Institutional audit

The Arts University College Bournemouth

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 Arts University College Bournemouth (the University College) from 9 to 13 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 University College offers in its own name and those which it offers on behalf of the University of the Arts, London.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the University College and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University 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 are 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 Arts University College Bournemouth is that:

- **confidence** can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers and those which it will offer on behalf of the University of the Arts, London
- **confidence** can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University College currently has a number of activities which strengthen a culture of continual improvement. These demonstrate the journey from quality assurance towards quality enhancement. The University College is developing a Learning and Teaching Strategy for 2011-16 which has the potential to establish a strategic, cross-institutional framework for enhancement.

Postgraduate research students

Although, at the time of the audit, no postgraduate research student programme was being delivered, the University College was hoping to be able to recruit students to register for University of the Arts, London full-time MPhil/PhD degrees from September 2011. The audit team had no reason to believe that the University College could not develop an appropriate environment to support postgraduate research students but noted that, at the time of the audit, no memorandum of agreement had been signed with the University and the University College was unlikely to be able to supply properly qualified supervisory teams without recruiting at least some external supervisors.

Published information

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.

Features of good practice

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

- the revised annual course review and Causes for Concern processes which encourage cross-institutional reflection on standards and the quality of the learning opportunities (paragraph 19)
- the timely completion of the annual course review process, and the speedy response to external examiners' reports through the annual course review reports, which allow effective action planning for the following year (paragraph 21)
- the cross-institutional approach to ensuring a shared understanding of standards as exemplified by the Verification Project (paragraph 31).

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University College to:

- ensure the validation, accreditation or approval status of all programmes is clearly indicated in all information for intending students (paragraph 62)
- ensure that students are not made a formal offer to a programme until the appropriate legal agreement, regulatory framework, resources and support are in place (paragraph 65).

It would be desirable for the University College:

- in line with its Employability Strategy, to ensure that all students are made aware of appropriate opportunities for workplace experience, including those provided by the Enterprise Pavilion (paragraphs 49 and 52)
- in implementing its new Learning and Teaching Strategy, to give priority to further developing a strategic understanding of, and systematic approach to, quality enhancement consistently across the University College (paragraph 60).

Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by the University 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, overall, the University College took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Report

1   An Institutional audit of the Arts University College Bournemouth was undertaken during the week commencing 9 May 2011. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University College's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers and those which it offers on behalf of University of the Arts, London and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2   The audit team comprised Mrs C Blanchard, Mr C McIntyre, Dr A Perera, Ms C Richer and Professor N Taylor, auditors, and Mrs S Gregory, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr P McCracken, assistant director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   The Arts University College Bournemouth (the University College) is a specialist institution delivering programmes in the creative arts. In the academic year 2009-10, there were 2,587 full-time equivalent students enrolled on higher education programmes of study. Of these, 210 were international students. At the time of the audit the University College offered 20 undergraduate programmes organised in two faculties: the Faculty of Art and Design and the Faculty of Media and Performance. The multi-pathway MA is administered by the Faculty of Art and Design on behalf of both faculties.

4   Since the previous audit in 2005, the former Arts Institute at Bournemouth achieved taught degree awarding powers in 2008 and university college title in 2009. It then changed its name to the Arts University College Bournemouth. Since September 2008 all new higher education students have enrolled on awards of the University College and since 2010-11 all such students are following its awards. In 2009 a restructuring led to the establishment of two faculties to which previously central roles and responsibilities, notably those for academic standards and quality, are being delegated incrementally.

5   The University College took appropriate action to address the six desirable recommendations from the last audit of 2005. However, the audit team found that the work undertaken on the advisable action had not entirely resolved the matter with regards to taking timely action to ensure that the validation status of programmes is clearly indicated in all information for prospective students. This has resulted in two advisable recommendations in this area (see paragraphs 62 and 65).

6   The University College has developed a set of institutional values which were summarised by the Principal in his introduction to the Annual Report of 2010 as: 'Academic excellence, student focus, public engagement, entrepreneurial approaches and strong records of professional practice'.

7   Academic Board is responsible for academic standards, including regulations, and delegates appropriate responsibilities to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee which oversees the operation of quality assurance policies and procedures. Under the two-faculty structure, course boards report to faculty boards for the monitoring and reporting of quality and standards. Each dean reports on the annual course reviews to the Deputy Principal who compiles an overview report, all of which are considered by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

8   The University College's quality management processes are designed to ensure that the academic standard of awards is secure and the quality of the student experience is maintained. A 'light touch' process operates, minimising the burden on academic and professional staff whilst ensuring consideration of stakeholder needs.

9   The University College's management of academic quality is supported by a Quality Assurance Handbook which informs staff of the policies and procedures they need to use. It is also available on the intranet. The Director of Academic Services, supported by the Academic Registrar and the Academic Standards and Quality Team, oversees the quality management infrastructure. The institution takes the view that since each of the processes is necessary, but none in itself sufficient, the infrastructure should be viewed as an interconnecting whole.

10   The executive decision-making processes lie in the Senior Management Team, chaired by the Principal, who reports to the Board of Governors. The Senior Management Team approves all proposals for new courses and other initiatives as well as having overall responsibility for the budget.

11   The audit team saw evidence of the location of responsibility for quality management at the senior committees and confirms that these responsibilities were managed rigorously and professionally. The team also saw evidence of the effective monitoring and reporting functions of the faculty and course boards, of the operation of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee and Academic Board, the use of statistical information and of the processes of critical reflection.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

12   The University College has a well-established process for the approval of new courses. Proposals are considered first by the Senior Management Team and those approved have to prepare clear information to allow the Academic Standards and Quality Committee to decide whether the proposal can go forward to validation. Proposals go first to a faculty-level validation panel which then forwards them to the Academic Standards and Quality team. Finally there is a formal scrutiny by a panel normally chaired by an experienced senior member of academic staff and including two external members.

13   Courses are validated for a maximum period of five years and, during the final year, a periodic review is undertaken by a process similar to that for validation with the addition to the panel of up to two student representatives. The panel receives relevant course statistics, and performance is evaluated against appropriate indicators, such as sector norms for the subject, throughout the review period. The review is also an opportunity to update the design and delivery of the course. In light of the increasing importance of key student data and public information, the University College has changed its periodic review process to encourage a stronger focus on student data, student satisfaction, employability and issues such as diversity and sustainability.

14   The outcomes of both validation and periodic review events result in a recommendation to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee for approval for a period of up to five years, or for further development work.

15   All courses and service areas undergo an annual review to consider potential improvements. A revised, less burdensome annual course review process was introduced in 2006 and, following a review, some revisions were implemented from 2009-10. It works effectively to provide assurance about the security of standards and quality, identify weaknesses to be remedied and respond to the comments of external examiners. The review also considers a range of statistics including performance against widening participation indicators.

16   Performance is considered through data provided by the Registry and Management Information Teams against performance indicators, each of which has a 'standard answer', corresponding to expected outcomes. Any significant deviation requires an explanation. One additional thematic question is included annually to allow a more thematic review of a specific area; in 2009-10 this was 'Responding to the employability agenda'.

17   Trained readers from other faculties or schools read each annual course review report to provide independent scrutiny, and each completes a template to confirm that the readers have looked at all the evidence. The readers' comments are considered, together with the annual course review report, by the faculty board.

18   The dean prepares a report on all the annual course reviews in the faculty for the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. This provides it with an overview of the academic work of the faculty, and identifies issues that require consideration or action at University College level and any trends that emerge from the course reports.

19   The University College has introduced a 'Causes for Concern' procedure following the implementation of the 'light-touch' annual course review process. The 'Causes for Concern' procedure ensures that any poor performance can be clearly addressed and is used where one or more course indicators suggest that there might be a risk to the maintenance of standards or quality. Course teams give detailed consideration to any areas where performance is significantly weaker than the institutional target and, if the issue is not resolved, a panel established by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee will review this area and make recommendations for improvement. The audit team concluded that the revised annual course review and Causes for Concern processes encourage cross-institutional reflection on standards and the quality of the learning opportunities and considered them a feature of good practice.

20   An annual overview report on the operation of the higher education courses is prepared by the Deputy Principal on behalf of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. This covers the outcomes of the annual course review process, considers an extended range of evidence, and reflects more broadly on the security of academic standards and the assurance and enhancement of quality. Academic Board and the Strategic Development Committee of the Board of Governors receive these reports. All stages of the annual review process are completed by October of the next academic year.

21   The audit team saw evidence of how the processes for approval, annual and periodic review were rigorously carried out and this was confirmed by the staff whom it met. The team considered that the timely completion of the annual course review process, and the speedy response to external examiners' reports through the annual course review reports, both of which allow effective action planning for the following year, to be a feature of good practice.

22   At least one external examiner is appointed to each of the higher education awards, and the roles and responsibilities of external examiners are published in the Quality Assurance Handbook. The University College has appropriate selection and training procedures for new examiners. The external examiners' report form is designed to allow them to confirm that academic standards are met, and requires comments on the quality of learning opportunities for students. It also confirms that any requirements of professional bodies have been met.

23   The University College has introduced a two-tiered examining system in which progression and award is confirmed by a central Progression and Awards Board reporting to Academic Board. The role of chief external examiner for each faculty has been introduced; they attend both the school examination boards and the Progression and Awards Board and

confirm that the regulations have been applied consistently and fairly across all the faculty's courses. This enables each faculty and the University College to obtain useful feedback on comparability of achievement and parity of assessment processes and is part of the formal response to a recommendation for the last audit.

24   The Deputy Principal, as Chair of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee, receives the external examiners' reports. A collective reading of the reports is undertaken by the Academic Standards and Quality Team to identify any common issues. There is potential duplication of institution paperwork and ambiguity in staff understanding of the process of formal institutional responses to external examiners' reports. The Deputy Principal formally thanks them for their work and sets out the arrangements for the following year. Responses to the content of the report are sent by the faculty registrar but, in more substantive cases, the Deputy Principal may also respond again directly to the examiner(s). The audit team was satisfied that every year external examiners receive a response to their reports from the University College. The audit team saw documents and spoke to staff and concluded that the external examiner system operates effectively to secure academic standards.

25   National reference points play a key role in the setting and maintaining of academic standards and institutional processes make explicit reference to the QAA Academic Infrastructure. The BA (Hons) Architecture responds to the requirements of the Architects Registration Board and the Royal Institute of British Architects as well as the EU professional qualifications directive.

26   Curriculum frameworks for undergraduate and taught postgraduate awards are aligned to *The framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), reference the Dublin Descriptors for European qualifications and align with the national credit framework. The relevant subject benchmark statements are considered by validation and periodic review panels, which must confirm that the course makes appropriate reference to these reference points.

27   The University College regards the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic standards and quality* (the *Code of practice*) as a significant point of reference, and ensures that its own policies and procedures reference it. The Academic Standards and Quality Committee receives a summary report detailing the institutional responses to each section of the *Code of practice* and these are revisited each time a section of the *Code of practice* is revised. Programme specifications make clear the aims and outcomes of each award, noting its level in the FHEQ.

28   Academic Board holds overall responsibility for the University College's undergraduate curriculum framework and postgraduate framework and regulations, and the associated assessment regulations. Any changes to regulations are confirmed by the Board before their introduction. A new curriculum framework for undergraduate courses has been implemented since the University College gained degree awarding powers; the regulations are consistent with sector norms for creative art and design subjects. The Academic Standards and Quality Committee is preparing for the next review of the framework, planned to be implemented from 2012-13. The postgraduate curriculum framework was revised during 2010-11 in order to offer greater flexibility, enabling it to be offered from 2011-12.

29   New students are issued with a regulations handbook and care is taken at induction to ensure students know where to obtain detailed information on assessment and other regulatory matters. The practical nature of the University College courses requires the making and presentation of creative work for assessment, and there are currently no formal examinations at any level. The University College is mindful of the responsibility of securing the integrity of the assessment process.

30   Each unit of a course has specified learning outcomes and assessment criteria, to enable students to be clear about what is expected of them. The University College uses a standard grading matrix across all undergraduate courses, giving indicative performance in each grade band at each level for each criterion. However, it recognises that the grading matrix is a complex document and has established a group to consider how to communicate matters relating to assessment practice more effectively.

31   Since 2007, the University College has operated a Verification Project which reflects the expectation that related disciplines have comparable outcomes. The annual Verification Project employs a selected group of academic staff to review key outcomes across courses and confirm that standards are applied consistently and appropriately. The practice has been found useful both in providing assurance about the standard of awards, and in sharing practice in assessment. Reports are received by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee in September following the year under scrutiny. The audit team considered the cross-institutional approach to ensuring a shared understanding of standards as exemplified by the Verification Project to be an example of good practice.

32   The school examination boards are chaired by the head of school and include an independent member and the recently introduced faculty chief external examiner. The boards confirm results for all programmes within the school and make recommendations to the central Progression and Awards Board. This new process provides an opportunity for staff to see the application of regulations across a range of programmes, contextualise decisions made on the individual ones and have an overview of patterns of student achievement. The Progression and Awards Board confirms final decisions on progression and award, and reviews results across the University College to ensure consistency of approach and adherence to the regulations. Both chief external examiners attend this board, which reports to Academic Board.

33   Examination boards receive a wide range of information about student achievement to inform their decisions. This permits an effective review of the pattern of student achievement which assists in course review. The audit team formed the view that this operated a rigorous process for assessment and contributed to the assurance of standards.

34   Statistical information forms an important part of the institution's review and planning cycles, which all make use of a range of relevant and helpful data. Data is provided centrally and is regularly considered at course and institution level, making effective use of year-on-year trends and sector comparisons. Through monitoring processes at an institutional level, any discrepancies between individual courses and institutional targets are highlighted and require a formal response from the course team. Strategic use is made of statistical reporting at institutional level, closely aligned to procedures for annual planning, monitoring and review. The audit team saw evidence and heard from staff that this was implemented, considered and understood consistently across the institution.

35   The audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

36   The audit team saw a number of examples of the important part the Academic Infrastructure plays in supporting the quality of learning opportunities in validation and periodic review, and all stages of the annual monitoring and review cycle. Overall, the team concluded that the institution's use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external

reference points was well embedded at institutional level and was understood by staff who engaged with it.

37   The audit team saw evidence of the effective implementation of the process from the validation of a new course through annual course review and periodic review. In each, the contributing panels and committees considered the quality of the learning and teaching methods, staff and learning resources, and the coherence of the student experience as a whole. To these ends, validation panel members are provided with course handbooks and staff CVs, and allowed access to teaching space, library and computing facilities.

38   The audit team considered a number of recent annual course reviews. These included the views of external examiners on the appropriateness of the learning opportunities as revealed through the assessment process. Staff met by the team expressed satisfaction, both with an operational analysis of the annual course review process which the University College had recently conducted and with the effectiveness of the process itself.

39   Periodic review of programmes includes consideration of quality management, with a section evaluating staff and material learning resources. Among other documentation, the audit team consulted the 2009 review of the BA Film Production and noted opportunities to collaborate with students on other courses and work alongside practitioners and industry-active staff. At meetings to discuss the student experience, second and third-year students were witnessing improvements made as a result of their feedback. The 2010 review of BA Illustration considered external examiners' comments commending the high levels of tutorial and technical support. The review emphasised the integration of input from industry to the course design. It believed that the new faculty structure, and addition of full-time technical demonstrator support, had created greater flexibility and additional platforms for opportunities across courses.

40   The audit team found these procedures to be rigorous as they are described, documented and implemented. The team concluded that, by the way in which the University College had reflected upon maintaining the quality of the students' learning opportunities, the institution's processes for programme approval, monitoring and review were effective.

41   All undergraduate and postgraduate students complete the annual Student Perception Survey, and at least one unit is evaluated for each level of each programme. Any low score in either the national or institutional student surveys requires a response from the course team and, if necessary, in the Deputy Principal's overview report to Academic Board. The audit team was able to track the effective use made of student feedback and students whom they met expressed confidence that their views were heard and acted upon. Postgraduate taught students had only taken part in the institutional, and not the national, survey. The audit team concluded that there was extensive and effective use made of management information collected from students in maintaining the quality of learning opportunities.

42   Students are members of, were trained for, and had been attending many of the key quality assurance committees and working groups. Students told the audit team that their views were given equal weight to those of other panel members when they served on validation and periodic review panels. In order to encourage student participation in a more informal setting than formal committees, the University College had established a Student Quality Forum and, following discussions with the Students' Union, a regular series of opportunities for students to meet the Director of Academic Services and the President of the Students' Union throughout the year, with an open agenda and no formal record of the discussion. Overall, the team formed the view that the arrangements for student involvement in the management of the quality of learning opportunities were appropriate and effective.

43   All postgraduate awards are available both as part-time or full-time study and two undergraduate courses can be followed by part-time study. The University College does not offer its awards through distance or e-learning alone. Many courses provide the opportunity for workplace experience. Where courses such as Foundation Degrees require work placements, these are secured through an existing network of industrial contacts, staff contacts and alumni. Some courses provide opportunities for students to organise their own bespoke work placements. Work placements and major projects are underpinned by learning agreements which allow students to focus on their own areas of interest and tailor assessments to meet their own needs as well as the unit's aims.

44   The University College defines research as academic scholarship, practice-led research within the creative industries and knowledge transfer. It has been actively developing its research agenda, including submissions to the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise. The audit team saw numerous examples of staff research informing teaching and learning opportunities, both during normal learning and teaching sessions and through additional lectures. Students have regular access to staff exhibitions through the Gallery which regularly presents staff work. Staff are supported to undertake research or professional practice, and information on staff research activity is collated annually. Staff are able to apply for additional support to undertake research qualifications or projects and, in doing so, are encouraged to reflect on the impact of their research on the curriculum.

45   The audit team saw evidence that research and professional practice within the creative industries impacted positively upon students' learning experiences, and the students with whom the team met confirmed that they valued the staff interface with the sector. These links are, however, largely informal and the team saw no consistent evidence of a strategic approach to ensuring, monitoring and evaluating the links between research and learning opportunities. The institution's development of its new Learning and Teaching Strategy and the thematic focus on research-informed teaching in the 2011 annual course review process provide a potential vehicle for ensuring that the practice that already occurs within the institution is disseminated, developed and enhanced.

46   The library, regarded as central to student learning, has specialist resources including e-books, e-journals and databases to support the University College's specialist provision. It is also valued by students as a social space for group work. The library has received consistently high scores in the National Student Survey and the Student Perception Survey, with some 92 per cent of students in each survey expressing satisfaction with the facilities and service. Feedback on staff satisfaction with the library is obtained through the annual staff survey. This shows that staff see the main focus lies in providing a student service and there is some concern about the need to preserve a quiet study space. Students and staff also have access to the Bournemouth University Library with its extended opening hours under a joint access agreement from 1995, although it was not widely known to students met by the audit team. There is a close collaborative partnership between subject librarians and course teams who work together on a regular basis and through initiatives, notably the pilot of the Information Literacy Framework designed to develop student research skills.

47   The virtual learning environment is a central source of key information for staff and students with links to the intranet. Its administrator also advises on new and alternative technologies to support learning, and is assessing the use of a student portal and the suitability of this virtual platform to accommodate appropriate new digital technologies. Forty per cent of computers are available to students as open access. Computing resources also include industry-standard software with an accompanying help desk facility. There are several specialist facilities including the Art of Studying website, an online, pre-entry resource for students designed to help facilitate transition to higher education study.

However, students met by the audit team, including overseas students, had limited awareness of it.

48   The Museum of Design in Plastic and the Gallery are seen by staff as major resources supporting the creative community, and the latter has received regional and national recognition. Both these facilities are used in the teaching and learning on many courses as reference resources for students and to enthuse students and stimulate creative ideas. In the latest Student Perception Survey available to the audit team, 85 per cent of students regarded studios, workshops, lecture rooms and computer suites as appropriate. The audit team concluded that there is a clear commitment to managing resources for students' learning opportunities.

49   To support student employability, the University College provides opportunities for students such as live projects, access to industry professionals, visiting lecturers and technician support. Related subject areas collaborate to broaden the student experience and there are well-established industrial liaison groups whose main purpose is to ensure that the curriculum is up to date. In such ways the University College provides opportunities for the development of employability skills needed by the creative industries. Students also have access to the Enterprise Pavilion with its resident businesses. Most of these are new businesses in the creative industries and are required to offer opportunities for students to gain professional experience. Students have access to its conference and technical facilities and also receive advice on running a small business. However, students met by the audit team were not familiar with the Enterprise Pavilion and the University College acknowledges that the range of opportunities this facility affords to students requires increased publicity (see paragraph 52).

50   Academic Board has ultimate responsibility for admissions. The admissions policy takes due account of the updated section of the *Code of practice* and other relevant reference points. The Equalities Committee monitors management information relating to the background of those who enrol, to identify and address any emerging trends. All students are interviewed and the interview process is reviewed annually. All staff are trained in interviewing applicants to ensure consistency. The University College has a Widening Participation Strategy which was considered by the Equality and Inclusivity Committee, the predecessor of the Equalities Committee, and then presented to Academic Board. Overall, the audit team concluded that the University College manages its admissions policy process effectively.

51   The University College has a comprehensive portfolio of support arrangements for students: academic, welfare, pastoral, counselling and mental health, and career development. It offers all students an initial screening service to identify their preferred learning style and to identify potential requirements for specialist resources. Through the Disability and Learning Support office, students can access specific support related to their individual learning needs. The students met by the audit team confirmed that they receive a thorough induction in which all essential information about available support is given to them.

52   In addition to the guidance included as part of all programmes, support with employment is provided direct to students through the Careers Service, in line with the Careers Education and Guidance Policy and Employability Strategy. However, students met by the audit team were unaware of all the facilities, such as the Enterprise Pavilion, which are available to them. The audit team therefore recommends that, in line with its Employability Strategy, it ensures that all students are made aware of appropriate opportunities for workplace experience, including those provided by the Enterprise Pavilion.

53   Human resource procedures, covering induction, mentoring, probation and observation, are communicated to staff through the intranet and induction processes, and

participation is encouraged and monitored both centrally and at school level. Procedures for induction, probation and mentoring are comprehensive and the audit team heard that they were positively received by staff.

54   There are detailed procedures for observation of teaching staff, with all staff being observed and acting as observer on an annual basis. All staff participate in an annual staff performance review process, which supports individual development and, through central monitoring of the summary forms, identifies common thematic issues for strategic focus across the institution.

55   The institution provides a range of professional development opportunities and participation in these is reviewed centrally and at school level. Provision is made for hourly-paid staff and visiting tutors to access staff development activities, including payment for their attendance. Some support is made available for staff to undertake research and teaching qualifications at other institutions or to work on particular projects within the creative industries, with financial support and remission available on an application basis.

56   The staff development budget and planning process is devolved to faculties and mapped against the institution's strategic priorities. The institution is in the process of developing a new human resources strategy and is currently reviewing procedures, including those for rewarding staff. Given the length of the review of this strategy, and in light of changes to the institution's academic governance structures, the audit team encourages the institution to implement its new strategy without undue delay.

57   The audit team formed the view that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

58   In the recent establishment of faculties, the University College acknowledges the need to review its approach to enhancement. The proposed new Learning and Teaching Strategy is seen as the main way to achieve this. The Learning and Teaching Committee is responsible for enhancement and is chaired by the Dean of Art and Design who also leads the working party responsible for developing the Learning and Teaching Strategy for 2011-16 which at the time of the audit was in 'initial draft form'.

59   This new strategy, which aims to shape future academic development and direction, has yet to be shared with staff across the institution. Learning and teaching objectives within the Strategic Plan are beginning to be shared more widely, through separate initiatives and a learning and teaching event scheduled for July 2011. However, there is some ambiguity amongst staff as to what constitutes enhancement and how the outcomes of future activities will be evaluated.

60   The audit team saw evidence of a number of local and cross-institutional activities that strengthen a culture of continual improvement. In the view of the team, such initiatives demonstrate the progression from quality assurance to quality enhancement. The cross-disciplinary membership of many of the groups contributing to the new, overarching Learning and Teaching Strategy and faculty-level academic plans has the potential to develop a shared understanding of enhancement. The emerging strategic documents collectively aim to contextualise and embed enhancement. However, at the time of the audit it was too early to judge their effectiveness or ways in which the institution will monitor and evaluate progress and success. The team recommends that, in implementing its new Learning and Teaching Strategy, the University College gives priority to further

developing a strategic understanding of, and systematic approach to, quality enhancement consistently across the University College.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

61   At the time of the audit, the University College did not have any collaborative arrangements for the delivery of higher education programmes.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

62   The University College has been planning to offer research degrees for two years. At the time of the audit visit, the University College was advertising MPhil/PhDs and stating that they were validated by the University of the Arts, London. In June 2010 the Academic Board of the University of the Arts, London, approved a partnership whereby the University College could deliver University of the Arts, London research degrees and a draft memorandum of agreement was drawn up, but it had yet to be submitted to the two institutions' Academic Boards for approval. In autumn 2010, the University College decided to remove the phrase 'subject to approval' from these degrees on its website. Having seen documents and spoken to staff, the audit team formed the opinion that, while it had no doubt that the University College sincerely believed it had followed a correct procedure in removing this phrase, this had been premature, since no memorandum of agreement had been signed by either institution and the University College was therefore not secure in publicising the degrees without stating they were subject to approval. In light of these concerns, and also of the existence of an advisable recommendation in the previous audit report along similar (although more limited) lines, the team considered it advisable that the University College take immediate action to ensure that the validation, accreditation or approval status of all programmes is clearly indicated in all publicity and information for intending students.

63   The audit team saw evidence nevertheless that the University College had taken a number of actions actively to promote its research culture and create a framework for the operation of research degrees. Several elements were in place to develop research, including the annual allowance for academic staff of 275 hours for research and scholarship and an active Research Committee which had instituted research clusters, research fellowships and a Research Forum. The team had no reason to believe that the University College would not be able to develop an environment appropriate to support postgraduate research degrees.

64   The audit team noted that, under University of the Arts, London regulations, the supervisory team as a whole should include a combined experience of supervising at least two research degrees to successful completion. Where a student's ultimate objective is a PhD, at least one of the two completions should be a doctorate. However, the team was informed that the University College might have difficulty, from its own staff resources alone, in assembling suitably qualified supervisory teams. It would probably therefore be reliant on the appointment of external staff in order to meet this criterion of the University of the Arts, London. The team concluded that the University College was not yet in a position to offer a student a place on a research degree with full confidence that an appropriate supervisory team would be in place in September 2011.

65   The audit team considered it advisable that the University College ensure that students are not made a formal offer to programmes until the appropriate legal agreement, regulatory framework, resources and support are already in place.

Section 7: Published information

66   The University College provides overall a full and reliable range of published information for staff and for prospective and current students. Information provided for undergraduate and taught postgraduate students about their courses, obligations and academic regulations, University College facilities and support services is accessible, complete and correct. Comprehensive information and guidance on policies and quality management processes, and committee minutes are provided on the University College intranet.

67   The audit found that, overall, 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.

Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the revised annual course review and Causes for Concern processes which encourage cross-institutional reflection on standards and the quality of the learning opportunities (paragraph 19)
- the timely completion of the annual course review process, and the speedy response to external examiners' reports through the annual course review reports, which allow effective action planning for the following year (paragraph 21)
- the cross-institutional approach to ensuring a shared understanding of standards as exemplified by the Verification Project (paragraph 31).

Recommendations for action

69   Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- ensure the validation, accreditation or approval status of all programmes is clearly indicated in all information for intending students (paragraph 62)
- ensure that students are not made a formal offer to a programme until the appropriate legal agreement, regulatory framework, resources and support are in place (paragraph 65).

70   Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- in line with its Employability Strategy, ensure that all students are made aware of appropriate opportunities for workplace experience, including those provided by the Enterprise Pavilion (paragraphs 49 and 52)
- in implementing its new Learning and Teaching Strategy, give priority to further developing a strategic understanding of, and systematic approach to, quality enhancement consistently across the University College (paragraph 60).

Appendix

Arts University College Bournemouth's response to the Institutional audit report

The Arts University College at Bournemouth welcomes the report of the Institutional audit, and the judgements that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University College's present and likely future management of both the academic standards of its awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to its students.

We are particularly pleased to note the identification of features of good practice which relate directly to the management of the quality infrastructure. We welcome the acknowledgement of the cross-institutional features of our processes which ensure a shared understanding of standards, and institution-wide reflection on matters of quality. We also welcome the opportunity to improve our practice through reflection on the recommendations. It was reassuring to note that the desirable recommendations reflect our current intentions, which demonstrates the soundness of our approach to enhancement. We shall develop an action plan in response to the report, including also those items which we had previously identified as priorities.

We look forward to the full implementation of our new faculty structure, and the opportunity this provides to strengthen our well-established processes for assurance and enhancement. Our consistently strong rates of application, retention, progression, student satisfaction and achievement, together with outstanding graduate employment outcomes, show the effectiveness of these processes. We remain committed to the continued provision of this high quality education, producing graduates who have both the skills and the professional attitude which will enable them to make a successful career within the creative industries.

Finally we wish to thank the audit team for their professional and constructive approach adopted throughout the process.