

Edinburgh College of Art

MARCH 2005

Enhancement-led institutional review

Preface

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

To do this, the QAA carries out reviews of individual higher education institutions (HEIs) (universities and colleges of HE). In Scotland this process is known as Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR). QAA operates equivalent but separate processes in Wales, England and Northern Ireland.

Enhancement-led approach

Over the period 2001-2003, the QAA, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, Universities Scotland and representatives of the student body have worked closely together on the development of the enhancement-led approach to quality in Scottish HE. This approach, which was implemented in academic year 2003-04, has five main elements:

- a comprehensive programme of review at the subject level, managed by the institutions;
- improved forms of public information about quality, based on addressing the different needs of the users of that information including students and employers;
- a greater voice for student representatives in institutional quality systems, supported by a national development service (known as the student participation in quality Scotland - sparqs - service);
- a national programme of enhancement themes, aimed at developing and sharing good practice in learning and teaching in HE.
- Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) involving all of the Scottish HEIs over a four-year period, from 2003-04 to 2006-07. The ELIR method embraces a focus on: the strategic management of enhancement; the effectiveness of student learning; and student, employer and international perspectives

The Qaa believes that this approach is distinctive in a number of respects: its balance between quality assurance and enhancement; the emphasis it places on the student experience; its focus on learning and not solely teaching; and the spirit of cooperation and partnership which has underpinned all these developments.

Nationally agreed reference points

ELIR includes a focus on institutions' use of a range of reference points, including those published by the QAA:

- the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF);
- the Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education;
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects;
- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. Programme specifications outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the SCQF.

Conclusions and judgement within ELIR

ELIR results in a set of commentaries about the institutions being reviewed. These commentaries relate to:

- the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards at the level of the programme or award. This commentary leads to a judgement on the level of confidence which can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The expression of this judgement provides a point of tangency between the ELIR method and other review methods operating in other parts of the UK. The judgement is expressed as one of: broad confidence, limited confidence or no confidence;
- the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair;
- the effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students;
- the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning;
- the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement.

The ELIR process

The ELIR process is carried out by teams comprising three academics, one student and one senior administrator drawn from the HE sector.

The main elements of ELIR are:

- a preliminary visit by the QAA to the institution in advance of the review visit
- a Reflective Analysis document submitted by the institution three months in advance of the second part of the review visit;
- a two-part review visit to the institution by the ELIR team; Part 1 taking place five weeks before Part 2, and Part 2 having a variable duration of between three and five days depending on the complexity of matters to be explored;
- the publication of a report, 20 weeks after the Part 2 visit, detailing the commentaries agreed by the ELIR team.

The evidence for the Enhancement-led institutional review

In order to gather the information on which its commentaries are based, the ELIR team carries out a number of activities including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, as well as the Reflective Analysis institutions prepare especially for ELIR;
- asking questions and engaging in discussions with groups of relevant staff;
- talking to students about their experiences;
- exploring how the institution uses the national reference points

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Introduction

1 This is the report of an Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) of Edinburgh College of Art (the College) undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). QAA is grateful to the College for the willing cooperation provided to the ELIR team.

2 The review followed a method agreed with Universities Scotland, student bodies and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), and informed by consultation with the Scottish higher education sector. The ELIR method focuses on the strategic management of enhancement; the effectiveness of student learning; and the use of a range of reference points. These reference points include the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, subject benchmark information, the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)*, and student, employer and international perspectives. Full detail on the method is set out in the *Handbook for enhancement-led institutional review: Scotland* which is available on QAA's website.

Style of reporting

3 ELIR reports are structured around three main sections: internal monitoring and review of quality and standards and public information; the student experience; and the effectiveness of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement. Each section contains a sequence of 'overviews' and 'commentaries' in which the team sets out its views. The first commentary in the first main section of the report leads to the single, formal judgement included within ELIR reports on the level of confidence which can be placed in the institution's management of quality and standards. This judgement is intended to provide a point of tangency with the methods of audit and review operating in other parts of the UK where similar judgements are reached. In the second and third main sections of the report, on the student experience and the effectiveness of the institution's quality

enhancement strategy, there are no formal judgements although a series of overviews and commentaries are provided. These are the sections of the ELIR report which are particularly enhancement focused. To reflect this, the style of reporting is intended to address the increased emphasis on exploration and dialogue which characterises the ELIR team's interaction with the institution on these matters. The reader may, therefore, detect a shift in the style of reporting in those sections, and this is intended to emphasise the enhancement-led nature of the method.

Method of review

4 The College submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA) which set out the College's strategy for quality enhancement, its approach to the management of quality and standards and its view of the effectiveness of its approach. Other documents available to the ELIR team with the RA included the institutional profile at 1 February 2005; the undergraduate prospectus for 2004-05; the postgraduate prospectus for 2002-04; the Strategic Plan 2004-07; Guidance notes for validation and internal review of academic programmes at December 2004; the College accreditation agreements with the University of Edinburgh and Heriot-Watt University; and the College academic committee remits and memberships. The RA provided the focus for the review and was used to develop a programme of activities by the ELIR team to provide a representative illustration of the way the College approaches the management of quality, enhancement and academic standards.

5 The College submitted three case studies with its RA. These were:

- an external benchmarking project in the School of Architecture relating to the development of programme specifications, and level and module descriptors
- a description and commentary on the development of the College procedure for the Internal Review of Academic Programmes (IRAP)

- a documentary, produced by students, following fourth year tapestry students through a two week project brief.

6 The RA was produced by the College ELIR Project Team, the membership of which included the Student President. Draft sections of the RA were subject to wider consultation with staff. The clear and open nature of the RA provided a very helpful starting point for the review.

7 The ELIR team visited the College on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 2 and 3 February 2005 and the Part 2 visit took place between 14 and 17 March 2005. During the first morning of the Part 1 visit, the ELIR team had the opportunity to meet informally with a group of staff including the Principal, Vice-Principal (Academic) and the Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement. This was followed by a set of presentations outlining the context and vision of the College. The team also received presentations from a group of pathway leaders working in subject areas with links to the creative professions, and from two academic staff currently on secondment to examine the College academic structures. The team had three further meetings during Part 1, with a group of senior staff, a group of student representatives drawn from across the College and a group of staff who had experience of the IRAP process.

8 During the Part 1 visit, the College made available a set of documentation which had been identified within the RA. This enabled the ELIR team to develop a programme of meetings and to identify a set of documentation for the Part 2 visit in order to provide a representative view of the College's approach to assuring and enhancing quality, and maintaining the standards of its awards.

9 The ELIR team comprised Mr Russell Boyce, Professor David Kirk, Professor David Lines and Ms Michaela Woodhouse (reviewers) and Ms Sheena Stewart (review secretary). The review was coordinated on behalf of QAA by Ms Ailsa Crum, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland. During the Part 1 visit and on the final day of the Part 2 visit, the review was observed by Mrs Shona Patterson, Assistant Director, QAA Reviews Group.

Background information about the institution

10 Edinburgh College of Art (the College) was founded in 1907, although it can trace its roots to the Drawing Academy founded by the Edinburgh Board of Manufacturers in 1760. In 1968 the College entered formal arrangements with Heriot-Watt University for the validation of programmes in architecture. In 1978 these arrangements were extended to include all programmes in art and design when the College was constituted, formally, as two faculties (Art and Design and Environmental Studies) of Heriot-Watt University. In 2002, the College renegotiated its relationship with Heriot-Watt, becoming an accredited associated college of that University, with responsibility for the management of quality assurance and enhancement activity. The two-faculty structure was dissolved as part of the renegotiation. From September 2004, for students entering the first year of programmes, academic awards have been validated by the University of Edinburgh. The awards of students already studying at the College will continue to be validated by Heriot-Watt University. There will be no mixed cohorts of students. The interim period of dual validation will continue until 2007-08 for undergraduate programmes, and for up to nine years for PhD programmes (see below, paragraphs 24-29).

11 The College is one of three designated Small Specialist Institutions (SSIs) in Scotland. It is located in three campuses all based in Edinburgh's Old Town. It has six academic schools and three academic centres: the School of Architecture; the School of Landscape Architecture; the School of Drawing and Painting; the School of Design and Applied Art; the School of Sculpture; the School of Visual Communication; the Centre for First Year Studies; the Centre for Continuing Studies; and the Centre for Visual and Cultural Studies.

12 The College also has a Graduate Research School responsible for the coordination of research student training. In 2004-05, the College had a total student population of 1,519 (full-time equivalent) of whom 1,251 were

undergraduates and 268 were postgraduates. In the same year, the College had a total of 347 staff comprising full and part-time and sessional staff.

13 The College is managed by a Principal who is supported by a Management Group with responsibility for the strategic management of the College. In addition to the Principal, membership of the Management Group comprises the Vice-Principal (Academic), College Secretary, Director of Finance and a representative from the academic staff. The College Board of Governors has delegated the overall planning, coordination, development and supervision of the academic work to the College Academic Council.

14 The College Vision includes the aim to be 'at the forefront of learning, creativity and research in the visual disciplines'. The aims of the College set out in its Learning and Teaching Strategy are to:

- foster creativity and innovation
- develop practical and analytical skills
- produce high-quality learning opportunities
- provide excellence in learning and teaching
- engage in creative research at the highest international level.

Institution's strategy for quality enhancement

15 The aim and purpose of the College's Learning, Teaching and Quality Enhancement Strategy is 'continuously and systematically to improve the operation of academic provision, student support services and the wider learning environment of the College'.

Internal monitoring and review of quality and standards and public information

Overview of the institution's internal arrangements for assuring the quality of programmes and maintaining the standards of its academic awards and credit

16 The RA indicated that the College has developed a more unified academic approach towards the management of programmes since the granting of Small Specialist Institution (SSI) status and its changed relationship with Heriot-Watt University. In 2002, the College renegotiated its relationship with Heriot-Watt whereby it became an accredited associated college of the University and assumed responsibility for the management of the quality and standards of the awards it offered on behalf of the validating institution. In September 2004, responsibility for validation began to transfer to the University of Edinburgh. Associated with the change of validating institution, the College has developed a new vision which, it believes, has been effective in providing the College with a more confident image of itself and of its relationships with other higher education institutions.

Committee structure

17 The RA stated that the College has been undergoing a continual review of its committee structures since 2002, citing the principal advantage of this as the opportunity to clarify the function of the Academic Council, which is now confirmed as the 'supreme academic decision-making body'. Prior to 2002, the two faculties had reported directly to Heriot-Watt University and not to the College Academic Council (see above, paragraph 10).

18 The Academic Council has four main committees: the Learning and Teaching Board, the Postgraduate Studies Committee, the Learning Resources Committee and the Research Board. At the time of ELIR, the College was in the process of establishing a Quality and

Standards Committee to replace the former Academic Planning and Audit Committee which, the RA stated, had been concerned primarily with matters of quality assurance rather than enhancement. The principal functions of the new committee were stated as monitoring and reviewing academic standards; considering and making recommendations on measures to enhance the quality of learning, teaching and assessment; and ensuring that the College quality assurance procedures meet external requirements. The ELIR team noted that some of these functions were included in the existing terms of reference for the Learning and Teaching Board.

19 At the time of the Part 2 visit, the Quality and Standards Committee had met only once. The ELIR team was not able to get a clear view of the relationship between the Committee and the Learning and Teaching Board. In discussion with the team, staff were similarly unclear about the interrelationship of these groups. The team noted that the Principal chaired the Quality and Standards Committee, although one of that Committee's main purposes is stated as being to provide advice and guidance to the Principal and the Academic Council, which the Principal also chairs. In discussions, it was emphasised to the team that the College has a small number of staff with cross-College responsibilities and the team recognises this noting, for example, that the Vice-Principal (Academic) chairs the Learning and Teaching Board. There may, however, be benefit in separating the chairmanship of the Quality and Standards Committee from that of the Academic Council in order to make clear the Committee's role in providing advice to the Academic Council and to the Principal.

20 The RA expressed the view that the new committee structure represented considerable progress towards coherent institutional management of learning and teaching, but acknowledged that certain limitations remain, particularly associated with the interrelationships of the committees reporting to the Academic Council. The team would agree with this view and suggests that there would be considerable

benefit in clarifying the respective remits of the Quality and Standards Committee and the Learning and Teaching Board.

Academic structure

21 The RA stated that the current College structure, consisting of six schools and three centres, is too complex for the size of the institution. Work had begun on a simplification of this structure in 2001 with the establishment of an Academic Structures Working Party. Following from this, in 2004, a more detailed and substantial review of both academic and management structures was initiated when the Principal circulated a paper 'Blueprint: a vision for teaching and learning at eca [Edinburgh College of Art]'. During the summer of 2004, a series of consultative meetings were held with academic and support staff and students. Since then, the academic restructuring project has been refined and its aims extended beyond simplifying the College structure to include providing students with greater choice and flexibility of study, using existing resources more efficiently and flexibly, and facilitating the better coordination of relationships with external bodies. Two senior members of academic staff have been seconded to the project and report to the Strategic Academic Development Steering Group. Membership of the Steering Group comprises the Principal, a lay member of the Board of Governors, the Vice-Principal (Academic), the Student President, the Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, the Head of Human Resources and the two seconded staff.

22 The timetable for the academic restructuring project involves extensive consultation and development of outline proposals during 2004-05, finalisation of operational details in 2005-06 and implementation of the new academic structures in 2006-07. The College has recognised that this is a protracted process but is committed to extensive benchmarking of practice in other institutions and consultation with staff and students to ensure as many stakeholders as possible are involved in what it considers to

be a 'far-reaching and profound process of re-organisation'. A number of specific operational objectives have been identified for the project, and the College pointed out that some of these have been addressed within the existing structure, for example, some elements of the First Year Studies in Art and Design programme have been extended to students in Architecture and Landscape Architecture. During the review, the ELIR team heard many positive endorsements of the approach to the change process but it also heard some concerns, especially during its discussions with students. These concerns appeared to relate to a lack of certainty which may have been generated by the extended change process.

23 The ELIR team considered that the academic restructuring project had been well planned and was widely understood by staff. The team regarded the consultative approach as positive, although the College could usefully consider whether the extended nature of the process may be affecting the views of some students who have concerns that their programmes could be adversely affected by the possible changes in the College structure. The team would also encourage the College to ensure that other important developments in the management of quality and standards are not delayed until the final introduction of the new academic structures (see below, paragraphs 25 and 41).

Validating universities

24 The RA stated that the 2002 Accreditation Agreement with Heriot-Watt University had presented the College with a number of challenges, but also provided important opportunities for institutional change. Not least was the need for the College to take responsibility for the management of quality assurance and enhancement which necessitated the development of an infrastructure previously located within Heriot-Watt University, although this also permitted the College to develop processes and procedures which, it believed, would be more fit for purpose. Prior to 2002, each faculty within the College operated

according to a distinct set of regulations. The College is working towards implementing a single set of regulations, policies and procedures. While a number of other developments, such as changes in reporting lines, have enabled some of the former diversity to be addressed, the College recognises that the process is not yet complete.

25 The ELIR team noted that the College, sensibly, has developed its new processes by adapting and building on those systems inherited from Heriot-Watt University. For example, the team heard that the College had made use of the feedback it received from its 2003-04 annual report to Heriot-Watt University, to inform policy development in the following academic year. The College is aware of the need to codify and document its policies and procedures and intends to produce a Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook to be in place by 2005-06. Given the potential for the Handbook to assist with the implementation of the new processes, the team would strongly encourage the College to progress this and to ensure that the Handbook is available for the start of 2005-06.

26 For a period the College will operate under a dual validation regime as it transfers validation of its programmes from Heriot-Watt University to the University of Edinburgh. The College is fully aware of the need for careful management of the potential risks during the interim period and, to minimise these risks, arrangements to ensure continuity have been put in place involving all three institutions. For example, all external examiner appointments during the interim period are subject to approval by the College and both validating universities. The College is also required to produce an annual report to both institutions. The RA stated that, to 'establish a focused approach to quality assurance and enhancement and reduce the potential risk of dual validation', the College restructured what was the Academic Registry in 2004 to form two separate units: the Registry and the Quality Office. The Registry is responsible for student admissions, matriculation, examination and

graduation, while the Quality Office is responsible for the coordination and management of quality assurance and enhancement. The heads of both units report to the Vice-Principal (Academic).

27 Under the 2004 accreditation agreement with the University of Edinburgh, the College reports to the University Senatus Academicus, and responsibility for managing the accreditation agreement rests with the University College of Humanities and Social Science. As part of the accreditation process, the College had submitted a set of documentation to the University, including programme specifications, course catalogues, module descriptors and student handbooks. Following consideration of this material, the University reported its view that the College had 'a mature and effective process for assuring the quality of its academic provision and maintaining appropriate standards for degree programmes'. The University also required the College to put in place a timetable for the revalidation of academic programmes that would align with the University's validation processes and schedule. The revalidation programme will take place over the period 2003-04 to 2007-08 and will be incorporated with the College's IRAP process (see below, paragraph 30). As a further measure to ensure continuity of the student experience, it has been agreed between all three institutions that reviewers from both Heriot-Watt University and the University of Edinburgh will be included on all panels.

28 In 2003-04, as part of the development of the accreditation process, the College reviewed its regulations aligning them with those of the University of Edinburgh where appropriate. All changes to the regulations have been approved by both validating universities but the College has highlighted that this review has resulted in some complex outcomes, for example, the College has to operate two different academic appeals processes. These differences have been articulated to staff and students in the College Academic Appeals Policy, the Student Guide Book and in school and programme handbooks. The ELIR team also learned that there have been ongoing discussions relating to the University of

Edinburgh's programme guidelines which the College is using to inform the development of its programme specifications, and about the adoption of the University's assessment regulations. The specific issues of module size and the anonymous presentation of marks to boards of examiners had resulted in some debate which, by the time of ELIR, had been resolved but had not been fully implemented.

29 The College explained that its students had been provided with information about the change in validating university through letters for new students and via the Student Guide Book 2004-05 which was issued with matriculation packs to continuing students in August 2004. In discussion with the ELIR team, students were clear and unconcerned about the arrangements, emphasising that they identified more closely with the College than with either validating university. Programme leaders supported the view that the transition from Heriot-Watt University to the University of Edinburgh had involved extensive consultation and that the implementation of the new arrangements had been smooth. It was clear to the team that the College has managed the transition carefully, putting in place effective arrangements. The College is aware of the difficulties associated with disseminating information to staff and students during its rapid process of policy development. In particular, it is aware of the limitations associated with relying on committee members to act as the only conduits of information and has emphasised the importance of the anticipated Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook as one mechanism for ensuring the better management and dissemination of information. The team concurred with this analysis.

Internal approval, monitoring and review

Internal review of academic programmes

30 In 2003-04, the College introduced a procedure for the IRAP and has indicated that, in 2004-05, to accommodate the change in validating university, the procedures will be

reviewed to incorporate a full validation review (see above, paragraph 27). Currently, the arrangements for approving new programmes begin with an initial approval being granted by the College Management Group before a more detailed submission is required for consideration by the Learning and Teaching Board which reports to the Academic Council, prior to submission to the validating university.

31 One of the case studies the College submitted with its RA described the steps the College had taken in developing IRAP, building on the previous review arrangements which had been managed by Heriot-Watt University, and on extensive consultation within and outside the College. The case study emphasised the extent to which the consultation process had been effective in achieving the support of staff for the process. It also highlighted that both validating universities had commented positively about the process following their involvement with it.

32 The IRAP process is overseen by the Learning and Teaching Board, which also considers IRAP reports and recommends any conditions to the Academic Council. The Quality Office has responsibility for supporting the operation of the process. There are detailed guidelines which include guidance for IRAP panel members and for schools and departments on producing the necessary documentation. Each panel includes reviewers drawn from both validating universities, members external to all three higher education institutions, College staff and a student member. There is a validation and review planning sheet which acts as a useful checklist to ensure that panels address all the documentation provided and that action is taken by schools and departments on any resulting conditions. There is also a validation and review evaluation checklist which is intended to ensure that panel members consistently apply College policies.

33 A schedule of IRAP events has been agreed over a six year period (see above, paragraph 27). At the time of ELIR, five IRAP events had been held. The ELIR team was able to consider documentation relating to these, including

evidence of institutional matters being brought to the attention of the Academic Council. There are clear arrangements for the Learning and Teaching Board to confirm the fulfilment of any conditions, and the team saw examples of IRAP reports being monitored to ensure that conditions were met. The team did note instances of an extended period elapsing before conditions were confirmed as having been achieved, and considered that the College should establish clear timelines for that part of the process to avoid such delays.

34 Students are involved in the IRAP process through groups of students meeting the panel and by the inclusion of a student member on the panel itself. Students are not provided with formal training for this role, although they do receive the written guidelines on the process and they are also briefed by the member of staff who will chair the particular IRAP to which they have been allocated. In discussion with the ELIR team, students who had been IRAP panel members said they had felt adequately prepared and had considered the process itself to be thorough. The team considered that the involvement of students as full panel members represents good practice.

35 The RA emphasised the extent to which the IRAP process has resulted in positive change. Staff involvement with IRAP panel membership includes participation as observers by invitation, which the College uses as an explicit form of staff development and as a mechanism for encouraging the sharing and dissemination of good practice across the College. In discussion with the ELIR team, staff confirmed the College view that there is an expectation that good practice will be both identified and disseminated. From its meetings with staff, the team found that there was wide support for the IRAP process, although there was a comment that experience of IRAP could be spread to a larger group of staff. The team considered that the College's use of observers is a helpful way of doing this.

36 The case study identified the extent to which there has been ongoing refinement of the IRAP process, and confirmed the College's intention to review the process at the end of the current academic year. The ELIR team considered that the College has adopted a

positive approach to refining IRAP, and that the proposed review would provide a valuable opportunity to enhance the process (see below, paragraphs 101 and 102). The team formed the view that IRAP is effective as a mechanism for assisting the College to assure the quality of provision and secure the standards of awards. The team also noted that IRAP meets the SHEFC criteria for internal review and that the College uses the process to generate information which it provides to SHEFC.

Annual programme monitoring and review

37 The RA stated that the College monitors all of its academic programmes through its Annual Programme Monitoring and Review (APMR) arrangements. Responsibility for collating information for APMR lies with heads of school and programme leaders. APMR reports include matters arising from external examiners' reports, statistical performance indicators, the results of student feedback, and the outcomes from school and/or programme committees, as well as a short action plan for the forthcoming academic year. The reports are also intended to identify broader institutional matters. The RA indicated that the APMR process was inherited from Heriot-Watt University and expressed the College's view that it does not yet meet the enhancement agenda. Currently, APMR reports are analysed by the Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement and the Vice-Principal (Academic), as well as being considered by the Learning and Teaching Board. The resulting analysis is included in the annual reports to the validating universities.

38 From the examples it saw, the ELIR team considered that the action plans within the APMR reports could be improved by identifying more clearly the responsibilities and timescales for taking action. The team noted that matters arising from APMR reports are considered through the College committee structure, including at the Academic Council. The matters reported are consolidated at each level in the committee structure so that it may become difficult for the matters raised to be identified within the reports, particularly when they reach the Academic Council. There is, therefore,

a danger that action points and the timescales for taking action are not specified clearly to the committees with responsibility for overseeing the process. The team would also concur with the College's view that there would be benefit in considering how the process could be more enhancement orientated (see below, paragraph 101). The team noted that the Quality Office has proposed changes to the APMR template which should promote the self-reflective nature of the process. From the team's discussions with all groups of staff, it was evident that the APMR process is regarded as having a clear purpose and value. Overall, and notwithstanding the caveats outlined, the team concluded that APMR is an effective process, incorporating feedback from staff, students and external examiners.

Assessment

39 The RA indicated that the College had introduced a Common Assessment and Progression System (ECAPS) in 2003-04 to develop consistent and transparent assessment criteria and procedures throughout the College. This builds on Heriot-Watt University's common assessment and progression system but includes criteria which the College considers are more appropriate to its studio based disciplines. ECAPS consists of a standardised system for grade descriptors, which is universally used across the College and is referred to in programme specifications and student handbooks. The College's IRAP process has identified inconsistencies in the application of assessment methods in some areas of the institution, and has also highlighted that in some areas there was an incomplete mapping between the assessment methods and the intended learning outcomes. One IRAP report identified that such a lack of clarity would result in inconsistent information being given to students.

40 The ELIR team heard examples of variability in the specificity of assessment criteria from its own discussions with staff and students. A number of students, including some in their final year, expressed a level of uncertainty about what is expected of them in assessments, particularly in studio based work. In discussion, some staff

indicated that the information included within the student handbooks was sufficiently explicit but it appeared to the team, from its discussions with students and from consideration of the IRAP documentation, that a clearer reference to learning outcomes is required.

41 The ELIR team recognised ECAPS as providing the basis of a sound system for the standardisation of assessment policy and practices, and would strongly encourage the College to pursue its plans to develop it in two main ways. First, as the College has identified, for the system to be meaningful the broad descriptors within ECAPS need to be related in more detail to the individual subject areas. Secondly, there is a need to ensure that there is alignment between the information set out in the learning outcomes, programme specifications, assignment briefs provided to students, and assessment feedback. Such alignment should ensure that all students can be clear about the specific learning outcomes being assessed, how these contribute to programme outcomes and about their own achievement relative to the intended outcomes (see below, paragraph 83).

Programme structure

42 Senior staff indicated that historically the College had diverse programme structures and that the variability had dated from the previous accreditation agreement with Heriot-Watt University. In recent years a standard approach towards structuring programmes has been developed. The ELIR team noted that references to the common programme structure were included within the process documentation for the approval and review of programmes, and heard that the common structure would be included within the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook (see above, paragraph 25). From the team's discussions with staff, it was clear that the need for a common programme structure across the College is recognised. The full implementation of the common structure will be important to secure comparability of practice within and between the schools, and to ensure equity of the student learning opportunities.

Progress files

43 At the time of ELIR, the College had not developed a policy on progress files. In discussions with the ELIR team, senior staff indicated that the College has a long history in the use of student portfolios and, therefore, they did not envisage any difficulty in adhering to the national requirement for personal development planning and the related need to produce progress files. The team would encourage the College to develop and implement an institutional policy on these matters in order to meet national deadlines, perhaps taking the opportunity to link this development with its wider work on employability (see below, paragraphs 85-88).

Research degrees

44 The College Graduate Research School is responsible for the management of policy and practice for research degree provision. The College has produced a Graduate Research School Code of Practice and each research student receives a copy. The College has also developed specific processes associated with practice-based research. In its discussions with research students the ELIR team heard that while students recognised the attention the College has paid to this area, the processes could benefit from further adaptation to suit this form of research. The students spoke favourably of other College processes such as induction, supervision and training. The training programme for new research students was generally regarded as effective and stimulating. In discussion, research students identified strongly with the individual schools and highlighted the support they receive from that source.

Collaborative provision

45 In its RA, the College stressed the importance of developing a range of strategic alliances beyond the current validation arrangements with Heriot-Watt University and the University of Edinburgh. Accordingly, the College is developing links with a range of Scottish institutions in addition to a number of international collaborations. Given that the

College did not have degree awarding powers at the time of ELIR, it was not involved in collaborative activity where the College acted as a validating partner.

Overview of the use made of external reference points for assuring quality and standards

External examiners

46 The RA emphasised that external examiners play a central role in the College's framework for ensuring the standards of awards. External examiner nominations are made by the Academic Council, via the relevant school committee and the Learning and Teaching Board, to the Senate and Senatus Academicus of Heriot-Watt and Edinburgh universities respectively. Under the current agreements, external examiners' reports are considered by both of the validating universities. Within the College, the process is managed by the Quality Office which is responsible for collating the reports and sending them to the relevant schools and departments with a pro forma identifying the areas where responses and comments are required. External examiners' reports are discussed by programme committees and responses are included in the APMR reports. The external examiners' reports are also analysed at institutional level and the outcome of that analysis is included in the annual report to the validating universities.

47 The RA expressed the view that the size of the College made it possible to ensure a consistent approach to dealing with external examiners' reports was adopted, but did acknowledge that the interim need for dual reporting to both validating institutions had lengthened the response time to the external examiners.

48 The ELIR team was able to consider documentation relating to the operation of the system and on the basis of that, and its discussions with staff and students, is able to support the College view of the effectiveness of its external examining process for securing the academic standards of awards.

Professional and statutory bodies and employers

49 The RA stated that the College is currently validated by three professional and statutory bodies (PSBs) all of which relate to the schools of Architecture and Landscape Architecture. Although PSB validation is a separate process, IRAP panels are briefed on the requirements of relevant PSBs. IRAP documentation demonstrated the alignment of the internal and external processes.

Use of the Academic Infrastructure

50 The College indicated in its RA that it takes full account of the Academic Infrastructure. The RA explained that since taking ownership of quality assurance and enhancement activity, the College has used the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, as a central focus for the ongoing review of policies and procedures. The ELIR team learned of one particular example where the College had used the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes* to evaluate its research degree policies and procedures. It was clear from meetings with heads of school and programme leaders that the *Code* was used routinely in the development of programmes, and use of the *Code* was confirmed as a part of the IRAP process. The team also saw examples of the subject benchmark statements being considered as part of the IRAP process.

51 The RA expressed the intention that all of the College's undergraduate provision will be credit rated in adherence with the SCQF by the end of 2004-05 and that taught postgraduate provision would be reviewed to incorporate credit rating during 2004-05. In discussion with the ELIR team, staff revealed a broad awareness of the SCQF, although there was confusion among some staff between programme structure changes that would be required to align with the University of Edinburgh's modularisation policies (see above, paragraph 28) and matters relating to the SCQF.

52 The ELIR team noted an absence of references to the Academic Infrastructure in some of the College's documentation.

The College guidance for validation and review panels makes no reference to the SCQF and the otherwise comprehensive validation and review planning sheet provides no overt reference to the SCQF, benchmark statements or to the *Code of practice*. The current pro forma for programme specifications does not refer to the SCQF, and the student handbooks considered by the team did not make explicit reference to the SCQF levels. There are references to the Academic Infrastructure within individual IRAP and APMR reports, but the team would strongly encourage the College to ensure that its documentation makes explicit reference to elements of the Academic Infrastructure to ensure that attention is paid to it systematically.

Programme specifications

53 One of the case studies submitted with the RA described the evolution of programme specifications, module descriptors and level descriptors in the School of Architecture and demonstrated the way in which external criteria, including the SCQF, had been incorporated into the programme outcomes, levels and module descriptors. The ELIR team considered that the approach demonstrated good practice which the College could usefully apply to ensure the explicit use of the Academic Infrastructure in other areas of the institution.

54 The College currently makes use of programme specifications within the IRAP process and the College is using these documents to provide a standardised approach to identifying the aims, learning outcomes and module descriptors within programmes. The College acknowledges that it is at an early stage in its use of programme specifications and, to some extent, the current documents represent a description of the existing curriculum rather than a more standardised approach. Senior staff expressed the intention that, in future, the development and review of programme specifications will become much more central to the programme planning process. The ELIR team would support that approach.

Commentary on the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards

55 The College has made considerable progress since 2002 when it assumed responsibility for the management of quality and standards within the institution, this previously having been the responsibility of the validating university. In particular, its external examiner process is well managed, and its IRAP and APMR processes are both effective and have the strong support of staff. There would be benefit in ensuring that the timescales for taking action in relation to both IRAP and APMR are always specified and that, in the case of APMR, the action to be taken is always identified clearly within the committee structure. There is evidence that the College, generally, makes effective use of the Academic Infrastructure although the College should ensure that its formal documentation makes more consistent reference to relevant elements of the infrastructure. In particular, there should be more overt references to the SCQF in the programme handbooks provided to students.

56 It is clear that the process of transition from one validating university to another has been managed carefully by the College in partnership with the validating institutions, and that effective arrangements are being put in place to ensure continuity for students.

57 The ECAPS system provides a useful starting point for the College's intention to introduce consistent and transparent assessment criteria and procedures across the institution. For this ambition to be realised, the College needs to progress its plans to relate the broad grade descriptors within ECAPS to individual subject areas, and there needs to be a more explicit alignment between the intended learning outcomes and the assessment feedback provided to students in the interest of enabling students to be clearer about what is expected of them and about their own achievement.

58 The College is in the process of conducting a significant review of its academic and management structures. The review has been well planned and is widely understood by staff. The College is encouraged to ensure that it does not delay other important work until final implementation of the review outcomes. The committee structure has been under ongoing review, and the College is supported in its intention to clarify the interrelationships between committees, particularly between the Learning and Teaching Board and the recently established Quality and Standards Committee, and the links between each of those committees and the Academic Council.

59 On the basis of the maturing relationships the College has with its validating institutions, the shared sense of the value of the IRAP and APMR processes which is evident in staff across the College, and the extent to which the College senior managers support a self-reflective approach, **broad confidence** can be placed in the College's current and likely future management of the quality of its provision and the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its validating institutions. This judgement assumes the College's implementation of its identified plans to produce a Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook and to revise its assessment arrangements for the start of academic year 2005-06.

Overview of the institution's approach to ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of provision is complete, accurate and fair

60 The RA explained that the College was aware of the need to implement systematic formal approval processes relating to the accuracy of public information, and that the College Management Group was reviewing a more strategic approach to the management of public information, in line with the Freedom of Information Act. The College has introduced a code of practice governing records management and, in April 2004, the Board of Governors approved a policy on the freedom of information.

61 The College has formal processes for approving its prospectus and the material included on its website. The process for approving the prospectuses will be changed for the 2006-07 prospectus. The final text of previous versions was approved by the Vice-Principal (Academic). In future, the final check for accuracy will be completed by the Quality Office and the College Admissions Committee. The College Web Committee, chaired by the Vice-Principal (Academic), oversees all aspects of the website from technical matters to its content.

62 A College Student Guide Book was introduced in 2002-03 and the information contained in it is collated by the Registry. This institution-wide publication is supplemented by school and department handbooks, which are produced to a template defined in the IRAP process, although there is no mechanism for the formal approval of these handbooks. In discussion with the ELIR team, students expressed general satisfaction that the information provided to them was accurate. At the time of ELIR, the College had very recently launched a student portal which the College and students regard as having great potential to provide information.

63 The RA described the College's approach to addressing the SHEFC requirements relating to the public information set. From its discussions with senior staff, the ELIR team formed the view that the College was well placed to provide the information for this purpose.

Commentary on the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair

64 The ELIR team considered that the College has adequate arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes in its prospectus and on its website about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair. The College is actively engaged in implementing arrangements to fulfil the SHEFC requirements relating to the public information set.

The student experience

Overview of the institution's approach to engaging students in the assurance and enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning

65 The College regards student involvement in quality enhancement and assurance as being of central importance, and identifies a number of ways in which students are encouraged to participate. These include representation on academic committees; participation in Internal Review of Academic Programmes (IRAP) and validation panels; formal module and programme feedback; and informal feedback to staff.

Student membership of committees

66 Students are represented on the Board of Governors, the Academic Council, the Learning and Teaching Board, the Quality and Standards Committee, the Postgraduate Studies Committee, and on individual programme committees. The Student President's membership of the Academic Council provides an opportunity for that postholder to participate in the monitoring of the College annual reports to the validating universities, and in the monitoring of the outcomes from IRAP and validation events.

67 The Principal's Committee for Student Matters sits outside the formal committee structure and is advisory to the Principal. It meets once or twice per year to discuss matters of a general institutional nature such as procedures relating to late night working and the recycling policy, the latter being an example of a student-led project which subsequently informed College policy. There is also a Student Forum which meets once per term with the agenda being driven by the Students' Representative Council via the Student President. All students can attend and the Forum covers a wide range of topics. Both of these groups have resulted in the College making changes to enhance the student experience and have been valued by those students who have attended meetings. There is limited awareness among the student body of the Principal's Committee for Student Matters

and there would be benefit in the College publicising its work more widely as well as informing students of how they might get involved. There is wider awareness of the Student Forum and there are a number of examples of the group making a positive difference to the daily student experience.

Student representatives

68 Student views on programme-specific issues are intended to be captured through a system of student representatives serving on school and programme committees. Membership of these committees enables students to be directly involved in the APMR process. There is no institution-wide mechanism for identifying student representatives and a wide variety of approaches operate ranging from staff appointing individuals, to the representatives being elected by their peers. The College acknowledges that it has, at times, had difficulty in appointing student representatives to these committees and attributes this, in part, to the reluctance of some groups of students to take on the role. In discussion, students expressed a view that they did not always have time to participate.

69 Currently the College does not provide formal training for the student representative role, although it did arrange for the national organisation Student Participation in Quality Scotland (sparqs) to deliver a training and development day for student representatives during 2003-04. Those students who attended evaluated the event highly and expressed a desire for more training. The College expressed disappointment in the low student turnout for the event and is considering how it can develop its communication systems with students generally (see below, paragraph 82). It is also considering the ways in which it can fit future training events with the increasing demands placed on students' time, particularly their external work commitments. During 2004-05, the College has been working with the Students' Representative Council and sparqs to prepare future training and development programmes.

70 Involving students in the formulation and discussion of APMR reports is good practice,

and the College is encouraged to pursue its work with the Students' Representative Council and sparqs to provide more training, both to clarify the nature of the student representative role and to ensure that students can feel more confident about undertaking the responsibility.

Internal review of academic programmes

71 Students are involved as full panel members in the IRAP process (see above, paragraph 34). Having the views of the student body represented in this process on an equal basis with those of staff is good practice.

Student feedback

72 The College believes that its size, together with the nature of art, architecture and design education, means that students and staff have a closer and more intense working relationship than might be the case in some other institutions. Because of this there are daily opportunities for students to provide informal feedback on the nature of provision through scheduled or unscheduled group meetings. Both the College and students value the role of such informal feedback and are eager to guard its spontaneity. The College is, however, aware of the importance of capturing students' views at institutional level and is currently reflecting on its mechanisms for doing this in order to bring about greater transparency and to ensure consistency of practice.

73 Currently there is wide variation in the formal methods used for capturing students' views. Module questionnaires are only used in some parts of the College with a number of schools operating more general feedback arrangements. The value of individual schools and programmes being able to capture programme and discipline-specific student comments is recognised. To facilitate the identification of institution-wide issues that are raised through this process, the College is developing a common feedback template to be used in 2005-06. The APMR process offers evidence of programme leaders and heads of school taking action in relation to matters

raised through student feedback although, in discussion, students revealed that there is disparity in the extent to which this occurs within the schools. The College is aware that students are not always clear about the significance or relevance of the various mechanisms for gaining their feedback. The College is, therefore, encouraged to consult with students while it develops its institution-wide template which has the potential to bring greater clarity and consistency to the whole process.

Student Representative Council

74 The Student Representative Council (SRC) fulfils an important role in ensuring that students' views are identified and transmitted to the College. The Principal meets with the Student President on a weekly basis. In discussion, students were appreciative of the work undertaken by the SRC (see below, paragraph 80).

Overview of the institution's approach to the promotion of effective student learning

75 The College emphasises the distinctive character of learning and teaching within the institution, acknowledging that this is embedded in the traditional culture of art and design education. This is based on small student cohorts, intensive staff-student contact and the public nature of art and design as an activity. Particular emphasis is placed on the one-to-one pedagogical relationship with tutors and to small group discussions (the group 'crit'). Staff and students identify many benefits of the group crit approach, explaining that value is added to the feedback from tutors through the method enabling constructive criticism to be provided by fellow students, and because it provides the opportunity for students to relate to, and comment on, the feedback immediately. In discussion, students were particularly emphatic about the extent to which this was helpful throughout their studies.

76 A close working relationship is evident, with groups of staff and students stating that this was effective in promoting student learning

by building trust and enabling students to focus on their work in a relaxed environment. The College is aware of the positive benefits and also of the need to manage the close relationships to guard against any potential subjectivity. Students were strongly supportive of the small group sizes, indicating that this facilitated the early identification and resolution of any potential problems. There are mechanisms in place to enable students to change tutor and, in discussion, students were aware of these mechanisms and were confident that they could use them if necessary. The College also has arrangements in place to secure the assessment process, for example, through the involvement of teams of assessors and, since 2003-04, the use of anonymity in the confirmation of student progress and degree classification.

Induction

77 Students are given an induction to the College as a whole and to their individual school or programme. There is no common policy on induction for schools to follow and there is considerable variation in practice. To address this diversity, and to ensure adherence with the *Code of practice*, the College has formed a working group to review its induction processes. Some students expressed dissatisfaction with the induction they had received while others, notably students in the School of Architecture, commented favourably on the arrangements in place. As part of the Architecture induction, students are provided with a tour conducted by students in later years of study, which those who had experienced it regarded as providing an 'authentic' impression and a very useful opportunity for new students to seek advice or information from their peers. The College is encouraged to consider the wider application of this approach, and to progress the positive steps it is taking to introduce equivalence of induction experience.

78 The College is aware of the need to improve its induction arrangements for international students and this will be particularly important, given its stated intention of increasing its overseas recruitment.

Student support

79 Student Services offers a range of support, such as welfare advice, counselling, academic and language support, employability information and guidance, and advice to particular groups of students including those from overseas and those with disabilities. The service has undergone a significant expansion since 2000, including the creation of a Disability Adviser post, the appointment of an overseas student welfare officer, and an increase in the number of staff offering language support. Disability is a particular concern at the College because, in common with art and design provision nationally, it attracts high numbers of dyslexic students. Student Services offers diagnostic screening and students can self-refer or may be referred for screening and support from other parts of the College. For students with any disclosed disability, the Disability Adviser prepares a learning profile which includes relevant information including setting out any adjustments to the student's learning environment that are deemed appropriate. The profile is then distributed to the relevant head of school and the Registry. The College is generally aware of issues relating to accessibility and has taken steps to adapt its expectations and the learning environment.

80 The College makes use of Link Persons (who are nominated members of academic staff) located in schools to help students access the services available centrally. There are examples of this arrangement having worked well, particularly in instances where there were sensitivities around referral, although there appeared to be variation across the College on the extent to which the Link Persons were known to other staff or students. There are effective links between Student Services and the SRC to ensure that students are provided with the most appropriate information and advice when the need arises. In discussion, students spoke highly of the quality and range of services available, and were very clear about where they could seek information and guidance.

81 Students spoke favourably about the support network available to them within the College as a whole which includes tutors, the

technicians and their peers. Technicians offer guidance to students during their creative practical sessions but are not involved in assessment or the academic evaluation of students' work. All groups of students commented very positively on the support they received from the technicians.

Student portal

82 As a first step towards providing a Managed Learning Environment, the College launched a student portal in January 2005. Its implementation and development was being overseen by the College Management Group. Although very recent at the time of ELIR, both students and staff identified the portal as potentially very beneficial as a tool to promoting effective communication. Students, in particular, were enthusiastic about its introduction.

Feedback on assessment

83 The arrangements for providing students with feedback on assessment vary considerably between schools and programmes. Staff state that different modules require different levels of feedback, but it is clear that the variety of approaches adopted are not understood by students. Feedback for some modules takes the form of a grade only, in other cases grades are accompanied by written feedback and in others tutorial feedback is provided. The College has already identified a lack of clarity, in some cases, in the information provided to students about the link between learning outcomes and assessment criteria (see above, paragraph 41). In discussion, students indicated that they were sometimes unaware of the assessment criteria which could, for example, identify a piece of work as 'good' as opposed to 'excellent'. Students also spoke of instances where assessment feedback had arrived very late, and they considered that this had adversely affected their learning experience. This was particularly the case with some postgraduate students who described experiences that reflect very poor assessment practice in terms of the delays they had encountered. In contrast, students in the schools of Architecture and Landscape

Architecture were satisfied with the feedback they received, indicating that they were provided with graded feedback including written comments and had not experienced delays. They emphasised that they had found this very helpful in terms of preparing for subsequent stages of their programmes.

84 The College has identified that further work is required in relation to its assessment practices. It is urged to give that work high priority and to ensure that the good practice which exists in providing assessment feedback in some schools can be implemented across the institution to provide equity of learning opportunities for all students.

Overview of the institution's approach to the promotion of the employability of its students

85 Art, design and architecture education is traditionally highly vocational. The College emphasises that students simultaneously are trained in craft processes and are encouraged to address high-level academic matters. For example, in a single project a sculpture student might learn about mixing plaster at the same time as grappling with the concept of negative space. The curricula of all degree programmes contain elements addressing key subject-specific skills, transferable skills, and knowledge and understanding of the vocational context and professional practices.

86 The College is clear that the primary responsibility for embedding employability within student learning rests within the schools. This affects both the curriculum and the methods of delivery. The curricula are structured to equip students with the necessary skills, understanding and knowledge to pursue careers in the creative industries. Professional placements are included in many programmes and most programmes include a professional practice module which enables students to gain knowledge and experience in areas such as business skills and legal matters. The curriculum is often delivered in the form of live briefs or projects, creating a learning environment that prepares students for the conditions of

professional life. The College has identified that while a high proportion of its graduates pursue careers in the creative industries, significant numbers do not. Therefore, attention is paid to providing students with the skills they will require to pursue a wide range of employment possibilities, and a range of transferable skills are embedded within the curricula. In discussion, students expressed high levels of satisfaction with the extent to which they are helped to acquire and practice the range of these skills.

87 Many of the College staff are professional artists, designers and architects, a feature which staff and students highlight as providing extra depth to the preparation of students for employment. The College also engages representatives from the industries to offer advice and support to the students, or to work with them on specific projects and competitions. Students identify this as very valuable in providing first hand knowledge of their chosen fields, as well as adding a further perspective to that offered by their tutors.

88 The College has plans to link with the national enhancement themes work on employability (see below, paragraph 98) and appointed an Employability Advisor at the beginning of 2004-05. The Advisor is carrying out an audit of careers and employability-related provision currently offered throughout the College as a prelude to developing an institutional employability strategy. This represents a positive response to work at the national level and has the potential to enhance the College's provision in this area.

Commentary on the effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students

89 Students identify the College as providing a creative learning environment in which staff and students demonstrate a commitment to their subject areas. The extent to which students are involved in both the APMR and the IRAP processes is positive. The general arrangements for student representation are adequate although there is considerable variation in the way in which representatives are identified. The

College is encouraged to pursue its work with the SRC and sparqs to provide training for the student representative role.

90 There is wide variation in the provision of feedback to students on their assessment performance and the College should give its planned work on assessment practices high priority to provide equity of learning opportunities for all students.

91 There has been an expansion in the range and availability of the College's student support services in the last five years which is welcomed by students. There are also close links between the College services and the SRC so that effective support is provided to all groups of students.

92 There is already a significant focus on employability across the provision and the College plans further work in this area. Particularly positive features are the extent to which transferable and other employment-related skills are embedded within the curricula and can be practised through the methods of delivery.

Effectiveness of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement

Overview of the institution's approach to managing improvement in the quality of teaching and learning

93 The College highlighted that its receipt of SSI status and the more recent change in validating institution have had a significant effect on its approach to managing improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. It characterises the changes that have occurred within the institution over the last five year period as involving a shift from a highly decentralised set of arrangements to a more centrally-focused process in which the College identifies consistency of practice as the guiding principle. Set alongside the aim of consistency, the College described its management of enhancement activity as involving reciprocity between the institutional level and the schools and centres.

94 There are a number of examples of areas in which the College has worked to deliver greater consistency of practice to achieve equivalence of learning opportunities for its students, such as its work in employability (see above, paragraph 88). The College recognises this is an ongoing process and has identified the largest challenge to success as the need to change the wider culture within the institution. The College has identified a concern among its staff about the imposition of a centralised quality system which some perceive to be a 'compliance culture'. Senior staff have stressed that they do not envisage a need to impose identical practices in all schools and departments but they do wish to see that the approaches adopted across the institution are commensurate with general precepts and policies in order that all students are given equal opportunities within a transparent system of learning, teaching and assessment. It is clear that senior managers have had some success in achieving this, for example, the wide support and enthusiasm across the College for the IRAP process (see above, paragraph 35).

Strategic approach

95 The College emphasises the extent to which its Strategic Plan plays a major role in the identification and management of strategic enhancement activity. Formulation of the Plan involves the development and updating of outline themes and an action agenda by the Principal and Vice-Principal (Academic), followed by consultation with heads of school and department. The finalised outline Plan is agreed by the Academic Council. Heads of school and department are required to report on progress in the achievement of the aims and targets identified in the previous year's Plan and, where appropriate, revise them.

96 The College Learning, Teaching and Quality Enhancement Strategy was authored in 2003 by a working party of the Learning and Teaching Board, and remains under review. It is not a single document but takes the form of a number of strands of activity, for example, student feedback, annual programme monitoring and

external benchmarks. The College intends to develop a Quality Enhancement Strategy that will be more fully integrated into wider institutional quality enhancement processes. In January 2005, the College produced the draft document Review of Strategic and Operational Planning which was being circulated for consultation at the time of ELIR. That document expressed a commitment to ensuring that the College strategic planning process would align with the development of its Learning and Teaching and its Quality Enhancement strategies. As part of its preparation for ELIR, the College produced a Quality Enhancement Action Plan. The Review of Strategic and Operational Planning highlighted the implementation of the Quality Enhancement Action Plan as being of key importance. The College is supported in its intention to bring about the closer alignment of these important institutional strategies and its operational planning (see below, paragraph 112).

Preparation for ELIR

97 The College stressed the rapid pace of change it had experienced in recent years associated with assuming responsibility for quality management, and indicated that its involvement with ELIR had been helpful in consolidating the progress made. It believed staff consultation in preparation for ELIR had provided a valuable mechanism for widening staff involvement and ownership, as well as providing a further opportunity to reflect on the College's policies and procedures.

Enhancement themes

98 The College has encouraged the attendance of its staff at the national Enhancement Themes events and the Vice-Principal (Academic) is a member of the steering group for the 2004-05 theme on Employability. In discussion it was clear that staff were interested in and committed to work in relation to the themes, particularly those on Assessment and Employability. The Quality Enhancement Action Plan included the intention to establish a series of workshops within the College in 2004-05 for sharing

and disseminating information from the Enhancement Themes events. Discussion with senior staff confirmed that the workshops had not yet taken place and were unlikely to occur in the current academic year, although individuals who had attended Enhancement Theme events had run workshops for staff in their schools to share ideas and information. The College has integrated good practice identified from the theme on Responding to Student Needs with the institution-wide staff development programme. The theme on Flexible Delivery appeared not to have captured the imagination of staff, and it was explained that this was because of the domination of studio-based learning and teaching within the College. Some staff had defined the theme rather narrowly as relating to distance learning, which is a mode of delivery that the College currently does not offer. While there is no requirement for institutions to engage with all themes, there may be benefit in the College considering the other aspects of the theme, which is intended to embrace all forms of flexible delivery. There may be benefit in the College considering its approach to flexible delivery in the context of the *Code of practice, Section 2* (September 2004) which includes aspects of flexible and distributed learning.

99 The College has supported the themes through attendance of its staff at the national events and some good practice identified through the themes has been adopted. The College is encouraged to revive its plans to put in place a more systematic mechanism for disseminating and developing the good practice highlighted through the themes in order to maximise the potential benefits of engaging with them.

Overview of the linkage between the institution's arrangements for internal quality assurance and its enhancement activity

100 The College has established a Quality Office (see above, paragraph 26) which has provided a focus for codifying the assurance

and enhancement activities across the institution. In order to minimise the burden on its academic staff and maximise the potential of the processes it has in place, the College is reviewing its processes to ensure that they are capable of serving an enhancement as well as an assurance role.

101 The benefits associated with the introduction of the IRAP process were emphasised by the College and in discussions with a wide range of staff. The provision of enhancement guidance notes helps to ensure that IRAP includes an enhancement focus, and the dynamic nature of the process is demonstrated through its adaptation following the institution's reflection on its operation. Some members of staff indicated that IRAP was still in the early stages of fulfilling an enhancement role while others described it as having provided them with time for reflection and the opportunity to analyse strengths and weaknesses. In discussion it was suggested that there could be a linkage between IRAP and the APMR process. For example, it was indicated that because IRAP operates over a six year cycle, APMR might assume increasing importance in the dissemination of good practice. It was also thought that good practice identified through IRAP could be applied in the context of the APMR process.

102 The IRAP process has been of considerable benefit to those directly involved with it, including for those staff who have acted as observers (see above, paragraph 35). IRAP and, increasingly, the APMR process are able to identify good practice and, to some extent, the small size of the institution facilitates the informal dissemination of this information. The College recognises that there would be significant benefit in putting in place more formal arrangements to ensure that the good practice identified can be shared systematically across the institution.

103 The College has demonstrated its willingness and ability to reflect on its experience of engaging with quality assurance processes. For example, following the QAA Subject Review of Architecture in 2001, the

Head of School played a key role in leading staff development activity at the College in writing self-evaluation documents and in preparing programme specifications. Senior staff also indicated that the College made use of its experience with the Subject Review in developing its internal processes.

Overview of the institution's approach to recognising, rewarding and implementing good practice in the context of its strategy for quality enhancement

104 Staff engage in an Annual Review which provides mechanisms for sharing good practice and for identifying staff development needs. The outcomes of the review are noted and acted upon by both the relevant head of school and the Head of Human Resources. Individual staff development needs identified by this route are collated within the Human Resources Department and inform the College's generic staff development programme.

105 The College acknowledged that traditionally the rewarding of good practice within the institution has focused on research output rather than on learning and teaching. In 2002, the College introduced a revised academic promotions policy that also recognises excellence in teaching, learning, administration and management as grounds for promotion. The operation of the promotions process is overseen by the Academic Promotions Committee. Documentation relating to the Annual Review process draws a clear distinction between career review and procedures relating to promotion, although material produced through the Annual Review is admissible evidence as part of an individual's promotion submission.

106 In discussion staff confirmed their overall satisfaction with the Annual Review process as a mechanism for identifying development needs and for facilitating their career development more generally, although they expressed the view that there remains an emphasis on research and consultancy rather than pedagogic skills as criteria for advancement. In relation to part-time staff who work in more than one school, it

appeared that it is not always entirely clear who is responsible for their career development and the College could reflect on this.

107 In both 2003 and 2004, the College designated a two-week period for staff development activity when the Human Resources Department coordinated a programme of events covering a broad range of skills including time management, research development and small group teaching. The College has recently created a post within the Human Resources Department to manage staff development centrally. It is acknowledged that, to date, the post holder has been primarily concerned with the coordination and delivery of generic training and education skills development. It is now intended to introduce a development programme more closely linked to teaching and learning, and the College should give this high priority.

108 Staff induction consists of a centrally organised day followed by induction programmes tailored to the individual schools. It is recognised that the latter raises issues of consistency. The College does not currently offer a formal teaching qualification for new staff although its Quality Enhancement Action Plan expresses the intention to explore this with its validating universities. Around 12 per cent of academic staff in the College currently hold teaching qualifications and there is a great deal of team teaching, providing opportunities for less experienced teachers to work directly with more experienced staff.

109 Around 15 per cent of the College staff were members of the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education and the College is promoting the registration of its staff with the Higher Education Academy. Many members of staff have close working relationships with colleagues in other art schools, with their professional bodies and with other organisations such as the Council for Higher Education in Art and Design. However, there appeared to be very limited awareness among staff of the Higher Education Academy subject network. The College may be missing out on a useful resource given that, for example, the Art,

Design and Media subject centre has carried out work in many of the areas the College is currently seeking to develop its practices, such as assessment and staff development.

Commentary on the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning

110 The College has made rapid progress in developing its quality assurance arrangements from a set of procedures designed to comply with the requirements of the validating university, to putting in place a set of policies and processes which enable the College to take responsibility for managing the quality of its provision and securing the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its validating universities. An explicit strategic focus on managing enhancement has been more recent and the College acknowledges that this is still developing. The IRAP process, in particular, fulfils a clear enhancement role and the College is seeking to adapt other processes to promote improvement as well as assurance. There would be benefit in the College giving consideration to the potential for links between the various processes it operates to maximise their potential for identifying, disseminating and implementing good practice. The establishment of the Quality Office has provided a helpful focus for the management of enhancement activity across the institution.

111 A positive contribution to quality improvement has been made by the institution-wide staff development programme. The College could usefully consider how it might promote an institution-wide focus on pedagogic development within its committee and management structures. There are currently very limited pedagogic development opportunities and the College should give priority to its plans for introducing a development programme relating to learning and teaching.

Commentary on the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement

112 The Learning, Teaching and Quality Enhancement Strategy in its current form is more reflective of existing practice than providing a future agenda for action. As part of its preparation for ELIR, the College produced a Quality Enhancement Action Plan. Senior staff have expressed their intention to produce a revised quality enhancement strategy which will relate more closely to the College Learning and Teaching Strategy and to the College strategic planning process. This would be a positive development which would provide an opportunity to ensure that the enhancement strategy could be linked explicitly to an action plan, in which clear priorities, timescales and responsibilities for undertaking action should be identified. While the existing Quality Enhancement Action Plan is helpful in identifying some intentions for future work, it could be improved by prioritising the work more clearly and by identifying in greater detail where responsibility will rest for carrying out the action across the institution.

Summary

Background to the institution and ELIR method

113 Edinburgh College of Art (the College) was founded in 1907, although it can trace its roots to the Drawing Academy founded by the Edinburgh Board of Manufacturers in 1760. In 1968 the College entered formal arrangements with Heriot-Watt University for the validation of programmes in architecture. In 1978 these arrangements were extended to include all programmes in art and design when the College was constituted, formally, as two faculties (Art and Design and Environmental Studies) of Heriot-Watt University. In 2002, the College renegotiated its relationship with Heriot-Watt University, becoming an accredited associated college of that University, with responsibility for the management of quality assurance and enhancement activity. The two-faculty structure was dissolved as part of the renegotiation. From September 2004, for students entering the first year of programmes, academic awards have been validated by the University of Edinburgh. The awards of students already studying at the College will continue to be validated by Heriot-Watt University. The interim period of dual validation will continue until 2007-08 for undergraduate programmes, and for up to nine years for PhD programmes.

114 The College is one of three designated Small Specialist Institutions (SSIs) in Scotland. It is located in three campuses all based in Edinburgh's Old Town. It has six academic schools and three academic centres. It also has a Graduate Research School which is responsible for the coordination of research student training.

115 In line with the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) method, the institution submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA) in advance of the review. The RA set out the institution's strategy for quality enhancement, its approach to the management of quality and standards and its view of the effectiveness of its approach. The clear and open nature of the RA provided a helpful focus for the review.

116 The institution submitted three case studies with its RA. These were:

- an external benchmarking project in the School of Architecture relating to the development of programme specifications, and level and module descriptors
- a description and commentary on the development of the College procedure for the Internal Review of Academic Programmes (IRAP)
- a documentary, produced by students, following fourth year tapestry students through a two week project brief.

Overview of the matters raised by the review

117 The aim and purpose of the College's Learning, Teaching and Quality Enhancement Strategy is 'continuously and systematically to improve the operation of academic provision, student support services and the wider learning environment of the College'.

118 The themes pursued in the review included the steps taken by the College to promote ownership of the arrangements for managing the quality and enhancement of its provision and for securing the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its validating universities; the management of the process through which the College changed its validating university; the work undertaken to enhance the student experience; and the development of an explicit strategic approach to managing enhancement across the institution's activities.

Commentary on the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards

119 The College has made considerable progress towards taking responsibility for the management of quality and standards since 2002 when it renegotiated the accreditation agreement with its validating university. In particular, the College's external examiner

process is well managed and its IRAP and Annual Programme Monitoring and Review (APMR) processes are both effective and have the strong support of staff. There would be benefit in ensuring that the timescales for taking action in relation to both IRAP and APMR are always specified and that in the case of APMR, the action to be taken is always identified clearly within the committee structure. There is evidence that, in general, effective use is made of the Academic Infrastructure, although the College should ensure that its formal documentation makes more consistent reference to relevant elements of the Infrastructure. In particular, there should be more overt references to the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* in the programme handbooks provided to students.

120 The process of transition from one validating university to another has been managed carefully by the College in partnership with the validating institutions, and effective arrangements are being put in place to ensure continuity for students.

121 The College introduced a common assessment and progression system (ECAPS) in 2003-04. This has provided a useful starting point towards the introduction of consistent and transparent assessment criteria and procedures across the institution. For this ambition to be realised, the College needs to progress its plans to relate the broad grade descriptors within ECAPS to individual subject areas. The College should also address the inconsistencies it has identified in some areas between the stated learning outcomes for programmes and the assessment feedback provided to students. This would enable students to be clearer about what is expected of them and to gain a clearer understanding of their own achievement.

122 The College is in the process of conducting a significant review of its academic and management structures. The review has been well planned and is widely understood by staff. The College is encouraged to ensure that it does not delay other important work until final implementation of the review outcomes.

The committee structure has been under ongoing review, and the College is supported in its intention to clarify the interrelationships between committees, particularly between the Learning and Teaching Board and the recently established Quality and Standards Committee, and the links between each of those committees and the Academic Council.

123 On the basis of the maturing relationships the College has with its validating institutions, the shared sense of the value of the IRAP and APMR processes which is evident in staff across the College, and the extent to which the College senior managers support a self-reflective approach, **broad confidence** can be placed in the College's current and likely future management of the quality of its provision and the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its validating institutions. This judgement assumes the College's implementation of its identified plans to produce a Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook and to revise its assessment arrangements for the start of academic year 2005-06.

Commentary on the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair

124 The College has adequate arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes, in its prospectus and on its website, about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair. The College is actively engaged in implementing arrangements to fulfil the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council requirements relating to the public information set.

Commentary on the effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students

125 Students identify the College as providing a creative learning environment in which staff and students demonstrate a commitment to their subject areas. The extent to which students are involved in both the APMR and the

IRAP processes is positive. The general arrangements for student representation are adequate although there is considerable variation between schools and programmes in the way in which representatives are identified. The College is encouraged to pursue its work with the Students' Representative Council (SRC) and the national organisation, Student Participation in Quality Scotland, to provide training for the student representative role.

126 There is wide variation in the provision of feedback to students on their assessment performance, and the College should give its planned work on assessment practices high priority to ensure it can provide equity of learning opportunities for all students.

127 There has been an expansion in the range and availability of the College's student support services in the last five years which is welcomed by students. There are also effective links between the College services and the SRC so that effective support is provided to all groups of students.

128 The College already places a significant focus on employability and has further work planned in this area. Particularly positive features are the extent to which transferable and other employment-related skills are embedded within the curricula, and can be practised through the methods of delivery.

Commentary on the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning

129 The College has made rapid progress in developing its quality assurance arrangements from a set of procedures designed to comply with the requirements of the validating university, to putting in place a set of policies and processes which enable the College to take responsibility for managing the quality of its provision and securing the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its validating universities. An explicit strategic focus on managing enhancement has been more recent and the College acknowledges that this is still developing. The IRAP process, in particular, fulfils a clear enhancement role and

the College is seeking to adapt other processes to promote improvement as well as assurance. There would be benefit in the College giving consideration to the potential for links between the various processes it operates to maximise their potential for identifying, disseminating and implementing good practice. The establishment of the Quality Office has provided a helpful focus for the management of enhancement activity across the institution.

130 A positive contribution to quality improvement has been made by the institution-wide staff development programme. The College could usefully consider how it might promote an institution-wide focus on pedagogic development within its committee and management structures. There are currently very limited pedagogic development opportunities and the College should give priority to its plans for introducing a development programme relating to teaching and learning.

Commentary on the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement

131 The Learning, Teaching and Quality Enhancement Strategy in its current form is more reflective of existing practice than providing a future agenda for action. As part of its preparation for ELIR, the College produced a Quality Enhancement Action Plan. Senior staff have expressed their intention to produce a revised quality enhancement strategy which will relate more closely to the College Learning and Teaching Strategy and to the College strategic planning process. This would be a positive development which would provide an opportunity to ensure that the enhancement strategy could be linked explicitly to an action plan in which clear priorities, timescales and responsibilities for undertaking action should be identified. While the existing Quality Enhancement Action Plan is helpful in identifying some intentions for future work, it could be improved by prioritising the work more clearly and by identifying in greater detail where responsibility will rest for carrying out the action across the institution.

