (paragraph 150).

## Section 1: Introduction and background

### The institution and its mission

1 The University College of the Creative Arts at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester (the University College) was formed through the merger of The Surrey Institute of Art and Design, University College (The Surrey Institute) and the Kent Institute of Art and Design (KIAD) in August 2005. The Surrey Institute had held taught degree awarding powers since 1992 and in the same year KIAD was accredited by the University of Kent to award its degrees. At the point of merger, KIAD dissolved and The Surrey Institute remained the legal entity, renamed as the University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester and approved by the Privy Council. Quality assurance and other academic policies and procedures have been predicated largely upon those of The Surrey Institute, to preserve the regulatory basis on which taught degree-awarding powers have historically been exercised. The University College is led by an Executive Team, supported by a Senior Management Team made up of heads of colleges and heads of departments.

2 Upon merger, the previous academic structures of faculties (The Surrey Institute) and schools (KIAD) were reorganised to form five Colleges (at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester) that became the principal academic units of the University College. The heads of college report to the Deputy Rector (Strategic Planning) and lead developments to the academic portfolio in each individual College and, as members of the Academic Board and the Academic Policy Quality and Standards Committee (APQS), the development of institutional quality management and enhancement policies and procedures. Each Head of College has a Deputy (Farnham, as a larger scale unit, having two), a Resource Manager and a College Registrar. The key academic managers of taught provision are the directors of studies who

manage academic groupings within each college organised on the basis of cognate subjects and courses. A Research Coordinator, at professorial or readership level, oversees staff and student research activities in each College. Academic-related and professional services departments are managed centrally, with heads reporting either to the Deputy Rector (Quality and the Student Experience) or to one of the Pro-Rectors.

3 The mission of the University College is 'to excel as a university for the arts which fosters creativity through local connections and global aspirations'. The University College provides over 80 specialist programmes in the creative arts across the five campuses and at the time of the audit there were approximately 5,000 undergraduate and 1,400 further education students enrolled across a range of programmes relating to art, design, architecture, media and communication. At postgraduate level, there were approximately 150 postgraduate taught and 30 postgraduate research students.

4 Prior to merger, both of the predecessor institutions offered research degrees under validation arrangements with different university partners. KIAD had offered research degrees validated by the University of Kent since 1996 and The Surrey Institute offered research degrees validated by the University of Brighton from 1999. As part of preparation for merger, the predecessor institutions undertook an evaluation of the respective validating bodies and chose to extend the Memorandum of Co-operation with the University of Brighton to cover all of its postgraduate research provision from 2006-07 (see paragraph 146).

5 At the time of the audit the University College operated a validation arrangement with one other higher education institution, originally established by The Surrey Institute in 1993, and a small number of articulation arrangements that recognise specific qualifications offered by a partner institution for advanced entry to specified University College courses.

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

6 The audit team had access to the reports on the following QAA reviews: the Institutional audit for The Surrey Institute, May 2003; the Review of research degree programmes, July 2006; and the Foundation Degree review report for The Surrey Institute of Fashion, June 2005. The team was also provided with reports produced by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, on request from the University College.

7 The University College provided the audit team with a Briefing Paper outlining its approach to managing quality and standards, supporting information as cited in the Briefing Paper, and sets of documents relating to the 'sampling' audit trails selected by the team.

8 The Students' Union produced a written submission covering the accuracy of the information provided for students, the experience of students as learners and students' involvement in quality processes. The written submission was informed by analysis of minutes and attendance by student representatives on various University College committees, the results of the University College 2006 institutional survey, student focus groups and a survey of students via a social networking forum.

9 The audit team was given full access to the University College's internal documents on the intranet. It also met groups of staff and students, according to a programme agreed with the University College.

### **Developments since the last audit**

10 The Institutional audit report for The Surrey Institute (2003) reported a judgment of 'broad confidence' in the management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

11 The Briefing Paper provided a detailed outline of the developments since the last audit, the most significant of which has been the merger of the two predecessor institutions to form the

University College and the subsequent harmonisation of institutional policy, procedures and regulations. The groundwork for this merger was undertaken in 2004 through the development of an interim Academic Strategy designed to inform the academic direction of the new University College. This was further supplemented by a 'Quality Assurance Plan for Merger' developed by a working group with membership drawn from both predecessor institutions and by an operational plan also developed jointly by the predecessor institutions. The aim of this work was to prioritise and complete the development and implementation of a common framework for the management of quality and standards by the beginning of 2007-08. The work has been monitored by the APQS and is now nearing completion.

12 Other developments that have taken place have sought to address the recommendations for action set out in the audit report. The Surrey Institute took action to ensure that the standard of awards offered by its collaborative partner was consistently equivalent to the standard of awards within the Institute. This was done through a statement articulating how academic standards are set and monitored, and a series of staff development activities during 2004-05, including observation of The Surrey Institute's validation and review events and the establishment of 'Quality Enhancement Tours', where course leaders present a sample of final-year work to a group of peers from the University College to promote a common interpretation of the grading matrix and a shared understanding of excellence within creative arts education. The oversight of assessment outcomes has been strengthened further through University College representation on the partner's central committee responsible for quality and standards. In 2007, this committee compared the achievement of students from the partner college and the University College over a four-year period and noted that the percentage of First and Upper Second class degrees awarded across the two institutions had converged over the period.

13 The Surrey Institute also took steps to ensure consistent use of the Academic Infrastructure. This work, which was ongoing at the time of audit in 2003, has been concluded and, since the merger, the University College has adopted a number of mechanisms to improve consistency of approach. Other developments in response to the audit report included forging links with employers and professional organisations at institutional and subject level; establishing industrial advisory panels to contribute to curriculum development; creating the Knowledge Transfer Office as a central point of contact for business and community interaction with knowledge transfer coordinators instituted in each College. In addition, employer feedback is now systematically considered as part of the validation, annual monitoring and periodic review process.

14 In the light of the 2003 audit, The Surrey Institute reviewed its policy on external verification with particular regard to the issue of the sample sizes of student work seen by external examiners. This was further reviewed during a harmonisation process, and guidance published in the University College's Assessment Policy Handbook clarifies expectations. While the University College has addressed the majority of the issues raised in relation to this matter, it has elected not to take a mandatory approach to all Firsts and Fails being seen by external examiners. The external examiner reports seen by the audit team confirmed that external examiners are broadly satisfied with the sampling arrangements currently in place.

15 The University College has also addressed the consistency with which external examiners are made aware of institutional responses to the issues they have raised through the dissemination of progress reports contained in the course quality action plans. Further work is being undertaken to develop a mechanism to inform external examiners of responses taken at institutional level (see paragraph 40).

16 The University College has introduced a new approach to peer observation of teaching. The new scheme has been placed within a framework for professional development and based upon a 'peer-review' model that uses the act of observing teaching as an opportunity for

dialogue and feedback. The scheme is supported by a performance development review (PDR) process, in which line managers play a key role in helping staff to realise any individual outcomes drawn from the observation process (see paragraph 125).

17 The 2003 audit report contained two further recommendations. In responding to these, the University College has incorporated guidance on the use of multiple or small assessment requirements within a unit and on portfolio assessment into an Assessment Policy Handbook. The University College has also produced a revised set of generic assessment criteria and marking descriptors, adopted for implementation in 2007-08, and has further clarified the processes and procedures for content approval and publishing for all publicity information, whether in printed or electronic form.

18 Overall, the audit team considered that the University College has appropriately taken forward the work of The Surrey Institute to address effectively the recommendations of the 2003 Institutional audit report.

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

19 The Briefing Paper stated that 'merger has demanded rigorous harmonisation and integration of policies and regulations to ensure comparability of provision and equivalence of academic standards'. Much of this work was started pre-merger, drew on the experience and good practice of both predecessor institutions and was approved at joint meetings of the legacy Academic Boards. Work is nearing completion on the development and implementation of a common framework that deliberately combines the management of academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities and quality enhancement. Central to this framework is the University College's deliberative structure.

20 The Academic Board has overall responsibility for the strategic direction of the University College's academic provision and confirms the regulatory frameworks. The Board has responsibility for ensuring that the quality and standing of all academic provision is appropriate to the level of each award. The Board discharges its responsibilities through three key committees: the APQS, the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLA) and the Research Degrees Committee (RDC). Each is chaired by a member of the Executive or Senior Management Team.

21 The APQS approves policies and procedures on the management of quality and the enhancement of the student learning experience and has the role of ensuring that they take account of all elements of the Academic Infrastructure. The TLA is responsible for the oversight of the implementation and development of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, enhancing student participation in this process, and evaluating learning, teaching and assessment practice within the University College.

22 The RDC is responsible for monitoring and advising on the regulations, policy and procedures relating to research degrees (see paragraphs 149 and 150). A subcommittee of RDC has delegated responsibility to oversee the delivery of those research degrees that remain subject to University of Kent regulations.

23 At college level, the committee structure closely echoes that of the University College, with College boards of study, College quality and standards committees (CQSCs), College research committees, and at the discretion of the Chair of the College Board of Study, some also have a College External Development Committee. Matters raised at College level are reported through these committees and the central deliberative structures to the Academic Board and form an important mechanism in ensuring institutional level oversight of academic standards and quality.

24 A Senior Planning Group (SPG), formed during 2006-07 and reporting to the Executive Team, has responsibility for developing the academic plan, reviewing course portfolios, planning student numbers and resources and scrutinising the resource implications of proposed new courses (see paragraph 99). The SPG also determines the corporate planning statement which provides the context for immediate resource allocation and longer term planning at college level, ensuring internal control, effective risk management and value for money.

25 The Common Undergraduate Credit Scheme (CUCS) and the Common Postgraduate Credit Scheme (CPCS) are other important elements of the framework. The schemes provide the mechanisms to regulate full-time undergraduate and all postgraduate awards. The CUCS was developed prior to the merger and phased in during 2005-06 and 2006-07, the CPCS was phased in during 2006-07 and following minor amendment will be implemented fully from 2007-08. The audit team considered the University College's prioritisation of the development of these credit frameworks to have been judicious and effective in securing standards.

26 The external examining system forms an important function within the framework by providing assurance of the comparability and appropriateness of its standards and awards; confirming that assessment processes are sound, fair and fairly operated and conducted within the University College's policies and regulations; and informing other quality assurance processes. The Quality Assurance Handbook (2007-08) is a central document to this system in outlining the role and remit of examiners, as well as the procedures for the nomination, selection, and induction of them.

27 The audit team concluded that the University College's framework for managing academic standards and quality of learning opportunities, during the merger and harmonisation process, was sufficiently robust to cope with the very significant volume of business. The University College has since had opportunity to review the effectiveness of its committee structure and the team viewed the subsequent amendments to the arrangements implemented in 2007-08 as encouraging.

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

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

28 The University College considers its processes of validation and review to be the primary means through which it defines appropriate academic standards, and annual academic monitoring (AAM) is the means through which it assures itself of the maintenance of these standards for all taught provision. Programme specifications and unit descriptors are the key documents scrutinised during the validation and review processes and are considered in the context of the FHEQ and relevant benchmark statements and professional standards.

29 The University College's processes for validation and periodic review are set out clearly in the Quality Assurance Handbook (2007-08). Externality is secured through the validation and review panels comprising two internal members of academic staff who are independent of the college developing the course proposal, and two external members who normally represent both the academic and industrial/professional communities.

30 The AAM process acts as a cornerstone of the quality system and operates primarily at course level through a critical reflection by the Course Board of Study of student achievement and progression data, external examiner and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) reports, professional consultant reports and student feedback. The outcomes from AAM, including the quality action plans, are scrutinised robustly through the deliberative structures via College Quality and Standards Committees (CQSCs), College boards of study, the Academic Policy Quality and Standards Committee (APQS) and the Academic Board. Overview reports and action plans are prepared by the chairs of college boards of study and the APQS. Actions coming out of the reports are recorded and tracked through college and institutional level action plans.



Through this process, the University College is able to gain an institutional oversight of the quality and standards of its provision. The audit team regarded the overview reports and their consideration by APQS and the Academic Board as evidence of an effective approach to the maintenance of standards.

31 Periodic review is quinquennial and is designed to operate at course level to evaluate critically the appropriateness of the provision, including its currency and continued engagement with external reference points; and ensure its alignment with the University College's strategic objectives. The process is based around a self-evaluation document written by the course team drawing upon a range of internal reference points such as annual monitoring reports and student progression and achievement data. The audit team read a range of periodic reviews reports and confirmed that the processes as described were followed.

32 Major course changes (as defined by the criteria stipulated in the Quality Assurance Handbook (2007-08)) require a full validation whereas minor changes may be approved by the CQSC. Other minor changes deemed to be non-substantive may be recommended by the Course Board of Study and approved by the Chair of the CQSC.

33 The University College's Quality Assurance Handbook (2007-08) details the conditions under which a course can be deemed to be lapsed and through which the APQS could decide to discontinue the validated status of a course. The audit team was unable to find evidence of the procedures the University College would adopt for ensuring the quality of the student experience following closure of a course, nor was it able to find evidence of where responsibility for this would lie within the University College's deliberative structure. The team would recommend as advisable therefore that the University College develop a robust process for managing the discontinuation of courses and might find the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*, published by QAA, a useful point of reference in this respect.

34 The audit team reflected on the high volume of review and validation activity prompted by the merger and noted the heavy workload of APQS. Whilst it understood the imperatives which drove this, the team questioned the sustainability of this volume of work, particularly in the light of the subsequent programme of periodic review, and would encourage the University College to reflect on future scheduling to pace APQS workload appropriately.

### External examiners

35 The process of harmonising the external examiner system post-merger was phased, resulting in legacy reporting templates being used by external examiners in 2005-06 and subsequently replaced in 2006-07 by a common template. It is the University College's view that although it is too early to judge fully the efficacy of changes to the management of the external examining system, it is generally deemed to be satisfactory, as indicated by external examiner feedback.

36 The roles and responsibilities of external examiners outlined in the University College's Quality Assurance Handbook (2007-08) are consistent with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examiners*. Nominations for external examiners are made by the constituent CQSC and considered by the APQS on behalf of the Academic Board. The policy and procedures for collaborative provision stipulates that the University College appoints the external examiners for all externally validated provision, and that such examiners will operate according to the University College's policies and procedures (see paragraph 142).

37 The process of nomination and the selection criteria are clear and comprehensively outlined in the Quality Assurance Handbook (2007-08). The Chair of APQS has delegated authority to approve external examiner nominations. Chief external examiners are appointed (normally from amongst serving external examiners) to each College's Progression and Award Board to ensure that decisions are reached in accordance with the University College's

regulations. At the time of the audit, the University College had approximately 70 external examiners of whom some 20 per cent were practitioners, 30 per cent came from specialist higher education providers and the remainder were drawn from a range of other UK higher education institutions. The number of external examiners required for programmes, or a group of programmes, is determined by the appropriateness of the academic and/or professional qualifications and expertise of the examiner in relation to course content and assessment methods. It was the application of this selection criterion that led the University College to appoint two examiners with responsibility for the 15 MA routes at Farnham. The University College is encouraged to keep under review the balance of subject knowledge required to confirm the standards of the award for each MA route and the scope of expertise offered by the external examining team.

38 The responsibility for inducting external examiners lies with the Quality and Standards Department and includes an institutional level as well as a college-based briefing. For collaborative provision the induction takes place at the partner institution with a representative from the University College present.

39 The reporting requirements make explicit what should be commented upon in the report and are consistent with the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*, published by QAA. Reports are sent to the Head of Quality and Standards prior to circulation as detailed in the Quality Assurance Handbook (2007-08). Any substantive issues raised by external examiners are considered and actioned by the CQSC. The Chair of the CQSC responds to external examiners on college-level matters and the Head of Quality and Standards on institutional level matters. The external examiner can, on an exceptional basis, send a confidential report to the Chair of the Academic Board when it is believed that the security of a programme may be at risk.

40 External examiner reports are considered through the AAM process and the response to issues raised by the external examiner are detailed in the course quality action plan, which is subsequently considered by the College Board of Study. Since 2003-04, external examiners have received a progress report on actions contained in the action plan (see paragraph 15).

41 The audit team noted the robust procedures the University College had in place to ensure that there was institutional oversight of issues raised by external examiners. The undergraduate and postgraduate overview reports were thorough and in the view of the team enabled the APQS to fulfil its remit of maintaining an institutional oversight of quality and standards (see paragraph 30).

42 The audit team concluded that confidence could be placed in the effectiveness of the institution's external examining process to assure the academic standards of courses and awards.

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

### **FHEQ**

43 The Briefing Paper indicated that the key documents used by the University College to improve consistent use of the Academic Infrastructure were the Common Undergraduate Credit Scheme (CUCS) and the Common Postgraduate Credit Scheme (CPCS); these set the standards for intermediate awards, honours degrees and master's awards and use the FHEQ as a reference point for the level descriptors. These level descriptors are used primarily during the design phase when course teams ensure that each stage of an award is equivalent to an award within the FHEQ. The process of validation subsequently tests the appropriate application of the FHEQ with regard to the level of the award, whilst subject benchmark statements are used to confirm the academic characteristics of the honours award.

44 From evidence the audit team read, it was able to confirm that course details are scrutinised thoroughly by validation and review panels in relation to both the Academic

Infrastructure and PSRB requirements. At course level, the University College charges academic staff with responsibility for setting and maintaining standards within the framework set by the University College, whilst course boards and College boards take responsibility for confirming that standards are being appropriately set, maintained and enhanced. The team learned that some academic staff seemed unclear about the value of the University College's own level descriptors in assisting them to calibrate standards at unit level. The team also noted that Section 5 (Validation and Review Documentation) of the Quality Assurance Handbook (2007-08) was relatively silent on the University College's own CUCS and CPCS documents. The University College may wish to review this to increase staff awareness of its common credit schemes and their alignment with FHEQ.

### **Programme specifications**

45 The Quality Assurance Handbook (2007-08) states that programme specifications provide a summary of course characteristics for students, employers and other stakeholders such as external examiners, and details their required content. Whilst the University College does not require this to be reproduced in the Students' Course Handbook, there is an expectation that the information from the specification is used to inform the Handbook. From the course handbooks that it read the audit team was able to confirm that programme specification material was used appropriately.

46 The audit team was also able to confirm that the validity of the programme specification in relation to the Academic Infrastructure and PSRB requirements is tested at validation, whilst its currency is checked through the process of periodic review. The team also confirmed that programme specifications could be accessed via the University College website.

47 Through the work of the APQS, the University College is alert to the developments with regard to the Bologna Process and the Standards and Guideline for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. It is also evident that the partner institution is also aware of UK and European developments regarding credit frameworks and quality standards.

### **Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies**

48 PSRB standards are integral to the content and assessment frameworks of a number of courses and hence are subject to periodic accreditation panel visits coordinated through the Quality and Standards Department. Following the merger, both the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), Architects Registration Board (ARB) and the Broadcast Journalism Training Council (BJTC) have continued to confirm the professional standards on the accredited courses.

49 The audit team saw evidence of some PSRB reports being considered by the APQS. However, the team found an instance where the required procedures were not followed when a PSRB accreditation report had not been scrutinised as part of the annual monitoring process. The report was satisfactory and did not raise any cause for concern, but its omission from the information on which the annual monitoring was based meant that the University College was not able to gain best value out of such an external report. Similarly, the University College's Quality Handbook (2007-08) stipulates that the documentation for periodic review must include the most recent approval/review report, but does not currently specify whether this includes both internal reports and external reports such as those which may be conducted separately by PSRBs. University College staff confirmed to the team that relevant PSRB reports should normally be included in review documentation, but the team considered that this was not absolutely clear from the current wording of the process in the Quality Handbook. The team would recommend as advisable that the University College develop robust processes for ensuring that professional body requirements and reports are considered fully at appropriate points in the approval, monitoring and review of courses.

50 The audit team also learned that the University College did not have a clearly stated and consistent mechanism for recording PSRB accreditation and did not recognise that there might be a need for such due to the small number of courses with PSRB recognition. It was the team's view that the accreditation agreements should be recorded in such a way as to enable the University College to monitor the status of its PSRB accreditation agreements and ensure that the PSRB requirements are considered at appropriate points in the approval, monitoring and review of courses.

### **Assessment policies and regulations**

51 To ensure that standards were comparable across the University College post-merger, common assessment regulations were introduced in 2005-06 for all first-year undergraduate programmes and for postgraduate programmes in 2007-08. To enhance the verification process, generic assessment criteria and marking descriptors were being implemented at the time of the audit. Full harmonisation of Progression and Award Board operation, under the CUCS, will be achieved during 2007-08.

52 In addition, Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLA) charged a subgroup, the Assessment Policy Group, with proposing a process to enable cross-institutional verification of standards. This was considered to be particularly important given that the institution offers awards carrying the same title at different colleges. The work of the Assessment Policy Group resulted in a revised Assessment Policy Handbook, which outlines the requirements for verification of assessments within units, between courses within each college, and across colleges. The APQS requires colleges to develop a process to ensure parity of marking standards within a college, but does not require this to occur before moderation of grades or in advance of assessment boards.

53 The Assessment Policy Handbook (2007-08) noted that the aim of cross-college verification is 'not to provide a comprehensive third tier of verification, but through targeted activity, add to institutional learning and understanding of parity issues between markers on difference courses at different colleges'. It is designed to occur after the assessment boards and is managed by the TLA. The verifiers who are nominated by the Assessment Policy Group are required to report their findings to the APQS as part of the quality assurance monitoring cycle. Although too early to assess the effectiveness of this system the audit team considered this to be a helpful development in principle.

54 At undergraduate level, the University College operates a two-tier board structure, with unit assessment boards (or legacy Assessment Committees) confirming unit marks for reporting to college-level progression and award boards, which consider student progression. For postgraduate courses, the University College has elected to use a single-tier assessment board structure due to the smaller numbers of students to be considered. These postgraduate assessment boards, which operate at college level (as subcommittees of Academic Board), are therefore responsible for confirming unit marks and considering student profiles.

55 The Academic Board received an annual report on the operation of the progression and assessment boards in 2005-06. The report by the Deputy Rector (Quality and Student Experience) found that the conduct of the boards was generally sound, as were approaches to the conduct of assessment across the University College.

56 From what it read, the audit team concurred that the University College was taking appropriate steps to reflect on its procedures in a self-critical manner which supported enhancement. Of particular note was the Academic Board's approach to the monitoring and evaluation of progression and award data to identify any trends arising from the consolidation of the harmonised CUCS across the University College.

57 The audit team concluded that the University College's phased and measured approach to managing issues of parity of awards and standards across the colleges, through a period of significant institutional change, had been appropriately guided by a considered assessment of the

potential risk to standards. It also formed the view that the University College's management of standards was robust.

### **Management information - statistics**

58 The Briefing Paper noted that the quality and quantity of the data available for the annual monitoring of undergraduate programmes in 2005-06 was problematic. There was a notable variation of statistical information regarding progression and final awards available to progression and award boards. These difficulties resulted in courses and colleges having limited means to evaluate student progression, retention and achievement. Some data were available for the 'Overview of annual monitoring report of undergraduate provision 2005-06' which was considered by the Academic Board. However, as that report acknowledges, inconsistent approaches to measuring 'retention' across colleges made comparison problematic.

59 The University College considers the harmonisation of the student record systems across the Colleges to be critical to improving the quality of data and has, since merger, been introducing a single student database. The audit team was told that while harmonisation is completing a contingency plan has been put in place to secure the delivery of assessment data for assessment boards. Notwithstanding this, some concern had been expressed by two external examiners about a delay in the start of Assessment Board meetings whilst student profiles were being finalised. The team considered that the action being taken by the University College, which included the monthly data checks by College registrars, was sufficient to ensure the maintenance of standards. In addition, the Academic Board's acceptance of the recommendations from the Deputy Rector's report on the 'Operation of the Progression and Awards Boards 2005-06' indicates that the University College is committed to taking appropriate steps to improve the use of management information data.

60 The audit team concluded that the University College was making good progress with the harmonisation of its student records systems. It noted that whilst the University College did not have the level of access to cross-institutional data that it desired, it was making good use of college, course and unit-level data to assure itself of academic standards.

### **The effectiveness of the institution's framework for managing academic standards**

61 From the evidence available to it, the audit team formed the view that the University College had developed a strategic and measured approach to merger. The business planning process which incorporated an assessment of risk, has informed a carefully phased implementation plan which ensured the maintenance of academic standards and quality and enabled the University College to maximise the opportunities for harmonisation that merger presented.

62 The audit team formed the view that the University College was seeking throughout the process of merger, not just to maintain a robust and secure position in relation to standards, but was also seizing the opportunity that merger presented to enhance its quality systems.

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

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

63 The Institutional audit (May 2003) of The Surrey Institute recommended that steps were taken to ensure consistent use of key elements of the Academic Infrastructure. In the context of the *Code of practice*, the audit team saw evidence that this had been addressed and that the University College had, in 2006, conducted a thorough check on how each section of the *Code* had been referenced in the harmonisation process. The team also noted that the annual monitoring report on research degree provision for 2005-06 included a close mapping of institutional process and activity with the precepts of the *Code* and concluded that the University College was making a conscious and consistent effort to engage with the *Code* across the range of its activities.

64 The University College has appointed the Academic Policy Quality and Standards Committee (APQS) members as 'Guardians' for each section of the *Code of practice*, to advise the APQS of the impact of any modifications to the *Code* on existing policies and procedures, with the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLA) acting as guardian for assessment-related matters. Although the system of 'Guardians' is relatively new, the audit team considered that it was achieving its stated purpose.

65 From the evidence that it read the audit team was able to confirm that the APQS fulfils its responsibilities for ensuring that the University College takes due cognisance of the *Code of practice*. Policies that are revised in the light of changes to the *Code* are subsequently recommended to the Academic Board for final approval.

66 Links with employers and their representative bodies such as the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), Broadcast Journalism Training Council and Sector Skills Councils provide additional external reference points for the University College, which takes the view that such links ensure that programmes reflect contemporary practice, evolving knowledge in the subject and the requirements of employers. The audit team saw evidence through the audit trails that the requirements of the media industry were being considered in approval documentation and review documentation showed very detailed mapping with the professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements in some areas as well as those of the relevant European Union directive and the Academic Infrastructure.

67 The University College references the Academic Infrastructure and professional external reference points in a range of documents for general dissemination to staff, particularly its Quality Assurance Handbook (2007-08). On the basis of its scrutiny of processes, the audit team concluded that the University College was making appropriate and consistent use of the *Code of practice* and other external reference points in the support of the quality of learning opportunities, and communicating effectively to staff the processes serving to implement them.

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

### **Approval and review**

68 Course validation goes through a four-stage process of initial course planning, approval to develop the proposal, course development and validation. Proposals for new courses are first scrutinised by the University College's Senior Planning Group (SPG) and ratified by the APQS. If approved, an event date is set and responsibility for developing documentation passes to the proposing college. Approval documentation must, itself, be approved by the relevant College Quality and Standards Committee (CQSC) and be received by the Quality and Standards Department at least three weeks before the event. This enables feedback from panel members to be considered by the proposal team before the approval event.

69 Review events incorporate annual academic monitoring (AAM) reports which specifically consider the quality of student learning opportunities and include a meeting with student representatives. The outcomes of approval and review events are reported to the APQS, with attendant conditions being tracked via an outcomes log. The APQS conducted the first of its annual reviews of approval, annual monitoring and periodic review in March 2007, with the resulting report being received by the APQS in May and by the Academic Board in June 2007. One recommendation forthcoming from this annual review was that CQSCs should routinely receive the full reports of validation and review events within the college.

### **Initial approval**

70 The purpose of initial approval is to assure the University College that the proposed award is consonant with its mission statement and strategic objectives, that the standards set for the award are appropriate and that the relevant expertise and resources are available to secure those standards. Proposal teams are required to provide a philosophy and rationale for the proposal,

programme specifications and a curriculum mapped against the subject benchmark statement(s) and other internal and external reference points, such as institutional priorities and relevant professional bodies. Appendices include staff profiles, a resource statement and a market analysis.

71 The approval documentation seen by the audit team complied with the template prescribed in the Quality Assurance Handbook (2007-08). Approval reports were clearly structured, beginning with a precise and reasoned formulation of the panel's conclusions, followed by a comprehensive account of the panel's interaction with the proposal team and student representatives.

72 The partner institution manages its own approval events at which the University College has representation on the panel. The audit team saw evidence that the approval process had made appropriate reference to the relevant benchmark statement, to the FHEQ, and the Architects Registration Board and RIBA criteria.

### **Annual academic monitoring**

73 Approval and periodic review processes are complemented by annual monitoring processes intended to provide the University College with regular assurance that academic standards are secure, to enable course teams to review provision and plan actions to improve the quality of learning opportunities, and to make connections between the research and scholarly activity of staff teams and its impact on the curriculum. To facilitate this, the University College made a number of changes to the annual monitoring report template in 2005-06 to better align the course and college reporting phases of the monitoring process.

74 AAM reports are scrutinised by CQSCs which report on the outcomes of monitoring and action plans to College boards of study whose chairs develop overview reports and college quality action plans for submission to the APQS. In turn, the APQS reports to the Academic Board on the outcomes of AAM.

75 The annual monitoring reports for undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision read by the audit team were informed and detailed, making use of a range of statistical information, external examiner reports and student feedback to create action plans designed to improve provision within a specified timeframe. Section VI of the annual monitoring report template invites authors to comment on quality enhancement and good practice. While there was some variation in the way AAM reports addressed this section, most evidenced the impact of research and scholarly activity on the development of the curriculum and learning and teaching methods.

76 The collaborative partner is responsible for the annual monitoring of its courses and the audit team was able to confirm that the annual course reviews and the overview report produced by the partner institution, and their attendant action plans, were of an appropriate standard. For research degrees, the University College's provision is validated with the University of Kent and the University of Brighton, and annual monitoring of the provision is carried out in accordance with the regulations of the validating universities (see paragraph 147).

### **Periodic review**

77 The purpose of periodic review is to take a longer-term view of courses and to provide the University College with a report that critically reviews and evaluates the provision since initial approval or the previous periodic review. Periodic review is intended to demonstrate continuing currency in the light of developments and market movements within the discipline and continuing engagement with external reference points, including the relevant subject benchmark statement(s), the FHEQ and employers. The audit team was able to ascertain how the periodic review process worked in practice through the two audit trails.

78 Both reviews complied with the procedural and documentation requirements specified in the Quality Assurance Handbook (2007-08). Both panels had an independent chair appointed by

the APQS and a combination of internal and external panel members, the latter encompassing both academic and industrial expertise. In both cases the panels met with a representative group of students. As with initial approval events, the reports of both periodic review events were clear and comprehensive and were received by the APQS. Course teams responded appropriately to outcomes and their responses were approved by the panel chairs.

79 The quality of analysis in the review documents was satisfactory, in one case the self-evaluation being particularly closely argued and well evidenced. In addition, it was clear to the audit team that review panels were properly concerned with the potential for enhancement of learning opportunities afforded by the review process. For example, while confirming technical alignment of the review proposals with the *Code of practice* and the FHEQ, the one review panel nonetheless required the course team to produce a more aspirational exposition of the MA scheme philosophy, providing the team with guidelines as to how this was to be achieved.

80 It was clear from one of the audit trails that due consideration had been given to the interests of current students who, because of the substantial nature of the proposed changes, would be unable to progress to Stages 2 and 3 of the new course. Their interests were protected via transitional arrangements that would enable them to complete their current course.

81 The Quality Assurance Handbook (2007-08) emphasises the role played by AAM in the enhancement of the University College's courses. Through the two audit trails and the wide range of additional documentation it read, the audit team was able to confirm that the two processes were contributing to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

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

82 The Briefing Paper stated that student feedback provides an indispensable contribution to the University College's quality assurance processes, particularly annual monitoring. The University College obtains formal feedback from students by a number of means including the internal Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS), the National Student Survey (NSS), and more narrowly focused unit feedback questionnaires, and student representation on a number of consultative committees.

83 The audit team noted that data resulting from the SSS are used at a number of different levels within the University College. Courses make use of SSS data within the AAM process to advise quality action planning at subject level and on occasions to hold focus groups on specific matters. Course and college quality action plans include sections on student feedback and the team found evidence that these reports are being scrutinised robustly by CQSCs. Institutional-level reporting compares results by college in areas such as assessment, employability and the quality of student handbooks and suggests that colleges may wish to share good practice on the basis of these findings. The team considered that the report on the First Year Undergraduate Experience, compiled by the Quality and Standards Unit for the TLA, provided a helpful example of the use of management information to trigger an evaluative report.

84 The Briefing Paper stated that the University College could make better use of NSS data within its own processes and the audit team saw evidence that this was beginning to occur, with use being made of the NSS results at course, college and institutional level. A report prepared for the APQS explored the extent to which there is consistency between the findings of the NSS and the SSS, and the University College envisages closer alignment between the two surveys in order to permit more direct comparisons to be made.

85 The Student Representation Policy states that 50 per cent of units will review their effectiveness and gauge student satisfaction by means of unit feedback questionnaires. The audit team found that the picture was rather more mixed, with fewer than 50 per cent of units using unit feedback questionnaires and many courses using alternative methods such as course focus groups at the end of each semester or informal student-tutor dialogue. Furthermore, with the



exception of Canterbury and Maidstone, the format of the module evaluation questionnaires varies from campus to campus, unlike the SSS, making it difficult for the University College to compare levels of student satisfaction. Representatives of the University College with whom the team met indicated they were aware of these issues and intended to address them as soon as possible.

86 Research students have similar but separate opportunities to provide feedback, for example through the annual Research Student Survey (RSS) (see paragraph 152). The results of the RSS inform the AAM report and are considered by the Research Degrees Committee (RDC) on which students are represented. Research students are also able to provide feedback via their supervisors and the Research Office.

87 As a result of its meetings with officers of the Students' Union, undergraduate and postgraduate students, and its scrutiny of relevant documentation, the audit team concluded that the University College's current arrangements for student feedback were satisfactory and would be enhanced by its intention to optimise the utility of student surveys and to standardise methods of collecting unit-level feedback from students.

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

88 The University College's Student Representation Policy is informed by practice prior to merger, by good practice identified by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and by consultation with student representatives and the Students' Union. The Policy identifies the role played by students in quality assurance and enhancement and commits the University College to responding with timely and appropriate action when required. Students' Union representatives confirmed to the audit team that formal representation mechanisms at college level are complemented at institutional level by effective regular meetings between the President of the Students' Union and the Deputy Rector (Quality and the Student Experience).

89 Course, college and institutional level meetings provide important opportunities for students to provide feedback to the University College about the quality of learning opportunities and to participate in policy and decision-making. Course boards of study are generally well attended and the minutes read by the audit team demonstrated significant sharing of course-specific information with students and the provision of opportunities for students to raise issues. Similarly, the students' written submission (SWS) also noted generally good attendance and provided examples of input by student representatives on institutional level committees.

90 College student fora provide a channel of communication to senior decision-makers and enable students to provide feedback on issues beyond the boundaries of individual courses. The audit team was able to confirm that student fora cover a wide range of campus-specific issues relevant to the overall student experience and are well attended by college senior management, student representatives and representatives of the support services. Student concerns are minuted and form the basis for action planning. The minutes of these meetings are reported to the College boards of study and, at institutional level, to the Student Affairs Committee.

91 The Briefing Paper stated that training is considered critical to the role of student representation and both the Students' Union officers and the student representatives that the audit team met confirmed that this was the case. Students also confirmed that committee chairs regularly hold pre-meetings to brief student representatives on forthcoming agenda items in order to encourage informed participation. In the context of the pace of organisational change and development, the team judged this to be a feature of good practice.

92 The audit team found that the University College made effective use of the student voice in its quality assurance processes for the management of learning opportunities.

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

93 The University College's TLA Strategy seeks to enhance these areas through 'research, reflective practice and knowledge transfer'. One of its objectives is to integrate discipline research outcomes into the development of a pedagogy for the creative arts. The audit team found a close correlation between this objective and the University College's strategic intention, stated in its TLA Strategy, that 25 per cent of individual research outputs should be related to pedagogy.

94 To facilitate this, the University College has established a number of teaching and learning clusters to act as focal points for pedagogic research and has established a Teaching and Learning Research Fund to which staff are able to apply for awards of up to £5,000. There is a clear expectation that recipients of funding will disseminate their findings to the wider academic community via the Learning Innovation Network for the Creative Arts (LINCA), and by inputs to college colloquia, continuing professional development workshops and the annual Teaching and Learning Conference. Bids are assessed by a two-stage process that provides for scrutiny at both college and institutional level. The audit team saw evidence of the careful scrutiny of applications and the provision of helpful feedback to both successful and unsuccessful applicants.

95 The TLA Strategy also provides for a teaching fellowship scheme. This is not exclusive to academic staff and one of the first four fellowships was awarded to a member of staff based in the Department of Library and Learning Services (LLS). Representatives of central support services spoke enthusiastically to the audit team about their participation in cross-service and cross-college pedagogic research projects. The team concluded that the University College's commitment to create links between research and teaching by supporting pedagogic research, research clusters and projects that are open to student support and technical, as well as academic staff, constituted a feature of good practice.

96 Individual colleges contribute to the achievement of the TLA Strategy through the annual Teaching and Learning Conference, teaching and learning colloquia, research seminars and the activity of the CQSCs. Although LINCA was in the very early stages of development at the time of the audit, the audit team formed the view that the strategic direction taken by the University College in respect of pedagogic research was reflected in the types of learning and teaching projects in which staff were engaged.

97 The audit team saw evidence of the University College's extensive involvement with relevant subject centres of the HEA. University College staff are represented on a number of HEA committees and working groups and have made a number of contributions to HEA conferences.

## **Other modes of study**

98 The University College made use of a report commissioned from The Surrey Institute into the use of virtual learning environments (VLE) to inform its e-learning strategy and has appointed learning technologists and a VLE Support Manager to facilitate the enhancement of existing e-learning projects and the creation of new initiatives. The Briefing Paper stated that a number of courses have developed delivery methods using the VLE, although students reported a mixed picture in which the VLE was used primarily as a depository for lecture notes and was subject to technical difficulties and delays in uploading learning materials. The University College's E-learning Strategy was finalised in early 2007, with a steering group to manage its implementation being established shortly afterwards. The development of e-learning was at a relatively early stage at the time of the audit, but the audit team considered that the University College had clarified its aspirations regarding e-learning and given due consideration to ways of realising them.

## **Resources for learning**

99 The SPG has designed a resource allocation and budgeting process aimed at increasing the transparency of the relationship between annual academic monitoring and academic resource planning. Distribution of resources is primarily, but not solely, linked to student numbers in each College as well as non-core income generated by colleges and departments. Through its

discussions with staff, the audit team was able to confirm that this was the case. The University College intends to develop the resource allocation model further during 2007-08 by analysing more closely resources at course level in relation to actual student numbers, in order to inform future budget setting.

100 Since merger, there has been a rebalancing of resources between the Colleges, in addition to notable capital investments at a number of college sites. General learning facilities are managed by the University College and specialist provision is managed at college level. The University College model encourages centralisation of learning resources within a College which promotes improved access, flexibility and responsiveness to curricular need. The Library and Learning Centres (LLCs) are located within the central LLS. Review and harmonisation of practices in the LLS has led to increased collaboration between the five Colleges. Staff commented that libraries are now particularly well stocked and this was supported by student feedback. A new library management system has facilitated expansion in electronic resources to support increased research activity. The student written submission confirmed that students were satisfied with the overall library provision, as corroborated by students in meetings with the audit team. However, in feedback from undergraduate, postgraduate and part-time students, concern was expressed about accessibility of learning resources, including studio space for different categories of students, with inadequate access both during and out of term-time, a view reflected in the LLS annual monitoring report. The team would recommend as desirable that the University College reviews the arrangements for access to resources in support of learning, in particular the opening hours of the LLCs.

101 The merger has provided opportunities to extend and develop the University College's IT infrastructure and the installation of a Wide Area Network (WAN) across all campuses in autumn 2006. The WAN has provided a platform for merging and upgrading the student records system and the financial systems. In meetings with the audit team staff confirmed that this was now facilitating access to more accurate and detailed student and financial data and enabling managers to plan more effectively and responsively.

102 Overall, the audit team concluded that the institution's arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of learning resources in relation to maintaining the quality of students' learning opportunities are effective.

### **Admissions policy**

103 The Admissions Policy takes appropriate account of the report conducted by Professor Steven Schwartz on *Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice*. The policy was implemented from 2005-06 and was subsequently updated in 2007 to accommodate revisions to the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*, published by QAA. These revisions helpfully extended the previous policy, which focused primarily on selection and assessment of candidates, to include consideration of the key principles to be considered in the admission of students.

104 The Academic Board approves the minimum entry requirement for each type of award and delegates responsibility for approving course entry admission and selection criteria to each college. Each College publishes an annual Admission Statement approved by the College Board of Study and the Academic Board. A register is maintained of trained admission tutors who have delegated responsibility from the Head of College to assess applicants against the agreed criteria. Applications from international students are managed by staff trained to evaluate overseas qualifications in line with the Admissions Policy and criteria.

105 The Admission Policy references the University College's Equality and Diversity Policy and is linked to widening participation targets. Analysis of the admission data informs the equality and diversity monitoring on gender, disability, ethnicity, and age of entrants. Appropriate provision is made for admission of applicants who declare a disability based on the same criteria and principles as for other candidates. Additional guidance to support such applicants is in the

Handbook 'Support for Success'. Prospective students with a disability are recommended to visit and discuss their requirements with the Disability Support Manager.

106 Although applicants have no right of appeal against the academic decision not to offer them a place at the University College, there are clear procedures in place for responding to instances where an applicant believes that admissions procedures have been inconsistently or incorrectly applied. These complaints procedures provide a mechanism for review by the Head of Registry Services.

107 Applications and progression from further to higher education are reviewed at local level by College management teams. A Progression Agreements Policy was approved by the APQS in July 2007. This Policy not only articulates arrangements between the University College and other institutions, but also clarifies the process by which the University's own Further Education students are encouraged to progress to higher education. Of the 2005-06 Further Education cohort who progressed to higher education, 53 per cent were retained within the University College.

108 The admission procedures for research degree students have recently been amended to secure greater efficiency. A formal panel is convened to consider applications, meeting three times a year to take account of two entry points, and the deadlines for applications to the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Research coordinators must indicate suitable supervisors for applicants who are offered a place to ensure that a supervisory team is established when the student enrolls. It is intended that the panel will help in allocating supervisors for new students and will ensure that the supervisory capacity across the University College is considered.

109 Research degree students who met with the audit team reported a positive experience of admission and allocation of supervisors. Undergraduate and taught postgraduate students also confirmed that the admissions process had met their expectations. They were provided the opportunity to demonstrate achievements, skills and potential through the selection process and international students commented that they too had been invited for interview.

110 The audit team concluded that the admission procedures are fair, clear and explicit. The University College maintains appropriate oversight of policy and practice at institutional and college level. Policy and practice is implemented consistently and is, overall, effective.

## **Student support**

111 Student services are managed centrally and delivered locally with an emphasis on a proactive approach to student development, rather than a reactive welfare model. Student services are responsible for a range of support, including advice centres, disability support, counselling, financial advice, a chaplaincy and support for international students including providing English for Speakers of Other Languages. Disability advice, information and support are available to students from application and throughout their study and are formally documented in a Learning Support Agreement. This Agreement identifies the student's responsibilities as well as the support and adjustments to be provided by the University College. Students are invited to review their Agreement annually. The dedicated team of international student advisers operates within the Code of Standards drawn up by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner. LLS manages the study-skills advisers who provide additional support for learners at each College targeted at supporting those students identified as being most at risk of not completing their studies. The LLS is also responsible for the management of the Careers Service which has recently been awarded Matrix accreditation. Responsibilities for student support are delegated to the partner institution under collaborative arrangements.

112 Oversight by the University College of the management, planning and delivery of services takes place through the deliberative structures at college and at institutional level through the Senior Management Team. Review of the quality of services to students is via an annual report to

the APQS. The questions used in the data collection for the report are subject to review following concerns expressed by Student Services that, since harmonisation, the questions and framework for gathering feedback was no longer appropriate. Student Services intend to review these tools and to initiate an additional more focused departmental questionnaire.

113 The Academic Guidance Policy sets out threshold standards for academic guidance and support with regard to timely and appropriate information on unit choice; the additional support available to students within a unit; and the explicit responsibility of the course leader to monitor student progress. Undergraduate and postgraduate students on taught courses are allocated a personal tutor to help them to review their progress and, in meetings with the audit team, students reported that, overall, the personal tutor system worked well. Students also confirmed use of the tutorial form to support the communication of entitlements through handbooks, CD-ROM and on-line information. Student feedback in college-level annual reporting indicates that students are extremely positive about the support of technicians and supervisory instructors and with the quality of studio/workshop teaching.

114 The careers team provides support to students and new graduates to help them manage their career planning and careers effectively. Personal development planning (PDP) is considered to be central to this support. However, the online PDP portal is not yet embedded or very meaningful to the majority of students met by the audit team. Staff acknowledged that the online portal was still in the early stages of development and emphasised that the portal was only one way for students to access support. The students' written submission stated that support is, in the main, good, although feedback on the Careers Service was less positive in terms of the quality of information about employment and work placements. The SSS reported that 40 per cent of students were dissatisfied with the extent to which their course had prepared them for employment; however, the proportion of students using the Service was relatively small. University College data indicate that student employment rates fall below the national benchmark indicators and this area has been appropriately identified as requiring further attention.

115 The TLA guidelines provided to staff encourage the embedding of PDP within course activities, and research is being undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of PDP with a view to identifying models of good practice.

116 In discussions with the audit team, staff spoke of the invigorating impact that the merger and harmonisation process has had on student support. Staff commented that not only had efficiency gains and economies of scale been achieved but that the development of professional networks, standardisation of data tools and an approach that prioritised equivalence rather than parity had impacted positively across the institution as a whole.

117 The University College has a variety of support in place for students whose first language is not English. Staff are developing further approaches to supporting students in their language development, including a pre-session course with the specific aim of raising International English Language Testing System scores by 0.5. In response to staff and student feedback, the University College is piloting additional support through further courses at the Canterbury, Maidstone and Rochester sites as part of a new 'English for Academic Purposes' programme. In meetings with the audit team, English language support staff emphasised that the programme was helping to embed their activity in the different subject areas and facilitating closer collaboration with departments. The merger of the predecessor institutions has brought the issue of English language support to the fore and a positive consequence has been an emphasis of development on English for the Creative Arts. Staff are currently working on an international collaboration to develop materials for dissertation support. Overall, the team concluded that the University College's approach to English language support, that focuses on specific student needs at different academic levels and that relates to English for the Creative Arts, was a feature of good practice.

118 The audit team concluded that the University College has effective mechanisms in place for the provision of academic and personal support to students.

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

119 The University College's Academic Strategy was drafted in anticipation of the merger between the predecessor institutions, and of the aim to be a leading university for the arts. The Academic Strategy recognised that the quality and commitment of the academic staff was crucial to promote change, support achievement of immediate and longer-term aims, maintain academic excellence and enhance quality. Staff development is therefore supported by, and in turn supports, a number of key strategies underpinning the University College's primary objectives. Annual review reports, external examiners' reports and the audit team's meetings with students highlighted the significant impact that the staff, committed to their professional and academic currency, were having on student achievement.

120 The Academic Strategy outlines clearly the University College's objectives in relation to the appointment and support of high-quality staff, including maintaining an appropriate balance of full-time, fractional and sessional staff, encouraging staff development to ensure currency of subject knowledge, for new staff to obtain a recognised teaching qualification, and promoting innovation in pedagogy. The audit team saw clear evidence to indicate that objectives within the Strategy are being realised. There has been effective communication and robust consultation on major academic issues, and there is greater awareness by staff of their contribution to achievement of strategic aims and objectives. The recent staff satisfaction survey indicated that the University College is still some way from securing the full confidence of staff in its commitment to recognition and reward of good performance.

121 Posts have been created at college level to promote and support an increased critical mass for research and professional practice, knowledge transfer and business development, and liaison with employers and professional bodies. Working with the Director of Learning and Teaching, the college teaching and learning coordinators have an important role in contributing to the continuous professional development at college level and, where appropriate, across the University College through LINCA. They also coordinate and support Teaching, Learning and Assessment Research Fund applications and similar internal and external schemes that promote innovation in, and dissemination of, pedagogic practice and scholarship.

122 Research coordinators work with the Director of Research and research degree leaders to promote and implement the Research Strategy. While support is being made available to staff to engage more actively with these developments, the audit team found some evidence of increased pressure on staffing at the point of delivery.

123 The audit team saw clear evidence of an integrated approach to development for staff in support of the institution's strategic objectives to enhance student learning. 'Solution finding groups' had been established to explore those areas of dissatisfaction identified in the most recent staff satisfaction survey.

124 Staff new to the University College undergo induction, which takes place within a well-defined and documented framework. A mentoring scheme for new staff or staff new to a role supports their development and seeks to facilitate a culture of learning and reflective practice. Academic staff new to teaching or with less than three years' experience are required to complete the University College's Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) in Learning and Teaching in the Creative Arts, launched in January 2007 and accredited by the HEA to August 2009. The award is aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework and confers Fellowship of the HEA on completion. From 2007, places on the PgCert will be available to sessional staff. Formal induction for sessional academic staff was reintroduced in September 2007 following limited activity as a result of staffing changes in the previous year. The audit team welcomes this reinstatement.

125 Staff development takes place in the context of the Learning and Development Policy and an annual summary report of staff development is considered by the APQS. The performance development review (PDR) for academic and support staff establishes objectives for development. There is support for the development of sessional staff and for technicians and the audit team saw and heard evidence of a good range of activities being undertaken by these staff, including an exhibition of technicians' creative practice.

126 The peer observation of teaching scheme is monitored by the TLA, and learning and teaching coordinators have an explicit role in its implementation and in seeing that the outcomes follow through to PDR. The scheme is evaluated as part of the annual monitoring process and feedback on the implementation of the scheme was evaluated by the TLA in the summer of 2007. This indicated that, while staff valued the process and development themes were being identified, the scheme was unevenly embedded across the University College. The view of the institution is that the scheme has been achieved with greater success in areas where teaching and learning coordinators have been appointed. The audit team would agree with the view expressed by the University College that once fully embedded, the process should contribute to its enhancement agenda.

127 Further development opportunities are provided to staff through the collaborative arrangements with the partner institution, for example via cross-representation committees and the 'Quality Enhancement Tours'. Research supervisors are required by the University of Brighton and the University College to engage with staff development activities (see paragraph 153).

128 Overall, the audit team concluded that all categories of staff have access to an appropriate range of mechanisms to support and develop their practice, whether pedagogic or professional. It is significant that distinctions are not made between staff groups in terms of reward and recognition and there is evidence that staff avail themselves of these opportunities to work collaboratively across central services and academic departments. Following a period of substantial change, the University College is committed to identifying and implementing practice that reinforces a positive workplace culture which it identifies as central to the core values of the institution.

129 The audit team concluded that confidence could reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

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

### **Management information - quality enhancement**

130 The institution's Strategic Plan makes clear its intentions to enhance student learning opportunities through clear performance targets, for example, in relation to resources for learning, teaching and assessment, research informed teaching and access to higher education. The merger of the predecessor institutions has created a significant opportunity for the University College to take deliberate steps, through the process of organisational change and development, to systematically review, revise and refine operations to emphasise their enhancement function. The University College's commitment to effective implementation of this approach is reflected in the support provided to staff, through development and training activities, during the period of harmonisation.

131 The University College approved a statement in May 2007 articulating its approach to enhancement for which management responsibility is delegated to the Deputy Rector (Quality and the Student Experience), supported by the Head of Quality and Standards. The statement sets out the principles on which the University College takes forward its support for enhancement and emphasises that, while colleges operate within strategic, policy and regulatory frameworks, there is a need for a degree of autonomy to acknowledge diversity and to allow responsive action to meet local needs and contexts.

132 The approach to enhancement relies on identification of responsibilities both at individual level and through the deliberative structures. At University College level, the Academic Policy Quality and Standards Committee (APQS) holds delegated authority from the Academic Board for oversight of enhancement, supported by the work of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLA). At college level, college quality and standards committees (CQSCs) are responsible for advising College boards of study on enhancement processes and for promoting the development of the quality of teaching and learning. University College quality assurance systems are described as assisting in providing an impetus for quality enhancement and the annual monitoring and review cycle includes a focus on identifying and investigating good practice for cross-college dissemination, by the TLA.

133 The Briefing Paper acknowledged that data arising from surveys and other feedback mechanisms need to be mined more extensively to support enhancement. At the point of merger, a Management Information Systems Board was established to address the difficulty of different systems for holding and reporting on student data inherited on merger. In meetings, staff confirmed that data were not comparable, using different formats and inconsistencies of approach. These have now been replaced and unified. Work has since been undertaken to improve the format in which data are to be presented for the next annual academic monitoring.

### **Good practice**

134 The Strategic Plan identifies the Learning Innovation Network for the Creative Arts (LINCA) as a vehicle for developing good pedagogic practice and for externalising pedagogic research. This emergent network is supported by a Director of Learning and Teaching and College learning and teaching coordinators. The audit team found that potential difficulties in the geographical distribution of colleges were ameliorated by the deliberate establishment of networks and research clusters, and the use from the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund allocation to facilitate colloquia on teaching and learning and an annual Teaching and Learning Conference. These facilitate the sharing of good practice across the University College.

135 Reports to the TLA provide constructive evaluation of progress and help to identify ways in which staff can be supported further. While there is some evidence of material being shared via LINCA through the Staff Portal, the audit team established that this aspect of the dissemination strategy is in the early stages of development but are confident that the network will attain its objective to promote and support the embedding of innovative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment and to raise the research profile in the pedagogy of the creative arts across the University College.

136 It is clear from the evidence provided by the University College that staff are active in debates and developments within the sector about what constitutes enhancement, and in exploring the implications of these debates for the institution.

### **Staff development and reward**

137 Recognition and reward for initiatives that contribute to learning and teaching priorities takes the form of teaching fellowship awards, of which there are currently four. A teaching excellence award scheme articulates well with the criteria of external bodies, to enable University College winners to be nominated for external awards. These awards are open to all full and part-time academic and support staff.

138 These initiatives, taken together with the University College's commitment to create links between research and teaching, research clusters and projects that are open to all staff with teaching and/or learning support responsibilities who are actively engaged in supporting and promoting excellence in student learning led the audit team to conclude that the University College's holistic approach to enhancement is a feature of good practice.



## Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

139 At the time of the audit the University College had collaborative arrangements with one other higher education institution but envisaged, however, that further collaborative links may be developed in the future and, accordingly, a policy framework for the management of different types of collaborations has been developed. Current procedures for the management and oversight of collaborative provision are set out in the Quality Assurance Handbook. A separate and more extensive draft Academic Collaborative Provision: Policy and Procedures Handbook has been developed and is being finalised by the Academic Policy Quality and Standards Committee (APQS) for operation. This draft was available to the audit team for scrutiny. The document sets out the principles, approval and monitoring processes and quality assurance arrangements that the University College seeks to apply to all collaborative arrangements. In meetings with staff, the audit team learned that future collaborative arrangements were likely to be developed by the individual colleges, including arrangements with overseas institutions and a number of such arrangements were, at the time of the audit, at an early planning stage. All such developments are reported to the University College through the APQS.

140 Following the recommendations made by the Institutional audit of The Surrey Institute, in 2003, a formal Institutional Review of the collaborative partner was carried out in 2004. As a result of the positive outcome of this Review, the validation arrangement was extended for a further five years. The University College recognises the growing maturity of the partner, as well as its capacity for critical self-reflection. In light of this, the Academic Board delegated some operational aspects of quality management to the partner institution whilst retaining overall responsibility for the standards of its awards.

141 The specific terms of the collaborative arrangement with the partner institution are set out in a Memorandum of Co-operation which was last revised in October 2005. A detailed report on the operation of the Memorandum of Co-operation was received by the Academic Board in March 2007. The report confirmed that the provisions contained in the Memorandum were generally being fulfilled effectively.

142 The audit team considered the University College's regulations, policy and procedures for the approval and monitoring of collaborative provision to be generally sound and well managed. The team noted in reviewing the partner institution's External Examining Handbook (2007-08), that there was significant discrepancy and omission in the requirements for the sampling of assessed work for external moderation between the procedures set out in the accredited partner's documentation and the University College's expectations, notwithstanding that briefing materials and guidance are supposed to be provided jointly by the partner institution and the University College. This discrepancy in the documentation contravenes the requirement set out in the regulations governing collaborative arrangements that external examiners appointed to monitor collaborative provision must operate in full accordance with University College policy and procedures. It is the view of the team that this deviation in the approved role and remit of external examiners, though not yet put into practice, represents a potential risk in the University College's ability to assure standards within the provision of collaborative arrangements.

143 In its reviewing of documentation and through meetings with staff, the audit team found much evidence of the supportive nature of the University College's collaborative arrangement with its partner institution. The team was able to confirm that regular and frequent contact between representatives from both institutions took place and that formal meetings are held biannually between senior managers responsible for quality assurance in order to review and develop the quality assurance processes and their operation. Regular communication also occurs between the University College's Quality and Standards Department and the Academic Registry at the partner institution. At college level, representatives attend annual academic monitoring meetings and examinations boards at the partner institution and report back to the APQS on the operation of these. Representatives from the partner institution were added to the membership of

the APQS and the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLA) in 2005. The Head of Quality and Standards became a member of the partner's central committee that considers academic standards and quality in 2006.

144 Appeals against the outcome of assessments or examinations made by students studying at the partner institution are conducted according to its own policies and procedures as approved by the University College. However, all students on courses validated by the University College have the right to appeal to the Academic Board once all other avenues have been exhausted.

145 Overall, the audit team found the procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of formal collaborative arrangements to be broadly effective. However, the team advises the University College to ensure that a more systematic and robust procedure is put in place for the approval of regulatory documentation that is locally produced by partners, under the terms of its own collaborative arrangements.

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

146 In the light of the review of the validation arrangements for the predecessor institutions (see paragraph 4), the Memorandum of Co-operation with the University of Brighton was extended to cover all five of the University College campuses from 2006-07. All new postgraduate research students are registered under the University of Brighton's regulations. The remaining University of Kent registrations are being phased out as students complete their studies.

147 The general nature of the cooperation between the University of Brighton and the University College is set out in the Memorandum of Co-operation. Under the terms of the Memorandum, applications for admission to postgraduate research study at the University College are made directly to the institution and students complete enrolment procedures at both the University College and the University of Brighton. At the time of the audit visit, the University College had not yet achieved a completion under University of Brighton regulations, but it had achieved three MPhil and eight PhD completions under University of Kent regulations, with five of the PhD completions being achieved post-merger.

148 The University College currently has 24 full-time students registered on research degrees and seven part-time, with three of the full-time registrations remaining under University of Kent regulations (see paragraphs 4 and 146). The research students are distributed across four of the five colleges, with the preponderance of students being based at Farnham and with small numbers of full-time students based at Epsom, Maidstone and Rochester. Through its discussions with staff and students, the audit team was assured that all postgraduate research students, even where small numbers were located, are fully integrated within the wider research community.

149 The Research Degrees Committee (RDC) has overall responsibility for regulations, policy and procedures relating to research degrees (see paragraph 22). The Research Office has responsibility for the central administration of research degree programmes in liaison with College research coordinators, and at Farnham, the Research Degrees Leader. These post-holders are responsible for the local management and coordination of research degrees within each college. The Research Office also supports the RDC and liaises with the validating partner. Research degrees officers, based at Farnham and Rochester, deal with general enquiries and the administration for research degree students across all five Colleges.

150 At college level, College research committees are responsible to the College Board of Studies for overseeing the implementation of University College policies and procedures relating to research degree students. Matters pertaining to research students that need to be brought to the attention of the University College are forwarded through a reporting line to the Academic Board, although there is no direct formal reporting relationship between the College research

committees and the RDC. Minutes of one College research committee meeting seen by the audit team suggested that a degree of confusion exists with regard to the roles and responsibilities of the different staff posts and committees with an interest in research degrees. The team came to the view that there was an unnecessary degree of complexity in the current arrangement of roles, responsibilities and deliberative structures in the oversight of the postgraduate research student experience and would recommend as desirable that the University College clarify and streamline the reporting lines on the operation of research degrees within the institution.

151 The Briefing Paper noted that the special Review of research degree programmes in 2005-06 concluded that, overall, the institution's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programme provision at the University College was 'appropriate and satisfactory'. The report made two recommendations relating to the further harmonisation of admission procedures across the Colleges and the appointment of independent chairs for viva voce examinations. The University of Brighton subsequently undertook a review of research degree provision arrangements to ensure comparability of provision, including structures and resources across the five Colleges following the merger. The outcome of the Review was positive and the recommendations for action have been addressed fully through the 2006-07 research degrees action plan.

152 The annual monitoring of research degree provision is carried out in accordance with the regulations of the validating universities. An annual report to the University of Brighton, which is informed by the results of the Research Student Survey (RSS) and includes a report on achievement against the research degrees action plan, is approved by the RDC. This report is also considered by the Academic Policy Quality and Standards Committee (APQS). The Academic Board receives the research degrees action plan that is produced in response to the issues raised in the annual report. The report for 2005-06 provided a particularly thorough analysis of student feedback, a commentary on the previous year's action plan, and a detailed mapping of activity against the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA. The audit team found that the report made a significant contribution to the enhancement of research degree provision at the University College. Although the University of Kent does not require an annual report, but instead requires that student progress is formally considered every six months, the University College is planning to provide it with an overview of the postgraduate research provision for 2006-07.

153 Research degree supervisors are appointed in accordance with the regulations of the respective validating University. Staff involved in supervising postgraduate research students must undertake Research Supervisor Training provided by the University College. The University College has also established a supervisors' forum with the University of Brighton as a means of sharing good practice. Students have at least two supervisors, with one designated as lead supervisor, who is the main point of contact for the student. The University College currently has 31 staff eligible to act as research degree supervisors but relatively few of these have experience of completions. Third supervisors, often from outside the institution, are appointed to less experienced supervisory teams. The University College has a staff development budget administered by the Research Office for research supervisors including training in Art and Design supervision programmes accredited by the Staff and Educational Development Association.

154 The University College has carried out two RSSs, one in 2005-06 and a revised version in 2006-7. Feedback gathered through these surveys reveals that students have expressed concern regarding the appropriateness of the structure and delivery of the research methods training provided, the range of supervisor expertise available within the institution, the availability of career information, identification of professional development needs and the workspaces made available to postgraduate research students. The postgraduate research students who met with the audit team were broadly positive about their experience and commented particularly favourably on the effectiveness of the College research coordinators and the Research Degrees Leader. They also acknowledged that improvements had been made in response to the RSS or from their individual feedback, although there was still scope for improvement in relation to the

research methods training. Postgraduate research students are represented on the College research committees, and the agendas of these meetings include a student issues item. Students also have opportunities to feed back through their supervisors and via the Research Office.

155 The application process and criteria for MPhil/PhD admissions are set out in the Research Student Handbook. The University College has implemented a two-part induction process for research degree students at institutional and college level. All students are issued with the Research Degree Student Handbook containing information on policies and procedures including Research Ethics, Research Degree Regulations and information on responsibilities and entitlements. The University College operates a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) scheme that sets out the range of duties that may be undertaken by GTAs and the minimum requirements for their employment. The GTAs are employed to assist in the delivery of specific and clearly defined components of provision. MPhil/PhD students can be considered for employment as GTAs during their first year but may be employed as sessional staff in subsequent years following thesis outline approval. The GTAs are provided with an induction into the work area and support and monitoring of their work is provided by a designated member of staff. Students who had acted as GTAs were positive about the Scheme's benefits.

156 All research students are required to attend research methods training and University of Brighton-registered students are required to pass a Postgraduate Certificate in Advanced Research Methods. This programme is currently delivered at Farnham though consideration is currently being given to a revised mode of delivery with short residential blocks delivered at the other campuses. Regular training sessions for research students are run by the library and these cover both general skills as well as the exploitation of subject-specific resources. International students are able to access English language support provided by the University College's Student Services (see paragraph 117).

157 Research students are encouraged to engage with the wider research community within and beyond the University College. Research students benefit from opportunities to attend staff research seminars supplemented by a programme of events provided by the research centres and clusters. The postgraduate research students who met with the audit team commented very favourably on the positive encouragement received from staff across the University College to engage with the research communities and clusters. Students are also able to benefit from access to archives, collections and galleries of national and international standing. However, the students who met the team expressed the view that the University College could do more to ensure that these resources were of greater benefit to postgraduate research students. Research student base rooms are provided at all five colleges; these offer a range of resources including high-specification computers, specialist software, study and meeting spaces for the exclusive use of postgraduate research students.

158 Plans for the development of research degree provision are set out within a Research Capability Fund Research Strategy. This Strategy states the University College's intention to both double the size of the postgraduate research cohort and to secure Research Degree Awarding Powers by 2010. However, the staff who met with the audit team recognised the need to ensure gradual growth in research student numbers whilst also ensuring good levels of completion. The University College is in the process of developing a supervisory guidance manual and a draft version of this was available during the audit visit.

159 The development needs of postgraduate research students are agreed between individual students and their supervisors at the commencement of their studies. Development needs are reviewed by thesis panels at least once a year, and at each progression stage. Students have access to funds to support attendance at conferences, training and research-related events; students met by the audit team expressed their strong appreciation of this support.

160 The audit team concluded that the University College's arrangements for postgraduate research students continue to be in alignment with the *Code of practice, Section 1*, published by QAA, and were operating as intended.

## **Section 7: Published information**

161 An institutional protocol with clearly identified responsibilities ensures that full and accurate information for staff and students is published. A comprehensive range of materials is available to students at the various stages of their experience and is available through the Student Portal. Students who met with the audit team confirmed that they were satisfied with the quality and quantity of information provided. The team was also able to confirm that both the printed and internet-based information provided by the partner institution clearly identified those programmes that lead to an award of the University College. Given the discrepancy in the partner institution's External Examining Handbook (2007-08) (paragraph 142 refers), the published Materials Protocol could usefully include more specific reference to the relevant responsibilities of partner institutions.

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

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