



University College Plymouth St Mark & St John

Institutional audit

December 2010

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited University College Plymouth St Mark & St John (the University College; Marjon) from 6 to 10 December 2010 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University College offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

- confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards in its on-campus and UK collaborative provision
- confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students in its on-campus and UK collaborative provision

There can be limited confidence in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities available to students in overseas collaborative provision.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University College has a series of initiatives designed to promote quality enhancement, which it sees as being related to the implementation of its Learning and Teaching Strategy and effective quality assurance. The roles and responsibilities of the Head of Quality and Student Experience and the faculty leads have the potential to support a structured and systematic approach in the future to quality enhancement, building on the good practice established to date.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit found that the arrangements for the support of postgraduate research students were generally sound and consistent with the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic standards and quality assurance (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the structured and developmental way in which research and scholarly activity supports learning, teaching and continuous professional development (paragraph 55)
- the integrated approach and effective work of Student Support (paragraphs 73 to 80).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers essential:

- in the context of its strategic intention to expand its overseas collaborative provision, that the University College establish secure and systematic institutional oversight of such provision, including the monitoring of compliance with its stated operational and institutional requirements (paragraphs 101 to 109, 112).

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- establish and maintain timeliness and effective action planning and completion of those agreed actions in relation to issues identified through institutional and local quality assurance and enhancement processes (paragraph 18)
- give consideration to whether the responsibilities and reporting lines in the executive and deliberative structures can secure reliable ongoing institutional oversight and assurance of academic standards and learning opportunities (paragraphs 18, 19)
- operate its programme approval processes in such a way as to ensure that all programmes are formally approved by the Learning, Quality and Standards Committee before students are enrolled (paragraph 21)
- define the procedures and associated responsibilities for notifying staff and students about changes to the Student Regulations Framework (paragraph 38)
- strengthen the provision, particularly in the faculties, for student and staff representation and involvement in decision-making (paragraph 54)
- examine whether the current approach to the recording of matters discussed at meetings is sufficiently detailed and precise to establish clearly the status of decisions taken and demonstrate institutional assurance and oversight of the operation of learning and teaching at all levels in the institution (paragraph 86)
- monitor whether the extent of the planned delegation of authority to faculty level is compatible with sound institutional management of the academic standards of awards and the quality of learning opportunities offered through collaborative provision (paragraph 112).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- clarify and define the responsibilities and procedures for variations to programmes of study, including definitions of minor changes and of modifications that entail revalidation (paragraph 24)

- keep under review the way in which material is presented in the Student Regulations Framework, in the interests of the clarity and accessibility of the various categories of information (paragraph 123
- share external examiner reports with student representatives, including those studying through collaborative arrangements, in accordance with the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes, October 2006* (HEFCE 06/45) (paragraph 124).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 University College Plymouth St Mark & St John (the University College; Marjon) is an independent Church of England voluntary college. Until 2007 the institution's courses led to awards of the University of Exeter. In July 2007, the Privy Council granted the College taught degree awarding powers. The University College's research degrees provision still operates under the auspices of the University of Exeter.

2 The University College's mission states that '[a]s a high quality and vibrant higher education institution with a strong community focus, providing learning and opportunity for local, regional, national and international markets our mission is to provide learning for life'. In support of this mission, the University College has seven key aims: to provide high quality learning programmes and work towards the achievement of university title; to achieve excellence in learning and teaching; to provide a high quality student experience; to deliver sustainable futures; to be inclusive and accessible; to work creatively in partnership; and to build capacity and good practice in research.

The information base for the audit

3 The University College provided a Briefing Paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trail selected by the audit team. The index and appendices to the Briefing Paper referred to sources of evidence to illustrate the institution's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. The University College provided hard copies of key documents referenced in the Briefing Paper, arranged access to its intranet and provided the team with a memory stick containing key documents, briefing visit documents, and documents supplied as supplementary requests during the audit visit, including documents relating to collaborative arrangements with partners.

4 The Students' Union provided a student written submission (SWS) setting out the students' views on the accuracy of the information provided to them, the experience of the students as learners and the student voice and roles in quality management. The audit team thanks the Union for its submission, to which members made repeated reference in the course of their enquiries.

5 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the Institutional audit of the then College of St Mark & St John (May 2003)
- the institutional assessor's report for the QAA advisory committee on degree awarding powers (December 2006)
- the report of the audit of collaborative provision between the University College and the Malaysian Ministry of Education (March 2010)

- the institution's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

6 The previous audit of the then College of St Mark & St John (the College) found that broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the College's current and future likely management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of the awards it offered on behalf of the University of Exeter. The 2003 audit report noted that, provided the College took timely action to remedy weaknesses in its management of its collaborative provision, it would be possible for there to be broad confidence in that area for the future.

7 The audit identified nine features of good practice. An overarching feature of good practice identified in the 2003 audit report was the caring ethos of the College, based on the College's Christian mission and heritage. The present audit found that this ethos continues in the University College's commitment to the pastoral care of its students (see paragraph 74).

8 A recommendation for action in the 2003 audit report was that the College should refine and extend the current thinking on its committees and management structures, with particular reference to the roles and responsibilities of the Academic Board, its subcommittees and the Senior Management Team. The College responded to this recommendation by introducing a six-school structure, which was subsequently reduced to three schools in 2006. At the time of the present audit the University College was completing a further realignment resulting from the 2009-10 strategic planning process. The three schools have been replaced by the two faculties of: Education, Health and Welfare, and Sport, Media and Creative Arts. A Centre for Partnership and Professional Development (CPPD), reporting directly to the Principal, has been established to coordinate the University's outward-facing activities.

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

9 The University College has also reorganised the deliberative structures of the institution. The previous Learning and Teaching and Quality and Standards Committees were merged in the academic year 2009-10 to form the Learning, Quality and Standards Committee (LQSC). At the same time, the brief of the Curriculum Development Committee was extended, and the committee renamed the Academic Development Committee (ADC), to consider academic issues in portfolio development and the approval of collaborative partnerships. The University College has also established a Resources Committee to oversee finance and resource planning.

10 Academic Board is the principal academic committee with overall responsibility for the academic standards of awards and the development of the academic activities of the University College. The Briefing Paper identified the purposes of the LQSC and its Learning Enhancement Sub Committee as being to establish 'a more comprehensive alignment of quality assurance and enhancement of the student learning experience'. Marjon identifies the Student Experience Council, reporting to LQSC, as a forum for discussion of 'key issues' important to students.

11 The faculties are led by deans, supported by the recently created posts of faculty leads for: Quality Assurance; Learning Enhancement and Student Experience; Research and Ethics; Employer Engagement; and International. The deans are advised by Faculty

Management Teams (FMTs), which comprise the four faculty heads of department. FMT meetings are designed to combine executive with deliberative faculty oversight for the two newly-created faculties. Faculty leads who are not heads of department are invited to attend FMT meetings as appropriate. Within faculties there are programme and subject committees and staff-student liaison committees. Faculty leads represent the faculty on relevant academic board standing committees; there is no formal reporting line between FMTs and the central committee structure other than through this provision for representation, and FMTs do not appear on the organogram of committees supplied to the audit team through the Briefing Paper.

12 The Principal is advised by a Senior Management Team (SMT) comprising the Vice Principal (Academic); the Vice Principal (Resources); the deans of faculty; the Head of Financial and Corporate Services; and the Head of Marketing, Communication and Planning. The central Learning and Quality Unit (LQU) is led by the Head of Quality and Student Experience, who reports to the Vice Principal (Academic). LQU is independent of the Registry but draws on senior Registry staff and the faculty leads and members of the Senior Management Team to carry out its work. The Registry focuses on student administration.

13 The University College identifies its systems for the management of curricula and assessment as the primary means by which it assures the academic standards of its awards. Academic Board discharges its responsibility for the specification of academic standards primarily through the LQSC, which oversees programme approval, monitoring and review. LQSC discharges its responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards through examination boards at subject and institutional level. The responsibility for standards locally is vested in the two faculties, including responsibility for collaborative provision at programme level. The Assessment Regulations and Procedures are designed to ensure consistency of approach to the management of academic standards and provide clear, consistent and detailed guidance.

14 Academic Board delegates authority to approve programmes to the LQSC through a process clearly defined in the Programme Approval Regulations and Procedures. Approval involves two main stages, Approval in Principle and Approval in Detail; the former by the Academic Development Committee, with input from Marketing, Communications and Planning, the latter managed by the LQSC. Approval in Detail comprises two stages: Internal Scrutiny, to ascertain that the proposal conforms with internal and external requirements and expectations, and a Validation Event, involving a panel which includes an independent external member approved by the Chair of LQSC. The validation report and the response of the programme team are received and considered by the LQSC, which is responsible for the final approval of programmes to operate.

15 The annual monitoring of programmes draws on a range of information, and reports follow the guidance set out in the Quality Assurance Framework. Module evaluation forms, feedback from staff-student liaison committees and issues raised in both the previous year's report and subsequent programme meetings, internal audit reports, periodic reviews, validation and external reviews or professional body inspections contribute collectively to the programme reports. Subject reports draw additionally from discussions at subject committee meetings. These two annual reports, scrutinised by the Faculty Management Teams (FMTs), contribute in turn to the Faculty Reports, which are presented to LQSC. An institutional report identifying matters of relevance across the University College is presented to Academic Board.

16 Academic provision is subject to periodic review, normally within a six-year cycle, in accordance with the Regulations and Guidelines for Periodic Review. The review involves scrutiny by independent internal and external academic and professional panel members.

Panels include student representation. Successful periodic review is followed by re-approval of programmes.

17 The University College states that it seeks to achieve an 'appropriate balance between central oversight and local autonomy'. It associates the creation of a two-faculty structure with 'a move towards a greater measure of local responsibility, whilst retaining the same measure of central oversight'.

18 In the course of the audit, the audit team reviewed the constitutions and terms of reference for the revised committee structure and explored the provisions for staff and representation. There is no provision for student and staff participation at the faculty level beyond specified ex-officio involvement in the FMT, limiting the opportunities for staff and student input into decision-making at that level. The linkage from the FMTs to the 'centre' relies on membership of central committees by faculty leads, who may not be members of FMTs. Given the lack of a formal subsidiary relationship from the FMTs to any of the central committees, it is difficult to perceive where the accountability of FMTs lies. The audit team also found that the records of discussion at all levels of the institution did not give a detailed account of matters discussed at meetings, nor did they record clearly the status of decisions taken and the follow-up to action points at the subsequent meetings; these deficiencies make it difficult to confirm that there is systematic institutional assurance and oversight of the operation of learning and teaching at all levels in the institution. The audit team considers it advisable that the University College establish and maintain timeliness and effective action planning and completion of those agreed actions in relation to issues identified through institutional and local quality assurance and enhancement processes. These matters, including the formal oversight of academic development, approval and review of programmes of study, faculties' deliberative decisions which affect the academic portfolio (LQSC and ADC), and the responsiveness of the University College to the student voice, are discussed in more detail elsewhere in this annex to the report.

19 The audit team considers that the University College has an appropriate framework for the institutional management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, but that further work is required to clarify and strengthen the academic governance structure in the faculties in order to provide for more oversight and engagement of the academic community with quality assurance. The audit team considers it advisable that the University College give consideration to whether the responsibilities and reporting lines in the executive and deliberative structures can secure ongoing reliable institutional oversight and assurance of academic standards and learning opportunities.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

20 In the past, School Management Teams approved documentation prior to an institutional Internal Scrutiny. The University College identified that this approach had not always been effective and comprehensive and had sometimes resulted in delays to the validation events. The processes involved in Internal Scrutiny now vest greater responsibility with the two faculty management teams, with support from the Learning and Quality Unit. The Learning and Quality Unit manages validation events on behalf of the institution. Audit team discussions with academic staff not involved in the faculty management teams discovered a lack of clarity about the proposed new arrangements.

21 Review of LQSC minutes by the audit team identified points at which the volume of approval work had become problematical, particularly for the Learning and Quality Unit, resulting in the delay and rescheduling of a number of approvals; the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies programme was reported to have commenced while still subject to validation. LQSC has now determined that chair's actions relating to validation events should be ruled out with effect from summer 2010. The audit team considers it advisable that the University College operate its programme approval processes in such a way as to ensure that all programmes are formally approved by the Learning, Quality and Standards Committee before students are enrolled.

22 In meetings with the audit team, staff acknowledged the difficulty encountered the previous year in meeting the planned timetable but were confident of fulfilling the planned schedule in future. It is planned that the Learning and Quality Unit be able to draw on additional support from the two deans and the faculty leads for quality and student experience in meeting the approval schedule at the initial scrutiny stage. Given the timing of the visit, the audit team was not in a position to evaluate the effectiveness of this proposal. The records of approval events do not include detail of the comments and contributions of panel members and were confined to a list of matters to be discussed and notes of the outcomes, without any indication of how the decisions were reached.

23 LQSC gives final approval to new programmes of study. The minutes of LQSC meetings give little indication of the extent or rigour of discussion of course proposals. In addition, the detail of responses to recommendations on the part of presenting teams, in terms of by whom and by when responses were required and delivered, is not clear from the minutes. For example, in consideration of the response to matters raised by the validation panel in respect of two Foundation Degrees, there was reference to 'the majority of issues [were] being addressed', but no amplification or indication of any areas of deficiency of response. There was no record of any further discussion of these programmes. The University College has recently introduced a template for the recording of the final approval of courses, which also records the responses to recommendations. In the view of the audit team, there is need both for a more realistic, measured and timely approach to approval and a more detailed record of the nature of the discussions between external and internal members of Validation Event panels.

24 The Briefing Paper stated that minor modifications to programmes or modules which involve adjustments to assessment patterns or learning outcomes in a module or variations in optional modules in a validated programme may be approved by the Vice Principal (Academic). The Programme Approval Regulations state that the Head of Registry and Student Administration, as secretary of Academic Board, may approve minor changes to validated programmes or modules. LQSC noted the possibility of 'change by stealth'. Discussion with staff established that, in practice, the deans of faculty were responsible for monitoring the impact of cumulative minor modifications on any given programme, before final approval by the Vice Principal. Staff whom the audit team met were not certain about either the formal arrangements or the definition of minor changes. There was no written record of institutional oversight of such changes to programmes. Any change not considered a minor modification leads to revalidation. The audit team considers it desirable that the University College clarify and define the responsibilities and procedures for variations to programmes of study, including definitions of minor changes and of modifications that entail revalidation.

25 Faculties are responsible for the monitoring of improvement plans arising out of annual monitoring. Given that faculty management team minutes are not received by any central committee, the audit team could not see how institutional oversight of faculty enhancement activity was achieved.

26 Periodic review undertakes an audit of the annual monitoring process, including feedback from students, external examiners' reports and responses thereto, and samples of students' assessed work, and reviews programme and module information for students as well as interviewing staff and students. The reports of periodic review panels, including commendations and recommendations, are reviewed by LQSC. Faculties are responsible for monitoring the action plans as part of the annual monitoring process.

External examiners

27 External examiners are regarded by the institution as fundamental to the assurance of the standards of academic awards. There are subject external examiners, with responsibility for cognate groups of modules, and general external examiners. Academic Board delegates authority for the appointment of external examiners to the LQSC. The External Examiners Handbook, issued to all external examiners, sets out clear criteria for the nomination and appointment of external examiners and the associated procedures. The handbook is reviewed annually by LQSC to confirm alignment with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*. The University College provides briefings and induction relating to assessment schemes, regulations, procedures and other expectations associated with programmes of study.

28 External examiners are required to produce a report commenting on the academic standards of programmes in relation to external reference points, on student achievement and on the assessment process. The University College plans to introduce a revised form for the academic year 2010-11, to include qualitative feedback. The audit team welcomed this change as the revised form has the potential to elicit feedback that is more conducive to programme improvement than is the case at present. External examiners take responsibility for collaborative provision where reporting requirements are the same as for home provision.

29 External examiner reports and related responses are considered as part of the annual monitoring process. There are sound arrangements for consideration of and response to matters raised by the examiners. The Briefing Paper stated that the Vice Principal (Academic) received all reports and responses. An overview of generic issues raised by external examiners and the General External Examiners is included in the Annual Programme Report, which is considered by Academic Board. The institutional action plan is monitored by LQSC.

30 The General External Examiner for taught postgraduate awards encountered some logistical problems, both in terms of arrangements for his visit and meeting with other external examiners, and also made a number of significant recommendations in his 2009-10 report about the operation of Progression and Award Boards, which are being considered through a small working group.

31 External examiners' reports confirm the appropriateness of the academic standards set by the University College. The audit found that the University College made good use of independent external examiners in summative assessment.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

32 Academic standards are defined as part of the programme development process by reference to the Academic Infrastructure and other relevant external reference points, as articulated in the Programme Approval Regulations and Procedures 2008, which are themselves aligned to relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*. Panels are required to confirm and record consideration of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and relevant sections of the *Code of practice*.

33 Programmes are also benchmarked against professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs) which, when relevant, are represented at periodic review and re-approval events. Reports from PSRBs, external examiner reports and discussions with staff indicated that the University College's relationships with PSRBs were sound. There are also formally constituted Professional Advisory Groups, which are in place to ensure that developments in the field of professional practice are reflected in the training provided for students. Alignment with the *Code of practice* is monitored centrally by LQSC.

34 The audit team concluded that the University College's procedures made appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure in its approval and review processes.

Assessment policies and regulations

35 The Assessment Regulations and Procedures, which form part of the Student Regulations Framework, provide detailed guidance on assessment policies, the constitution of examination boards, the conduct of assessment, and student progression. The Assessment Policy is directly linked to the University College's Learning and Teaching Strategy, the University College's e-Learning Strategy, and draws on the *Code of practice*. The University College's assessment policies and regulations are monitored and reviewed annually. Recommendations for change are made to LQSC in the light of proposals from the Regulations Working Group, which meets termly and considers possible changes to the regulations from a number of sources including external examiners, student experience questionnaires and student appeals.

36 The Student Regulations Framework echoes the key principles of the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice* and is generally implemented appropriately by programme teams. Some programme handbooks did not contain a summary of submission dates for coursework assignments as required in the regulations. Moderation procedures were clear in documentation and in the minds of staff and students. Anonymous marking has been recently introduced and further discussion has been undertaken about double marking and associated issues. Staff, students and documentation confirmed that during programme approval and in practice special requirements for assessment are made in accordance with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*. Programme specifications follow QAA guidelines.

37 Students are informed of the regulations as part of induction. Details of assessment methods are available in module guides and handbooks. Programme specifications set out the relationship between curriculum and assessment, and module descriptors give clear indications of assessment weightings. The Student Regulations Framework is available on the website; when specific issues arise, for example if students are considering making an academic appeal, they will be re-sent the relevant regulations.

38 There was a lack of clarity over the locus of responsibility for notifying staff and students about any changes to the Student Regulations Framework, and an issue over the timing of changes. This issue was brought into focus in the case of the changes to arrangements for extenuating circumstances during the course of the academic year and the timing of those changes, which meant that students were not informed of the change at the start of the academic year in which it came into force. Staff offered different accounts of how this change was communicated, with some citing a newsletter, some an email from the Academic Counsellor and some acknowledging that there had been some confusion in this area. The audit team considers it advisable that the University College define the procedures and associated responsibilities for notifying staff and students about changes to the Student Regulations Framework.

39 Although the student written submission indicated that 'improvements could be made to better ensure consistency across courses, the timing of feedback and to ensure relevance', the students who met the audit team reported that they were provided with clear information about assessment and were satisfied in terms of the loading of assessments and the quality and timeliness of feedback. The most recent findings of the National Student Survey (NSS) indicate that 49 per cent of students agreed that feedback was detailed.

40 The University College operates a two-tier system of assessment comprising Subject Assessment Boards, which make decisions relating to students' performance at module level and award credit accordingly, and institutional Progression and Award Boards, which make decisions on students' progression on their programme of study and recommendations to Academic Board for the conferment of awards. External examiner reports attest to the sound conduct of FdA and undergraduate examination boards. As noted above (paragraph 30), the General External Examiner for postgraduate awards did identify some matters for further attention in relation to the conduct of progression and award boards, which the University College is tackling through a working group.

Management information - statistics

41 While the establishment of the Information and Planning Unit has clearly led to progress on the production of improved student data, the University College reported that there was further work to be undertaken in this area, including 'information@marjon', which provides management information at the programme level. The intention is that information@marjon be the means of providing instant access to relevant data relating to 'the institution's health' and facilitating more systematic and comprehensive analysis of degree classifications than has been possible hitherto.

42 Data included in programme reports showed evidence of the use of a standard template for recording data, but the data were limited to admissions, registration, progression and completion and there were no statistics available relating to equality and diversity, students in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance and student disability by mode and level, age, gender or ethnicity. The attendant commentary and the extent to which it was used to provoke analysis and reflection on these data in the context of standards varied between programmes. Progression and achievement data also inform the annual Self-Evaluation Document for Ofsted, and the audit team learned that strenuous efforts were being made to address the recommendation by the most recent Ofsted inspection that the University College should 'improve the use of qualitative data related to trainees' attainment and progress against the Standards'. Overall, the team formed the view that good use was being made of the available statistical information at subject, programme and institutional levels, but would encourage the University College to build on its progress to date in improving the quality of data available for interrogation.

43 The conclusion reached by the audit team is that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the College's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards in its on-campus provision.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

44 The University College's normal frame of reference for its management of learning opportunities is its Learning and Teaching Strategy. The most recent Strategy was approved up to 2010 but its currency was extended to 31 August 2011. Consultation on the revision

began in the academic year 2008-09 and the consensus was that the aims and objectives of the 2006-10 Strategy were still valid. The Academic Board agreed that the final revision be delayed to take account of the new Strategic Plan 2010-15.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

45 The University College procedures make appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure in its approval processes; panel members are allocated a specific role in evaluating the use of subject benchmark statements and teams are required to make explicit reference to them in the Rationale for the new programme(s). The University College also makes effective use of its own level descriptors, developed from the FHEQ, in validation and assessment processes. The brevity of the recording of panel proceedings has been noted above and applies equally to consideration of learning opportunities.

46 There is a system for monitoring and responding to changes to the Academic Infrastructure and for updating internal documents through the Regulations Working Group (RWG), which reports to the Learning, Quality and Standards Committee (LQSC), and a standing item at LQSC on recent Quality Assurance Developments. There is provision for internal audit to ensure that specific areas of the Academic Infrastructure are implemented. Significant changes to the *Code of practice* are discussed at faculty development days and institutional conferences.

47 The audit team concluded that the University College makes generally appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in the management of learning opportunities.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

48 The process for the approval of new courses is clear and takes account of the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*. An ongoing theme of the curriculum reviews of 2007, 2008 and 2010 is the management of the portfolio to create sustainable programmes, which avoid small cohorts with very small subject teams. Issues relating to resourcing and capacity are considered by Academic Development Committee during the Approval in Principle process, while specific matters relating to resources are considered by the validation panel. The 'Programme approval regulations and procedures' contain a helpful list of questions for panels to use which prompt them to consider key issues relevant to the teaching, learning and assessment opportunities of students, though the limited scope of the validation event reports mean that the extent to which these issues have been discussed by the panel is not clear.

49 Annual monitoring reports are written in accordance with guidance in procedural documents at programme, subject, faculty and institutional levels, each of which has one or more action plans and designated headings. Issues relating to the sustainability of modules and resourcing are carefully considered. School and faculty reports have clear and appropriate action plans; for example, the school reports for the academic year 2008-09 include tables relating to programme, subject, school and external examiner issues. Faculty reports are received at LQSC. The institutional annual report provides a comprehensive collation of issues arising from annual monitoring, external examiners, periodic review, internal audits and other factors affecting the learning opportunities of students. Although reports followed the prescribed headings, the relevant committees did not typically discuss the relevant reports nor monitor their actions in a consistent or timely manner, focusing predominantly on operational/executive matters and the organisation of the monitoring system, though there is some evidence that very recent departmental meetings are beginning to consider these issues more formally.

50 The audit team noted that there were clear periodic review procedures, including those for the involvement of students. The brevity of the records of discussion at periodic review events has been noted. Some review panels identified inconsistencies in formal documentation, including handbooks and guides made available to students; there is evidence in meeting minutes that this is improving. Module guides still vary significantly in the level of detail. Handbooks are now also made available to students through LearningSpace. Plans are underway to develop a template to bring greater standardisation to programme specifications.

51 External examiner reports indicate that recent closures of courses were being handled effectively, with good practice being disseminated and the University College Annual Accreditation and Programme Report indicating high levels of commitment to the students' experience on programmes that were subject to closure.

52 The institution is strengthening its quality processes through the employment of faculty leads and the recent development of a faculty quality responsibilities document. Overall, the audit team found the management of quality through procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review to be making an effective contribution to the management of the quality of the students' learning opportunities.

Management information - feedback from students

53 While faculty (and previously school) meetings discuss effectively and monitor issues arising from the National Student Survey, a range of sources indicates that the institution is aware that it is not feeding back consistently to students on actions taken in response to survey results. The institution is continuing to tackle this through a review of the system for coordinating student surveys. Nonetheless, the system is complex and the institution notes that there is the risk of 'student survey fatigue'. There is some inconsistency in the guidance documentation, including that for Annual Monitoring, amended, 31 August 2010, and 'Student Feedback and Representation'; it needs updating in the light of recent changes and there is 'still a considerable amount of work to be done'. Work continues on these issues and improvements are being made. The audit team encourages the institution to continue to review and improve the system for student feedback so that it is more manageable and effective.

Role of students in quality assurance

54 Student Union sabbatical officers are members of the main University College committees and also other panels, including those for internal audit and periodic review, and boards. Locally elected student representatives are on Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs), but not on faculty, departmental/subject or programme-level committees. SSLCs are thus the key programme-level mechanism for formal dialogue with students, and the Student Experience Council (SEC) is the key institution-wide forum. The SSLC and SEC minutes seen by the audit team typically focused on student-generated issues but did not systematically consider wider issues arising from review and monitoring processes. Records of programme meetings seen by the audit team did not normally contain reference to the SSLCs. The institution recognises that the system is not currently working effectively and has undertaken an informal audit of SSLCs, though it has not yet resolved the problem. The LQSC recorded 'that work on student feedback and representation was ongoing' through the new Student Feedback Implementation Group. The student written submission suggested that the student voice was heard, but not responded to adequately. Student representatives whom the audit team met knew what the opportunities were to offer feedback. Students expressed a wish that the SEC meet more frequently and for some SSLCs, which varied in

membership, to have more students and fewer tutors in membership. The audit team considers that, while the central committees provide opportunities for representation by sabbatical officers, the revised structures provide only limited opportunities for more representative student input into decision-making. The audit team advises the University College to strengthen the provision, especially in the faculties, for student representation and involvement in decision-making.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

55 Across its last three strategic plans the University College has maintained a commitment to supporting teaching with research and advanced scholarship to support the learning opportunities of students. These aims are articulated in the latest draft of the 'Learning and Teaching' and 'Research' strategies and monitored by their related committees, which share some common membership to strengthen the alignment of their work. Programme approval and periodic review considers the link between research and learning opportunities. Recently there has been a proposal to develop Research Groups and Research Centres. Professional Advisory Groups ensure staff are up-to-date with professional practice. Staff development funding is effectively planned and sufficient for staff to attend conferences related both to pedagogic practice and subject knowledge. Targets are also set for research and scholarly activity in academic staff appraisals. Subject reports discuss research and scholarly activity. The 2009-10 faculty plans have an action relating to a project assessing the impact of research and scholarly activity on teaching. The structured and developmental ways in which research and scholarly activity supports learning, teaching and continuous professional development are identified as a feature of good practice in the audit.

Other modes of study

56 The framework for the delivery of flexible and employment-related learning is provided by the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2008-10 and the strategy for e-learning 2008-09. Both strategies have come to the end of their cycle and are currently under review. The University College has a long tradition of vocationally oriented courses with a strong emphasis on professionally accredited programmes and programmes with a work-related and work-based learning focus. While the major part of this provision falls under Ofsted inspection, there are also a number of professionally accredited programmes in the youth and community, sport and health disciplines, as well as Foundation Degree programmes predominantly offered through partner colleges. In the Initial Teacher Training Education Inspection Report from June 2010 the University College was given very favourable judgements, with the majority of grades awarded in the good and some in the outstanding category.

57 In its five-year Strategic Plan 2010-15 the University College recognises the need for flexible access to learning resources and support and articulates its aspiration to increase employer engagement and part-time provision. Staff acknowledged that the establishment of a new virtual learning environment, LearningSpace, has been at the expense of a more strategic and consistent development of e-learning and flexible and distributed learning. Currently, there is no programme that is wholly or predominantly delivered by e-learning, but e-learning does support teacher training students on placements based in schools and students in regional centres on programmes such as the MEd Professional Development or the Master's in Teaching and Learning (MTL).

58 In line with its Employability Strategy the University College has an active approach to work-based and work-related learning, offering a wide range of opportunities to develop

employability skills within the curriculum. These range from formal placements for professionally accredited programmes to work-based learning modules within the curriculum and extra-curricular activities organised by the Student Volunteering initiative for a variety of programmes. To support the strategy and extend work-related learning across the curriculum a new role of a Faculty Lead in Employer Engagement has been established from the academic year 2010-11 to promote employer engagement and employability within the curriculum. At the time of the audit this role had just been established and an evaluation of its effectiveness was therefore not yet possible.

59 The University College's definition of placement learning includes full-time sandwich degrees, courses with a year or semester abroad, work placements in accredited programmes (for example Initial Teacher Training, Speech and Language Therapy, Youth and Community Work), modules within the Modular Degrees Framework and client-linked projects, whereby students negotiate projects with organisations from outside the University as part of their studies. The Placement Learning Policy makes explicit the University College's definition, principles and the regulatory framework for placement learning. It stipulates mechanisms for quality assurance, student support, feedback, and complaints procedures. The last audit of placement learning was conducted in 2006. In 2009 the Placement Advisory Group considered placement activities in the context of assessment procedures. Students who met the audit team expressed their satisfaction with placement provision and confirmed that placements were well organised and supported by staff. Overall, the team concluded that the University College was developing and embedding employability effectively throughout the curriculum and offering students a wide range of opportunities with appropriate support.

Resources for learning

60 The responsibility for the provision and monitoring of the learning resources in support of the University College's academic portfolio lies with the Resources Committee, which reports to the Senior Management Team. There is also an Information and Learning Resources Committee with a reporting line to the Resources Committee and the Academic Board. The University College has a Draft Information Strategy; there is no specific learning resources strategy.

61 There is a systematic approach through the annual planning process to the resourcing of programmes. Learning resources are monitored through the Faculty and Departmental Business Plans and are considered by the Resources Committee. The Library Annual Review Reports are presented at the LQSC. The Annual Reviews from the two previous years point to understaffing in the library, particularly at the professional staffing level, benchmarked against other HE colleges and SCONUL libraries. At the time of the audit it was not evident from the reporting of action plans whether this issue had been considered and action taken.

62 While students expressed their satisfaction with learning and teaching facilities and resources to the audit team, the student written submission highlighted consistently negative comments in the National Student Survey (NSS) and University College's questionnaires regarding the book provision and accessibility of electronic journals in the library. The University College responded with Library Guidelines for staff for ordering resources prior to delivery of the module. The Library Business Plan 2010-11 points out that the 'library is now at full capacity' and that the 'facilities currently available no longer fully meet the student needs and patterns of study'. A refurbishment is planned for the financial year 2010-2011 to provide a 'social learning' environment which will enhance the integration of units such as Media Services, the Marjon Open Learning Unit and Computer Services and Student Support within the library.

63 The University College provides free laptops to home and EU students as part of its access agreement. The students spoke highly to the audit team of the 24-hour IT access room with on-site IT technician support. The Marjon Open Learning Unit offers free support and training in IT skills and the navigation of LearningSpace, as well as opportunities to gain additional recognised IT qualifications.

64 The LearningSpace functions as an effective means of communication, offering access to learning resources as well as opportunities for an interactive learning tool. A comprehensive training programme for the new LearningSpace was offered to students and staff; both commented positively on the enhancement of the student experience.

65 Given the University College's stated aim in the five-year Strategic Plan to achieve 75 per cent blended learning coverage of all programmes, there are at present only limited staff resources to support this target. The team dedicated to the support of academic staff for the development of e-learning materials consists of the Head of e-Learning and one technician. These developments come within the remit of the faculty leads for learning enhancement and the student experience. A document called e-learning Targets 2010-12 sets targets and timescales and requests additional technological staffing and staff release for various projects to accelerate the uptake of e-learning. The University College has made a successful start with the provision of Marjon Re-useable Learning Objects (RLOs), which cover generic learning objects, such as enhancing presentation and essay writing skills, as well as subject-specific learning objects.

66 The University College's timetable is centrally managed and available on LearningSpace, but not yet in the format of individual timetables for students. Student feedback through various channels commented on its late publication. The University College responded by bringing forward the module selection procedures and the establishment of a Service Level Agreement. The Draft Information Technology Strategy 2010 recognises the need for efficiency improvements in space management and timetabling systems. The audit team was informed that refinements in line with the exploration of further technical enhancements were forthcoming.

Admissions policy

67 The Admissions Policy and Procedures document provides the framework for the centralised admissions procedures, which draw on the guidance and precepts of the *Code of practice*. Institutional oversight of admissions is held by the Head of Registry and Student Administration, while the operation of recruitment is located under the Head of Marketing, Communication and Planning; both report to the Vice Principal (Resources). The Marketing and Recruitment Sub Committee reviews the Admissions Policy, the annual reports on the operation of admission arrangements, and programme-specific entry criteria. General admission requirements are stated in the Regulations for Academic Awards. Faculties consider recruitment, retention and cohort progression in their Faculty Summative Reports.

68 In accordance with its Widening Participation Policy, the University College welcomes student applications from a diversity of backgrounds. Student selection is made on the basis of suitability for studies, which includes academic achievement, professional and personal experience and potential to succeed. The Admissions Policy is complemented by a Policy for the Accreditation of Prior Learning. Programme leaders in faculties consider the applications and provide a mapping where required, while the final decision rests with the Head of Registry and Student Administration. The Credit and Short Course Approval Panel monitors accreditation of concurrent learning and accreditation of prior experiential learning decisions for consistency across the institution.

69 The University College offers visit and open days to prospective applicants. The Schools and College Liaison team arranges visits to schools by Marjon student ambassadors. The Widening Participation Coordinator also arranges visits to local schools by AimHigher student ambassadors; the audit team met students who were actively engaged in these schemes and who reported very positively on their experience.

70 Admission of students from collaborative partners is devolved to collaborative partners in the UK and abroad, who follow agreed standards. The audit team was told that agents recruiting international students coming to the UK are not involved in admissions and only act as brokers for applications. International students are not interviewed, but admitted via email.

71 The University College offers an induction to honours degree studies for Foundation Degree students during their last year at the partner colleges and provides early additional support for the dissertation/project module before entry into the final year at the University College.

72 The audit found that the University College's admissions arrangements are fit for purpose and operating in accordance with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*.

Student support

73 The five-year Strategic Plan states as one of its key aims the provision of a high-quality student experience by creating a 'vibrant student support hub' delivering student support responsive to the needs of widening participation students. The University College has a high percentage of students from non-traditional backgrounds and an above-average proportion of students with disabilities. A Student Support Strategy is currently under development and a first draft was made available to the audit team. The audit team also had sight of the Student Support Annual Report for 2008-09 with action plans that presented a thorough analysis and account of activities.

74 Marjon Student Services aims to deliver a personal and flexible service to enhance the student experience and contribute to achievement and retention. They clearly work within the parameters of the Retention Strategy, the Widening Participation Strategy and the Employability Strategy and provide a comprehensive, well-publicised network of support activities, which comprises nine teams: Accommodation, Academic Counselling, Campus Support Team, Disability Advice and Support, Study Skills, Counselling, Finance and Welfare, Careers, and Volunteering. The Chaplaincy is open to all faith groups. The one-stop shop provides extensive pastoral and academic care through a wide range of activities such as induction, one-to-one interviews and group work. Leavers are eligible to receive career advice and guidance for up to five years after they have left the University College.

75 A comprehensive Student Guide is sent to students before arrival on campus and students receive an extensive induction programme, but the audit team found that in autumn 2010 programme handbooks had only been available in draft format.

76 All students are allocated a personal tutor, a member of the academic staff with the responsibility of providing a first point of contact for pastoral care and academic support. The Academic Counsellor is responsible for the operation of the Personal Tutor System, which entitles students to a number of scheduled meetings as well as one-to-one meetings. Students are well aware of their entitlements signposted in the programme handbooks. They are particularly appreciative of the individual meetings with personal tutors and staff. An internal audit of the system was conducted in March 2007, which resulted in a

comprehensive policy and guidance document in 2008, updated in November 2010 reflecting the institutional restructuring.

77 An additional feature of the University College's comprehensive support system is the specialist support offered by the Academic Counsellor, who is located with the Student Support team. The purpose of the role is to advise students in academic difficulties and on referrals due to absence and module failure, appeals and complaints procedures, and to attend progression and award boards and mid-cycle review boards where students at risk are identified.

78 The pilot for an e-mentoring scheme seeking to improve retention, community cohesion, academic performance and conversion of applicants to places has been discussed at the Learning Enhancement Sub Committee and subsequently approved by LQSC. It is another example of the proactive and imaginative response of the University College to the needs of its students. This project aligns strategically with the Retention Strategy, the Widening Participation Strategy and the Employability Strategy by using student peers and student ambassadors as mentors for applicants and students new to the University College.

79 The Employability Strategy describes an integrated approach to employability across the curriculum. The Careers Service has developed a range of interventions firmly embedded in the programmes of study or as extra-curricular activities, reaching out to current students as well as to graduates five years after completing their programme. A preliminary internal audit of the *Code of practice, Section 8: Career education, information, advice and guidance* had been undertaken in June 2010 but had not yet been completed by the University College at the time of the audit. The development of employability skills is actively encouraged by the Careers Team. They provide subject-specific careers education, a variety of employer events and workshops. The Student Opportunities Group coordinates extra-curricular events, which include accredited volunteering opportunities, paid work, placements and a number of different fairs.

80 The University College obtained re-accreditation for the Matrix Standard for its Student Support Team in March 2009. The audit team met students who were overwhelmingly positive about the support they were receiving and concluded that the provision of Student Services is reflective of the student life cycle. The integrated approach and effective work of Student Support is identified in the audit as a feature of good practice.

Staff support (including staff development)

81 The Senior Management Team approves the Human Resources Strategy and the University Council carries responsibility for the annual review against its targets. The Strategy is accompanied by a comprehensive range of human resources procedures. Principles are laid down in the Staff Development Support document (effective until August 2010). The University College holds Investors in People status. Staff development is organised centrally by the Staff Development and Training Coordinator and is integrated into the annual academic business plans prepared by deans and heads of service with a detailed cost analysis. The budget is allocated to the faculty or department, but controlled by the Staff Development Coordinator.

82 There are clear and comprehensive guidelines for staff recruitment, appointment, induction, probation and promotion procedures. All new staff have an induction programme and are allocated a mentor. Staff new to teaching are required to undertake the Higher Education Academy (HEA)-accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Development, which consists of two 30-credit modules. For newly appointed staff who are

not yet members of the HEA the successful achievement of the first module is a condition of the probation. According to the HEA Institutional Annual Report for the University College in 2008-09, 74 per cent of staff were members of the Higher Education Academy.

83 The University College makes financial contributions for staff studying for master's and doctoral qualifications. Progress is reviewed annually through the staff appraisal process. The audit team was supplied with an example of a Staff Development Day organised in faculties and schools, which included migration training for the virtual learning environment. An annual Learning, Teaching and Research Conference offers a full and varied programme of internal and external contributions on learning through research and learning through practice.

84 Staff appraisal is managed through the Performance and Development Review process, resulting in a Personal Development Plan, a copy of which is passed on to the Staff Development Coordinator to determine staff development needs. In addition, all academic staff are required to be observed following the guidelines of the University College Peer Observation Scheme. The scheme is monitored by deans and intermediate line managers on the basis of a Peer Observation Schedule and a summary sheet, which details the focus of the observation with targets for improvement and good practice, which is kept in the Faculty Office. The University College is aware of a need for more effective monitoring for both processes. The audit team was able to confirm that coverage had been variable, but that measures had been taken to raise awareness and implement consistent application.

85 Staff who met the audit team were positive about how their development needs are met. Overall, the team found that the University College's arrangements for staff support were fit for purpose and largely effective.

86 There can be confidence in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students in its on-campus and UK collaborative provision. The audit team considers it advisable that the University College examine whether the current approach to the recording of matters discussed at meetings is sufficiently detailed and precise to establish clearly the status of decisions taken and demonstrate institutional assurance and oversight of the operation of learning and teaching at all levels in the institution.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

87 The Briefing Paper expresses the University College's commitment to a culture of 'continuous improvement'. The roles of the Head of Quality and Student Experience (HQSE) and the faculty leads for learning enhancement and student experience are identified as important to the 'effective management and development of quality assurance and enhancement processes'. In discussions with the audit team, senior staff were firm in the view that processes for quality assurance naturally lead on to enhancement of quality. The University College believes that its methods for assuring the academic quality of programmes through annual monitoring, external examiners and periodic review activities create opportunities to disseminate good practice across the institution through annual faculty reports. Internal audits are also designed to ensure that practice is aligned with the Academic Infrastructure while highlighting areas for further enhancement.

88 The implementation of strategic enhancement projects is linked to the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The overarching responsibility for the delivery of the new strategy has been devolved to the faculties in order for it to be discipline-focused, as was the last strategy. The creation of faculty lead roles for learning enhancement and student experience and research and ethics within each of the two faculties is designed to ensure that local

innovation is identified and disseminated to the whole institution and to secure monitoring of the implementation of central enhancement initiatives.

89 The institution disseminates good practice through faculty and staff development days and an annual Learning, Teaching and Research Conference. The conference draws together both best practice from within the institution, as well as a series of external contributors from the sector. A specific example of dissemination of good practice cited by staff was of the approach to peer observation in one programme, which led to an institution-wide policy change.

90 The institution offers a series of annual learning and teaching and research awards, which enable staff to enhance their pedagogic learning and teaching skills. Staff whom the audit team met were enthusiastic about the awards and associated support provided to award holders. The work of the award holders is disseminated at the annual Learning, Teaching and Research Conference.

91 The University College has a series of initiatives designed to promote quality enhancement, which it sees as being related to the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy and effective quality assurance. The roles and responsibilities of the Head of Quality and Student Experience and the faculty leads have the potential to support a structured and systematic approach in the future to quality enhancement, building on the good practice established to date.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

92 The University College's Strategic Plan includes the aim of expansion of the number and range of the University College's UK and overseas collaborative arrangements. Recent University College plans for new partnership arrangements include potential developments in Vietnam, North Carolina USA, Cyprus and Nigeria. The Briefing Paper noted that 'the new emphasis on partnership in the Strategic Plan will lead to a steep learning curve' and that there '[were] considerable risks, as well as opportunities, associated with this development'.

93 The University College has a range of overseas and UK collaborative partners. It also offers a range of short course and externally funded partnerships in the UK, particularly associated with school-based education in the South West of England. The audit team noted the contribution the University College is making by such partnerships to the educational life of its region, and to the practice of teacher training and language teaching more broadly. The academic provision delivered with these partners is aligned to areas of the University College's expertise: teacher education and English language provision for overseas provision; sport and education for UK provision. At the time of the audit there were about 1,007 students in overseas programmes of study (218 of which are enrolled in Pakistan), 78 from UK Foundation Degree provision and 1,781 on short course and other UK provision.

94 The types of collaborative provision undertaken by the University College include: accredited in-house overseas partnerships, supported distance learning, customised off-campus delivery, franchise/accreditation, and placement learning. The University College maintains a Collaborative Provision Register, which is received at least annually by the Learning, Quality and Standards Committee.

95 The Vice Principal (Academic) has institutional responsibility for collaborative provision within the University College. At the time of the audit, operational management of collaborative provision had recently been devolved to the faculties, with the retention of central oversight by the Vice Principal (Academic) and the Learning and Quality Unit. The operation of collaborative provision is governed by the Collaborative Provision Principles and

Procedures (CPPP) document published early in 2010. In meetings with staff the audit team encountered a lack of clarity and awareness of the arrangements for the management of collaborative provision, in particular the assignment of responsibilities. This includes the potential role of the CPPD and the contributions of the link tutors and the Learning and Quality Unit under the revised structures.

96 The University College's risk register includes mechanisms for individual risk assessments of proposed new collaborative provision developments. There are also codified due diligence arrangements, which form part of the executive approval process through Academic Development Committee. Collaborative provision development is judged to be 'medium' risk on the register. While financial and political risk are clearly appraised and planned for by the University College, academic risk is not given such overt priority in the planning process for future developments.

97 The University College has made efforts to take account of the guidance in the relevant section of the *Code of practice* in its management of its collaborative provision. In 2010 the institution conducted an internal audit of collaborative provision, the findings of which considered the funding environment and imperatives and led to the introduction of a Risk Assessment for Collaborative Provision.

98 The University College separates approval of partnerships from approval of programmes and their delivery. Following preliminary exploratory discussions, normally involving a visit to the potential partner, the relevant Dean of Faculty completes an Academic Collaboration Proposal Form for consideration by the Academic Development Committee. This form, in combination with its adjunct agreement for each proposed new development, is fit for purpose. The financial annexes to executive approval documentation are appropriate and fit for purpose, as are the University College's arrangements for due diligence as part of its approval of new arrangements within its executive structures.

99 There are specified approval periods for new and revalidated collaborative provision approval. Periodic review of collaborative provision operates in line with the University College's standard arrangements. At the time of the audit none of the institution's partnership arrangements had been subject to periodic review since the grant of taught degree awarding powers, as the reviews are due in the forthcoming and subsequent academic sessions. Given the difficulties arising from the volume of work for approval and periodic review of home provision, the University College will wish to ensure that the scheduling and programme of work for the periodic review of collaborative provision allow for the process to be conducted fully in accordance with the stated requirements.

100 All collaborative arrangements have a link tutor, who is the main operational contact with the partner institution. The role and attendant responsibilities have recently been defined by the University College and this should assist in promoting consistency of approach.

101 The University College operates a partnership for the delivery of a Certificate in Professional Education (CPEd) and a Certificate in Higher Education (CertHE) through a combination of supported distance learning and approved University College tutors at various sites in Pakistan, operating under the auspices of the University College's then Centre for International Education, which has now been incorporated into the Faculty of Education, Health and Welfare. Documentation associated with the arrangement shows a variety of start dates for the partnership, but it has certainly been in operation since the academic session 2007-08, initially with the CPEd, with the CertHE approved subsequently to operate from October 2010 to the end of December 2015.

102 The validation report for the CPEd in September 2006 identifies the issues to be considered and conditions and recommendations for approval, but there is no record of discussion of the proposal. Documentation for the CPEd provided to the audit team and discussions with staff did not establish the status of the programme; it was described as 'obsolescent' in the programme specification, which records it as being validated until December 2009. Other documentation seen by the team indicates that the programme is still operating. The University describes the programme as being 'available for those students who do not apply, or are unsuccessful in their application, for Accreditation of Concurrent Learning'.

103 The arrangement was extended to the partner's site in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia in June 2007. The extension of approval was based on discussion at a working group of a report by the Dean of International Education, the department responsible for the operation of the provision, without independent input. The University College now requires independent input for such approvals. The notes of the working group that received the visit report do not record any of the matters discussed, but it was agreed that the Chair of the Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) should take chair's action to approve the location; the extension of the arrangement was therefore not discussed in the institutional committee responsible for oversight of the provision. The notes of the working group indicate that the original approval of the partnership in October 2006 had been given on the basis of an audit visit conducted on behalf of Marjon by the British Council. The notes also record that decisions taken in October 2006 had not been recorded at CDC. The report from the British Council provided to the audit team consists of a brief email. In the view of the audit team, this document trail indicates that the original approval and extension of the arrangement to Malaysia lacked both rigour and institutional scrutiny.

104 The audit identified a number of other matters of concern with regard to the provision in Pakistan. The external examiner raised issues on marking standards and marking comments for the initial CPEd and there was a subsequent block-raising of marks. The external examiner report for the academic year 2009-10 drew attention to inadequate assessment documentation and to a lack of evidence of an examination board having taken place for the 2009-10 cohort on the CPEd. The external examiner also noted '[d]espite these difficulties, the documentation that I was able to examine was entirely satisfactory and of good standard'.

105 Staff-Student Liaison Committee documentation is only available with regard to one cohort and one student member of this committee for a one-year period. There is little evidence of institutional-level programme monitoring for any years of the provision to date. There have also been problems with the mode of delivery and the blurring of distinctions between approved tutor delivery and supported distance learning; the University College attempted to deliver the programme online when serious communication problems with Pakistan arose. In the documentation provided to the audit team there was no formal record of consideration of and approval of change in the mode of delivery for the Postgraduate Certificate to online delivery. In a meeting with the audit team staff acknowledged that the situation with regard to the provision was 'very bad'.

106 In response to representations from the partner institution about the awards available to the students, in 2009 the University College undertook an investigation into the provision, which led to agreement to validate the CertHE. The investigation did not look more widely at the operation of the provision. An approval panel then recognised an additional 60 credits to allow students to gain the CertHE rather than the Certificate award under Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning and Accreditation of Previous Learning arrangements. In November 2010 the Credit and Short Course Approval Panel, acting within its remit as a 'quasi-examination board', awarded 29 students the extra 60 credits required to guarantee a Certificate of Higher Education award.

107 The audit team was provided with a report dated November 2010 from the CPEd Coordinator about the collaborative arrangement as a whole. The report refers to a Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Development (listed as 60 credits at Level 7); the audit team did not find any other reference to this award. The report notes that the delivery of the CPEd programme was 'widely agreed to have been successful' but goes on to recommend an 'urgent review of the provision' as the situation 'is now so challenging'. The problems identified included:

- security difficulties resulting in staff having been unable to visit the partner in Pakistan for 'several years'. The situation meant that it was difficult to arrange assessment boards with appropriate notice for the external examiner to attend
- misunderstandings on the part of the partner about the accreditation of prior learning procedures for the CertHE
- inadequate financial arrangements
- administrative difficulties in dealing with a number of centres with a lack of organisational coherence
- communication difficulties
- significant deterioration in the situation in the last three months.

The report also noted that results for the third cohort could not go to the examinations board because of staff not knowing if resubmissions had been marked, and that staff did not know whether teaching for cohort 4 had been completed.

108 The audit team recognises the aspiration of this educational partnership to deliver educational skills against a background of political and environmental uncertainty. Nonetheless, the audit team notes with concern the expansion of the provision to a cross-national (Pakistan and Malaysia) Certificate in Higher Education at a time when problems had already materialised with the initial provision in Pakistan.

109 Based on scrutiny of documentation and discussions with staff the audit team came to the view that the University College has not acted to safeguard both itself and the cohorts of relatively large numbers of its students in Pakistan from problems which might have been expected. The audit team appreciates that political and environmental volatility has contributed significantly to problems associated with the provision. The University College itself identified the political context as a strategic risk but did not put in place any measures to mitigate that risk or any contingency planning. The documentation provided to the audit team does not demonstrate strategic and operational superintendence of the provision; the lack of contingency planning has meant that monitoring of the provision, collection of student feedback and assessment arrangements, including external examining, have not operated so as to secure reliably both the standards of the awards and the quality of learning opportunities. At the time of the audit, the University College had not come to a decision on how to proceed with the management of the partnership to fulfil its responsibilities to and protect the interests of the students registered for its awards.

110 The audit team considered the operation of a customised MEd Programme delivered off-campus at local institutions in Mexico, which has operated since 2007. There was evidence of developed and comprehensive Staff-Student Liaison Committee responses from students, consistent and complete approval documentation and favourable external examiner reports. While there have been some concerns raised over availability of teaching materials, the overall learning opportunities for students on this provision have been, and remain, sound. However, one external examiner report noted concerns over the staffing levels within the Mexican provision, and the University College will wish to respond to these concerns.

111 The audit team reviewed documentation relating to the operation of the University College's UK collaborative provision and found it to be sound and operating as intended. There is detailed approval documentation, including signed and dated franchise and accreditation and validation agreements, due diligence documentation and validation documentation for the partnerships. SSLC minutes demonstrate programmes of study being delivered to the great benefit of students.

112 The audit team considers it essential, in the context of the strategic intention to expand its overseas collaborative provision, that the University College establish secure and systematic institutional oversight of such provision, including the monitoring of compliance with its stated operational and institutional requirements. The audit team recognises that the University College has incorporated a free-standing Centre for International Language Teacher Education into a faculty, where it will be subject to established quality assurance and monitoring procedures, but the revised arrangement was too recent for the audit to appraise its effectiveness. Nonetheless, given that substantial responsibility for the operation of the University College's provision in Pakistan was delegated to local level, the team also considers it advisable that the University College monitor whether the extent of the planned delegation of authority to faculty level is compatible with sound institutional management of the academic standards of awards and the quality of learning opportunities offered through collaborative provision.

113 As a result of its examination of the University College's arrangements for collaborative provision, the audit team concluded that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards in its UK collaborative provision. Confidence can also be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students in its UK collaborative provision. There can be limited confidence in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities available to students in its overseas collaborative provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

114 The University College's Postgraduate Research Programmes lead to awards of the University of Exeter and are limited to areas related to research-active staff expertise, as determined by the University of Exeter: Theology and Philosophy, Education, and English Literature. There have been no new postgraduate research students registered within the University College since September 2008, and the few remaining students registered for such awards are nearing completion.

115 Regulatory requirements for postgraduate research students are those of the University of Exeter and are published in the University College Student Regulations Framework. Arrangements for the supervision of research students are sound and clearly identified in the Student Regulations Framework. Arrangements for the assessment of research students are secure, as are the arrangements for complaints and appeals. The University College has demonstrated a reflective and considered approach to research, including provision for the development of its postgraduate research student base, by means of its Strategic Plan, its Research Strategy, the developmental work of its Research Committee, its support for current postgraduate students and its operational arrangements for postgraduate provision, including training in research methodologies.

116 The University College's Ethics Policy was implemented in the 2009-10 academic session and has been updated in the light of external benchmarks from an established Research Council. The University College Ethics Policy is understood by students and staff.

117 The University College is developing its approach to research clustering and concentration both to assist its strategic developments to promote research and to benefit its postgraduate research students. The University College's ongoing 'Research Matters' newsletter is making an appropriate and effective contribution to the institution's developing research ethos. Academic staff whom the audit team met spoke of the contribution that the new faculty lead roles on research were making to developing the research ethos.

118 Postgraduate students whom the audit team met reported that they felt well supported by the University College and in particular by their supervisors and tutors. They expressed some concerns over the availability of written research resources, especially books in the library. Arrangements for their supervision and transfer (upgrade) from MPhil to PhD status are appropriate.

119 Arrangements for maximum registration periods for research postgraduate students are administered by the University College but established in University of Exeter regulations. Research methods training for postgraduate research students is available through the University of Exeter. Opportunities for postgraduate students to teach are appropriate and supported by training at an appropriate level.

120 The audit found that the arrangements for the support of postgraduate research students are sound and consistent with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 7: Published information

121 The marketing and communications department has overall responsibility for maintaining the homepage of the University College website, with individual faculties and programmes given overall responsibility over the internal contents of the website. There are templates for programme specifications, programme handbooks and module guides, but the audit team found inconsistencies in the format and content of some of the documentation. Several periodic review panels also identified inconsistencies in formal documentation, including in the area of handbooks and guides made available to students; the issue was followed up and there was evidence of improvement in this area. The audit team found some inconsistencies in handbooks; there is some evidence in meeting minutes that this is improving.

122 The Head of Marketing and Communication (as at the time of the Briefing Paper) approves the style of websites; the Head of Registry approves the regulatory accuracy of the content. The audit team's attention was drawn to an incident where an overseas partner had published inaccurate information on its website, which was picked up by a member of University College staff. The University College may wish to consider whether a more systematic institutional approach to the authorisation of material about University College awards published by partner institutions might provide further safeguard of the accuracy of information published about and on behalf of the University College.

123 The student written submission commented favourably on the accuracy of published information produced by the University College, which was confirmed by students whom the audit team met. The general lack of clarity about the procedures and associated responsibilities for notifying staff and students about changes to the Student Regulations Framework has been noted; in addition, there was a wide range of useful information

included in the Student Regulations Framework, but it can be difficult to access and to find particular items. The audit team therefore considers it desirable that the University College keep under review the way in which material is presented in the Student Regulations Framework in the interests of the clarity and accessibility of the various categories of information.

124 The Briefing Paper stated that students were provided with either a summary or the full external examiner report at the first meeting of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC), but students and staff indicated that this was not the case for all. The audit team found no reference in the records of meetings to external examiners' reports being shared with students through the SSLCs, and therefore also considers it desirable that the institution ensure that it shares external examiner reports with students, including those studying through collaborative arrangements, in accordance with the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes, October 2006* (HEFCE 06/45).

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

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