QAA

Institutional audit

Royal College of Art

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Royal College of Art (the College) from 12 to 16 March 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 College offers.

Outcomes of the institutional audit

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

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

- 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

Overall, the audit team found that the institution was engaging in enhancement activities at institutional and departmental levels, but considered that there is scope for a more proactive and strategic approach at the institutional level.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit team concluded that the institution'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,* and secured appropriate academic standards and quality of provision for its postgraduate research programmes.

Published information

The audit team found that reliance could reasonably placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution published about its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as good practice:

- the College's commitment to ensuring the research students' voice is heard through its student representation mechanisms (paragraph 107)

- the proactive approach taken by the College to develop and maximise its network of contacts to support and enhance student learning opportunities (paragraphs 111, 120, 205)

- students' opportunity to participate as members of admissions boards, in support of both the applicant and their own personal development (paragraphs 121, 215)

- the commitment of the College to the provision of a range of staff development opportunities in support of learning and teaching across the College (paragraphs 156, 180)

- the additional benefits accruing from the internal moderator system in terms of departmental, institutional and interdisciplinary understanding (paragraph 164)

- the content of the Research Methods Course and its leadership, management and currency which equips students with excellent skills and research methodology (paragraphs 180 and 183).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- develop a mechanism by which the College can assure itself that it has a systematic, ongoing, timely and effective engagement with all elements of the Academic Infrastructure (paragraph 62)

- appraise the timeliness with which the College responds to and/or implements changes in key areas relevant to the institutional leadership and management of learning opportunities (paragraph 35)

- further develop and strengthen the College's policies and procedures for collaborative arrangements (paragraphs 195, 197, 213)

- review, develop and enhance its quality assurance procedures and consider the merit of publishing them in a single, comprehensive, readily accessible source (paragraphs 44, 46, 48, 85, 86, 98, 194, 249).

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- ensure that the tutorial system regulations are implemented consistently across the College including the issuing of written feedback to all students after each formal assessment (paragraphs 87, 139, 226)

- establish a personal tutor network for MPhil/PhD students, separate from the supervisory team (paragraph 225)

- provide training, guidance and support for all PhD students who are granted the opportunity to teach and assess (paragraph 232).

Reference points

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

- the *Code of practice*

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

- subject benchmark statements.

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

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and mission

1 The College was founded in 1837 as the Government School of Design. It became the Royal College of Art in 1896 and was awarded its Royal Charter, conferring the right to award degrees, in 1967. Its mission is:
'to achieve international standards of excellence in the postgraduate and pre/mid-professional education of artists and designers and related practitioners. It aims to achieve these through the quality of its teaching, research and practice and through its relationship with the institutions, industries and technologies associated with the disciplines of art and design'.

2 At the time of the audit the College had approximately 830 full-time equivalent postgraduate students, with an average age on entry of 27. The majority of students undertake a two year taught MA programme, although one in nine studies for an MPhil or PhD degree. Students are taught by over 100 members of staff, including artists, designers and writers who are practitioners and researchers.

3 The College is organised into six schools, each containing a number of departments. The College's main site is in South Kensington, with the Sculpture Department located just south of Battersea Bridge. The College has plans to expand its estate in Battersea in order to meet its strategic desire to diversify its academic provision.

The information base for the audit

4 The information available for this audit included the following documents:

- the report of a review of research degree programmes, conducted by QAA, July 2006

- the College's one-year on response to the institutional audit report, September 2004

- the report of the institutional audit, conducted by QAA, March 2003.

5 The College provided QAA with a series of documents and information including:

- an institutional briefing paper (the Briefing Paper) with appendices

- access to the College's intranet.

6 In addition, the president of the Students' Union of the College prepared a student written submission on behalf of the College's students. The audit team is grateful for the students' engagement with the process.

7 During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was given convenient access to a range of the College's internal documents. The team identified two programmes for which sampling audit trails were requested to illustrate further aspects of the College's provision, and additional documentation was provided for the team during the audit visit. The team is grateful for the prompt and helpful responses to its requests for information.

Developments since the last institutional audit

8 The College underwent an institutional audit in March 2003 and received a judgement of broad confidence in its management of the quality and standards of its academic programmes. A one-year on report was submitted to QAA in September 2004 and was confirmed as a satisfactory response.

9   A number of important developments have taken place since the previous institutional audit, including:

- a Senate working group, established in October 2003, initiated a streamlining of Senate subcommittees

- a new full-time senior post of Director of Academic Development with overall responsibility for running the academic affairs of the College, with the exception of research, was established from 2006-07

- an Academic Development Office was created to oversee quality assurance, learning and teaching initiatives and the accuracy of online and printed publications in these areas.

10 The audit team welcomed these developments and noted their relevance to matters arising from the previous institutional audit report which contained several features of good practice and a number of recommendations. In the area of assessment, the report advised that the College should 'develop a more structured and consistent approach to course design, delivery and assessment, with particular attention to a uniform system for the definition across the institution, of generic and subject-specific learning outcomes linked to assessment criteria and to their inclusion in course handbooks'. It also advised the College to 'define institution-wide marking criteria to provide a secure basis for the identification of pass and fail student performance'. In response to these recommendations, the College has engaged in extended internal debate that has resulted in a College-wide assessment scheme (considered in more detail below, see paragraph 55) that is now in place and described in the College-wide Handbook.

11 The institutional audit report also advised the College to 'review the effectiveness of institutional processes for the gathering and provision of student feedback in the areas of tutorials; assessment; the institutional questionnaire and representation on the Academic Standards Committee'. The audit team discerned a number of practical responses to this recommendation. The sabbatical officers of the Students' Union sit on the key committees of the College, including Academic Standards and Planning and Resources, and have regular meetings with the Senior Management Team; the College has also provided funds to permit the appointment of a third, part-time sabbatical officer from 2006-07; the annual student survey has been redesigned and has been available in both printed and online versions since 2005-06 and the College provides a report of the key findings and intends to disseminate this to all staff and students through the College intranet.

12 In the area of tutorial discussions, the Regulations have been amended to provide further guidance on their structure, but the Briefing Paper accepted that this is an area where consistency needs to be improved across the College. The audit team encourages the College to continue in its efforts to ensure a greater harmonisation of practice in this area throughout the College (see below paragraph 90).

13 The institutional audit report advised the College to establish a typology and codified set of procedures for collaborative activities. As noted in paragraph 26, the College has established a typology of collaborative activities but the audit team considered that the College had further work remaining to develop its procedures for collaborative activities.

14 The institutional audit report advised the College to develop further the arrangements for evaluating and using management information. The audit team noted progress had been made in this area.

15 The institutional audit report advised that the College should strengthen the effectiveness of the leadership and management of the dissemination and implementation across all departments of centrally determined policies and procedures. Although the present audit team noted that the developments (see paragraph 9) have the potential to address this, the team found evidence that this issue continues to require attention. Of all of the College's responses to the advisable recommendations in the previous institutional audit, this was one that the team considered to be the least timely.

16 The institutional audit report recommended that it would be desirable for the College to 'give further consideration to the institutional approach to careers information'. As a result of this, and following a consultation exercise commissioned by the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) in 2003, the audit team was informed that InnovationRCA (a Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF2)) initiative, FuelRCA and the Students' Union now coordinate a range of professional practice events. InnovationRCA and FuelRCA are described in paragraph 142.

17 The institutional audit report found it desirable that the College develop a template for departmental responses to external examiner reports. The audit team found that this has been addressed.

18 The institutional audit report found it desirable that the College put in place a peer observation and support system to assist in assuring the quality of learning, teaching and assessment across the institution. The College, in its one year on response to the institutional audit report indicated that, after due consideration, it would not be introducing a peer review scheme, with appraisal of teaching being the responsibility of heads of department. Systems had, however, been put in place to identify and support the dissemination of good teaching practice. The present audit team saw evidence of the latter having been implemented.

19 The College underwent a review of its research degree programmes by QAA in July 2006. The review team formed the view that, overall, the institution's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programmes was appropriate and satisfactory. The report noted two areas of good practice: the arrangements for training for both new and more experienced supervisors, and the Research Methods Course with its particular emphasis on practice-based research. The report suggested the College might wish to consider the introduction of mechanisms by which feedback on research degree programmes from a range of external parties could be collected and acted upon. The audit team noted that this had been addressed.

The institution's framework for managing academic standards and learning opportunities

20 Senate, chaired by the Rector, has overall responsibility for the academic standard of awards and the quality of the programmes of study. Senate appoints external examiners. Senate is supported by a number of other key committees with responsibility for managing academic standards and learning opportunities. These include the Academic Board for Concessions and Discipline (ABCD), Academic Standards Committee (ASC), LTC, Planning and Resources Committee (PRC), Research Committee and the Staff Committee.

21 ABCD, chaired by the Rector, is responsible for monitoring admissions, progression and completion, academic disciplinary matters, examinations and appeals for MA and MPhil/PhD students. It is the main committee for overseeing adherence with the College's academic regulations.

22 ASC, chaired by the Director of Academic Development, has prime responsibility for academic quality assurance. Its remit includes the approval of new programmes of study, including collaborative programmes; changes to courses; course validation and revalidation; the annual Departmental Review process; the formulation and review of all academic regulations and procedures; and the scrutiny of external examiner and internal moderator appointments and reports.

23 LTC is a subcommittee of ASC and is also chaired by the Director of Academic Development. It is responsible for supporting and enhancing postgraduate learning and teaching to enhance the quality of students' experience, and for developing, reviewing and implementing the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The College describes its approach to quality enhancement as being 'to develop and apply systems for quality assurance and enhancement which ensure timely identification of the need for change in any area of academic provision and that there is continuing effort to improve the quality of the student experience'. To drive the enhancement

agenda forward and, in particular, to drive the engagement of academic staff in professional development activities related to their teaching roles, a full-time Learning and Teaching Coordinator was appointed in September 2005.

24 PRC, chaired by the Rector, is responsible for academic planning and the allocation of resources. The Staff Committee is responsible for policies and procedures for appointments, contracts, promotions, discipline, staff development and appraisal.

25 The Research Committee, chaired by the Director of Research, is responsible for developing and implementing staff and student research policy across the College, including the recruitment policy; advising Senate on research strategy; keeping a College-wide record of research degree activity; and ensuring that the provision for research students enhances the College's research infrastructure and accords with good practice. The Research Office is responsible for operational matters in relation to postgraduate research students.

26 The College's collaborative provision is managed through the College's main framework for academic standards and learning opportunities. Partnerships are formalised through a memorandum of agreement and also overseen by joint academic advisory boards (JAABs) which meet annually and include representation from both institutions. Beyond the JAABs there are no separate specific structures, polices or procedures for collaborative arrangements. The College has a typology of its main collaborative arrangements which cover a dual award in partnership with another local higher education institution (HEI); partnership agreements, with a prestigious local museum which contributes to two jointly-taught awards, and a validation of another partner's own programme. In addition, there are relationships with a range of host institutions to provide a significant proportion of the learning experience for students on one of the College's programmes.

27 To ensure the accuracy and reliability of published information, members of the College's Senior Management Group are responsible for signing off all publications. Documents issued to students at registration are coordinated by the Quality Assurance Office and their production is managed centrally. These documents include the College-wide Handbook, the Regulations, the College Diary and departmental handbooks. The Director of Academic Development is ultimately responsible for the accuracy of the content. Induction packs are distributed by the Research Office to all research students at registration, including a copy of the Research Handbook, the Research Methods Course Brochure and UK Grad resources.

28 The production process for the College prospectus is managed by the Publishing Manager and text is provided by senior academic staff. Final proofs are approved by the Rector or Director of Academic Development. The Director of Finance is responsible for signing off all financial information. The Rector or Director of Academic Development has final responsibility for publications such as the Rector's Review and the Show Catalogue.

29 The College's website, departmental websites, the intranet and the increasing engagement with virtual learning environments (VLEs) are governed by a College policy. The Web Board is responsible for making strategic recommendations for all College web space and it issues web-related guidelines. The Web Board reports to the Senate. Information and Learning Services is responsible for information and content of the intranet with technical aspects led by designated members of staff.

Learning and teaching strategy

30 In 2004, Senate approved a set of 20 educational aims for the College which provide the basis for a revised Learning and Teaching Strategy due to be implemented in 2007-08. The audit team was informed that the result of this current institutional audit would feed into the revision of the Strategy.

31 During the audit team's meetings, the team heard a great deal of confusion about the current status of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. Although the Briefing Paper quoted from a

'Learning and Teaching Strategy' to illustrate the College's aims in relation to a number of key areas, the team was told that the old version of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, dated from 2002, and updated for the College's submission under Teaching Quality Enhancement in 2004, was now considered to be out of date and had subsequently been removed from the intranet. The College was, therefore, in the process of developing 'a comprehensive Learning and Teaching Strategy and set of associated action plans' with the intention to use the 2006-07 academic year as a period of planning and consultation and to publish the new strategy in readiness for the 2007-08 academic year.

32 At the time of the audit the College had 20 distinct educational aims, developed in 2004, of which aims 14 to 20 still required full contextual development. The aims are grouped under the four headings of student recruitment, progression and achievement; the learning experience; the educational environment; and quality assurance and information.

33 The College described these four headings and 20 aims as constituting the draft Learning and Teaching Strategy for 2007-08. The audit team did establish that the February 2006 meeting of LTC was informed that the Learning and Teaching Coordinator was currently in the process of revising the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The team additionally learned that some heads of department were unaware of the draft Learning and Teaching Strategy or the 20 educational aims, in spite of a member of the Senior Management Group in the same meeting stating that it was an 'essential' document for the College.

34 When asked for clarification, members of the College's senior management informed the audit team that the Learning and Teaching Coordinator was responsible for producing the new Strategy, and that this had been delayed by the present institutional audit. They also stated that, while they would not expect all members of staff to be aware of the 20 aims, all heads of department would be aware of them as they had been agreed with them following an extensive period of consultation.

35 An overarching learning and teaching strategy is a requirement under Teaching Quality Information (TQI) and plays an important role for the institutional management of learning opportunities. It can do this by providing a statement of the institution's priorities, expectations, aims and objectives in the area of learning and teaching. In light of the confusion that clearly exists as to the status, validity and currency of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, the audit team strongly encourages the College to revise, adopt and disseminate the new version of the Learning and Teaching Strategy throughout the College in order to ensure that its approach to the development of learning opportunities is widely understood and drives activities at all levels. The team also formed the view that there was room for the College to act more swiftly in addressing matters of significance such as this, as well as others identified elsewhere in this report (see paragraph 15 and Section 3). The team therefore recommends it is advisable that the College appraise the timeliness with which it responds to and/or implements changes in key areas relevant to the institutional leadership and management of learning opportunities.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

External examiners

36 External examiners are integral to the final summative assessment of students for awards of the College. The Regulations state that the purpose of the external examiner is to ensure that the 'academic standard for each award is set and maintained at an appropriate level and that student performance is properly judged against this; standards of awards are comparable with those of other UK higher education institutions; [and the] process of assessment and examination is fair and has been fairly conducted'.

37 External examiners are expected to have appropriate academic or professional experience and to be independent. External examiners are nominated by the head of department and formally

appointed by Senate on the recommendation of the Academic Standards Comitee (ASC). Nominations are scrutinised by ASC and may be, and are, returned to departments when there is uncertainty about an examiner's experience.

38 A considerable proportion of the College's external examiners are drawn from professional practice and have high professional standing but not all have direct experience of UK higher education on which to draw in making judgments about the comparative standards of awards against *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The audit team was told that there had been occasions when experience of UK higher education has been asserted on appointment, but examiners have subsequently stated that they were unable to comment on the comparability of standards on their report form. The team was told that practice in the appointment of external examiners had been strengthened and the team would encourage this rigour to be maintained.

39 On appointment a standard set of documentation is sent by the College to external examiners for MA programmes. This includes an extract from the Regulations on the role of final examination boards, the Regulations and a copy of the Prospectus together with a covering letter. The same information is sent to MPhil and PhD examiners together with the Research Handbook.

40 No induction is provided for external examiners by the institution but heads of department are expected to brief external examiners on their role and the examination process, using the Regulations. Guidance on the role of external examiners, criteria for appointment, reporting requirements, termination arrangements, responsibilities of the Examination Board and conduct of the examination are included in the Regulations. A letter sent from the Registrar to heads of department states that they 'must ensure that all members of the final examination board are aware of the submission requirements, the assessment criteria and of their role as members of the board'. No other guidelines are provided to support heads of department when briefing external examiners and clarifying the responsibilities and limits of the role.

41 The audit team was informed that external examiners 'make a preliminary visit to the department in advance to meet the head of department and to see students' work'. The information within the Regulations does not cover this visit but the existence, nature and purpose of the preliminary visit is referred to in departmental handbooks. Some departments have a more formal 'part 1' examination and, where this occurs, it must also involve a properly constituted examination board. Heads of department have been reminded through a memo from the Registrar that 'it is very important that external examiners who are involved in a part 1 examination do not offer guidance to students' and are fully briefed on their role. External examiners have commented about some confusion over the purpose and status of this visit as well as the possibility of students misinterpreting its function. The team considered that more detailed information within formal documentation to support heads of department, external examiners and other staff involved in any preliminary visit or part 1 examination would assist all and enable the College to assure itself that any potential for misunderstanding was minimised.

42 External examiners are full and equal members of the final examination board. An examination board is not deemed to be properly constituted without the presence of the external examiner and it can only make a recommendation for the award of a degree with the agreement of the external examiner. The final examination board for master's level awards must include at least one external examiner; for PhD two external examiners. Where the external examiner does not agree, a board cannot make a recommendation for an award and the matter must be referred to the Academic Board for Concessions and Disipline (ABCD) together with a written report from the external examiner. External examiners consistently confirm that the standards of the awards are commensurate with the awards of master's and MPhil/PhD and with comparable provision within the UK.

43 Examination boards are chaired by the head of department who is asked to 'ensure that every effort is made to reach a unanimous decision'. A guidance note issued by the Registrar to heads of department reminded them that 'each member of the board has an equal voice in the

deliberations, oral examinations and final decisions'. The audit team, however, noted that concerns about the nature of the examination board and role of the external examiner have been raised by external examiners, and that similar concerns were reflected in internal moderator reports. The team considered that a more detailed statement of the role of the external examiner and the limits of their responsibilities would assist all those involved in the examination process and concluded that it would be advisable that the College produce an agreed set of published induction or briefing guidelines to assist the College to assure itself that external examiners and internal staff had a consistent understanding of the role of the external examiner and had documentary support to draw upon if individuals acted outside their role.

44 The headings under which examiners are required to report are specified and include a requirement for confirmation about the academic standards for the award and in comparison to similar UK provision. In order to ensure institutional oversight of external examiners' reports and of academic standards, reports are considered directly by the Rector and Director of Academic Development and by ASC. Reports are also circulated to the relevant department and, in the case of research degree provision, the Research Committee. Departments indicate their response to the external examiner report in their annual Departmental Review report, with the relevant portion of the report being sent to the external examiner. The Research Committee considers all MPhil and PhD reports and submits a report to ASC; ASC considers all MA reports early in the autumn term, although the validated collaborative programme report is considered at a different time (see paragraph 187). ASC identifies any major concerns or cross-College issues, and reports to Senate. The audit team concluded that the consideration of external examiners' reports was thorough but that, although issues of concern were identified appropriately, actions to address those issues could be slow to emerge. The team found that the College made a strong and scrupulous use of independent external persons in summative assessment procedures but considered that a number of recurrent issues could be addressed by improved induction and briefing as well as published guidance. The team concluded that the use of external examiners in summative assessment supported a judgement of confidence in the College's current and future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

45 The procedures for the approval of new programmes, annual monitoring and periodic review are described in the Regulations.

Course approval and validation

46 The audit team examined validation reports for new programmes and confirmed that the process as described was observed. The reports were comprehensive, indicating the full extent of discussions with both staff and students. The minutes of ASC indicated appropriate and rigorous debate on the issues raised in the validation reports, and provided evidence of an active deliberative process. The approval procedures described in the Regulations make reference to 'maintaining the standards of awards' but no reference is made to how the academic standards are defined or to the external reference points such as the FHEQ. The team concluded that the process of validation could be improved by requiring validation panels to assess standards of awards with reference to the FHEQ.

Annual monitoring

47 The College conducts annual monitoring through its Departmental Review process. The aim of the process is 'to enable Senate to ensure that academic standards are maintained and enhanced'. Appended to the departmental review report and discussed within it are admission and progression statistics, external examiners' reports and a summary of the student questionnaire. The audit team examined a number of departmental review reports and found some variability in the extent to which they had been considered. The best reports were comprehensive, evaluative and reflective documents. The ASC minutes indicated active discussion

of departmental review reports with examples of reports deemed to be unsatisfactory being returned to departments for amendment. ASC minutes also show clear discussion of the content and form of the reports. The team found that Departmental Review met its stated aim of maintaining academic standards.

48 The audit team was informed that the responsibility for delivery of programmes rested with departments and changes to programmes, including new modes of study, were reported to ASC through the Departmental Review process. For major changes and developments to programmes, direct application to ASC is required and the team was informed that this was understood by all staff. The team, however, was unable to find any regulations or documents which indicated those changes that departments could make independently or those which required ASC approval. It was therefore difficult for the team to ascertain where the locus of responsibility resided for the approval and monitoring of programme changes. The team formed the view that the College should have the means by which it could assure itself that academic standards continue to meet the designated academic level and other external reference points, such as professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements. The team therefore recommends that the College define minor and major programme changes, the process by which these changes are approved, articulate them for all staff and monitor their implementation.

Periodic review

49 Information, in addition to that described in the Regulations, is provided to departments at the time of revalidation by the Head of Quality Assurance. The review procedure is the same as that for validation. The audit team found evidence of a rigorous and robust process both in terms of the panel discussions, which were reflected in their reports, and the later discussion and decision-making at ASC. While the normal period for approval is six years, the team saw evidence of shorter approval periods where concerns regarding specific issues had been identified.

50 In the most recent revalidations a recurring concern has been the ability of students to articulate the intellectual engagement and contextualisation of their work, linked to the College-wide assessment criteria now in place. This has been recognised by the College and support has been forthcoming for a project to develop this area within Sculpture. The staff who met the audit team stated that revalidation was worthwhile as it required them to examine their processes and methods.

51 Revalidation panels also consider postgraduate research student support. The College recognises this has not been an entirely successful review mechanism. The audit team heard that these sections of the report are sent to the Director of Research who reports to the Research Committee on issues raised. On examining the revalidation reports, the team found inconsistency in how research student support had been considered. The College is aware of these shortcomings and intends to develop more specific guidance on issues relating to research students for validation panels. The team endorses this intention.

52 While the responsibilities of revalidation panels are clearly described in the Regulations and in the advisory documentation provided for panel members, the audit team found inconsistency in the headings and format of the reports from revalidation panels. The team considered the revalidation process to be fit for purpose but considers it advisable that the College develop a more consistent reporting template, linked to the supporting documentation to enable the College to be assured that revalidation of all programmes is consistently based on the same criteria.

53 Overall, the audit team found that the quality assurance procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes enable the College to be assured of the academic standards of its awards. The team noted areas where improvements could be made to improve consistency of reporting and to ensure appropriate formal approval of programme changes.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

FHEQ

54 The College is committed to ensuring that it articulates with the FHEQ definition of a master's degree, and the Briefing Paper stated that the generic learning outcomes, assessment criteria and level descriptors now in use in the College were prepared with reference to the FHEQ as well as other external and internal sources. External examiner reports seen by the audit team generally confirmed that the standards of the MA programmes were equivalent to those in other UK institutions and that in many cases the standard of student work was very high.

55 The audit team found the MA standards descriptor in the Regulations, which included the statement 'at a level demanding more advanced and intensive study than a first degree', to be an insufficient description of master's level within the FHEQ. The Briefing Paper indicated that learning outcomes are given in departmental handbooks, whereas the team found that in departmental handbooks they are described in terms of aims and objectives. The team noted variation in the way that the objectives were written in terms of student learning and it was not clear how these objectives mapped to the recently introduced assessment criteria and, hence, how the College was assured that the assessments were measuring the achievement of the learning outcomes for each programme of study. While the team recognised that the College had come some way in developing more consistency in the content of departmental handbooks, the team considers that there would be merit in the College revisiting these level descriptors to ensure that the MA standards described in the Regulations, course objectives in the departmental handbooks and the College-wide assessment criteria are consistent with each other and the FHEQ.

Code of practice

56 The Briefing Paper indicated that each section of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice),* had been reviewed by the Committee responsible for that area of work and the necessary actions had been agreed and implemented, and that new academic developments were informed by the relevant section(s) of the *Code of practice.* From its examination of ASC, Learning and Teaching Committee minutes and other documents, the audit team confirmed that the College had considered *Section 6: Assessment of students* in the development of College-wide assessment criteria; discussed *Section 8: Careers education, information and guidance* while considering careers and professional practice provision; reviewed *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* when considering a proposal from a collaborative partner to validate a joint course with another higher education institution; discussed *Section 9: Placement learning* in relation to the proposed work-based placement route for the MA Curating Contemporary Art; and considered *Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes* through a working party established for this purpose. However, the team could only find evidence of a systematic mapping of the precepts for *Sections 1* and *8* and a summary of changes for the updated *Section 4: External examining* presented to ASC by the Quality Assurance Office. The team did not find evidence of any consideration of the most recently updated *Section 6: Assessment of students*; *Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*; and *Section 10: Admissions to higher education*. This indicated to the team a less than full engagement by the College with the *Code*. The team was informed that the College is still adopting the precepts of *Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes.*

57 The Briefing Paper stated that the rigorous scrutiny of applicants at the admissions stage contributes to the College's high retention rate. The audit team found that the College's admissions process was a key strategy within the College for ensuring that students were able to achieve the standards set for its awards. The team also found that this process aligned with the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education.*

58 Overall, the audit team formed the view that the College mainly engages with the *Code of practice* in a reactive way when considering developments, and that the lack of active engagement has the potential to put quality and academic standards at risk. The team therefore suggests that the College reviews, as a priority, its approach to consideration of the *Code of practice,* both ongoing and as new sections are published.

Programme specifications

59 The Briefing Paper indicated that ASC had considered QAA's *Guidelines on preparing programme specifications* and the proposals for *Programme Plus* and concluded that programme specifications were unnecessary as the information was available from existing documents. As part of these deliberations it was agreed that the Quality Assurance Office would be responsible for checking the accuracy and reliability of information by coordinating the production of departmental handbooks from 2006-07. The audit team examined the information contained with the existing documents and the minutes of ASC and concluded that while the information was available as stated, the departmental handbooks were not available to those outside the College and, hence, prospective students and employers would not have access to the full information. The team was informed that there were plans to put the departmental handbooks on the public website so they would be more accessible.

60 The audit team saw more recent discussions at ASC relating to programme specifications and the Bologna Agreement which identified that programme specifications may be required. The team formed the view that that the provision of a single document containing clear, explicit, programme specific information would enable the College to assure itself that prospective students could make an informed choice about their studies. The team also considered that such a document would offer other benefits in support of the institutional management of academic standards and learning opportunities. The College will wish to review its policy of the provision of programme specifications in the context of the desirability of providing all relevant course information within a single document, which is also publicly available.

Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)

61 The MA Architecture is the only programme within the College with PSRB links, being validated by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and accredited by the Architects Registration Board (ARB). The recent RIBA validation, in November 2005, was successful, resulting in revalidation for four years. The follow-up accreditation from ARB has also now been secured. The audit team saw evidence of appropriate ASC and Senate input into the process. PSRB reports are considered at departmental level and considered by ASC through the Departmental Review process.

62 Overall, the audit team determined that the College makes use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in setting and maintaining the academic standards of its awards at the appropriate levels. However, given the various reservations noted above regarding the extent of its engagement, the team considers it advisable that the College develops a mechanism by which it can assure itself that it has a systematic, ongoing, timely and effective engagement with all elements of the Academic Infrastructure.

Assessment policies and regulations

63 The previous institutional audit recommended that it was advisable that the College develop without delay institutional-wide marking criteria and generic learning outcomes linked to assessment criteria. After what the College itself described as protracted consideration, a College-wide Assessment Scheme was introduced partially in 2005-06 for final assessments, and in 2006-07 for all formal assessments on MA programmes. The College stated that the scheme was developed with due reference to the Academic Infrastructure and practice in the art and design sector.

64 In order to ensure parity in the assessment of MA students the College has developed generic learning outcomes. The two key attributes, in summary: the ability to produce work at an advanced level at or near the forefront of the discipline and the ability to articulate clearly the intentions of the work, are used as the basis of assessment, together with other attributes of intellectual engagement, technical skills, postgraduate studentship and professional orientation. These are classed on a five point qualitative scale ranging from very good Pass to Fail but 'an overall qualitative assessment…based on the achievement profile of the student' is made. Descriptors support the process for both staff and students. The approach is intended to allow students to demonstrate that they have achieved an appropriate standard and to enable the College to assure itself that there is consistency in decision-making, especially, as recommended in the previous institutional audit, around the borderline/Fail boundary.

65 All MA students are formally assessed at the end of the first year of study (interim examination) to see if they may progress to the following year. Final assessment is through formal presentation and viva voce examination. The final examination board includes the head of department, an internal moderator from another department, the external examiner and senior tutors from the discipline. The assessment of MA Architecture is slightly different as it is prescribed by the professional bodies; this is made clear to students in both the College-wide and Departmental Handbooks. The MAs in History of Design, Conservation, and Curating Contemporary Art, as well as the dissertation element of all MA programmes, have slightly different assessment criteria but operate on the same set of principles.

66 The internal moderator's role is to ensure parity in examination practices and report to the Rector on the assessment process, the application of assessment criteria and examples of good practice, and thus contributes towards the assurance of academic standards.

67 Examinations are overseen by ABCD which approves all interim and final examinations results on behalf of Senate. An annual report to Senate identifies themes and trends; ABCD also propose amendments to the Regulations to Senate. Assessment regulations are coordinated by Registry.

68 The audit team concluded from discussions with staff and students and the documentary evidence provided that the College-wide assessment criteria had so far made a significant contribution to the assurance of academic standards and consistency in decision-making between disciplines, and had addressed the recommendation from the previous institutional audit.

Management information (including progression and completion statistics)

69 Statistical information is generated by the Registry and by Finance. Information is used for planning, financial and performance measurement purposes, for example, to set and monitor targets for admissions, as well as to support the monitoring of quality and standards. Statistical information is considered both by College committees and at departmental level.

70 In terms of academic standards, ABCD considers statistics and trends on requests of leave of absence and appeals, and monitors the progress of students offered concessionary places. ASC receives an annual report which monitors cohort progression and admissions statistics. There is some consideration of student entry standards but this is not straightforward as the College does not wish to limit itself just to those with good first degrees and is looking for those, for example, with degree equivalent work experience as well. The proportion of students entering with overseas qualifications is noted as being a growing trend. Progression is noted as being high for MA students and improving for MPhil/PhD students. Achievement standards are difficult to monitor with a Pass/Fail threshold. Research completion rates are compared with national information from the Higher Education Statistics Agency/the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The College notes that its rates have improved and those for part-time students are above national norms.

71 The College has conducted its own surveys of destinations: 92.5 per cent of graduates from 1992 to 1996 and 91 per cent from 1997 to 2001 achieved linked employment at an appropriative level of seniority.

72 At department level a range of statistical information is considered as part of annual monitoring, this typically includes information on entry numbers, including information on late withdrawals, requests of leaves of absence and referrals; the full statistics are appended to the reports.

73 The audit team concluded that statistical information was being used appropriately by the College in the assurance of academic standards.

Other modes of study

74 The College has developed alternative modes of study for a part-time MA Printmaking, a work placement based route in the MA Conservation, and is considering a full-time work placement based route through the MA Curating Contemporary Arts for the Arts Council 'Inspire' Fellows (a programme to promote an increase in black and minority ethnic curators). Although there are relatively few students registered on these routes and the latter has been put on hold due to funding issues, the College has intentions to offer an increased number of variations on the traditional full-time route.

75 Departments are responsible for the development of these different modes of study and their subsequent review, reported through Departmental Review, is integral with that of the existing full-time version of the programme. The audit team was unable to see clear evidence of a mapping process for these alternative modes of study to their equivalent full-time programmes or the mechanism for their approval, but did find evidence of active discussion at ASC regarding quality assurance issues related to the work placement based route for the MA Curating Contemporary Arts. The team formed the view that institutional level oversight for the development, approval and monitoring of programmes using other modes of study could be strengthened. The College will wish to consider the means by which it is able to differentiate within its approval, monitoring and review processes any matters relating to other modes of study.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

External examiners

76 External examiners are asked to comment upon the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning, as seen through student work, in their reports as well as on the strengths, weaknesses, knowledge, skills and innovation displayed in student work.

77 Departments respond to MA external examiners' reports as part of the annual monitoring process which provides an opportunity for departments to consider these comments in detail. Departments that do not respond fully to external examiners' reports are asked by the Academic Standards Commitee (ASC) to resubmit their departmental review reports. The section within the departmental review report containing analysis and response to MA external examiners' reports is forwarded to the external examiner with a covering letter from the Rector. External examiners are asked to confirm, in their report the following year, that the issues they raised have been responded to: the majority of reports scrutinised by the audit team confirmed that they had been.

78 Students are represented on the departmental committee responsible for considering the Departmental Review and thus have the opportunity to see the external examiner's report. Students are also involved in the consideration of external examiners' reports within the formal committee system through the Students' Union sabbatical officers who are members of ASC. However, the audit team found that this active involvement of students in the consideration of external examiners' reports was underplayed in College documentation. It is not mentioned in the Regulations or College-wide Handbook or in the departmental handbooks sampled. As it is an established strength of the College's system, this information could usefully be included in briefing information prepared for external examiners and given greater prominence in other documentation provided for students.

79 As well as fulfilling their primary purpose to ensure academic standards, the audit team concluded that external examiners and their reports are used to contribute to the management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students. Reports are shared with students as part of the process of annual monitoring, illustrating the established commitment of the College to involving students in the management of learning opportunities.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

Programme approval

80 Validation panels include in their terms of reference the requirement to ensure that the necessary staff expertise, staff training and resources are available and that teaching, learning and assessment strategies are appropriate for the aims and outcomes of the course. The audit team saw evidence in the validation reports that these issues are given full consideration.

Periodic review

81 The Briefing Paper indicated that the revalidation process has enabled the College to identify areas for improvement within the curriculum and priority areas for Teaching Quality Enhancement Funding. The audit team examined documents which confirmed such development. This included funding for a consultancy exercise on English support for students for whom English is not their first language, resulting in the appointment of an English for Academic Purposes Coordinator; five-week presessional courses and in-sessional language courses; and a consultancy exercise with the Dyslexia Training Centre, resulting in the appointment of a Dyslexia Coordinator, a Dyslexia Policy, a Dyslexia Steering Group and a Dyslexia Forum. The team found revalidation to be an effective process in relation to the management of learning opportunities.

Annual monitoring

82 In relation to course provision, Departmental Reviews include action planning for the year ahead; reporting against the previous year's plan; evaluation of student questionnaires, and a response to external examiners' reports.

83 The Briefing Paper indicated that the departmental review process has resulted in a number of significant developments in relation to students' learning opportunities. These have included an audit of the library; the appointment of a professional practice tutor; the appointment of an interdisciplinary tutor; and collaborative projects between departments. The audit team examined a range of documentation evidencing these developments in managing learning opportunities and heard from students who were supportive of the interdisciplinary developments and who wished for more such opportunities. This was supported by staff who indicated the value of interdisciplinary critiques on student work which were organised on request by the Interdisciplinary Tutor.

84 Departmental Reviews have also identified the need to support the development of student writing activities ranging from creative writing, such as scriptwriting, to writing as an element of professional practice, such as design briefs, personal statements and project pitches for research students. The audit team saw evidence of the College response through the Learning and Teaching Comitee (LTC) commissioning a senior member of staff to conduct a review of current practice and aspirations in relation to writing and to make recommendations for action. The Director of Research informed the team that there had already been changes to the Research Methods Course to accommodate writing skills.

85 The audit team found, in general, that departmental review reports are evaluative and identify issues and interesting developments in relation to programmes. The value of Departmental Review as an annual programme monitoring process for the management of learning opportunities at College level was clear from the developments which had taken place (see above

Section 2). However, the team found the general lack of evaluation in those sections related to learning and teaching at programme level (for example, the currency of curriculum and effectiveness of assessment in relation to learning outcomes) reduced its value as a mechanism for the College to assure itself of the management of learning opportunities at programme level. This was borne out by evidence the team found where significant issues raised in teaching and learning at programme level within revalidation reports had not been previously identified in the preceding annual Departmental Reviews.

86 Overall, the audit team found that Departmental Review has the potential to be an excellent quality assurance process; however, the team recommends that the College reassess its value as an annual programme review process with reference to the recently updated *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*.

87 The audit team identified a recurring theme about the quality and form of feedback received by students from their tutorials. Feedback from students reported in Departmental Reviews, indicated a lack of concerted response to this issue from the College. Students who met with the team were, however, very enthusiastic about the feedback they received.

88 Overall, the audit team found the College to be actively using quality assurance processes to identify issues relating to the management of learning opportunities; however, the team encourages the College to ensure that it responds in a timely, proactive and consistent manner to issues raised in departmental review reports.

Assessment policies

89 The College's approach to assessment is intended to allow students to demonstrate that they have fulfilled the programme's learning outcomes. Courses feature opportunities for regular tutorial support and review points, to help enable students and staff to monitor development and progress, in addition to formal summative assessment at interim and final examination. The students who met with the audit team were enthusiastic about the tutorial support available to them, both in terms of the formal requirement for progress tutorials each term on which they predominately received written feedback, and in the rich range of visiting and permanent staff which meant that it was always possible to obtain views on the development and progress of their work.

90 Student concern about feedback following interim and final examinations has been a recurrent issue for the College. Matters that have been raised included lack of awareness of the availability of student tutorial files; the need for a more formalised approach to feedback following interim and final assessment; the need for constructive, critical feedback; the lack of clarity in some departments about assessment criteria and the need for borderline students to be more aware of their status. The College's new assessment scheme should help to address all of these issues. The audit team could only test this in part as the scheme was not rolled out for interim assessment in 2005-06, and it was too early in 2006-07 for all students to have experienced the new system in operation. The indications from the piloting of the College-wide assessment scheme were that it would make a significant contribution to addressing these issues. The team considered that significant progress had been made as students who met with the team were aware that all their tutorial records were kept in a file to which they had access, and the criteria and forms that are central to the new assessment scheme had helped to ensure that students receive clear written feedback on assessment.

91 The audit team found that the rich range of opportunities, both formal reviews and the opportunities available through the calibre and range of tutorial staff, provided students with outstanding opportunities to develop their work and for formative assessment to take place. The team concluded that the new College-wide set of assessment criteria and assessment forms not only contributed to assuring academic standards, but also supported students in their learning by providing clear information about what they were assessed against, their level of performance and providing written and oral feedback linked to both.

Management information (including completion and progression statistics)

92 The audit team found that progression, completion and other statistics did not appear to be used to monitor or assess the quality of learning opportunities.

Management information (including student representation, feedback and National Student Survey outcomes)

93 In response to the 2003 institutional audit, ASC reviewed its mechanisms for evaluation and feedback. ASC concluded that there were weaknesses in the following areas: the lack of clarification of roles and responsibilities in relation to student representatives; the variability of student response rates to questionnaires; and departmental procedures for formally 'closing the loop', that is, informing students of the actions taken as a result of their feedback.

94 The Briefing Paper described how the College, as a result of its review, had implemented significant changes in the process and conduct of the annual student survey. The format, structure and content of the questionnaire was redesigned to avoid ambiguous or leading phrasing and to maximise the richness of feedback. In order to facilitate its collation, discussion and evaluation by the ASC and LTC, it was delivered online. While the College considered the online experiment to be a success, it indicated that there was a danger that exclusive online availability may advantage some students over others.

95 The audit team viewed a number of other documents concerning the College's consideration of the student survey. In a meeting of LTC, discussion had been given to the format and process of the 2005-06 student survey. It reported a return rate of 26 per cent, a drop of 4 per cent in relation to the previous year, and that two departments had not received any student returns. The Learning and Teaching Coordinator indicated that he would be collating a fuller version of responses to be published online. These concerns were discussed subsequently in ASC where it was suggested that the low rate of returns could in part be due to student perception that surveys are not acted upon. In response to this suggestion, a reminder was given by the Head of Quality Assurance that heads of department should report back to students on actions taken. A target of 50 per cent for student returns was agreed by the Committee. The Briefing Paper confirmed that the College intends to make the survey available in online and in paper format in 2006-07 and that heads of department have been charged with promoting the survey more actively and consistently. The team noted that there had been a timely online response to the Information and Learning Services questionnaire and considered this to be an effective mechanism for reporting back to students.

96 The audit team saw evidence within the documents that the College had given careful consideration to student feedback mechanisms and issues, in particular, online delivery, the low rate of returns and the need to ensure that students are aware of resulting actions. It noted the College's efforts to address these points through the tightening up of existing procedures and the fine-tuning of the student survey. The team encourages the College to assess the benefits of employing additional means of attaining student feedback so as to raise overall levels of engagement with the process.

97 The audit team sampled a number of Departmental Reviews to test how the information was being used. These included those of Communication Art and Design; Ceramics and Glass; History of Design; Animation, and Industrial Design Engineering. In all cases the individual student responses were appended and specific student comments reported. There appeared to be some variability in the way in which the information was extrapolated, evaluated and used as potential action points. The Departmental Review for Animation contained extensive commentary on student feedback but not on every point of the student survey; the Department of Ceramics and Glass reported upon each section of the survey after which followed analysis and action points, where appropriate; the Departmental Review for Communication Art and Design itemised only issues of concern along with limited evaluation and response; and the Departmental Review for Industrial Design Engineering

gave summary comments rather than detailed analysis and response. There was similar variability in the reporting and usage of feedback within Departmental Reviews obtained through appended minutes of course forums and other such meetings.

98 The audit team considered that the College's mechanisms for the evaluative use of student feedback as a management information tool are potentially very effective. However, the variability in reporting mechanisms within Departmental Reviews could compromise ASC's ability to draw out common threads across departments, thereby preventing maximum use of the information for development and improvement. In reassessing the Departmental Review process, the College will wish to review the format and content of evaluation and commentary on student feedback.

99 The audit team explored the role of students in the Departmental Review process and relevant documents to the revalidation of the MA Sculpture and the MA Industrial Design Engineering were made available. In both cases, the team was able to view reportage of specially convened meetings with students. In the case of the MA Sculpture, consideration of student feedback within Departmental Reviews had informed the agenda of the revalidation meeting with students.

100   The course team of the MA Industrial Design Engineering had canvassed students and staff on recent curriculum changes through additional questionnaires and departmental meetings/course forums. It was evident to the audit team that comments made in the student revalidation meetings concerning tutorials had led to revalidation conditions. The team met students who were able to confirm their participation in feedback through these additional questionnaires.

101   The audit team concluded that the College has effective mechanisms for ensuring the student voice is heard in revalidation and that it is responsive to their opinions.

Role of students in quality assurance and quality enhancement

102   The Briefing Paper stated how a strong relationship has been developed over the last few years between the management of the College and the Students' Union. It described how student views are taken seriously and gave examples of how students have contributed to academic affairs.

103   The inclusion of the President of the Students' Union as a member of ASC was cited as a particularly valuable development. The College believes that this has permitted the Students' Union to participate fully in the development of the revised assessment forms and disseminate information on the new scheme back to departments. It is the College's view that ASC is a vehicle by which the Students' Union is able to comment on new academic developments at an early stage so as to protect the integrity of the College's awards and the student experience. The audit team saw evidence of the Students' Union President's input into the proceedings of ASC. The Briefing Paper outlined how the College had implemented mechanisms by which research students could participate further in institutional decision-making.

104   On a less formal level, the College feels that its small size allows students ready access to senior managers, thus enabling urgent concerns to be dealt with promptly.

105   The audit team met with a group of student representatives who confirmed that they understood their various roles. They expressed the strong view that the College was responsive to student feedback. The representatives confirmed that they had been issued with a student representative briefing document, although there appeared to be variability in informal and formal training for the role. Students spoke positively about the system of student representation and were able to give examples of resultant change. They identified mechanisms by which they were able to feedback to other students but were unable to identify the way in which heads of department report to representatives on actions taken with respect to the student survey. Similarly, in a meeting with members of staff, heads of department were unable to outline formal mechanisms for reporting back to students. The team heard that the Research Office plays a pivotal role in giving guidance to students' representatives.

106   In a subsequent meeting with students who were not representatives of the Students' Union, the audit team learnt of support for the view that the student voice is heard within the College and that the institution is responsive to their opinions and needs. They were able to cite examples where change had arisen as a result of feedback from students. Members of the group were aware of their respective student representatives and the way in which they are engaged in the broader institutional committee structure. Students knew of the annual student survey and the second year students present confirmed that they had been given the opportunity to participate, although they preferred to use less formal means of raising concerns.

107   The audit team formed the view that the College offers a clear invitation to students to be involved in the development of learning opportunities: formally, through student questionnaires and representation on institutional committees, and informally through meetings with members of staff. It was evident to the team that the College wishes to enhance the research student voice. The team noted how the College has made extra funding available to the Students' Union to facilitate its operations and to encourage higher levels of engagement with feedback processes. The team considered the College's commitment to ensuring the research student voice is heard across the College through its student representation mechanisms to be a feature of good practice.

108   It was clear that the College considers that further tightening up of mechanisms to report back to students on actions taken as a result of the student survey is necessary, so as to maximise its perceived relevance and, thus, heighten student engagement. The team encourages the College to continue its efforts in this respect. Overall, the team considers that the arrangements for student involvement with quality assurance and quality enhancement are appropriate.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

109   The College's aim is to recruit art and design practitioners/researchers of the highest calibre. Contracted academic staff are required to continue to engage in practice/research as well as fulfil their teaching/administrative duties at the College. The Briefing Paper stated that active practitioner/researchers enable the latest developments in subject-based thinking and practice to be incorporated into curriculum design, and in the advice and critical feedback given to students in tutorials.

110   In discussions with staff, the audit team heard that there is an increasing drive to develop a research culture within the College and verified the process for granting of research time (which should contribute towards the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)). The team also heard there are tensions between the output-based disciplines, such as Sculpture, and engagement in 'research'. This latter issue has clear links to the debates surrounding the implementation of the College-wide MA assessment criteria. Part-time staff also expressed concern about finding time to carry out research, when their time at the College was already limited. Overall, the team formed the view that the College is striving to develop a research culture and is engaging through various mechanisms to achieve this.

111   Departmental review reports identify an impressive and wide range of national and international contacts in business and industry, professional organisations, museums, galleries and other higher education providers. The audit team was also able to confirm that both academic and technical staff actively seek to support the ambitions of individual students which could involve employing an external practitioner/researcher as a 'visiting lecturer' to provide the specialist expertise required or enabling students to travel internationally to attain this expertise. The team was informed of the significance of these external contacts in relation to accessing specialist expertise, facilities, sponsorship and engaging with the 'cutting edge' of their discipline by both staff and students. The team formed the view that the proactive approach taken by the College to developing and maximising its network of contacts to support and enhance student learning opportunities is a feature of good practice.

Resources for learning

112   The College identifies four elements to the resources that contribute to students' learning: physical; human; information and learning; and financial resources. Some resources are managed centrally and others by academic departments, including some aspects of cross-College services. Both central and cross-College services are described for students in the College-wide Handbook. The College is aware of the challenges it faces in providing and updating resources, and both accommodation and resources are rolling themes in Departmental Reviews and the annual overview report to Senate from ASC.

113   The Planning and Resources Commitee (PRC) (see paragraph 24) is the key body dealing with resource allocation. PRC makes decisions about major equipment acquisition. Annual and periodic review processes are used to inform resource decision-making and both academic and non-academic departments may bid to PRC for human or physical resources or for new initiatives. The College stressed that the ex officio membership of heads of school of PRC has helped to develop 'an increasingly mature and collegiate approach to the identification of priorities for funding'.

114   Departmental resources are outlined in departmental handbooks. All students have a materials allowance to support the development of their work. Resources can be negotiated and obtained on the basis of the individual student when required. Students are expected to discuss resource needs within their department and the head of department is responsible for taking forward any negotiations that are required, for example, for access to resources managed by another department.

115   Students who met with the audit team were appreciative of the resources available to them but also conscious of areas where resources were less good or more stretched, as well as the general problem of space. However, the students had a mature approach and appeared to balance awareness of areas where resources had been upgraded against frustrations with older, less reliable equipment. The College is proactive in seeking links and partnerships to enable students to access specific high-end resources and, beyond these specific initiatives, a rich range of industry links provide access to resources that would otherwise be unavailable to students.

116   Teaching, technical and visiting staff are the major resource for learning with face-to-face contact at the core of the College's philosophy. The College aims to 'provide a learning experience which is genuinely informed by cutting edge professional practice and research'. The contribution of technical staff to the student learning experience was highlighted in the previous institutional audit report and this aspect of students' learning remains a clear strength and feature of the student experience, with technical staff valued highly by students.

117   Moves to develop the use of information technology to support learning and teaching began in 2002-03 but had only recently led to the adoption by the College of the open source Moodle software for its virtual learning environment (VLE), the Royal College of Art Digital Environment (RCADE). The development of the VLE has been supported by the appointment, in October 2006, of a part-time e-learning coordinator to assist the promotion, creation, testing and evaluation of pilot projects. Interest and use of RCADE is said to be developing rapidly, although the audit team found no written evidence of a College strategy to achieve this. The College characterised its approach as 'incremental and demand-centred' in the first instance but was planning to develop a more strategically driven approach during the next academic year. The VLE had not had a particular impact upon the learning opportunities provided in studio areas. Research students have access to a Virtual Research Community, using different software, which includes materials in support of the Research Methods Course, a feedback mechanism and space to show work.

118   The College has sought for some time to find solutions for its space problem. A series of potential solutions have been actively taken forward but each had, in the end, failed and the College has had to accept it cannot address its space problem on the Kensington Gore site.

Negotiations, at the time of the audit were being finalised, and should secure additional space alongside Sculpture at Battersea. This will enable the College to move the School of Applied Art and the rest of Fine Art to Battersea over time. The College is aware that this would solve space problems but also lead to new challenges connected with communication and the splitting of the College as an academic community, potentially diluting the richness of the learning environment.

119   The College undertook an audit of its library service in March 2005 at the request of ASC as a result of concerns expressed in Departmental Reviews 'about the quality and character of the services provided by the library' and 'extremely serious concerns' expressed by staff from the library to the Pro Rector. The audit included appropriate external professional membership. The audit concluded 'that the Royal College of Art does not have a library appropriate to a prestigious postgraduate college but that there is considerable potential to develop the service and for it to become [a] specialist contributor to the sector'. The Head of Information and Learning Services responded positively to the report and a progress report in November 2005 described changes achieved and the steps undertaken to ensure continued positive progress. A follow-up audit of the library in September 2006 noted the 'very considerable progress made'. The present audit team regarded this as an example of active and effective management in response to an identified problem.

120   The audit team concluded that the College is innovative and creative in forging new links and building on existing networks in order to extend the range of learning opportunities available for its students and in responding to the needs of individual students. The College has long recognised issues to do with space and the restrictions of its site and is aiming to resolve these through the acquisition of additional space adjacent to that already housing Sculpture; this will allow the relocation of a number of disciplines and address space issues for all its studio disciplines. The team considered that there was a collegiate approach to the planning and development of physical and human resources and agreed with the College that the richest resource provided for its students is the expertise provided by teaching, visiting and technical staff. The team noted that some developments were clearly strategically led, for example, space, while that of the VLE had, to date, been demand-centred with future development of a College strategy planned.

Admissions policy

121   The audit team examined copies of admissions documentation for a number of MA applicants and found the process as described in the Regulations had been adhered to. Students indicated to the team that they found the presence of a student at their interview to be comforting and positive. Those who had taken up the opportunity also found it to be beneficial to sit on admissions panels, see applicants' work and hear the discussions regarding such work. The team considered the membership of students on admissions panels, and the value this brought to the process for both the applicant and the student taking part, as a feature of good practice.

122   While the majority of MA entrants have a degree or equivalent in a relevant subject, those without a first degree can be admitted with the approval of the Academic Board for Concessions and Discipline (ABCD). The audit team saw evidence in ABCD's minutes where applications from students with or without degrees had been considered, and found the process to be rigorous.

123   The audit team saw evidence in the admissions reports submitted to ABCD from the departments of an assessment of a student's ability in English along with recommendations relating to how any shortfall should be made up. The team also saw in the ASC minutes an example of a student being given a concession regarding the English test at interview being conditional on further English training.

124   The College has an active support programme for those students identified as dyslexic at arrival or during their studies. Support is also available for students with other disabilities such as hearing impairment to maximise the ability of the student to engage in the learning opportunities provided. The team heard from a student with a significant hearing difficulty that the support he had received was excellent.

125   Overall, the audit team considered the MA admissions process to be fair and rigorous. It is a key element of the College's strategy to ensure that the students accepted are able to take full advantage of the learning opportunities offered.

Student support

126   The Briefing Paper gave two broad categories for student support: departmental and College-wide. It outlined how student support needs vary enormously and how the College aims to be sensitive to the academic, financial and personal pressures that adapting to a new course, city and culture may bring. It has established specific College-wide support initiatives in areas where it perceives the greatest need: English language support and dyslexia. The College considers that LTC has a pivotal role in enhancing student support and that it is an efficient agent in the furtherance of this goal.

Dyslexia and dyspraxia

127   The provision of support for dyslexic and dyspraxic students is College wide. Pages dedicated to dyslexia on the College's intranet contain information to students on effective learning and to staff on information for teaching for diverse learning styles. Student representatives who met with the audit team spoke positively of the quality of dyslexia support available to them. The team was provided with a set of guidelines for academic staff aimed at giving advice to staff on the assessment of dyslexic students' work. The guidelines also give information to academic staff on interviewing dyslexic students, tutorial delivery, criticism of work, writing a brief, guidelines for handbooks and the conduct of viva voces. The team concluded that students are well supported in this area.

Other disabilities

128   The audit team sampled the minutes of the heads of department meeting which showed that the College was aware of the need to respond more fully to other disabilities including mental health problems. They stated that the College would be required to produce a Disability Equality Scheme three-year action plan to improve provision for disabled people and that this should be formulated in consultation with the relevant stakeholders. The team was advised that the Disability Equality Scheme action plan had been formulated and was awaiting approval from senior management. The team noted that the College is aware of the imperative to broaden its provision and to make this explicit to students.

International students

129   Support for international students is provided on a College-wide basis. The College-wide Handbook gives details of how support is available to students who are travelling from abroad and advice concerning visa renewals. The dedicated section on the website for FuelRCA contains a statement of intention to provide international students and alumni with business and professional practice advice and support.

130   The audit team learnt of a specifically tailored induction in the form of an International Student Orientation Day held in September 2006. Although the team discerned a feeling on the part of some students that support for international students was limited, in a subsequent meeting with students there were very positive comments, and the team was once again informed of the specially tailored induction event. At a meeting with research students and staff the team was advised of the Assistant Registrar's role as a designated International Students Officer, the provision of English for Academic Purposes, and of the existence of an international students' committee. Members of staff gave clarification that the international students' committee is actually named the International Development Group. Functions of this group include developing international College liaisons and providing an interface with international students at the College. The departmental reviews for Ceramics and Glass, Industrial Design

Engineering, Animation and Communication Art and Design contain generally supportive responses for this area of support.

131   The audit team concluded that students are broadly well supported in this area. On the evidence presented the team concluded that there is scope for broadening the range of provision as described in the College-wide Handbook. This might include support to students for ongoing cultural and social issues; help with the acclimatisation to learning and teaching methods in the UK; and information to members of staff on the learning expectations and practices of groups of international students.

Technical support

132   The audit team explored the role of technicians in respect of student support. Technicians present at a meeting with the team stated that they felt able to input into College processes and Departmental Review. In addition to giving specialist student support, they felt enabled to input into development of resources. Student feedback in respect of technical support was broadly affirmative within the Departmental Reviews for Ceramics and Glass, Industrial Design Engineering, Animation and Communication Art and Design. This positive feedback was borne out by students who met with the team. Student evaluations within Departmental Reviews also confirmed broad satisfaction with the administrative and College-wide support available to them. The team concluded that students were well supported in terms of technical and administrative support.

Induction

133   The audit team investigated mechanisms for student induction. Members of staff confirmed that a wide range of College-wide and departmental events are provided to induct students to their College life and courses. In a meeting with students, the team heard that their experience of induction had been variable. However, at a subsequent meeting with students, a high level of satisfaction was expressed with the mechanisms for course induction. Research students reported positively on their induction experience which included a one-day event with MA students and meetings with the head of department and their research supervisor.

134   A minority of students who met with the audit team described how it had been difficult to establish a real sense of belonging and identity with the College as their course required them to be frequently off-site; these students would have relished more contact with the College and students from other departments. The team learnt that the Student Support Officer, while unable to attend all course forums, prioritised those for off-site partnership/joint programmes so as to maintain a high level of support for these students. However, some members of staff expressed the view that this issue of identity and belonging was inevitable given the geographical constraints of the programmes.

135   The student surveys within Departmental Reviews for Ceramics and Glass, Industrial Design, Animation and Communication Art and Design were broadly affirmative of College-wide and course induction. The audit team concluded that students are well supported in the area of College and course induction.

Tutorial support

136   The audit team became aware during the audit that tutorial support procedures had been a significant area of debate within the College. The Briefing Paper stated that evidence arising from the validation process suggested that the standard of tutorial reporting was variable, sometimes focusing on specific aspects of students' work and sometimes taking a broader and reflective view of overall progress. In the minutes of Senate, the report from ASC highlighted concerns about the frequency and consistency of tutorials in some departments. It was agreed that once new assessment arrangements were implemented, ASC would review whether it would be helpful to provide a standard template for tutorial reports. This variability of tutorial provision

was echoed in student feedback found in some Departmental Reviews. Notably, some students felt that there was discrepancy in the provision of written feedback on tutorials and that they did not receive equal attention from tutors. The revalidation report of the MA Industrial Design Engineering also outlined problems with tutorial support including cancellations, feedback and tutor punctuality. Identification of this problem led to the condition imposed for revalidation of more rigorous enforcement of the tutorial system.

137   Written guidelines concerning tutorial procedures are stated in the Regulations; they are also given in the departmental handbooks. Student representatives confirmed variability in practice and reporting mechanisms across the departments although they seemed unaware of the College's written guidelines. Nevertheless, it was clear that they valued tutorials highly. In order to address tutorial inconsistencies, the College intends to explore the advantages and disadvantages of using learning outcomes and broad criteria as a basis for tutorial discussions and reporting.

138   The audit team heard that research student supervisory contact is negotiated between the supervisor and the student. At a subsequent meeting, the team was informed that research supervisors also fulfilled the role of personal tutors. Broad support was expressed for the aims and operation of Personal Development Planning provision.

139   The audit team concluded that students are generally well supported with regard to the provision of formative feedback through the tutorial system but noted the inconsistencies with regard to written feedback and the concerns mentioned by some students regarding parity of attention from tutors. The team noted that the College was aware of these problems and is considering strategies for addressing them. The team urges the College to continue its initiatives to achieve greater consistency across the College. The audit team considers it desirable that the College ensures the tutorial system regulations are implemented consistently across the College including the issuing of written feedback to all students.

Careers

140   The previous institutional audit recommended that it was desirable for the College to re-examine its provision in respect of careers and professional practice. The Briefing Paper outlined how the College considers that professional orientation of students is embedded in the curriculum of some academic departments, particularly in those where there is a high level of interaction with business and industry through project work. It outlined how, following the institutional audit, the College became aware through feedback mechanisms that some students did not feel well prepared for life after graduation and there were some disparities in departmental provision and strategies. This issue was designated a priority area by LTC in March 2003 and a consultation exercise was commissioned to establish how provision could be enhanced. This process served as a tool for defining the future academic and College-wide provision for careers and professional orientation. As part of this the Committee reviewed the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 8: Career education, information and guidance* at its March 2004 meeting.

141   The Briefing Paper outlined how, in view of the resultant changes and the continuing development of provision, it would be necessary to monitor continuously the nature and level of professional orientation at departmental level and to disseminate good practice through validations, departmental reviews, heads of department meetings and other existing mechanisms. Similarly, it identified the need to monitor the effectiveness of its newly instigated individual careers guidance seminars. A number of specific College-wide initiatives were given as examples of student support for professional practice.

142   The College's website describes InnovationRCA as a network designed to link College graduates with business in order to create innovation activities. The Briefing Paper described how FuelRCA aims to assist students in making the transition from postgraduate study to professional life. The College's intranet details recent and forthcoming FuelRCA events including sessions on

tax advice, intellectual property rights, presentation skills, pricing and negotiation and 'Making the most of the show'. In a meeting with members of staff, the audit team was informed that FuelRCA was a bottom-up and predominantly student-led initiative which responds to student demands and is supported by the College.

143   AlumniRCA was described as an important facility for alumni who, during their formal training at the College, may have resisted participation in elements of the curriculum dedicated to 'professional skills' because of a preference to focus on personal creative work.

144   ReachOutRCA is cited as a valuable introduction to elements of a portfolio career through student participation in educational work. Students of the College have access to the careers guidance service at the neighbouring Imperial College, London.

145   Student representatives who met with the audit team spoke positively about the provision of careers and professional practice guidance. This was echoed in a subsequent meeting with students who displayed awareness of the FuelRCA programme.

146   It was evident to the audit team that the College has given considerable thought to the development of professional practice and careers following the previous institutional audit, and that a coherent programme has been established which is in the process of continual development. The team endorsed the input of students into the FuelRCA programme. Similarly, it noted the role of students in the initiation of interdisciplinary work and the subsequent enhanced promotion of professional practice through the appointment of interdisciplinary tutors. The team concluded that the College has appropriate mechanisms for the maintenance and improvement of its careers and professional practice provision.

Staff support, development and reward

147   The College has a particular and distinctive staffing profile. Permanent staff consist of full-time and fractional appointments, a number of staff are appointed to part-time contracts on a sessional basis and, in addition, there are a large number of visiting staff, approximately 28 per cent full-time equivalents. Students are also taught by staff from other institutions through formal and less formal collaborative arrangements. Staff development is matched to this profile and the different needs of the staff groups. The College has in place systems to monitor staff performance, to provide support where it is needed and proactively encourage and reward staff to extend their skills.

148   The Human Resources (HR) Strategy 2006-09 covers the size and composition of the workforce; recruitment, retention and remuneration; skills profile, staff development and performance management; and staff health and welfare. The HR Strategy set the context for the professionalisation of teaching staff and established initiatives such as a reward for achieving Higher Education Academy (HEA) membership.

149   There are structured support and development opportunities to support staff research. The College expects its academic staff to continue to engage in practice and/or research and those performing at an appropriate level have time allocated to research within their workload. Research performance and research time are kept under review. Support is provided to individuals from the Research Development Fund and sabbatical leave, matched funding and support to attend conferences are all eligible for funding. Training for staff wishing to supervise research students is mandatory.

150   Although the College considers that the strong emphasis it places on subject-based expertise makes it harder for it to encourage staff to engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning there are structured support and development opportunities available. LTC supports pedagogic projects through a Teaching Fellowship programme which was established in 2004-05 and funds two fellowships annually. The fellowships are worth £10,000. A Learning and Teaching Coordinator has been appointed to support teaching fellows and more broadly to champion

teaching and learning activity. A Learning and Teaching Development Fund (LTDF) is used to provide up to £2,500 support for small initiatives. There are three bidding opportunities each year: the priorities and criteria are set by LTC. The LTDF has been used to fund curriculum reviews and to address issues raised through quality assurance processes. For example, to enhance the level of theoretical discourse in Sculpture as raised in its revalidation.

151   Staff are encouraged to participate in courses offered by Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design, a partnership between the College and the University of the Arts, London. From 2006-07 new academic staff are required to undertake teaching-related staff development as part of the conditions of probation. The requirement is proportional to individual contracts (those working three days a week or more have to undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PgCert), those working less than three days are invited to participate in a three-day course). There is a reward of £1,000 upon successful completion of the PgCert and this has now been modified to include the joining of HEA, as membership is an entitlement on successful completion. The PgCert has been pursued by both academic and technical staff and, at the time of the audit visit, 14 current staff had been awarded the PgCert.

152   The audit team was told that the College had made a strategic decision to embed teaching professionalism primarily in its full-time staff; however, the approach to the support of staff appeared to be broader than this in practice and neither fractional nor visiting staff felt excluded from the opportunities available.

153   The College acknowledges that it should prioritise staff training in the provision of academic feedback to students on their work as this is a long-standing and common student concern. There was a stated intention for LTC to oversee a programme of staff training in 2006 with the issue of providing challenging and effective feedback as one of its priorities. However, teaching staff met by the audit team were not aware of the student concern around this issue, the intention to provide training or of any training available, and it was evident to the team that progress had been limited.

154   Formal staff appraisals as well as informal meetings are used to discuss staff performance in practice/research, in teaching, supporting learning and in administration. Where an area for improvement is identified, funds are available from a number of sources including the HR budget, LTDF and the Research Development Fund.

155   The audit team was told of the tension between two professionalisms: that of staff as active and significant practitioners and that of staff as teachers. The team heard that there was a need to play to the strengths of the individuals employed by the College but also to develop pedagogic skills and understanding. While the College saw the need to encourage staff to see teaching as a professional practice, it considers the notion of all staff having teaching qualifications as impractical given that the majority of staff are either part-time or visiting.

156   Overall, the audit team concluded that the College provides a wide range of opportunities to support the further development of pedagogic practice and that the range of initiatives and activities represented a step change in the emphasis on learning and teaching practice. The team considered the commitment of the College to the provision of a range of staff development opportunities in support of teaching and learning was a feature of good practice.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

External examiners

157   The purpose of external examiners' reports is 'to enable Senate to judge whether the course is meeting its stated objectives and to make any necessary improvements'. The report pro forma invites external examiners to identify areas of innovation or good practice and to highlight where they consider learning could be enhanced. External examiners tend to discuss aspects of students' work when responding to this heading rather than comment on assessment practices.

158   The Academic Standards Committee (ASC) produces a summary overview of external examiners' and internal moderators' comments for Senate. This provides an opportunity for the College to identify areas where there is scope for improvement, and propose actions to address any such areas, as well as to identify areas of good practice on which it could build. There are a number of examples where the College stated that initiatives have stemmed, in part, from comments by external examiners including English for Academic Purposes, the provision of interdisciplinary learning opportunities for students, changes to aspects of assessment practice and FuelRCA. At departmental level external examiners' comments have, for example, resulted in coaching in presentational skills or a mock viva in order to better prepare MA students for final examination.

159   The audit team concluded that the overview report of external examiners' reports prepared by Research Committee on MPhil/PhD reports for ASC, and by ASC on MA examiners' reports, provided scope for enhancement and has led to improvements in the learning opportunities available.

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards and programmes

160   The College's approach has been to seek to identify areas for improvement or enhancement through the information generated through the quality assurance processes of validation and Departmental Review. The audit team found some evidence of the information from these quality assurance processes leading to enhancement (see paragraphs 81, 83).

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

161   The audit team's findings with regard to the College's engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points are given in paragraphs 54-62.

162   The audit team was unable to identify any institutional level enhancement initiatives arising from consideration of the Academic Infrastructure or other external reference points. The team encourages the College to recognise the good practice within these external reference points and to consider how their use can be incorporated into deliberate institutional level enhancement strategies.

Assessment policies

163   Internal moderation is a feature of the College's approach to final assessment. The College regards internal moderation as a valuable part of the assessment process. A number of internal moderators refer to how much they learned and the value to themselves and their department in participating in the process, and many also commented about how enjoyable they found the experience. A few reports demonstrate less engagement, with comments from one year reappearing the next; however, external examiners have also commented on the value of internal moderation.

164   The College identified internal moderation's importance as an additional mechanism 'to ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms in place for the objective and impartial assessment of students' work and to ensure parity of examination practices between departments'. The audit team agreed that internal moderation helps the College to ensure parity of practice between departments. The team considered that internal moderation had three further clear benefits that were being realised by the College. Firstly, there were benefits for the individual moderators in that it was evident they were able to learn and take this back to their own department. Secondly, the production and consideration of internal moderators' reports enabled institutional learning from the process. Finally, the process acted as an effective means to spread understanding and appreciation of the cultures and practices in the various disciplines which had contributed to the development of a more collegiate culture. The audit team formed the view that the additional benefits accruing from the internal moderator system in terms of departmental, institutional and interdisciplinary understanding make this a feature of good practice.

Management information (including completion and progression statistics)

165   The audit team found that progression, completion and other statistics do not appear to be used for quality enhancement purposes.

Role of students in quality assurance and quality enhancement

166   The Briefing Paper stated how the small size of its departments has produced a tradition of informal contact between staff and students, thus enabling the gathering of feedback for enhancement at local level. It outlined how the role of students in quality enhancement is similar to that of their role in quality assurance.

167   The Spotlight initiative (podcasts of students' experiences disseminated through the intranet) led by the Learning and Teaching Coordinator and funded by the Learning and Teaching Committee is considered by the College as an example of a successful and supplementary source of feedback information in respect of quality enhancement.

168   A student-initiated project to promote interdisciplinary activity has led to the College funded Interdisciplinary Critical Forums which aim to provide critical appraisal of students' work from different departments. The minutes of ASC outline how the Learning and Teaching Development Fund is sponsoring a pilot programme of online interdisciplinary tutorials. They also give details of the appointment of an Interdisciplinary Tutor to coordinate interdisciplinary critiques and to develop a strategy with the Learning and Teaching Coordinator for more interdisciplinary activity.

169   Innovation RCA is a network designed to link College graduates with business in order to create innovation activities. ReachOutRCA (see paragraph 144) is cited as a valuable introduction to educational work for students as an element of a portfolio career.

Links between research and scholarly activity and the enhancement of learning opportunities

170   The audit team identified no specific institutional strategy regarding the enhancement of learning opportunities through links between research and scholarly activity. However, as described above in Section 3, there are clear links between research and scholarly activity and delivery of learning opportunity and the College is developing a stronger research culture which could enhance the learning experience of MA and research students.

Dissemination of good practice

171   The audit team identified three main mechanisms used within the College for dissemination of good practice: within the business of groups within the College; through the quality assurance processes in place; and through the work of the Learning and Teaching Coordinator.

172   With regard to group business, the College asserted in the Briefing Paper that discussing and communicating good practice are central functions for all College committees, working groups and forums. Examples include the Research Supervisors Forum, the Dyslexia Forum, Web Board, and heads of department meetings. The audit team examined minutes or filenotes of these meetings and concluded from them that the business of these groups did include discussion on and sharing of good practice. In some cases College-wide developments had been initiated in response to such debates, such as the template for the departmental handbooks coordinated by the Quality Assurance Office.

173   The report template for Departmental Review indicates the identification of good practice as an element of the review; however, the audit team found this to be included under the heading 'interesting development' and the only identifiable records of 'good practice' were within the external examiners' and moderators' reports which are reported in the Departmental Review.

174   The College cited the example of ASC having identified examples of good practice reported in Departmental Reviews, which are highlighted in its annual report to Senate. The audit team considered these reports and found some examples of good practice in the main body of the report but most were under the 'interesting developments' section. However, these were not clearly identified as 'good practice' and the College may wish to consider adopting this terminology more openly to encourage engagement with the examples identified. The team was informed by one head of school that he had picked up teaching ideas from the departmental reviews which he reviewed for ASC. All departmental reviews are available to staff and students via the intranet.

175   The Learning and Teaching Coordinator has a role to promote the sharing of good practice in learning and teaching. While this is still a relatively new post, there is some evidence of this occurring through his involvement with a range of College committees such as College forums, heads of department meetings, professorial board and administrators' meetings. The audit team was informed by some staff that they would welcome more opportunities to discuss teaching and learning across disciplines, as they had found this beneficial when able to do so.

176   The audit team found that the College is committed to the identification and discussion of good practice, however, the team encourages the College to consider a more open use of the term 'good practice' and proactively develop dissemination mechanisms, particularly across disciplines.

Staff support, development and reward

177   Teaching fellowships are offered to provide opportunities for research into the enhancement and dissemination of good learning practice. These typically provide one day a week to investigate a particular aspect of postgraduate art and design teaching. Individual projects had a significant impact on particular departments but had little impact to date on teaching practice in other departments. The team concluded that staff development was being approached strategically, but the outcomes of initiatives and investments were not yet being utilised strategically to enhance the learning opportunities available to students in a way that would produce systematic and demonstrable improvements.

Selection, admission, induction and supervision of research students

178   The College has a strong commitment to supervisor training. There is an informal supervisors' forum at which ideas can be shared, as well as an annual Supervisor Training Day. The audit team saw detailed documentation in relation to the impressive Supervisors Training Day dedicated to Research Procedures at the College held in November 2006. This event covered procedures and regulations, assessment, good research practice, research ethics, the final examination and research training and support mechanisms.

179   The College also participates in the London Hub of the UK Grad Programme and collaborates with two other institutions in the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design (see paragraph 151). This latter body provides a supervisor training course that is mandatory for all new supervisors, and established supervisors are encouraged to attend as well. The audit team discovered that staff value this training and efforts were being made to ensure that established supervisors engage with some of these development opportunities.

180   The review team for the review of research degree programmes considered that the College's arrangements for training both new and more experienced supervisors was an example of good practice and the audit team endorses this view.

181   Overall, the audit team believes that the College's arrangements for research supervisors and students in these areas make a very positive contribution to the area of quality enhancement.

Progress and review arrangements

182   The College is currently piloting a Personal Development Plan which incorporates a Supervision Tutorial Log and a Training Needs Analysis Log as part of each student's supervision process. During the pilot phase, the Research Office must be sent electronic copies of the completed forms for every student at the end of each term. The audit team learnt that there was an ongoing debate about the balance between the student's input to the Supervision Tutorial Log and the supervisors', but that this debate was welcomed by the Director of Research and would be fed into the first-year review of the scheme in April 2007.

183   There is mandatory attendance by all new PhD students on the College-wide Research Methods Course, administered by the Research Office, and designed to be consistent with the Joint Research Councils' Skills Statement. It is a prerequisite for passing the first-year interim review that prescribed elements of the course are passed. The team discovered that the Research Methods Course was updated on an annual basis and that staff and student feedback was actively solicited to help shape its programme. The review team for the review of research degree programmes considered that the Research Methods Course was an example of good practice, and the team agrees with this view as it contributes strongly to the College's enhancement agenda.

Feedback arrangements

184   Research students are eligible for election as sabbatical officers of the Students' Union and a research yearbook, highlighting the work of all research students, is intended to be published in 2007.

Assessment of research students

185   The Research Committee conducts an annual review of reports from MPhil/PhD external examiners for report to ASC. In 2006, it undertook an audit of reports between 2001 and 2005. Many examiners commented on the ground-breaking nature of the theses, but some highlighted a lack of contextual background or problematic academic writing. The College has responded positively to this audit and introduced measures such as enhanced training in writing English for Academic Purposes. The audit team considered this to be a good example of enhancement.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

External examiners in collaborative provision

186   The collaborative arrangements covering the jointly taught awards and the dual award are managed by the College and follow its standard procedures for external examining. The College appoints external examiners for all its awards delivered through collaborative arrangements. In the case of the dual award with another higher education institution (HEI), the partner also appoints an external examiner. Although this report is not submitted to the College, it is seen by the College as part of the Departmental Review process.

187   External examiners for the validated programme are appointed by the College following nomination by the partner. The reports are received by the College and considered in the normal way, by both College and the partner, except that they are not considered in the autumn alongside other programmes as the partner operates on a calendar year. Internal moderation for this programme operates in line with the College's usual procedures. The internal moderator is a senior member of College staff.

188   The audit team found the use of external examiners and their reports within collaborative arrangements to be in alignment with the *Code of practice* and demonstrates appropriate use of independent and external persons in the summative assessment of students studying on collaborative arrangements.

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards and collaborative programmes

189   Collaborative arrangements are formalised in a memorandum of agreement. The College is aware that its earlier memoranda of agreements do not fully reflect current practice in the sector. The memorandum with the HEI partner offering the dual award was redrafted in May 2005 but was not finalised and has since been overtaken by strategic changes in the relationship between the two institutions. The audit team was told that a revised memorandum of agreement would be discussed at the Joint Academic Advisory Board (JAAB) (see paragraph 26) in spring 2007. The College intends that the memorandum of agreement with the partner for the jointly taught awards will be revised as part of the scheduled revalidations during 2007-08. This award is also part taught 'in association' with the HEI partner that offers the dual award, but this element of the association did not appear to be governed by a memorandum of agreement. The agreement with the partner whose programme is validated by the College was reviewed in 2006 and was said to reflect the revised *Code of practice, Section 2*. A number of public and private providers act as host institutions for the MA Conservation with each arrangement being described as a 'distinct individual MA course'. These relationships are not governed by formal institutional memoranda of agreement, although documentation is signed between the partner and the Department of Conservation. Sixty per cent of the curriculum is based in, and delivered by, the partner with staff from the collaborative partner acting as first assessor for the students' final research project.

190   In addition, the College has a wide range of informal relationships that contributes to the learning experience and the opportunities provided for its students. These include relationships established to provide access to specific technical resources; opportunities for work experience during vacations; and external involvement in setting project briefs.

191   The audit team found that the memorandum of agreement for the validated programme included a range of measures designed to assure the standards and quality of the provision. These included periodic revalidation; the submission of an annual quality assurance report to the College; a representative of the College's academic staff (currently the Director of Academic Development) as a member of the partner's Academic Standards Committee; Academic Board for Concessions and Disciplines (ABCD's) approval of concessions and examination results; the appointment by the College of the external examiners; and an internal moderator appointed from the academic staff of the College who attends the final examination board. The team found the annual report to ASC for the collaboration with the validated partner to be a comprehensive and thorough document reviewing the position of the course. Overall, the team found the monitoring and review procedures used for the validated programme to be fit for purpose.

192   The College has numerous informal relationships (see above) which are developed, approved and managed at departmental level and reviewed as part of the appropriate Departmental Review. The audit team found no specific reference to these arrangements in the relevant Departmental Reviews and encourages the College to consider doing so, in order that it can assure itself of the quality and standards offered in such provision.

193   The approval, monitoring and review procedures for the dual award and the jointly taught awards are the same as for other College programmes. JAABs are intended to meet annually to review the partnership, but the audit team found that the JAAB for the dual award had not met for nearly two years, until recently, due to ongoing negotiations regarding the programme arising from a revalidation event. The recent meeting included discussions of major programme issues.

194   Similarly the audit team found evidence of significant developments in the jointly taught award relating to changes in the host institution for students. The Department has developed an increasing number of alliances with other appropriate organisations to act as 'host institutions' for students. While this clearly supports students in access and developing specific expertise in the subject, the team was unclear as to how the Department assured itself of the quality of learning opportunities received by the students while in these host institutions in which they spend up to 60 per cent of their time.

195   Overall, the audit team found the procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of the formal collaborative arrangements, and the other numerous informal collaborations, to fall short of the good practice described in the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. The team advises the College to re-examine and confirm these arrangements with reference to this section of the *Code*.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

196   The audit team found evidence of reference to the use made by the College of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, but could find no evidence of a systematic consideration of all the precepts in relation to the development and management of collaborative provision within the College. As already noted (see paragraph 196) the College recognised in its Briefing Paper that while the most recent collaborative memorandum of agreement meets the precepts, those predating this arrangement do not show best practice. The team concurred with this conclusion. The team did see evidence of the current deliberations regarding a revised memorandum of agreement with the HEI partner offering the dual award which would address many of the previous memorandum's shortcomings. However, the team considered the speed of response to updating the agreements to be rather slow.

197   Beyond the memoranda of agreement (which is at programme level), the audit team found no evidence of an institutional level approval process. The team encourages the College to be more proactive in developing memoranda of agreement with collaborative partners in developing agreements that do meet the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 2*, which will assure the College of the nature and status of their specific partnership arrangement with each institution. The team consider it advisable that the College further develops and strengthens its policies and procedures for all collaborative arrangements.

Assessment policies and regulations

198   Students on the validated programme are assessed according to the partner's processes, but an internal moderator from the College attends all final examination boards and thus the College is able to observe directly each year that final assessments are conducted fairly and appropriately. Recommendations from the partner are ratified by ABCD.

199   The assessment processes for the collaborative arrangements covering the dual award and the jointly taught awards are those of the College. However, for the MA Conservation the first assessor for the student's final project is from the host institution with which an individual agreement may be drawn up.

200   The audit team considered that assessment practice, assessment policies and regulations are appropriately conducted and overseen by the College in collaborative arrangements. However, the team would suggest that formalising the briefing and training of those staff in host organisations that have a substantial role in assessing the final award should be considered both to support those staff and to ensure consistency of approach.

Management information (including completion and progression statistics)

201   The statistics for the jointly taught College awards are considered alongside all other MA awards. Statistics for the validated award form part of the annual report from partner to the College and include information on admissions as well as the achievement of awards. There is no separate consideration of statistical indicators for awards offered through collaborative arrangements but the audit team considered that the use of statistics was appropriate given the nature and scale of the College's collaborative provision.

Management information (including student feedback and National Student Survey outcomes)

202   The audit team looked specifically at the arrangements for the dual award and the jointly taught awards. These are subject to the College's normal monitoring procedures. The Department of Industrial Design Engineering, which offers the dual award, had carried out additional course monitoring via questionnaires/meetings to inform revalidation. The team viewed a sample of Departmental Reviews and identified some variability in the consideration and evaluation of student feedback as discussed above.

203   The audit team examined evidence available in respect of the validated programme. The validation agreement requires that annual reports include a summary of student feedback and responses given. In a meeting with students, the team heard that the partner's mechanisms for course evaluation were different to College programmes in as much as each module is subject to appraisal by the students. On examination of the partner's annual reports to the College it was only possible to identify a short paragraph in each concerning feedback from students. These sections confirmed that feedback had been obtained through regular meetings with the Director and adjustments had been made to meet student needs where possible. More formal means of obtaining feedback and evaluative mechanisms were not evident. The College may wish to ensure that its arrangements provide adequate formal opportunities for feedback from students.

Role of students in quality assurance and quality enhancement

204   Students on jointly taught and dual award courses fulfil an identical role in quality assurance and quality enhancement as those on College specific programmes as outlined in paragraphs 102-108. The audit team was informed of module evaluation mechanisms in respect of the validated programme. However, other formal mechanisms and/or roles were not apparent within the documents provided.

Links between research and scholarly activity

205   The collaborative programmes enable students to gain access to important resources, facilities and expertise which they would not otherwise be able to. The audit team recognised that this clearly inputs into the quality and reputation of the programmes and provides students with excellent research expertise and practitioner contact at the cutting edge of their discipline.

Other modes of study

206   The work placement based route for the MA Conservation enables those in suitable employment to attain an MA award from the College. In this case, project work is replaced with work-based learning associated with their employment. The audit team found the College had suitable arrangements in place to manage the academic standards and learning opportunities.

Resources for learning

207   The jointly taught collaborative arrangements with the prestigious local museum in particular provide students with access to specialist resources, collections, facilities and specialist practitioners in a unique environment. However, the students' primary base is at the partner's location and they have more limited access to the learning environment of the community of practice-based students at the College. The relationship with the neighbouring HEI also opens up additional resources, staff and space to the students on Industrial Design Engineering.

208   Under the memorandum of agreement with the partner providing the validated award, the partner is responsible for the provision of learning resources, and the evidence suggested that the resources provided are industry standard and are well regarded by students.

209   The collaborative arrangements with dual award and the jointly taught awards and other host organisations fulfil the stated intention of the College to provide access to facilities, resources and expertise that it would not otherwise be able to provide, and thus extend the resources for learning. However, the audit team concluded that with the exception of the validated

programme, the College played a limited role in ensuring that the resources provided by the partner were appropriate, passing the prime responsibility to the partner to provide its students with industry standard resources and experiences.

Admissions policy

210   The College applies the same admissions procedure to all its programmes. Those students applying for a dual award apply to both institutions and must be accepted by both to gain access to the MA programme. The students studying on the validated programme apply to the partner, but their entry is confirmed by ABCD. The audit team found the admissions procedures for the collaborative programmes to be fair, thorough and rigorous.

Student support

211   Student support arrangements for students on the dual award and the jointly taught awards are identical to those provided for College-based students. Students on the validated programme are covered by the partners arrangements which are agreed as part of the memorandum of agreement.

Dissemination of good practice

212   The audit team could find no overt evidence of sharing or dissemination of good practice between the staff associated with collaborative provision. The College may wish to consider if there would be any benefit in facilitating this.

Staff support, development and reward

213   No specific arrangements are in place to support the development of staff in collaborative partners. While there was no evidence of any problems having occurred, the use of specialist practitioners in a range of host institutions, not formalised through institutional level memoranda of agreement, to provide 60 per cent of the teaching for students on one course with very small numbers of students, and to be lead assessors without any systematic training, surprised the audit team. The team considered that this was an area where training could usefully be offered to support these staff so as to ensure consistency in assessment and student support. The College may wish to consider the incorporation of staff development into its collaborative arrangements.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Selection, admission, induction and supervision of research students

214   The application process and criteria for MPhil/PhD admissions are detailed in the Regulations, the Research Handbook, the Prospectus and online. The audit team found a very comprehensive and attentive admissions process.

215   Admissions to an MPhil or PhD programme is via an MPhil/PhD admissions board which comprises as a minimum the head of department; two tutors or senior tutors from the department, one of whom has had experience of supervising postgraduate research students; and a research degree student. The audit team heard that current students at the College clearly enjoy the opportunity to participate on these boards, both for the opportunity to reassure the applicant and to enhance their own personal development. The team formed the view that, as noted above (see paragraph 121) with MA students, the opportunity for MPhil/PhD students to participate as members of admissions boards is a feature of good practice.

216   The admissions board reviews the applicants' portfolios of work, proposed scheme of study, research proposal, addressing the proposed research question; methodology; and link to extant work in the area. PhD candidates must also describe the original contribution to knowledge of the proposed project.

217   The overall admissions process is monitored by the Academic Board for Concessions and Discipline (ABCD) and the Research Office. In particular, ABCD considers whether the supervisors are appropriate and ensures that no supervisor has more than six students at any one time.

218   If the application is successful, the Research Office prepares an appendix to the offer letter detailing the specific terms of the offer (for example, whether they are to be accepted as an MPhil or PhD student, part or full-time, by 'Project' or 'Thesis', their supervisory team, research coordinator, availability of College resources and funding) and information about the mandatory Research Methods Course. The appendix is forwarded to the Registry Office and accompanies the formal offer letter sent by the Registrar.

219   The audit team examined detailed evidence of the admissions cycle in relation to four separate MPhil students. The team found the process to be clearly recorded, conducted with rigour and transparent.

220   There are currently 94 MPhil and PhD students at the College, following a period of rapid growth, and some bursary funding is available to eligible home students. The audit team learnt that the College wished to continue this expansion and was aware of the need to ensure that increasing numbers should not place excessive demands on existing resources: hence the plan to expand the estate. Research students are located within individual departments and are allocated studio space as appropriate. They are offered a wide network of external supervision and placements, for example, academic, museum and industrial. Details of facilities and resources are specified in the Research Handbook.

221   The audit team learned that PhD students are very appreciative of the induction programme that was run in the first week of the academic year. It included introductions to the head of department, the supervisory team and the students' allocated space.

222   MPhil students have a minimum of one supervisor, and PhD students a minimum of two. The students who met with the team confirmed this was indeed a minimum arrangement, that they had a clear expectation of what was required of them at PhD level and that supervisory teams often included external advisers.

223   The College has a strong commitment to supervisor training. There are regular informal supervisors' forums at which ideas can be shared, as well as an annual supervisor training day which covers topics such as research ethics. The College participates in the London Hub of the UK Grad Programme and collaborates with two other institutions in the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design. This latter body provides a supervisor training course that is mandatory for all new supervisors.

224   The review team for the review of research degree programmes in 2006 agreed that the College's arrangements for training both new and more experienced supervisors were an example of good practice, and the audit team endorses this view.

225   The audit team was told that there are no separate personal tutors for MPhil/PhD students as this role is generally undertaken by a member of their supervisory team. The team noted the potential for tensions to arise between the two roles and felt that this was an area that the College might like to consider with reference to good practice elsewhere in the sector. The team therefore recommends that it is desirable the College establishes a personal tutor network for MPhil/PhD students, separate from the supervisory team.

Progress and review arrangements

226   Research students receive a minimum of six formal tutorials per year. They must complete an interim annual progress report and interim examination each summer term. Transfer from MPhil to PhD is subsumed in this process. The audit team was told that students generally received oral feedback from the interim examination from their departments. The team formed the view that the value of oral feedback can be maximised by its confirmation in the form of

written feedback to students. The team encourages the College to consider making the production of written feedback a mandatory requirement for all departments.

227   The College is currently piloting a Personal Development Plan (PDP) which incorporates a Supervision Tutorial Log and a Training Needs Analysis Log as part of each student's supervision process. The Supervision Tutorial Log provides a template for the assessment of a student's achievements since their last supervision tutorial and for the agreement of objectives relating to academic progress and skills development to be completed prior to their next review. Section one is completed by the student and section two by their supervisor, with each keeping a separate copy and the signed one being kept in the department. The team saw an example of a Supervision Tutorial Log which has sections for completion on 'Progress since previous supervision', 'Difficulties encountered', 'Summarise any ethical issues arising from your research and how these will be addressed' and 'Does the Research Ethics Committee need to be consulted?'.

228   The Training Needs Analysis Log is completed by the student at the first supervisory session of the academic year and reviewed annually at the interim examination. It is a skills audit, designed to make students aware of the diversity of skills that they might desire to acquire during the course of their research degree and should inform the planning discussions that take place during formal supervisory sessions. The audit team established that the Training Needs Analysis Log has useful sections on research skills and technique, research environment, research management, personal effectiveness, communication skills, networking and teamworking and career management. The students that met with the team were aware of the PDP process and expressed support for its aims.

229   As noted in Section 4 there is mandatory attendance by all new students on the College-wide Research Methods Course. Coordinated by the Research Office, the Course offers a range of workshops, seminars and mentoring services to enhance and develop the transferable and career skills of postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers. Mandatory components include the creation of a research abstract, research proposal and research presentation, and the impressive array of research methodology lectures offered by College staff, visiting speakers, other higher education institutions, the London Hub of UK Grad, business, industry, museums and galleries, is set out in the attractive Research Methods Course brochure.

230   Of the 34 students who responded to the Research Student questionnaire in 2005-06, 57 per cent stated that they did not feel that the course was structured appropriately, with the main reason being given that there had been too many parallel sessions. The audit team established that this figure was due to the immense popularity of the workshops and the students' desire to attend as many as possible. In the same survey, 75 per cent of students felt that the seminars were very helpful or helpful in developing their own research.

231   The audit team saw evidence that the components of the Research Methods Course are kept under constant review to ensure its currency and utility. The review team for the review of research degree programmes in 2006 felt that the Course was an example of good practice and the present audit team concurs with this judgement, in the light of its content and ethos, and the willingness of staff to take on board the comments of students in relation to its structure.

232   The audit team was told that PhD students are granted opportunities to teach, but that training for this is optional. The team formed the view that there are benefits to PhD students, those they teach and to the College's ability to assure itself of the quality of learning opportunities, if training is a mandatory requirement. The team considers it desirable that the College provide training, guidance and support to all PhD students who are granted the opportunity to teach and assess.

Feedback arrangements

233   Research students provide feedback through several means: termly review, departmental review, meetings on the Research Methods Course, the Research Methods Course review, the online research student questionnaire and the three dedicated research student representatives. The audit team saw examples of the research student questionnaire and the detailed summarised results document which highlighted the main issues raised.

234   Research students are eligible for election as sabbatical officers of the Students' Union and a research yearbook, highlighting the work of all research students, is intended to be published in 2007.

235   The review team for the review of research degree programmes in 2006 felt that the College may wish to consider introducing mechanisms by which feedback on research degree programmes from a range of external parties can be collected and acted upon. The audit team was told that the Research Committee has considered this recommendation, and mechanisms had now been developed by referring to relevant examples from the UK Grad website and by taking into account the needs of relevant employers and the sector as a whole.

Assessment of research students

236   Clear criteria are available for the submission of theses and/or practice-based artefacts and the students that met with the audit team were clear as to the criteria for the final viva. Communication of assessment criteria and processes is via the Regulations and the Research Handbook.

237   MPhil degrees are examined by one external examiner and an internal examiner. PhDs have two external examiners. Both vivas have independent chairs and supervisors attend as observers. The potential outcomes from the vivas are explicitly set out, the Research Committee receives a brief report on the outcome and ABCD, chaired by the Rector, is the ultimate arbiter for any outstanding issues. The audit team learned that students are strongly encouraged to take advantage of mock vivas provided by the relevant department, should they so wish.

238   Research students are required to undergo an interim examination each year prior to their final year examination. This must take place before May of each year other than their final year. Interim examination forms were viewed by the audit team on the intranet. The interim board reviews progress of research training requirements and considers supervision tutorial logs.

239   Students wishing to transfer from MPhil to PhD status must undergo a transfer examination overseen by the transfer examination board. This replaces the interim examination process and transfer forms are available on the intranet. In order to transfer to PhD, a student should be able to demonstrate a high level of competence in the development and implementation of their research methodology; present a case that the research has progressed to a greater focus and depth and have formulated a hypothesis for further research which would, in the opinion of staff and external experts, be likely to produce an original contribution to knowledge. The audit team found this process to be suitably rigorous.

240   The Research Committee conducts an annual review of reports from MPhil/PhD external examiners for the Academic Standards Commitee (ASC), and the audit team saw evidence of the College developing suitable enhancement initiatives as a result of the information contained in the report.

Representations, complaints and appeals arrangements for research students

241   The Research Handbook details the complaints procedure and the student appeal process. Informal resolution is sought initially, with the next stage being a complaint directed to the Director of Research who must respond within 21 days. Appeals are made to the Registrar (and to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, if necessary) and ABCD receives an annual report on complaints.

242   PhD students are represented on departmental and school committees. The Director of Research meets every two weeks with the research student representatives, of whom there are three per year, and also termly with the Students' Union. The Director also holds an annual meeting with each first-year research student to offer impartial advice.

Section 7: Published information

Accuracy and completeness of published information, including Teaching and Quality Information

243   The College outlined how over the last five years it has endeavoured to improve the printed publications provided for students and potential students in terms of content, presentation, consistency and reliability of the information provided. The College reported parallel developments in online provision, both within the College via the intranet and externally via the web.

244   The Briefing Paper outlined how the Learning and Teaching Commitee had driven and funded change over the previous five years. The first centrally produced College-wide Handbook was produced in 2003 to complement the locally produced departmental handbooks. In 2006-07 MA students received a hard-cover College Diary, a College loose leaf binder, and a set of centrally edited, designed, formatted and produced documents to insert into this binder. These documents included the College-wide Handbook, the Regulations and the relevant departmental handbook.

245   With respect to departmental handbooks, the College described the aim of achieving greater consistency in content and organisation without imposing uniformity and losing individual character. Departmental handbooks viewed by the audit team were similar but not identical in format and included a breakdown of subject-specific course aims and objectives, broad course descriptions, the College-wide assessment scheme, tutorial procedures, mechanisms for departmental monitoring and details of professional practice. The College-wide Handbook included the generic learning outcomes and details of assessment along with other broad, non-departmental specific College information.

246   It was clear to the audit team that the College has made considerable progress in improving the consistency of the departmental handbooks and that there is a strong house style evident in these and the College-wide Handbook. As noted (see above paragraph 55) the team identified a degree of variability in the articulation of course aims and objectives.

247   The College outlined its dissatisfaction with the presentation values, content and navigation of online resources and that these are undergoing a major review. The student written submission (SWS) confirmed that the online provision, website and intranet, were not entirely satisfactory. The Briefing Paper explained that debate had been focused on how to find a balance between central control and autonomy at departmental level. It is intended to make information increasingly available online as PDF documents. The minutes of ASC indicated unanimous support for making the departmental handbooks available to prospective students through the web as long as the information therein could be deemed as reliable.

248   The audit team considers that the College has appropriate mechanisms and procedures for ensuring that the content of online material is controlled and developed. It endorses the College's intentions with respect to the content and timetable of revisions to online published material.

249   The audit team were informed that the College had decided not to produce an academic quality handbook. It had been decided that the priority should be focused on other published information and that guidelines normally found in such a document were available elsewhere. The team, however, was unable to find various written guidelines and procedures that might normally be expected to be lodged in a document such as an academic quality handbook (for example, College-wide guidelines on the briefing and induction of external examiners, definitions

of minor and major course changes, procedures for making ongoing course changes and a College-wide template for revalidation). The team considered that it is increasingly standard practice for an institution with degree awarding powers to collate centrally all policies and guidelines relating to academic procedures. Moreover, the team considers a central resource (online or paper-based) would produce substantial benefits to the College in terms of quality assurance and College-wide consistency. The team therefore considers it advisable that the College reviews, develops and enhances its quality assurance procedures and considers the merit of publishing them as a single, comprehensive and readily accessible source.

250   As already noted (paragraph 59) the College decided not to collate all course information in one document but that it was available to students in various forms. The team sampled the minutes of ASC in which programme specifications were discussed. While the meeting's outcome was a decision not to introduce programme specifications, there was an acknowledgement that the Bologna process, and the need to ensure transferability of credits, might require the College to produce a similar format of course information.

251   The audit team was able to access most generic programme information from a number of different sources (departmental handbooks, the College-wide Handbook and the Regulations) and it noted the College's intention to make this publicly available online. However, as already noted the team considers that detailed course specific information could be more readily accessible and digestible within a single comprehensive programme specific document, with particular benefits to potential and existing students.

252   The Briefing Paper stated that the College met the Higher Education Funding Council for England's requirements for Teaching Quality Information on the Higher Education and Research Opportunities in the United Kingdom's website until its closure in December 2006. It outlined its intention to consider over the summer and autumn 2007 how best to make this information available publicly through the College's website.

253   The audit team investigated the policy on published information with regard to the College's validation arrangement. The memorandum of agreement with the partner states that 'During the operation of this agreement [the partner] may advertise that its [programme] is granted by the Royal College of Art'. The team formed the view that the word 'may' in this clause implies a degree of conditionality that could lead to misunderstanding. The team noted, however, that the partner's website was clear on this matter, although other course literature was not available to be checked. The team nevertheless urges the College to satisfy itself that its partner makes clear, as a matter of course in all publicly available information, that the programme is validated by the College.

Students' experience of published information and other information available to them

254   The SWS outlined how the Prospectus is sent out to applicants. On joining the College, during registration, students receive the College-wide Handbook, the Regulations and departmental handbooks. It set out how the College also publishes information on the website and the intranet. The SWS stated that these were not entirely satisfactory but were constantly under review. The document stated that most students found the published information to be accurate and some found that it surpassed expectation. It gave examples of affirmative student quotations on the experience of published information.

255   Student representatives met by the audit team outlined how the College's reputation and referrals through personal contact was a significant factor in their application to study. They considered that this was probably more important than formal sources of information such as the website and the Prospectus. Student representatives confirmed that they had received the College-wide Handbook and departmental handbooks, and they possessed all the necessary information. Representatives seemed aware of assessment processes and the criteria by which they would be assessed. The Research Handbook was thought to be excellent. Students considered that word of mouth was an important source of information.

256   Students who were not student representatives indicated that their application had often been spurred by recommendation. They had also viewed the Prospectus and the website and some had attended open days. There was strong endorsement of the accuracy and relevance of this information. They confirmed that they had been issued with the College's handbooks which they tended to use for reference to particular queries rather than for everyday use. In parallel with the student representatives, they were happy to rely heavily on word of mouth as a means of communication and information gathering.

257   In a subsequent meeting, students were affirmative about the information contained within their handbooks. They were able to confirm that they had been given comprehensive and timely information on assessment requirements and their programmes of study.

258   The audit team sampled Departmental Review reports for a range of programmes and student feedback contained in these reports indicated a range of opinion on published information from excellent to satisfactory. There were no poor ratings.

259   On consideration of the available evidence the audit team concluded that overall, students had a high regard for the format and content of information available.