Institutional audit

The College of Law

May 2011

Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA's) mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To this end, QAA carries out Institutional audits of higher education institutions.

In England and Northern Ireland QAA conducts Institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector, to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and the assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations to assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies, and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the then Department for Education and Skills. It was revised in 2006 following recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, a representative group established to review the structures and processes of quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland, and to evaluate the work of QAA.

Institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. It forms part of the Quality Assurance Framework established in 2002 following revisions to the United Kingdom's (UK's) approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aim of the Institutional audit process is to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges of higher education in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of:

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner
- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications
- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews and on feedback from stakeholders.

Institutional audit results in judgements about the institutions being reviewed. Judgements are made about:

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and the quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes

- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

If the audit includes the institution's collaborative provision, the judgements and comments also apply unless the audit team considers that any of its judgements or comments in respect of the collaborative provision differ from those in respect of the institution's 'home' provision. Any such differences will be reflected in the form of words used to express a judgement or comment on the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

The reports of quality audits have to be useful to several audiences. The revised Institutional audit process makes a clear distinction between that part of the reporting process aimed at an external audience and that aimed at the institution. There are three elements to the reporting:

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students
- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences
- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website.

Summary

Introduction

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

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the College and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the College manages the academic aspects of its provision.

In Institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities is audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK. The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for the students.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

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

Postgraduate research students

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

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

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

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the College to:

- establish a systematic institutional framework for assessment and award.

It would be desirable for the College to:

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

Reference points

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

- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

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

Report

1   An Institutional audit of The College of Law (the College) was undertaken during the week commencing 2 May 2011. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information about the College's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2   The audit team comprised: Professor J Baldock; Professor M Howarth; Mrs J Lyttle and Dr M Rawlinson, auditors, and Mrs C Cobbett audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mrs S Patterson, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

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

4   The College has a specialised role within UK higher education and is currently the largest provider of professional legal education In the UK. The provision consists of the programmes, which a person who has already obtained an honours level degree, has to complete in order to qualify and remain qualified as a solicitor or barrister in England and Wales. The College was granted taught degree-awarding powers in 2006. The College operates eight centres for its educational provision: Birmingham; Bristol; Chester; Guildford; London Bloomsbury; London Moorgate; Manchester and York.

5   The College's mission is to:

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

6   The College offers five degree-level awards: the LLB (Bachelor of Laws); the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL); the Postgraduate Diploma in Legal Practice (on successful completion of the LPC); the Postgraduate Diploma in Bar Vocational Studies (on successful completion of the Bar Professional Training Course), and the LLM in Professional Legal Practice or International Legal Practice.

7   The College intends to continue to use its degree-awarding powers cautiously. Its current strategy and its focus on its core mission mean that the number of degree programmes is unlikely to expand significantly in the foreseeable future. The College indicated that its first degree award-bearing programme, the LLB, awarded for the completion of the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) and then the Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC) or the Legal Practice Course (LPC), might be subject to a change of title so that the title LLB could be used for a two-year LLB under development at the time of the audit. This latter new undergraduate programme has implications for the College's approach to learning and teaching, and for its student support provision, which are discussed later in this report.

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

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

9   Subsequent to the grant of taught degree-awarding powers, the College revised its arrangements for academic governance by replacing its Academic Quality Council with an Academic Board, which has oversight of the management of academic standards and quality. A feature of Academic Board's composition is the proportion of external members; the constitution provides for at least four external members from academic higher education or professional education, at least two of whom should be from a legal background. Academic Board reports on the performance of its duties to the Board of Governors through the latter's Academic Audit Committee. Academic Board is also responsible for ensuring that the quality of academic provision encourages effective teaching and learning.

10   An Innovation Design and Production Board and an Operations Board, responsible respectively for learning resources and for programme delivery, and the Registry, undertake the day-to-day management of academic activity. Both of these boards report to Academic Board. There are no formal terms of reference for these boards that reflect the revised structures established after the grant of taught degree-awarding powers. While there was evidence that the boards did report to Academic Board as required, the audit team considered that it would be desirable for the College to define and formalise the relationship between Academic Board, the Innovation, Design and Production Board and the Operations Board in the context of the management of academic standards and quality.

11   Routine management and deliberative reviews of academic standards and quality are reported to an annual sequence of Academic Board meetings, which then monitor plans for future action. Lines of communication and structures of responsibility are well understood by staff, and there is ownership and responsibility for quality assurance at all levels and locations of the College's staff, both academic and business professionals. The College has a number of distinctive features, which provide the context for this approach:

- the professional, statutory and regulatory bodies are a significant influence on the College's activity, particularly in respect of curriculum and assessment
- teaching methods and learning materials are a carefully designed combination of face-to-face guidance and a range of electronic resources
- the College takes an evidence-based approach to evaluating the effectiveness of its academic activities.

12   Academic standards and quality are thus managed both by deliberative instruments, such as annual monitoring reports, which are aggregated in the cycle of Academic Board meetings, and by routine management, which is reported through the hierarchy of boards. It is the view of the College that its new structures for the management of academic standards and quality are comprehensive and coherent. The audit team was able to endorse the College's view on the basis of the documentary and oral evidence provided to it.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

13   Academic Board is responsible for setting and maintaining the academic standards of the College's awards. It ensures that academic standards are aligned with external academic reference points, including the *Subject benchmark statement: Law*, and those set by the professional bodies representing solicitors and barristers. A College Awards Framework sets out the basis on which modules and programmes are calibrated with the *Higher education credit framework for England* and with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

14   Among the key ways in which Academic Board fulfils its responsibilities for academic standards are the approval and periodic re-approval of all modules and programmes and through confirmation of the appointment and removal, if circumstances demand, of external examiners. Before the grant of taught degree-awarding powers in 2006, the College delivered courses and made awards that were regulated and validated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority, the Bar Standards Board, and the Joint Academic Stage Board. After obtaining degree-awarding powers, the College approved its own awards, some of which were made to students who had successfully completed the professional training courses. Thus, the College developed programme design and approval processes that allow it to align the degrees it awards with the qualifications validated by the professional bodies.

15   The first qualification approved by the College using its new powers was the LLB awarded to students who had successfully completed the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) and either the Legal Practice Course (LPC) or the Bar Vocational Course (BVC). As a result, the College's award of the LLB involved considerably more study and assessment than the 360 credits at Level 6 for the award of a bachelor's degree indicated in the Higher Education Credit Framework for England. In order to maintain the integrity of the programme, the College decided not to award the LLB at the point at which students had obtained the threshold of 360 credits, but rather at the point at which students had successfully completed the whole programme. At the time of the audit, the College was planning to introduce a second LLB for non-graduates that would comprise the standard 360 credits at Level 6. Approval of this programme will be sought in 2011 for recruitment in 2012. The College is considering questions of comparability with the current postgraduate LLB and how it might distinguish the two degrees.

16   The Board delegates its responsibility for the approval of new courses to a standing Course Approval Sub-committee, which in turn appoints a panel to carry out the detailed scrutiny of a new proposal. Both the Course Approval Sub-committee and approval panels involve external members. Additional external experts and internal or external members of Academic Board may be appointed to the panel depending on the size and scope of the approval. There is some overlap between external membership of the approval panels and individuals who have previously or subsequently acted as external examiners. As the College seeks to extend the range of awards offered and also to operate in collaboration with overseas institutions, it may find advantage in involving external expertise beyond the provision of law degrees to bring additional useful perspectives to the formal scrutiny of its proposals. The audit team, therefore, considers it desirable that the College gives thought to extending the type and range of external involvement in the programme approval process.

17   The College has developed systematic arrangements for the annual monitoring of the operation of all courses at each of its eight centres. These processes explicitly scrutinise the management of academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience. External examiners' reports and responses to them form a significant part of the annual monitoring documentation produced by the Registry, and by the Innovation Design and Production and Operations Boards. A key point in the annual monitoring cycle occurs at the

January meeting of Academic Board when it considers documentation, including a summative review of key issues prepared by the Registry Head of Quality Assurance. At this meeting, Academic Board explicitly confirms its confidence in its academic standards and their application. These conclusions and any issues that have been identified for action are then part of Academic Board's annual report to the Academic Audit Committee.

18   The College requires that all programmes be re-approved after a period of no longer than six years. The procedures are similar to those for initial programme approval but with the addition of consideration of performance data collected from annual monitoring. At the time of the audit visit, no programmes had yet reached the point of periodic review. The first review scheduled is the LLB, first approved in 2007 and due for periodic review in 2012. The College is also required to revalidate periodically the courses it provides on behalf of the professional legal education bodies.

19   The audit team regarded the protocols and frameworks published by the College, together with the detailed procedures used to design, approve and monitor its courses, as providing a secure foundation for the management of academic standards.

20   Academic Board has formal responsibility for the approval of external examiners, authority for which is delegated to the Routine Business Sub-committee. The criteria for the appointment of external examiners are clearly specified in the College protocols and require external examiners to have appropriate standing, expertise and experience in relation to the relevant subject area and in assessment. The examiners are generally appointed for no more than two consecutive three-year terms.

21   Particular characteristics of the selection of external examiners are that many are chosen to examine specific modules in which they have professional expertise and that a significant proportion is drawn from lawyers in practice as well as from higher education providers. Nominations for external examiners for the Legal Practice Course and the Bar Professional Training Course are initially made by the Solicitors Regulation Authority and the Bar Standards Board respectively and are subsequently considered through the College's approval mechanisms. The College can raise any issues with the nominations with the Public Statutory and Regulatory Bodies before confirmation of the appointment of examiners.

22   The College provides new external examiners with an initial induction meeting and detailed written guidance. Where external examiners have no previous experience of examining, the College asks them to work alongside an experienced examiner for a period of six months. The professional legal education bodies also provide training for those examiners that they appoint in the first instance. The templates for external examiner reports are comprehensive and consistent with the guidance in the *Code of practice.* External examiners are asked to judge comparability of marking standards with those applied in similar programmes across the higher education sector, and to comment on the design of assessment, the performance of students and the administration of the processes.

23   External examiners' reports for all courses, a substantial digest of comments and observations made by the examiners, and details of the College's responses demonstrate that the processes are sound in practice. The extent of involvement of external examiners at all stages, including the approval of all assessments and marking schemes before use, and the range and comprehensiveness of their comments, was notable, as were the thoroughness and detail of the College's responses.

24   In the view of the audit team, the College's external examining processes are effective in contributing to the assurance of the academic standards of its awards. The College makes strong and scrupulous use of external examiners in summative assessment.

25   The College has engaged explicitly with the Academic Infrastructure in programme design. Particular attention is paid to the *Subject benchmark statement: Law* and to the requirements of the regulatory bodies through the Bar Standards Board, the Solicitors Regulation Authority and the Joint Academic Stage Board.

26   The College relies on the guidance in the *Code of practice* in course design and quality management; it does not have an explicit institutional learning and teaching strategy. This approach to the observance of external reference points, directing the attention of College staff to the relevant documents, is the standard method of the College.

27   The College's programmes place strong emphasis on vocational relevance in the design of programmes. The professional legal education bodies set classification and grade boundaries, which are not always easily mapped onto those that conventionally govern the award of honours degrees across the higher education sector. The College's approach to the design of courses and the production of teaching materials means that its programmes are specified in substantial detail in terms of curriculum, methods of instruction and learning, and standards of assessment. The links between the curriculum, learning outcomes and assessment are explicit in the course documentation and made clear in the materials provided to students.

28   The College has developed guidance covering assessment design and the matching of assessment methods to learning outcomes. Protocols cover the conduct of assessments, including matters of procedure such as submission of work, disruption to examinations, use of computers, candidates with special needs, resits and other procedural issues. The documentation prepared for each course, including the programme specifications, sets out the requirements for successful completion, classification rules, and the procedures for the finalisation of results at module and programme levels.

29   Most courses are taught in at least two modes, the A (Attendance mode) and the S (Supervised or distance learning mode), and each of these may use different course materials and methods of assessment. In addition, the Legal Practice Course (LPC) is taught in modes specific to, and restricted to, the trainees of particular law firms. The Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) is taught and assessed in a range of modes: full-time, part-time, part-time distance learning, and in a part-time distance learning online modular mode. Because of the close links between teaching mode, learning outcomes and course materials, separate assessments are frequently developed for the different modes of study. The College, therefore, faces particular challenges in securing consistency of assessment across the centres and the variety of modes of learning. The College has dealt with these potential difficulties by conducting extensive statistical modelling of past patterns of performance in the components of the various programmes to assure itself of comparability of assessments and consistency in marking its awards.

30   The College has also dealt appropriately with the potential difficulties outlined above through assessment regulations and procedures designed to ensure that academic standards are applied consistently across the College and the variety of programmes and modes of delivery and assessment. However, in the judgement of the audit team, it would be advisable for the College, as it develops its range of programmes and potential partnerships, to consider establishing a single institutional framework for assessment and award that could be used to benchmark assessment across its various programmes and to inform the deliberations of course approval panels when deciding these matters.

31   The College collects two main types of statistics. Course statistics are assembled by the Registry to monitor students' performance, progress and achievement. The Customer Insight Team conducts an annual student survey and collects teaching quality evaluation data on all programmes and modules. Both sets of information are used by teaching and

administrative staff to assist in assuring consistency of academic standards, fairness in the assessment of students and to develop and improve courses.

32   The data is used to monitor student performance and progression by programme, centre and mode of delivery and to distinguish among students by gender, academic background, ethnic origin, disability and age. Academic Board has also regularly commissioned special analyses of the data on subjects such as marking across modes and centres, on the performance of students with disabilities and/or with special learning needs. The College also undertakes 'in-year' monitoring of progress and trends, thus allowing speedy assessment of the impact of changes to curricula, teaching or assessment; this prompt and timely use of data is particularly noteworthy as most of the College's students currently attend programmes lasting no more than a year. The audit found the ways in which the College compiles, analyses and uses management information in quality assurance and enhancement to be a feature of good practice.

33   The College's arrangements for the management of academic standards are sound, take due account of relevant external reference points, and are applied consistently across its provision. There is effective institutional oversight through Academic Board and its subsidiary bodies. External examiner reports confirm that the processes for the assurance of academic standards are effective in practice. The College makes particularly noteworthy and timely use of management information in its assurance of academic standards. The audit found that confidence could be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

34   The College defines its distinctive learning model as 'learning by doing', which aims to simulate legal practice and requires students to assume responsibility for their own learning, with staff acting as facilitators or supervisors rather than as instructors. Key features are the role of ELITE (Electronic Legal Interactive Training Environment), the College's virtual learning environment, to support student learning, i-tutorials as preparation for workshop sessions and Test and Feedback exercises to allow students and staff to monitor progress.

35   The College makes extensive use of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of learning opportunities. It has engaged in detailed and often painstaking work to assure itself that its policies and procedures align with the guidance in the *Code of practi*ce. The requirements of the professional, statutory and regulatory bodies represent a further set of external reference points for the College's management of its provision. Some of the professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' requirements, such as those for admissions, and appeals and complaints procedures, overlap with the precepts of the *Code of practice*. The professional, statutory and regulatory bodies are also prescriptive about the level and quality of the learning resources provided for students; the College is confident, and the audit team saw confirmatory evidence, that it sets its own standards for provision in this area above the minimum requirements of the professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

36   On the basis of its study of documentation and from discussions with staff and students, the audit team formed the view that the College makes effective use of the Academic Infrastructure, particularly the *Code of practice,* and other relevant external reference points in its management of learning opportunities.

37   The College has clearly defined procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes and ensures that students and external participants are fully informed about the requirements for their role in these processes. Annual monitoring represents the most

important means by which the College currently assures itself of the quality and availability of learning opportunities for students.

38   The annual monitoring process is overseen by Academic Board and is designed to permit an opportunity to focus on those resources and services that most directly support student learning. In the first stage of a three-stage process, annual monitoring reports are produced for each programme; these reports include feedback from external examiners, tutors and students, as well as centrally produced data on student performance. At the second stage these various reports go to Academic Board at its January meeting and the Board then receives a report on progress against action plans at its May meeting, being the final stage of the annual monitoring cycle.

39   At the time of the audit, the College was conducting annual monitoring on a programme-by-programme basis but, in the interests of ensuring consistency of practice and of gaining a college-wide view of the management of learning opportunities, it was moving towards a cross-programme approach. This move is in accordance with the College's wider strategic intention to adopt a more holistic overview of academic standards and quality. While there has not yet been a cycle of annual monitoring on the basis of the strengthened procedures, senior staff of the College consider that the ability to take an institutional view will provide further assurance that its management of learning opportunities enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes of their programmes.

40   Based on study of documentation and on discussion with staff and students, the audit team concluded that the College's procedures and systems for approval and monitoring of provision were effective in maintaining the quality of student learning opportunities. The introduction of a college-wide approach to annual monitoring will further strengthen procedures in this area. At the time of the audit, no programme had yet reached the point of periodic review.

41   The College collects student feedback through the annual student survey and through Teaching Quality Evaluation Forms distributed to students at the end of each module. The information is collated centrally and used both as a student-led input into the annual monitoring process and as a means of evaluating tutor performance.

42   Student input to the review and approval processes is typically undertaken by means of focus groups where student views on the operation of the programme in question are used to inform its future development. It is also the practice of the College formally to pilot a new learning method before introducing it across the College and to secure student feedback in this context. Similarly, all new programmes are subject to an additional level of quality monitoring during their first year of operation and this includes the use of structured focus groups with students. The College does not currently participate in the National Student Survey but expects to do so in the context of the new undergraduate LLB.

43   Staff Student Liaison Committees are organised in all centres for all programmes and modes of study and represent an opportunity, which is valued by students, to raise matters of concern directly with staff. Responsibility for feeding back on actions taken in response to student views lies with staff. Students recognised that the College often acted promptly in response to their feedback but noted also that there were instances where they considered that the response had been slow. Staff Student Liaison Committees meetings are minuted and the minutes are available on ELITE.

44   Prospective student representatives receive a short briefing on the requirements of the role. The College does not have a formal organisation to represent the general student body but, in the context of the College's plans to introduce an undergraduate LLB, it is considering the possibility of establishing a Students' Union. The College has recognised

that there may be a need in the future to provide training for the role of student representative.

45   In the view of the audit team, the College's arrangements for obtaining and processing student feedback ensure that all sectors of the current student body have opportunities to represent their views on the management of learning opportunities. While much of this information is gathered at local centre level, it is all collated and processed centrally and the College maintains oversight at institutional level.

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

47   Currently there is no provision for student representation on college-level committees, such as Academic Board. It remains to be decided whether such representation would be considered appropriate when the new undergraduate degree has admitted its first student cohort.

48   The College's strategic approach to research and scholarly activity is closely aligned with its learning model, where the primary requirements are to ensure both the currency of the syllabi and the efficient production of the learning resources required to deliver them. The College is clear that the support it gives to its programme designers makes certain that they have access to the legal and pedagogic knowledge necessary for these objectives to be achieved. The College is equally clear that its staff development programme and associated performance management processes secure the consistent use of these resources across the College. The College is confident, therefore, that its approach to research and scholarship contributes very effectively to learning opportunities.

49   The College is also aware of the need for the pedagogical knowledge of staff to be as current as their legal knowledge. In this respect, the College has particularly benefitted from its long-standing relationship with the Institute of Learning Technology at the Open University and the contributions it makes to the annual Open University Law School conferences and training days. Further, some College staff present their work at national conferences and the work of the College in e-delivery of legal education has also attracted interest from other law faculties in the UK and abroad.

50   From its discussions with staff, the audit team found that there was a broader spectrum of scholarly activity taking place in the College than was suggested in the documentation available to it and that much of this activity was of interest and relevance to the College's strategic objective of being a leader in legal education.

51   The College has introduced online distance learning, known as the S (Supervised) mode of study, for some of its programmes. Current numbers of students studying in this mode are low but are expected to grow. In line with standard College practice, this mode of study was piloted and the effectiveness of the learning method and courseware were closely monitored and adjusted, where necessary, during its first year of delivery. Similarly, training was provided to support tutors in their role as facilitators and supervisors in the delivery of S mode programmes.

52   The provision of employability support is an inherent component of the College's learning model and the College has put in place a range of e-resources to support S mode students in this area. In addition, UK-based S mode students are formally attached to either the Manchester or the Bloomsbury centre, where they may make use of all of the facilities and resources available to A (Attendance) mode students.

53   On the basis of its study of documentation and its discussions with students, the audit team concluded that the College has made effective arrangements for maintaining the learning opportunities for students studying online and at a distance.

54   All programmes are designed for delivery through an integrated set of electronic multimedia 'courseware' available through the College's online learning environment, ELITE, irrespective of centre or mode of study; library resources are also made available through ELITE. ELITE, which is integral to the College's learning model and to the delivery of its programmes, was commended in the student written submission. The audit team heard from students that this interactive and participative approach was a particular strength, setting the College apart, and that they valued ELITE and its comprehensive user-friendly resources for providing access to both academic and support services. The team came to the conclusion that the considered design of the College's online learning environment, which provides an integrated and comprehensive resource for both staff and students, and thereby promotes a culture of learning throughout the College, was a feature of good practice.

55   Courseware includes: i-tutorials with multimedia packages replacing lectures; Test and Feedback exercises to help students prepare for workshop sessions, which are the main focus of face-to-face learning; demonstrations, and interactive seminars conducted electronically (webinars). All courseware is developed and maintained in-house by teams of designers, assisted by tutors. The design team is currently researching sixth form pedagogy and learning backgrounds to ensure that courseware for the new LLB degree will be suited to the needs of undergraduate students entering the College. The audit found the coherence of the approach to the design and delivery of programmes to be a feature of good practice in the College's management of learning opportunities.

56   The College strives for consistency and equity of provision across its centres and students may access resources within centres other than their own; students told the audit team that flexibility is such that they can change centre during the course if personal circumstances change. The College's physical libraries are very well-resourced and well-equipped with good printing and photocopying facilities, although there are some inevitable peaks in demand, and the students who met the audit team confirmed that libraries were well used and sufficient for their needs. The overall impression given by students about both resources and library staff was extremely positive.

57   Admissions decisions are mainly non-selective subject to minimum requirements, except for those for the Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC). Students who met the audit team had found the admissions process straightforward but suggested that interviews for the BPTC might be useful as a means to identify particular academic or English language support needs. At the time of the audit, detailed selection criteria for the new LLB degree had not been confirmed.

58   Students are allocated a personal tutor who is also one of their academic tutors, an aspect of support appreciated by students, especially those studying part-time. Specialist support services are provided in each centre, information being available through ELITE. In-course, the College uses management information to identify and contact students who may need support, and monitors their subsequent performance. Staff are alert to the likely different support needs, both academic and personal, of the undergraduate students who will be entering the new LLB. The student written submission referred to initial difficulties faced by entrants unused to academic and legal writing; students who met the audit team also raised the issue of English language support for international students, which is under discussion within the College. The College will no doubt wish to consider further its provision in this area given the introduction of the new LLB degree.

59   The College's careers and pro bono services are well staffed and are praised by students. Once students accept their places, a wide range of resources is made available; the student written submission expressed some dissatisfaction with the availability of employability services, particularly for part-time students, and also indicated that pre-acceptance information about employment prospects would be helpful, a view shared by students who met the audit team. In response, the College is developing a policy on minimum levels of careers and pro bono support in each centre. Structured online careers support for S mode students has recently been developed for delivery through ELITE; these online resources will be expanded to form the basis of employability provision for the new LLB students. Based on consideration of available documentation and other material, and on its discussions with staff and students, the team considered the College's approach to the provision to students of careers and employability support and advice to be a feature of good practice.

60   The College considers staff support and development to be key aspects of its overall approach to quality enhancement. Its academic staff (tutors) are usually professionally qualified, have legal practice experience, are recruited from practice and maintain their professional currency. Both the student written submission and students who met the audit team emphasised the value of practice insights given by their tutors.

61   New tutors are assigned a mentor. The induction process, set out in a comprehensive staff handbook, includes a mix of face-to-face and interactive online activities through ELITE; they undertake a course on Teaching in Higher Education and then apply to become Fellows of the Higher Education Academy. They are then expected to apply for promotion to Senior Tutor, which is the College's career grade, and on to further positions of responsibility. The current policy of staff undertaking an Open University module, and subsequently applying for Higher Education Academy membership, is well-established.

62   Ongoing staff support is provided by way of tutor notes for workshops, marking guidance, team meetings, programme-specific training, peer observation of teaching and observation of classroom practice by senior staff, as well as multimedia training programmes and face-to-face sessions for staff taking on new roles. The College holds an annual training week in each centre, attended by all tutors, that includes both college-wide and centre-specific dimensions; topics include academic and pedagogic issues. The College also supports its staff by paying Higher Education Academy fees, subscriptions to professional academic bodies and fees for external seminars and conferences. Staff who met the audit team confirmed that there were regular opportunities to meet within and across centres to discuss both teaching and student support issues.

63   Reports from teaching observations and student evaluations contribute to annual staff evaluations; an annual summary of teaching observations and student evaluations is reported to Academic Board and the expectation is that staff will score at least four out of five. A performance related pay scheme for career grade staff, based partly on teaching quality, is in place but this is separate from the annual Career Management Review, regarded as a developmental process, which is informed by the tutor's personal learning development log.

64   At the time of the audit, a new career structure had recently been introduced and explained to staff at centre meetings. It offers career development opportunities in curriculum development and course design as designers, as well as in programme and staff management roles. The introduction of the new LLB degree also presents additional staff development opportunities for tutors in central courseware design and in course delivery.

65   The College states that key academic staff development priorities were: preparing new staff to conduct classes and assessments; enabling them to become confirmed in post

and then to become senior tutors; ensuring that they remained equipped to carry out those roles and responsibilities; and providing opportunities for them to progress within the College's career structure. The audit found that the College was extending and reinforcing its 'learning by doing' philosophy by developing online and interactive staff support and development through ELITE. Through reading the documentation available to it, and from discussion with students and with staff at all levels, the audit team identified the College's strategic and effective approach to staff support and development to be a feature of good practice in the management of learning opportunities.

66   The College's approach to the management of learning opportunities is designed to support its 'learning by doing' model, and takes account of the needs of students following the different modes of study available. ELITE and its comprehensive user-friendly resources that provide access to both academic and support services are integral to the provision of learning support. The College makes detailed and effective use of the relevant external reference points, including professional body requirements, in its management of learning opportunities. The College's procedures and systems for approval and monitoring are sound and the introduction of a college-wide approach to annual monitoring will further strengthen procedures in this area. There is a range of opportunities for students to provide feedback and the College is generally responsive to issues raised by students. Staff support and development are designed to ensure that tutors have up to date pedagogical and subject specific knowledge and expertise. There can be confidence in the College's current and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

67   The College's approach to quality enhancement is implicit, and is currently not explicitly distinguished either from routine procedures or from one-off projects. The College is responsive to student feedback through both informal and formal channels and makes use of management information to take an evidence-based approach to the monitoring of pedagogic effectiveness. Developmental activity is guided by the use of focus groups composed of students and alumni. These activities are not captured in the language of enhancement or articulated into an overall strategic approach.

68   The College does not have an overarching statement of principle, such as an institutional learning and teaching strategy, against which specific programme teaching methodologies or plans for new programmes are aligned or tested. Elements of such a set of principles are dispersed through the documentation, particularly in programme handbooks.

69   A systematic approach to quality enhancement is found in the College's emphasis on planning and design, which are central mechanisms in assuring academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, as is witnessed by the development of blended delivery of programmes through ELITE and the practice-oriented workshops.

70   Responsibility for the 'development of learning and assessment strategies across new and existing programmes' is vested in the Innovation Design and Product Board. The Director of Learning, Quality and Assessment manages seven practice heads, each overseeing design work in specific areas of legal practice, and responsible for leading enhancements of the design process.

71   The College has effective networks for disseminating good practice between centres and between staff involved in design and in delivery. The new career development structure and a new approach to the commissioning and scheduling of design work formalise these interactions in job descriptions and intermediate management roles. The College

engages staff in collegial reflection through distributed learning methods and multimedia resources, and ELITE is also used to gather tutor feedback to design teams.

72   Planned staff development opportunities make a significant contribution to quality enhancement. Staff are required to engage in timetabled training, which focuses both on pedagogic aspects of legal education and on subject knowledge. A week-long Summer Training Programme draws on external expertise in these areas. Staff contribute to the enhancement activities of the relevant Higher Education Academy subject centre.

73   Enhancement is not recognised in the centres under that description: the idea of 'taking deliberate steps to improve student learning opportunities' was understood as indicating responses to student feedback and not as systematic activity to implement and test the precepts of a high-level plan. In the view of the audit team, the redefinition of 'design, update and QA' through the Future Design initiative, a reorganisation of the planning, execution and quality control of design work, has significant positive implications for quality assurance and for quality enhancement. The development of career paths for tutors and designers represents an additional benefit. In the view of the audit team, this project has the potential to support the development of a shared institutional understanding of enhancement.

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

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

75   To date, the College's only involvement in collaborative provision has been as a partner of the Open University through extensive input to the University's LLB programme. The College considers the relationship to be of mutual benefit through sharing technological, pedagogical and subject expertise, and found that experience gained from working with the University was useful in developing its new LLB degree.

76   The College plans to proceed cautiously in developing collaborative provision in its own right, using its own learning model and working with equivalent institutions in other countries. At the time of the audit visit, the College was in the process of developing a Framework for Collaborative Provision; as the Framework was still at the draft stage, the audit team considered it would be premature for it to consider it in any detail.

77   At the time of the audit, the College was developing a London-based programme, with some teaching input from American staff, to enable successful students to apply for the New York Bar examination. It had also concluded an agreement in principle with a European University with a view to providing an undergraduate degree delivered in English and covering both jurisdictions.

78   Based on its reading of the documentation available to it, and on discussions with senior staff, the audit team would encourage the College in the development of its collaborative provision framework. Such a framework should enable the College to be ready to evaluate future opportunities and potential partners, and to ensure the effective

management of academic standards and quality of any subsequently approved programmes.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

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

Section 7: Published information

80   The College promotes its programmes to prospective students on its website, publication and updating of which is the responsibility of the Marketing Director. Information for students applying to and preparing to study in the College is communicated by the Admissions team in the Customer Contact Centre, which reports, like the Marketing Director, to a Business Development Board with overall responsibility for the currency, fitness and accuracy of information. Student handbooks for each programme are produced by Innovations Design and Product. The course handbooks are points of reference in induction and in the personal tutor system.

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

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

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

83   The audit team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the ways in which the College compiles, analyses and uses management information in quality assurance and enhancement (paragraph 32)
- the considered design of the College's online learning environment, which provides an integrated and comprehensive resource for both staff and students, and thereby promotes a culture of learning throughout the institution (paragraph 54)
- the coherence of the approach to the design and delivery of programmes (paragraph 55)
- the approach to the provision to students of effective careers and employability support and advice (paragraph 59)
- the strategic and effective approach to staff support and development (paragraphs 60 to 66).

Recommendations for action

84   Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- that the institution establishes a systematic institutional framework for assessment and award (paragraph 30).

85   Recommendations for action that is desirable:

•   define and formalise the relationship between Academic Board, the Innovation, Design and Production Board and the Operations Board in the context of the management of academic standards and quality (paragraph 10)
•   give thought to extending the type and range of external involvement in the programme approval process (paragraph 16)
•   establish a structured institutional approach to quality enhancement, drawing on the range of existing activities, including scholarship, which improve the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 74).