Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln

November 2009

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance for Higher Education (QAA) visited Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln (the University College) from 16 to 20 November 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University College offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln 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

- 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 audit team found that the University College was committed to enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities, and that the University College was taking a systematic approach at institutional level to such enhancement. The team also concluded that there was effective identification and dissemination of good practice across the University College.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The University College is at an early stage in the introduction of research degrees having recently concluded validation agreements with an awarding partner. The audit team considered the arrangements in place to meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. The team also concluded that there were thorough and well-conceived plans for securing the research degree experience of the initial students.

Published information

The audit found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that 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 of good practice:

- the comprehensive arrangements for student feedback and its use in quality assurance and enhancement (paragraphs 83 to 87 and 149)

- the enhancement of the student experience through the provision of opportunities for self-development (paragraphs 125 to 128, and 130)

- the contribution of the Centre for Learning and Teaching in support of staff development and the furtherance of the University College's quality enhancement agenda (paragraphs 133, 136, 143, and 149)

- the thorough and well-conceived plans for securing the research degree experience of the initial intake of students (paragraphs 179 to 182).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- review its Codes of Practice and associated documentation to ensure appropriate recognition of the specific quality assurance needs of collaborative provision (paragraphs 155, 157, 159, 161, 165, 167 and 173)

- review the operation of its quality management processes for collaborative provision to ensure they are fully implemented (paragraphs 163 and 173).

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- formalise the role of Chief External Examiner in the institution's Codes of Practice for external examining and conduct of boards of examiners (paragraph 47)

- effect regular review of aggregated statistical data to facilitate consideration of academic performance at the institutional level (paragraphs 67, 68, 112 and 113)

- make systematic and timely consideration of revisions of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, and other elements of the Academic Infrastructure as they are published (paragraph 71)

- make explicit expectations for the quality assurance of programme placement arrangements in order to strengthen institutional oversight (paragraph 100).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   Bishop Grosseteste College was founded in 1862 by the Church of England to train teachers in primary education. As well as developing its portfolio of teaching qualifications and programmes for continuing professional development since the 1990s, the College diversified its provision with three awards in the arts and humanities. The institution was granted taught degree awarding powers in April 2006 and at the same time a new institutional title of Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln was approved and adopted.

2   The University College decided to make use of its own degree awarding powers, ending the validation agreement with the University of Leicester, so that students were enrolled on University College awards from September 2007. This has marked a period of further growth for the University College with an envisaged increase in student numbers over the current planning period 2007-10. The University College awards both undergraduate and taught postgraduate degrees and has recently entered an arrangement with the University of Leicester for the award for research degrees. In the academic year 2008-09 there was a total of 1965 enrolled students of which 1461 were full-time and 504 were part-time. A large proportion of these part-time students, around 80 per cent, are registered for programmes of Postgraduate Professional Development in Education. Since being granted taught degree awarding powers, the University College has developed partnerships with two further education colleges in Greater Lincolnshire. There are currently 50 students registered on programmes related to education and services for young people.

3   At the time of the audit, the University College was structured into two academic schools: the School of Culture, Education and Innovation and the School of Teacher Development, reflecting sources of funding from HEFCE and the Training and Development Agency for schools respectively.

4   The Corporate Plan 2007-10 sets out the vision, mission, purposes and values of the institution. As well as a growth in undergraduate student numbers, it sets out ambitions for more significant growth in taught postgraduate numbers, international work, research and third stream activity. The key elements of the institution's mission are to:

- excel at teaching, learning and research

- enable students to achieve at the highest possible standard in their chosen field of study

- foster an ethos in which the whole person is valued and diversity is celebrated

- provide a dynamic environment that supports learning, research and external collaboration

- work with partner schools to ensure that present and future teachers are well prepared and challenged in their thinking about learning

- engage with cultural and creative activity at all levels for the enrichment of our society

- develop productive partnerships with businesses and communities for mutual benefit.

The information base for the audit

5   The University College provided the audit team with an institutional briefing paper (the Briefing Paper) and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The briefing paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the institution's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. The audit team had access to all documents referenced in the briefing paper either in hard copy or in electronic format as well as access to the institution's intranet.

6   The Students' Union produced a student written submission (SWS) setting out the students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management. The audit team is grateful for the students' engagement with the audit process.

7   In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report in lieu of Institutional audit (2006)

- reports produced by other relevant bodies (Ofsted, the Diocese of Lincoln Board of Education and the University of Leicester)

- the institution's internal documents

- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

8   A report in lieu of Institutional audit was published in September 2006, following the scrutiny of Bishop Grosseteste College by the QAA in connection with the institution's application for taught degree awarding powers (TDAP). Following QAA's subsequent recommendation to the Privy Council, the College was granted taught degree awarding powers in April 2006. At the same time the College was granted permission to use the title of Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln. The University College made an early decision to exercise its new taught degree awarding powers. Thus, from September 2007, all new students were enrolled upon Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln degrees. Only a very small minority of taught students now remain on University of Leicester awards.

9   The report indicated that broad confidence could be placed in the University College's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

10 The previous scrutiny team noted particularly the effective management of:

● the developing academic profile of the College and the close relationship between the institutional Strategic Plan

● the executive and committee deliberations relating to curricular development and resource allocation

● the effective management of change in structures, systems and processes

● the good communication links throughout the institution

● the systematic actioning of tasks and issues.

11 A number of further strengths were identified by the team:

● an appropriate regulatory framework based on a set of College Codes of Practice which mirror the sections of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA

● a robust internal scrutiny process for the approval of new programmes

● thorough and reflectively applied annual monitoring of programmes

● effective procedures for the appointment and induction of external examiners and consideration of their reports.

12   The report indicated a number of matters to which future institutional auditors might wish to give consideration. In particular: installation of the new management information system (MIS)/student records system in order to ensure accurate and timely data is provided to inform a range of aspects of the work of the College, notably examination boards; the extent to which the scrutiny process distinguishes between programme development and programme approval; the extent to which College staff undertake a range of external commitments to broaden the College experience of higher education sector practice; and the management of the 'pool' of external expertise on which some programmes were particularly dependent.

13   The report also recommended that the College might find it desirable to keep under review the operations of the committee system and the roles and responsibilities of senior committees to promote efficiency, maintain the clear division of responsibilities and lines of reporting, and to avoid duplication.

14   In its Briefing Paper for the 2009 Institutional audit, the University College described in detail how they had addressed these matters.

15   The University College had invested in a student record MIS. At the time of the audit visit, the audit team read that the core aspects of MIS had been carefully rolled out over a two-year period and that assessment boards and statutory returns had been successfully supported by the new system for the first time in the academic year 2008-09. The University College is currently in the process of procuring and implementing further aspects of MIS and considering the use of a user portal to permit ready access and record management by both students and staff. The team has more to say about this in paragraphs 67 and 68, and 112 and 113. Also, the team recommended an action in this area that it considered desirable.

16   In respect of programme development and approval, the report in lieu of institutional audit observed that the initial stage of validation scrutiny routinely resulted in significant numbers of recommendations and conditions, and suggested that the College might wish to bring a more judgemental and less developmental culture to scrutiny events. In the post-TDAP evolution of their programme approval processes, the University College decided that the developmental process remained important, and retained a two-stage approval process in order to accommodate this.

17   There were two recommendations regarding the development and exploitation of a sector-wide knowledge of both higher education and specialist knowledge and skills. The audit team read and heard how the University College has emphasised the importance of staff personal research through staff support and development initiatives and involvement in external activities. These activities are described in Section 3.

18   Finally, the audit report pointed towards a deliberative committee structure that relied heavily upon a few key individuals, and which the team considered may be unsustainable over time. The present audit team noted that the University College had completely overhauled its deliberative structure (see paragraphs 24 to 27). By introducing deliberative committees at school level (school boards) and re-focusing the roles of the institutional committees of Academic Board, the University College has intended to empower a significantly greater proportion of academic and academic support staff to allow them to focus on learning, teaching and the student experience. In the view of the audit team, these changes to structure and process have been achieved without compromising the particular strengths identified previously.

19   Since the previous audit there have been a number of other significant developments at the institution.

20   The power to award its own degrees has permitted the institution, in line with the intention articulated within its corporate plan, to explore broader relationships with further education colleges within the region. It is now in partnership with two regional further education colleges for the franchise to and delivery of a limited number of the University College's awards.

21   The briefing paper drew particular attention to the significant growth in student numbers since the previous audit, and explained how, among other things, this had contributed to the decision to introduce a new departmental structure within the two academic schools that had been created at the time of the previous audit.

22   Since the College's 2005 TDAP scrutiny and the subsequent report in lieu of Institutional audit, the University College has undergone three further external inspections by Ofsted, one of which also considered the delivery of the University College's awards in a partner further education college. These found all aspects of teacher education to be of at least satisfactory standard and, in the inspections of primary and further education training, provision was considered to be outstanding or very good respectively (both Grade 1).

23   In their consideration of the developments since the last audit, the audit team considered that the University College had taken appropriate steps to address the matters raised in the previous audit report, and noted that other processes of external review had expressed confidence in academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities of the University College's awards.

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

24   Academic Board is responsible for all matters regarding academic policy, strategy and planning, and retains oversight on maintenance of academic standards of taught provision, and of the quality of the student learning experience. It engages formally in the approval and closure of all taught programmes; the approval of academic regulations and Codes of Practice; and the appointment of external examiners to programmes. By working through its subordinate committees, Academic Board has oversight of the more detailed work of the institution pertaining to academic standards and quality.

25   Academic Board has six subordinate committees: Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC); Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC); Research Committee; Diversity and Equality Committee; and the two school boards. Each school board has established a further level

of departmental boards, the boards of study for provision in each of the two partner further education colleges which report to QAEC. The Research Committee has established a Research Students Committee for detailed consideration of matters pertaining to individual research degree students. Deliberative committees have clearly defined terms of reference and inclusive constitutions, and operate according to well-defined institutional procedures.

26   QAEC is responsible to Academic Board for the maintenance of academic standards, and the development, monitoring and review of the academic portfolio. Its particular responsibilities include the management of the programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review processes as well as the development and review of the academic regulatory framework for the institution.

27   LTC is broadly responsible to Academic Board for the maintenance and enhancement of the student learning experience. In particular, it manages the various internal mechanisms for seeking direct feedback from students, and monitors the construction and implementation of any subsequent action plans. It is also charged with responsibility for the institutional level consideration of reports from external agencies on University College taught provision.

28   On the management side, there is the Directorate which comprises the Principal and the three Vice Principals (Academic Affairs, Corporate Services and External Affairs). They are joined on a regular basis by members of the Extended Senior Management Group, including, among others, the School Deans, the Academic Registrar, the Head of Learning and Teaching, the Director of Library and Knowledge Services, and the Head of Student Support.

29   The institution has designed and approved a detailed set of academic regulations together with a suite of Codes of Practice, procedures and guidelines; the former defining the academic decision-making processes for the assessment of students, the latter constituting a comprehensive academic quality manual which describes the various processes whereby the institution assures itself of the academic standards and quality of its awards. Both the regulations and codes of practices are readily accessible on the institution's website. The University College is currently operating two suites of regulations and codes, one for the few remaining students registered on University of Leicester awards, the other for those on the University College awards. The University College's suite was reviewed in detail after the receipt of degree awarding powers, but remains largely attuned to that operated in its relationship with the University of Leicester.

30   The University College has recently reaffirmed its ongoing relationship with the University of Leicester with the University's validation of a framework for the operation of research degree programmes by the University College. A comprehensive set of regulations has been designed for doctoral level awards and these were subsequently approved by the University Senate in 2009.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

Programme approval

31   Programme approval is a two-stage process. The first, developmental, stage is conducted at school level, and comprises a formal meeting attended by an external panel member at which the draft proposal is considered. This is followed by an iterative process which allows the school panel to give advice as modifications are made, to ensure particular attention to the alignment of learning outcomes with assessment and, finally, to ensure the presentation of documentation is of high quality.

32   The second stage is a University College level formal peer review event chaired by the Vice Principal (Academic Affairs). The validation panel includes at least one external member with relevant expertise, a member of academic staff from another school, and a continuity member

from the school-level scrutiny panel. The documentation provided to the panel includes a rationale for the programme; an account of the learning and teaching strategy to be adopted; an overview of the resources available to support student learning; an account of assessment and admissions policies; and an overview of the arrangements for the management and organisation of the programme.

33   The confirmed report of the event, together with confirmation that conditions of approval have been met, is received by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) which recommends approval to Academic Board. In meetings with staff, the audit team learnt that the outcome of a review can result in recommendations for major changes requiring revalidation, otherwise approval is extended until the next periodic review.

34   The audit team examined a number of first and second stage reports of validations, and found the processes to operate effectively, with thorough reports produced at both stages. Although the team was assured that the first stage was a developmental process to enable the school to inform the course design process and ensure the proposal had been scrutinised before it was presented for approval at University College level, the events and reports associated with each stage appeared very similar. This was acknowledged by the staff whom the team met. The University College indicated that it was considering a checklist approach for the first stage process, and the audit team considered there may be opportunities in so doing for the University College to streamline programme approval processes without detriment to academic standards and quality.

35   The audit team learnt that the approach to dealing with changes to validated programmes was one of proportionality; the volume and type of change is matched to the process required for its approval. In-year module housekeeping may be handled at programme level; minor structural changes, following approval by the external examiner, will be approved by the school board and significant modifications would require a new validation event. The audit team saw from minutes of committees that such changes were considered thoroughly. The relevant Code of Practice fully details the procedural notification and approval mechanisms to ensure that an appropriate level of scrutiny is brought to bear.

Annual monitoring

36   Academic co-ordinators and their respective programme teams are responsible for conducting the annual monitoring exercise for their respective programmes. Whilst the institution considers monitoring to be a continuous and ongoing process, the formal production of the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) takes place at the end of each academic year. The process is evidence-based, requiring the scrutiny of quantitative and qualitative evidence, including student feedback and evaluation, external examiners' reports, the views of employers and other external bodies and statistical measures of retention, progression and achievement. Reports are produced in a standard format, the final section of which requires a specification of the plans for maintaining academic standards and enhancing the quality of the student experience, thus reinforcing the University College's intention that enhancement is the central outcome of the AMR process (see Section 4).

37   Heads of department are responsible for confirming that AMRs are appropriate, and also for preparing a departmental executive summary of issues raised, including an overall judgement on the health of their department's provision. Executive summaries and AMRs are considered at School Board, and are either approved or referred for further attention. Boards are particularly asked to confirm that action plans are comprehensive in their coverage of issues raised.

38   Following consideration at school board, the head of school prepares a school report on the outcomes of annual monitoring for QAEC, including an analysis of the extent to which the process has been conducted with rigour and integrity, and identifying any matters that the school believes warrant attention at institutional level. These school-level reports inform the

Annual Report of Quality and Standards prepared by the Vice Principal (Academic Affairs) for consideration at Academic Board.

39   From consideration of a sample of course and school level annual monitoring reports, the audit team was able to confirm that the process is well understood and implemented rigorously. Reports at all levels are comprehensive in their consideration of evidence, and clearly make a significant contribution to quality enhancement.

40   QAEC itself monitors the effectiveness of the annual monitoring process at departmental level by auditing at least one AMR (there are around 30 AMRs per year), scrutinising the report and the primary evidence on which it is based and meeting with the Head of Department and programme team. This process is intended to provide further assurance of the integrity of the process, permitting the identification of examples of good practice for dissemination, and potentially identifies ways in which the process of annual monitoring might be improved. The audit team was able to view the documentation and report of the meeting relating to this annual audit. Although this process clearly engaged the programme team and resulted in recommendations for further developing their use of annual monitoring, the team was less clear about how the auditing of a single report gave assurance to the University College about the integrity of the process as operated across the institution. The team noted that there was already thorough scrutiny of reports at school level, and that in auditing the one report each year, the audit cycle became extremely lengthy. The University College may wish to reflect further on the purpose and added value of the audit process.

Periodic review

41   The University College has revised its process for periodic review following the end of the validation arrangement with the University of Leicester. The audit team read that academic reviews carried out under the University of Leicester arrangements were thorough in considering matters pertaining to academic standards but that the new process is designed to bring additional focus on the learning experience of students. At the time of the audit, only one such review had been completed under the revised procedures.

42   Periodic review scrutinises all programmes in one department at the same time, in a five-yearly cycle. Academic Coordinators and programme teams produce formatted Self-Evaluation Documents (SEDs), and heads of department prepare an overview report which provides a departmental context and identifies any salient or cross-cutting themes from the SEDs. The departmental overview, SEDs, programme documentation and supporting evidence are considered by a panel appointed by QAEC, members of which must be independent of the department. The panel also includes at least one external expert. By prior arrangement, panel members are able to acquaint themselves with teaching and learning activities in the department by observing teaching and meetings of the Departmental Committee in advance of the review event. The review event comprises a day of documentary scrutiny, meetings with staff and meetings with students.

43   The briefing paper stated that the panel decides 'whether it can have confidence in the thoroughness and integrity with which the review has been undertaken and in the standards set and achieved'. If it is unable to give this endorsement, a second review is required after an appropriate interval during which the department addresses the panel's concerns.

44   A written report of the periodic review event is received and approved by QAEC, and the outcome reported to Academic Board. The report may set conditions and make recommendations for departments and programme teams respectively to undertake or consider. A detailed response to the report is required one month after the event from the department, and a year after the head of department is asked to provide a commentary on the outcome of actions taken. In extreme cases the conditions set might require changes of such magnitude that formal programme approval would be required.

45   The audit team was able to scrutinise records of deliberative committee meetings, and track approval, monitoring and review activities through their various stages of the recently completed periodic review, and also other periodic reviews completed under the University of Leicester process. Records were detailed and meticulous, discussions robust and thorough, and decisions made in a timely manner. The team came to the conclusion that the University College's framework for managing the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities is both appropriate and secure.

External examiners

46   The University College operates a clearly defined system for taking expert peer advice from their external examiners. Academic Coordinators nominate potential candidates to the Academic Registry, which ascertains the availability of the candidate, and the appropriateness of their academic credentials. Given the formal support of the head of department, the relevant school board formally considers the nomination against the criteria for appointment and, if supportive, passes the proposal to a subcommittee of Academic Board which makes the final decision. In their reading, although the auditors were able to follow the appointment process through departmental and school committees, they were unable to identify records of the final decision, and explanation for rejections when they occurred. They heard that the subcommittee deliberations were not formally recorded, although decisions were communicated to the school. The audit team believed that the University College may wish to reconsider whether or not records should be kept of these formal Academic Board decisions.

47   Externals are appointed for a four-year term of office, and processes are in place to enable the removal of an external who is unable to fully undertake the role. Every programme has at least one external appointed to scrutinise its assessment, and in the case of larger programmes, additional externals may also be appointed. In such cases, one is identified as the Chief External Examiner, although no terms of reference or specific duties are identified. The audit team considered that the lack of such role descriptor left the examining team potentially vulnerable to internal misunderstandings, and considered that it is desirable for the institution to formalise the role of the chief external examiner in the institution's Codes of Practice for external examining and conduct of boards of examiners.

48   The audit team noted that externals are extremely well-briefed for their role through a series of Codes of Practice, regulations and policies. Externals are invited to a formal induction event operated by the Registry in conjunction with the schools. The team noted from their scrutiny of the records of boards of examiners that externals attended the final board at which their predecessor was present, as part of their induction and to facilitate a 'handover' between the externals.

49   External examiners approve assignments and examinations which contribute to the classification of an award, and are subsequently asked to moderate a sample of all such work. They agree the methodology underpinning the selection of their sample, and are additionally required to sample all failing and first class work. They are required to contribute formally at examination boards, and, if unable to be present, must be available to comment by telephone or electronic means.

50   In an additional role, externals may be asked for advice prior to programme revalidation, and are formally consulted upon minor changes to their programme; their support is required before changes can be made.

51   The external is required to confirm, by signature, the award of degrees and grades. The audit team noted one occasion when the external felt unable to do so, highlighting a number of irregularities in the assessment process. The examination board subsequently refused to confirm the grades, and instigated a rapid enquiry and reassessment of the students' work. This robust action reassured the external examiner, and the team was similarly confident that the institution

is making appropriate use of the expertise of its externals, and has processes in place to take remedial action where required.

52   The University College makes use of a comprehensive annual report form which externals complete at the end of the academic session. The Registry receives reports, and initiates formal consideration by both the relevant school and the Vice Principal (Academic Affairs). Within schools, the reports are initially considered at departmental meetings, before being taken to school board with recommendations for subsequent action, and for the formulation of a response to the external. At both departmental and school meetings, the report is shared with students. The audit team was able to identify matters that had been raised by externals being specifically addressed within the programme AMR. The team also noted that consideration of the action plan arising from the external examiners' reports appeared as a standing item on departmental meeting agendas.

53   The agreed response to the external is sent by the appropriate Academic Coordinator in the department, and copied to the Vice Principal (Academic Affairs) together with the appropriate records from the discussion at school board. The Vice Principal (Academic Affairs) considers all the externals' reports, the school deliberations and the formal responses, and uses these to inform both his annual report on external examining to QAEC and his annual report on the AMR process to Academic Board. The audit team read the latest report on external examining and found it to be comprehensive, analytical and incisive. In particular, they noted that the report highlighted several matters with potential impact upon standards and identified actions.

54   The audit team considered that the external examiner process was detailed, well-managed and operated effectively, enabling the institution to confirm the academic standards of its awards.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

55   The briefing paper stated that the University College's framework for supporting academic standards is enshrined within its own Codes of Practice, which themselves draw heavily upon the Code of practice, published by QAA. The institution has adopted the SEEC generic level descriptors, which are consistent with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The Programme Development Manual contains generic guidelines about expectations for programmes and modules at all levels which broadly reflect the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* published by QAA and which, in particular, define the detailed standards-related aspects of programme specifications.

56   In their reading of the records of validation activities and periodic reviews, the audit team noted that panel members had both been directed to consider the curriculum match with the subject benchmark statements, and made specific note in their reports to confirm that programme teams had developed an appropriate curriculum. The external panel members are recruited specifically to bring discipline and sectoral expertise to the event, and to assist the panel in making standards-related judgements. The team noted that the University College has also fully adopted the principles embodied within the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* and embedded them within the Programme Development Manual.

57   The University College's substantial involvement with regulatory body scrutiny brings an additional, standards-based perspective to the development of the curriculum, and their reading of recent validation reports and Ofsted reports on the institution's provision reassured the audit team that these matters had been fully addressed.

58   Overall, the audit team found that the University College makes effective use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in the management of academic standards.

Assessment policies and regulations

59   Institutional assessment regulations are comprehensive, properly documented, and apply to collaborative as well as internal provision. Detailed regulations for specific programmes are widely available in both hard copy and electronic format. Students informed the audit team that they were aware of the criteria relevant to their programmes of study.

60   Academic Board has recently approved revised regulations following the granting of degree awarding powers. These revisions provide a robust set of regulations addressing accreditation of prior learning, taught undergraduate and postgraduate awards, the conduct of examinations and examination boards, and guidelines on plagiarism and other academic malpractice. The institution has additionally published a suite of guidance notes for staff regarding the specification of modules, assignment briefs and assessment moderation. The audit team considered that these provided a supportive framework for staff in defining and judging academic standards.

61   The audit team found that policies and procedures are clearly detailed in the Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students, and assessment strategies and criteria form one lens for the scrutiny of programme proposals at validation and periodic review.

62   In their reading of Academic Board papers, the audit team found that the Board took significant interest in the development of a consistent suite of academic regulations and a set of regulations for research degrees, which are operated under a framework validated by the University of Leicester.

63   Students expressed general satisfaction with arrangements for assessment, and the processes for redress when there were causes for concern.

64   The audit team, having reviewed both the regulations and their implementation within the institution, was able to confirm that assessment processes are explicit, valid and reliable. More generally, the team considered that institutional assessment policies and regulations made an effective contribution to the management of academic standards.

Management information - statistics

65   The Academic Registry provides wide-ranging statistical and analytical information from the student record system to support programme management, including admissions data, qualifications, information on ethnicity, gender and maturity, student achievement at each stage of study, and graduate destinations. The audit team observed that data collected are provided in a timely manner in order that Academic Coordinators may construct their AMRs. The data is routinely copied to heads of department and deans of school so that they will be fully aware of any aberrations or points worthy of celebration.

66   The student record system is also used to generate data for examination boards, and was used for the first time with success in 2008-09. In their meetings with staff and scrutiny of the records of assessment boards, the audit team was assured of the integrity of the data and the confidence in staff of the records for academic decision-making, and tracking students from admission to award. The University College acknowledged that it was likely to procure further elements of the system and that further consideration was being given as to how the data might inform decision-making processes within the institution.

67   The audit team was thus aware that rich data are available regarding academic performance at the programme level, but were surprised that this data was not routinely aggregated for consideration either at school or institutional level. The team believed that while the annual report by the Vice Principal (Academic Affairs) provides a robust analysis and evaluation, the inability of Academic and school boards to exercise an overview of academic

achievement and performance in all departments in their school is a potential weakness in the annual monitoring process. They heard that prior to the roll-out of the new student record system, such data was produced manually and considered at institutional level. Staff had already felt the loss of such information and the audit team heard that it was planned to reintroduce the consideration of aggregated data at levels above the programme in the future.

68   The audit team concurred with these views, and considered that it would be desirable for the University College to effect regular review of aggregated statistical data to facilitate consideration of academic performance at the institutional level. This would enable a more ready analysis and use of management information to inform decision-making and action planning in its institutional level academic deliberative structures.

69   Overall, the audit team concluded that confidence could reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University College's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

70   The briefing paper made extensive reference to the *Code of Practice,* published by QAA, and many, but not all, sections of the *Code* are reflected and explicitly referenced in the University College's own Codes of Practice. Together, the University College's codes constitute a set of processes and procedures for quality management, and the audit team found that these were generally well understood by staff.

71   The audit team was informed that there was no automatic mechanism for systematically considering revised sections of the *Code of practice*, or subject benchmark statements as they are updated. *Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* had not been considered at institutional level, although the team was informed that *Section 8; Career education, information and guidance* had informed personal development planning developments and there were plans to consider the forthcoming revised *Section 3* on disabilities. Consequently, the team considered it desirable for the University College to make systematic and timely consideration of revisions of the *Code of practice* and other elements of the Academic Infrastructure as they are published. Notwithstanding this matter, the audit team considered that the University College makes generally appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in the management of learning opportunities.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

Programme approval

72   The programme approval processes are described in detail in Section 2, paragraphs 31 to 34.

73   The process for the approval of new courses is outlined in the Programme Development Manual, which includes the need for evidence at the programme proposal stage of the available resources and the implications for the resource allocation model. The proposal leader is responsible for ensuring the signatures from the head of each support service (Head of Finance, Head of the University Services/Estates and Director of Library and Knowledge Services) to confirm resources are in place. Proposals are then presented for discussion to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC). The validation event also requires confirmation of adequate learning resources, including staffing. The audit team confirmed these arrangements were taking place through meeting staff and examining proposal forms and minutes of the QAEC.

74   The procedures for making minor modifications to programmes are set out in the Code of Practice for the Changes to Validated Programmes. The audit team noted that should minor modifications to programmes impact on resources, the changes are presented to school boards for approval with representatives from the support departments (the Centre for Learning and Teaching, Library and Knowledge Services and Student Support) in attendance, before final approval at QAEC.

Annual monitoring

75   The annual monitoring process is explained in Section 2, paragraphs 36 to 38.

76   Resources are monitored through the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) process as set out in the institution's Code of Practice for the Annual Monitoring of Academic Programmes. In particular, the AMRs are completed on a standard pro forma which includes a section on the adequacy and effectives of resources for learning. The team confirmed these arrangements through a review of AMRs and meetings with staff.

77   The audit team further confirmed through a review of school reports on annual monitoring, that they draw on the resource section of the departmental AMRs, for example, both school reports include issues relating to ICT, the Library and rooming. The final stage of the review process requires the completion of the annual report by the Vice Principal (Academic Affairs) for the Academic Board. The Annual Report of the Vice Principal January 2008 provided an overview of physical resources for each of the two schools.

78   The audit team learnt during the audit visit of a template for annual monitoring of support departments agreed by the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) and how completed monitoring reports are expected to be presented to the next meeting of LTC. The team further confirmed that the student support and the library are in the process of producing their own reports and those reports are expected to contain information from student surveys, AMRs and management statistics.

Periodic review

79   The process of the periodic review system is described in Section 2, paragraphs 41 to 44, which includes the review of learning resources. In this respect, the new Code of Practice for the Periodic Review of Academic Provision outlines the requirement of the Self-Evaluation Document (SED), which academic coordinators are charged with producing in preparation for programme reviews. The SED follows a standard structure which includes a section on learning resources. The audit team confirmed these arrangements through the examination of the most recent periodic review.

80   Overall, the audit team found that the processes for programme approval, monitoring and review to be operating in accordance with the University College's stated procedures and are making an effective contribution to the management of the quality of the students' learning opportunities.

Management information - feedback from students

81   The student written submission (SWS) stated that students felt there were 'ample opportunities' for them to express their views and provide feedback. The briefing paper described the mechanisms through which the University College obtained feedback from students on their academic studies and their overall experience as students, including: end of semester surveys of student opinion using standard questionnaires, student representation on departmental committees and School Boards, and an annual institution-wide student satisfaction survey, as well as the National Student Survey (NSS).

82   Responses to the institution's and NSS student surveys are analysed by the Head of Learning and Teaching and reviewed by QAEC and LTC, with the latter being where matters relating to service departments are considered. The evidence from student feedback informs annual monitoring processes at module, programme, departmental and school levels, with matters requiring attention at institutional level being considered through the Annual Report on Academic Standards and Quality prepared for Academic Board by the Vice Principal (Academic Affairs).

83   The University College undertook a comprehensive review of the collection of feedback in 2008, resulting in the adoption of a set of standard questionnaires. The questionnaires exist in several variants to reflect the stage (year) of the programme, and there are versions for end of semester 1 and for end of semester 2. Feedback is invited on both the course as a whole and individual modules. They are currently administered in paper format, but the intention is to move to online administration in due course. The questionnaires are complemented by a pro forma which standardises the analysis of results and prescribes the action that should be taken where the measure of satisfaction falls below a specified threshold level. Module leaders are encouraged to publish the response pro forma in module guides.

84   The course and end of module questionnaires are supplemented by the annual institution-wide student satisfaction survey, which as well as inviting responses relating to academic experience, covers a wide range of support services. This survey is conducted online. The data is analysed centrally and results for questions on course-related matters are provided to course teams with guidance on interpretation. Departmental committees are required to discuss and respond to the results at their autumn term meetings. A standard pro forma is provided to ensure responses are consistent and constructive.

85   Students who met the audit team spoke positively about the formal and informal opportunities to provide feedback, and indicated a number of ways in which information on action was communicated back; for example, through the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) or via the student representatives. At module level the team noted the comments in the SWS that students would like more information on actions taken as a result of feedback. The team identified some variability in module handbooks in terms of completion of the response pro forma and its publication for students, but was informed that it will become a requirement in the future in order to ensure action loops are closed. The audit team observed that the University College might usefully bring together into a single document the requirements and expectations for collection and use of student feedback, so that these are clearly communicated.

86   The audit team found that the results of the institutional and the NSS - both of which typically indicate high levels of satisfaction - were given careful and comprehensive consideration within the University College and informed quality monitoring action plans at various levels. Results of both the NSS and the University College's own satisfaction survey (including three year comparative data) are presented to relevant committees and responses requested from the Head of Learning and Teaching and other service heads as appropriate. The audit team saw evidence through the committee papers that issues are identified and actioned in a systematic way. A decrease in student satisfaction in the last NSS had been thoroughly analysed and action taken at management level to deal with identified problem areas.

87   In recent years steps have been taken to address issues raised relating to the adequacy of library resources, information included in students' handbooks, and issues relating to assessment. The audit team found the comprehensive arrangements for student feedback and its use in quality assurance and enhancement to be a feature of good practice.

Role of students in quality assurance

88   Student engagement in matters of quality assurance and enhancement is achieved through student representation on departmental committees and school boards as well as

Academic Board and its various sub-committees. Programme handbooks contain a standard section alerting students to the system. Departmental committee membership includes provision for a student representative from each year of each course, while school boards include a student representative from each department nominated by the Students Union (SU).

89   Minutes seen by the audit team indicated that there is generally good representation of students at both departmental committees and school boards, although in its briefing paper the University College indicated that attendance in some areas is less good. Reports by student representatives are a standing item on committee agendas and they are able to contribute to discussion on a wide range of issues, including external examiner reports and AMRs. Training for student representatives is provided by the SU and supported by documentation prepared jointly by the University College and the SU. SU sabbatical officers attend Academic Board and sub-committee meetings and have regular meetings with the Principal and the Directorate.

90   The course representation system has been in place for two years and is supported by the SU sabbatical officers who may also attend some of the larger departmental committees which meet once per term. The SWS indicated a high level of awareness of the student representative system and a general feeling that there are many ways in which students can make their views known. The formal systems of departmental committee meetings are supplemented by informal meetings between course leaders and student representatives so that immediate issues do not have to wait for termly meetings. Representatives are expected to feedback to students, and the audit team heard that representatives can be re-elected mid-term. Students with whom the audit team met understood the systems and indicated a number of ways in which they received feedback from representatives, especially via the VLE.

91   The audit team confirmed that students are widely represented across the University College's committee system, and that the mechanisms for engaging students in quality assurance enable them to contribute significantly to assuring and enhancing learning opportunities.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

92   The University College believes that excellence in teaching requires the development of the research base, and the research strategy therefore establishes a number of objectives to incentivise research activity. The briefing paper referred to three schemes which support this strategy: a research support fund to meet the costs of conference attendance to present papers and similar activity; a scheme to support sabbatical leave for a term to make progress with a book, research paper, a thesis or higher degree; and a scheme for the appointment of readers and professors, who are given remission from teaching to carry out research. At the time of the audit, there were three professors and two readers in post, and the newly appointed Head of Research was working with the Deans of School and with individual members of staff to encourage engagement in research activity. A submission to the Research Assessment Exercise was made for the first time in 2008, involving eight staff in two units of assessment, achieving a satisfactory outcome. The audit team was informed that all staff were expected to have an individual research plan, although it was acknowledged that for some this would focus more on scholarly activity.

93   The University College's Learning and Teaching Strategy includes a long term aim to fully integrate the links between learning, teaching and research in the practice of both students and staff. It sees such links as impacting positively on course content and teaching strategies, as well as supporting the development of a rich and rewarding academic environment. The Centre for Learning and Teaching facilitates this by providing funding to supplement the research support fund and the sabbatical scheme in cases where there is a clear link between research and teaching, and supporting the development of the research skills of students. A number of projects and initiatives to support this have been carried out, notably an audit of current practice related to enquiry-based and research-based learning, the development of information literacy skills for first year students, and a project to develop understanding of progression in research skills at

postgraduate level. The Head of Learning and Teaching, working closely with the Head of Research, has established the Centre for Higher Education Research as an interest group of practitioner researchers.

94   The audit team confirmed that the University College has a clear and targeted strategy for fostering links between research, scholarly activity and learning and teaching, such that professional practice is underpinned by relevant research and student learning is research-informed.

Other modes of study

95   The University College has no distance or online programmes, although many of its postgraduate programmes are delivered through weekend and block teaching supported by use of information technologies in a 'blended learning mode'. The audit team was informed that a working group is currently looking at the implications of distributed learning in relation to new postgraduate programmes and will report to the Directorate in due course.

96   Students are supported by a VLE which is now fully established for all academic programmes which the audit team was able to review. The lecturer in e-Learning has played a major part in the development of a range of learning technologies, including the VLE. The Academic Review in 2008 by the University of Leicester noted the VLE as commendable with a high degree of student satisfaction. The review, though, thought that consideration should be given to extend its use further. The students met during the audit visit commented that they found the VLE useful, particularly the availability of online resources such as module handbooks, PowerPoint presentations, and discussion boards. However, there were some concerns about the accessibility of the partner institution's VLE at one of the University College's partner institutions.

97   The Centre for Learning and Teaching also works with colleagues on a one-to-one basis or with a whole department or course team, on specific technical issues associated with the VLE or the exploration of pedagogic approaches. To support VLE development the Lecturer in e-Learning has been offering a programme of events which have demonstrated the more advanced features of the VLE and the learning applications of web 2.0 technologies.

98   To further explore issues relating to the way in which e-learning was developed within the University College, the institution participated in the HEA Change Academy in 2007. As a result of the Change Academy the institution had developed a framework to encourage the formation of networks, modelled on e-networks, and an action plan which attempts to identify the different kinds of support each network might require and how each might lead to distinctive outcomes. The audit team learnt during the audit visit that the institution currently had two network groups that had a bearing on e-learning projects, and provided distance-learning as one example.

99   Placements and work-based learning are particular features of many of the University College's programmes. The briefing paper acknowledged that such programmes bring challenges, especially in securing consistency in the quality of the experience provided by different employers and settings. The University College has considerable experience in working with schools to provide placements for teacher education students, and following an Ofsted report on Secondary Initial Teacher Training that had identified some weaknesses in the arrangements for placements, has developed its processes for ensuring a robust approach to the management of school-based placements.

100   In discussions with staff, the variety of arrangements for placements and work experience were emphasised. Responsibility for the design, management and quality assurance of such opportunities resides at departmental and course level, although in the case of initial teacher training courses there is a School Placement Partnership Office. The audit team saw documentation associated with other programmes that included work-based learning or placements and this was generally clear and appropriate, and made reference to the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. Placement experience is the subject of a

question in the University College's student feedback questionnaire and also constitutes a section of the AMR template. The audit team noted, however, that Section 9 of the Code had not been explicitly reviewed by the University College when the revised version was published in 2007, and noted that there was no institutional Code of Practice or set of principles to inform the quality assurance of work-based learning and placement opportunities. The team considered it desirable for the University College to make explicit expectations for the quality assurance of programme placement arrangements in order to strengthen institutional oversight.

Resources for learning

101   The two academic schools match resources to programmes through the application of a resource allocation model, which has recently been revised with the new arrangements due for implementation in 2009-10. Through a review of committee papers and meetings with staff, the audit team confirmed the QAEC takes an overview of the resource allocation model process and further noted that the school allocations are reviewed twice a year by the Extended Senior Management Group (ESMG).

102   The annual budget for corporate service departments, including those providing academic-related services, is initially determined through discussion at ESMG, with the final decision resting with the Directorate and the Governing Body. The audit team was informed during the audit visit that the library and IT departments have their own budget and liaise with the programme teams on how these budgets should be spent.

103   Students' opinions of the library vary, high on the internal survey, low on NSS, and PGCE students in particular find the library ill-equipped for the ratio of students to resources. The Academic Reviews conducted by the University of Leicester in 2007 and 2008 reveal the library resources had been a major issue for a number of years. The briefing paper claimed the provision is being improved through a number of initiatives.

104   The students met during the briefing and audit visit commented that although they experienced some pressures on the book stock for larger programmes, the library has improved through an increase in the number of online journals. They further commented on the opportunities to borrow from other universities and pay subsidised rates for external borrowings. The audit team learnt of a document prepared by the Director of Library and Knowledge Services for students, intended to communicate survey results, responses to the students' concerns and make the students aware of what was available and how best to use the service. The team further confirmed during the audit visit that the library has recently extended its opening hours and that a strategy was in place with agreed plans and financial approval to increase and reorganise the space within the library.

105   With regard to access to general IT resources and specialist equipment, the audit team noted that the NSS scores for 2008 and 2009 reflected a high degree of student satisfaction. On teaching accommodation, the briefing paper commented on difficulties encountered in booking suitable rooms. Students that met with the audit team had varied opinions on teaching accommodation, with some finding rooms unsuitable while others viewed the rooms as appropriate. The team also noted that the periodic review for Applied Studies in September 2009 found 'the increase in student numbers had put most pressure on room allocation and timetabling'.

106   Through a review of the documentation, the audit team was made aware that a new post in Academic Registry had been created to coordinate the timetable and room bookings and that a review of timetabling was being undertaken and would be presented at the next meeting of LTC.

107   The audit team concluded that steps had been taken to improve the Library and timetabling while both ICT and e-learning resources effectively met the needs of the institution and made a positive contribution to the learning opportunity available to students.

Admissions policy

108   The institution's admissions policy is set out in the Code of Practice for the Admission of Students. The Code comprises three main principles: fair and transparent selection criteria; decisions to be made by trained staff using published entry requirements; and the use of interviews. The institution's Corporate Plan 2007-10, includes a commitment 'to being an inclusive community which welcomes and hosts a diverse population of students'. The institution's commitment to recruit and retain a diverse range of appropriately-qualified students is further articulated in the institution's Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2007-10 and the strategic objectives of the Widening Participation Strategic Assessment document.

109   The Code of Practice states that interviews are compulsory for Qualified Teacher Status programmes and applicants will normally be interviewed for all other programmes. Staff met by the audit team confirmed that all students applying for a place at the institution are interviewed and that staff involved in the admissions process receive ongoing training on admissions through Registry and at school development events.

110   The institution's Code of Practice for Admission further requires that all policies and procedures relating to the recruitment and admission of students are monitored annually through the institution's committee structure to ensure they are relevant, efficient, transparent and fair. The Academic Review conducted by the University of Leicester noted that the programme team regularly analyses and evaluates recruitment statistics and that this process has informed a review of the entry requirements.

111   The audit team established, through an examination of Annual Monitoring of Academic Programme reports that they contain wide-ranging statistical and analytical information. Although the AMRs do not include specific information on domicile (UK, overseas), entry qualifications or age, issues of that nature are discussed.

112   The audit team also confirmed that the school reports on annual monitoring draw on figures from the departmental AMRs supplemented by admissions data presented to the Student Recruitment Strategy Group. The final stage of the review process requires the completion of the annual report by the Vice Principal (Academic Affairs) for the Academic Board. The report includes a descriptive overview of recruitment and a section on diversity and equality issues. However, reports contain limited evidence of aggregated data to support an institutional overview, as previously noted in paragraph 67.

113   While the audit team took the view that although the admissions process was robust and admissions data was analysed as part of the annual monitoring process, the institution would benefit from a more coherent representation and discussion of admissions data through the departmental to institutional monitoring reports.

Student support

114   The institution has recently developed a student charter which describes the expectations of the institution and student partnership. The charter covers aspects of application, admission and arrival, fairness and equality, learning and teaching, learning resources, concerns and complaints, financial responsibilities, student support, student participation and representation, and academic achievement. The audit team confirmed the draft went to Academic Board in September and was then intended to be distributed to the students.

115   The briefing paper described support for students through the work of the Centre for Learning and Teaching and, in particular, the Learning Advice section of the Centre. The Learning Advice section offers one-to-one surgeries and group sessions on a variety of topics. The Learning Advice section also includes a Dyslexia Support Tutor, who provides dedicated support for students with specific learning difficulties.

116   The briefing paper further described the role of the Student Support department, which offers a range of high quality pastoral services providing practical information, advice and guidance to prospective, current and former students. There are five main areas of service delivery within the Student Support department: generalist advice; accessibility support for students with disabilities or specific learning difficulties; careers advice and guidance; funding and financial support; and counselling.

117   The audit team was informed during the audit visit of the institution's partnership with local assessment centres to provide additional support for students with disabilities and how the institution keeps in touch with those students (at least 3 times a year) to monitor progress.

118   The institution provided evidence of the success of the Student Support department through external recognition, for example the Matrix Quality Mark in May 2009. The SWS noted that, overall, students expressed satisfaction with the support received from the institution and quality of the tutors but suggested that more work could be undertaken to promote the work of support services. The findings of the Matrix Quality Mark Assessment reveal the institution uses a range of mechanisms to engage with students. The findings further recognise the extremely high quality of support. The audit team also noted that the University of Leicester Academic Review in 2008 commented favourably on the take-up of learning support and the support students are given. The team was informed during meetings with students that they were fully aware of the advice provided by the Centre for Learning and Teaching, where to go to get that advice and generally viewed the support as helpful. The students further commented on tutor support that went far beyond expectation, buddy systems organised by the Students' Union welfare team and support provided for students with disabilities.

119   The Policy for students' personal development plans (PDPs) sets out the primary objectives of PDP planning, how the process will be administered and general responsibilities for the monitoring, review and oversight of the PDP system. Notes of Guidance on Students' Personal Development Plans accompany the Policy and provide a three-year plan of activities.

120   As set out in the PDP policy, it is expected that the process will be administered by a personal tutor and include, as a minimum, one annual individual tutorial to discuss overall personal and academic progress. It is further expected that PDP's should include a clear timetable for personal tutorials and careers advice provided by the academic coordinator.

121   The Careers Service Policy and Procedure describes the activities undertaken by the career service, for example, confidential individual appointments, resource centre drop-in sessions, group work sessions on subjects such as CV preparation and interview technique. The Careers Service makes available a range of booklets for each year of study and specific advice on career options for each subject area. The Service also includes online job searches, email for specific opportunities and e-guidance through the VLE. The team was further informed of the increased links between the Career Service and the Business Development Office to encourage students' enterprising nature.

122   The University of Leicester Academic Review in 2007 and 2008 commented positively about the wide range of careers materials available and the use of PDP for career planning. The Matrix Assessment Report further identifies career guidance staff involved in the review of students' PDP as a key strength.

123   The audit team confirmed through meetings with staff and students that students are assigned a personal tutor to, amongst other matters, support mandatory PDP. The team learnt that PDP support is working effectively and is embedded in programmes; however, it was noted that the experience varied across the programmes. The institution acknowledged that the PDP system varies between the schools and has recently revised the PDP policy to reflect the different requirements of the programmes.

124   Procedures for student complaints are set out in the Procedures for Dealing with Complaints by Students. The effectiveness of the procedures are kept under regular review by Academic Board. The audit team learnt that the complaints and appeals procedure could be found in the student handbook and although the students thought the process looked complicated they could seek advice and help with the process from Student Support or the Students' Union. The team, therefore, concluded that although some difficulties may have been encountered understanding the process, students would know what to do if required.

125   As a University College with a faith foundation, the Chaplaincy is recognised to be an integral part of the wider community of the University College. Within this context the Chaplaincy has a significant role in providing faith-based support and also has responsibility for volunteering schemes. To further support volunteering activities the institution's Volunteering Coordinator and SU Student Activities Officer have combined their work in order to raise awareness of potential projects, respond to individual needs and make one-off volunteering opportunities available.

126   Volunteering opportunities further extend to the Student Ambassador Programme, which enables students to 'represent the University College at a variety of events'. Activities include leading tours and helping visitors during open days, assisting in careers fairs as well as presentations at schools and further education colleges. The students met by the audit team during the visit confirmed the student ambassador scheme enhances the student experience through their involvement in the induction process, open days, talks at higher education fairs and showing applicants around the campus.

127   The institution also supports students through the Bishop Grosseteste Foundation Fund. The funds can be used to aid volunteering work, help with projects within courses or to enable departments to 'enrich the student experience'.

128   The institution has recently implemented the Business Development Office strategy which offers a jointly (University College and University of Lincoln) funded and managed programme of student enterprise activities entitled the 'Futures' programme. The audit team confirmed that the students were aware of the Business Development Unit as a source of support and noted that a number of events have been scheduled for 2009-10.

129   The audit team confirmed through a review of documentation, that student guidance and support is reviewed on an annual basis as part of the AMRs of programmes and as part of periodic review. The team further observed that school and institutional level monitoring reports are less explicit about support for students from central departments, but noted, however, that the institution is currently reviewing the monitoring process for support departments. As part of that review, support departments are expected to provide their own monitoring report. It is expected that the very comprehensive draft of the first Centre for Learning and Teaching report for the session 2008-09 will be presented to Learning and Teaching committee on 9 December 2009.

130   The audit team considered the support provided to students through induction, the VLE and Centre for Learning and Teaching, the Student Support department, PDP and Careers Service was effective in maintaining the quality of the student learning opportunity. The institution offers a range of corporate opportunities for students, for example, a volunteering scheme, ambassador programme, business development strategy and SU activities. The team further viewed the institution's enhancement of the student experience through opportunities for self-development as an instance of good practice.

Staff support (including staff development)

131   In relation to the two recommendations regarding staff development from the previous QAA audit report, the audit team noted the steps taken through the implementation of the

research strategy to enhance the disciplinary and pedagogic knowledge base of staff (see paragraphs 92 and 93). In addition, staff are positively encouraged to accept external appointments as expert members of review and validation panels, as external examiners and in office with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Over 25 per cent of staff are thus engaged, and the Board of Governors routinely monitors the external staff profile.

132   Support for new academic staff is provided through an induction programme, a reduced teaching load in the first year, a mentor, and opportunities to complete a postgraduate certificate (Professional Studies in Education) leading to fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. The audit team was able to confirm these support arrangements.

133   The process for induction of and the role of mentor are set out in the Induction Policy and Procedures for Academic and Support Staff (full-time, part-time, fixed term, hourly paid and temporary). The audit team was advised that academic staff induction and probation years are overseen by the Centre for Learning and Teaching and that staff found these to be thorough processes. The Academic Review in 2008 by the University of Leicester commented on a strong and well established induction procedure with new staff benefiting from regular reviews of their training needs.

134   The Learning and Teaching Strategy 2007-2010 sets out the direction for learning and teaching across the institution. In particular, the strategy describes the role of Centre for Learning and Teaching as the main resource and development base for all academic and academic-related staff. The Head of Learning and Teaching manages the Centre to provide support for academic staff development, learning and teaching policy and practice, new learning technologies, and the provision of learning advice to students, including those within specific learning difficulties.

135   The audit team learnt that the institution expects all staff to focus on research or scholarly activity as agreed through the appraisal process. It was further expected that deans would work with academic coordinators to articulate the training needs identified within the appraisal process. The team noted that the Head of Learning and Teaching works closely with Human Resources, although the Head of Learning and Teaching has overall responsibility for academic staff development.

136   The Centre for Learning and Teaching arranges three full-day staff development conferences each year which have been well attended and also shorter events which have been less well supported. The audit team further learnt that to improve attendance the Centre had adopted new approaches to conducting training within departmental meetings. In its reading, the team scrutinised the Centre's arrangements for three conferences a year for the past three years and, as set out in the Centre's Handbook, a series of workshops, for example, giving effective feedback to students, and understanding the Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students.

137   The review of staff professional development, scholarship and research takes place through the AMRs for programmes which are considered and evaluated at departmental level as set out in the Code of Practice for Annual Monitoring of Academic Programmes. The audit team confirmed through a review of School Reports on annual monitoring that they draw on departmental AMRs and include issues relating to staffing. The final stage of the review process requires the completion of the annual report by the Vice Principal (Academic Affairs) for the Academic Board. The team was able to verify that the annual report for January 2008 provided an overview of staffing resources for each of the two schools.

138   The audit team noted that the draft AMR from the Centre for Teaching and Learning recorded that 81 per cent of staff attended at least one workshop or engaged with the Centre in alternative ways in relation to their development needs. The report further noted evidence of a successful induction programme for all new staff.

139 The institution has a teaching fellowship scheme which is modelled on the national Higher Education Academy scheme. It offers up to two awards per annum which include a grant for a learning and teaching project. The awards also expect the teaching fellows to act as 'champions'. The audit team learnt through meetings with staff of a Network of Teaching Fellows for past and present fellows.

140 The institution operates a peer-observation scheme and since April 2009 has introduced a new pilot scheme Peer-Assisted Reflection (PARtners). The audit team confirmed during meetings with staff that it was the institution's expectation to run PARtners as an optional exercise alongside the existing Peer Observation scheme during the pilot phase (academic year 2009-10).

141 The Academic Review in 2008 by the University of Leicester noted that although difficulties had taken place in the scheduling of peer observations this did not prevent the observations taking place, demonstrating a commitment by the staff to raising standards.

142 The audit team was informed during the audit visit that the current reward and promotion scheme focused on providing teaching fellowships and sabbatical leave (for research leading to publication or a research degree) to support promotion to readership/professorships opportunities. The staff further commented that they would also get help from the Head of Learning and Teaching, Head of Research or previous holders of awards to help achieve available positions.

143 It was clear to the audit team from scrutiny of supporting documents and meetings with staff that the institution's approach to staff support and development played a positive role in the management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students. Furthermore, the team considered the contribution of the Centre for Learning and Teaching in support of staff development and the furtherance of the University College's quality enhancement agenda to be a feature of good practice.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Management information - quality enhancement

144 The University College does not view quality enhancement as being completely separate from quality assurance. The University College views responsibility for quality enhancement as being variously distributed at the appropriate levels across the University College's management and deliberative structures. Alignment of the enhancement activities to institutional enhancement objectives is intended to be realised through the reporting line of the committee structure to Academic Board, and through the reporting line of the management structure to the Directorate. There is no separate committee with sole responsibility for enhancement or separate enhancement policy.

145 Members of the Directorate assume management responsibility for quality enhancement at an institutional level. The Vice Principal (Academic Affairs), in addition to reporting on academic quality to a number of University College committees, further exercises responsibility for quality enhancement as part of the management of Academic Registry (and the quality office), the Centre for Learning and Teaching, and the Library and Knowledge Services and the management of the Schools. Similarly, the Vice Principal (External Affairs) manages the Student Support department, and leads on the widening participation and recruitment and retention agendas. The third Vice Principal, the Vice Principal (Corporate Services), is responsible for the provision of suitable teaching accommodation and the learning environment more generally through management of the Estates service.

Good practice

146   Academic Board (and a number of its subcommittees including the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee and the Learning and Teaching Committee plays a key role in the deliberative consideration of the enhancement of academic quality, with these committees receiving a number of annual overview reports. A coherent view is taken of enhancement issues and opportunities in the Vice Principal's (Academic Affairs) Annual Report on Academic Quality and Standards, which is submitted to Academic Board. The report is based upon an examination of external examiners' reports and school board reports on annual monitoring. The University College considers that reports related to the annual monitoring process, along with those arising out of periodic review, contribute to institutional quality enhancement, and to the identification and dissemination of good practice.

147   The audit team judged that the overview reports, and the discussions of these by Academic Board and its key subcommittees, made an effective contribution to the enhancement of quality at an institutional level and saw examples of such enhancement. These included the action the University College is taking to address the issue of assessment feedback, including the provision of staff support and development, and the organisation of a learning and teaching conference. The team could affirm that annual monitoring is effective in identifying good practice. The team noted, however, that the recommendations for enhancement arising out of periodic review were relatively small in number and scope and would encourage the University College to keep under consideration the impact of periodic review in terms of quality enhancement.

148   Enhancement of learning opportunities is also advanced by initiatives embedded in University College strategic plans, a number of which directly relate to the student experience. In particular, the Learning and Teaching strategy is seen as a key driver for enhancing the student experience. The fulfilment of actions in the strategies is overseen via the University College committee structure, and the audit team saw a number of examples of the way in which the strategies were contributing to the enhancement of the student experience.

Staff development and reward

149   In support of the quality enhancement agenda, the University College created the post of Head of Learning and Teaching in 2007 with the specific remit of developing the University College's learning and teaching policy, promoting innovation, sharing good practice and making available appropriate development opportunities for staff. The Head of Learning and Teaching leads the Centre for Learning and Teaching, which comprises a number of learning advisers and staff concerned with advising on, and promulgating the use of, learning technology. The Centre provides staff development including learning and teaching programmes, courses, workshops and conferences; academic development guidance; and funding for a number of projects related to enhancing teaching and learning. The Head of Learning and Teaching also takes an active role in leading on quality enhancement, reviewing all annual monitoring reports, and analysing feedback from NSS and other satisfaction surveys to identify opportunities for furthering the enhancement agenda. As noted above (paragraphs 81 to 87) the University College also makes comprehensive and systematic use of student feedback questionnaires to identify quality enhancement issues and inform priorities for action. The audit team considered the Centre to play an effective role in enhancing the student experience and in disseminating good practice across the institution.

150   In 2008, in furtherance of its enhancement agenda, the University College created the 0.5 post of Quality Enhancement Academic to undertake projects which are intended to improve the student experience, such as the monitoring of the accuracy and consistency of information in student handbooks. Additionally, the University College has awarded a number of teaching fellowships to colleagues who have been recognised for the excellence of their teaching practice. The audit team formed the view that these appointments have also been effective in furthering the enhancement agenda.

151   The audit team concluded that there was ample evidence of the University actively promoting enhancement activity, and that the University College was taking a systematic approach at institutional level to enhancement. The team also saw evidence of the identification of good practice through the academic quality processes, and of its dissemination across the University College.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

152   Since the granting of taught degree awarding powers, the University College has taken the opportunity to develop its collaborative arrangements. The University College's collaborative higher education provision currently comprises programmes delivered by two further education institutions. The University College envisages some further modest growth in its collaborative provision and is committed to working with further education colleges in the local region. The briefing paper noted that as part of the strengthening of working relationships with further education colleges, the University College intends to develop 'improved progression opportunities' and 'appropriate validation relationships'. The audit team heard that the University College had been in exploratory discussions with other further education colleges and heard of its intention to establish a school of theology.

The University College's framework for managing collaborative provision

153   The University College's approach to managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities of collaborative provision are set out in its Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision, which as the Code itself notes, is intended to reflect the relevant provisions of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. The University College's approach to collaborative arrangements largely builds upon the quality assurance mechanisms for programmes offered directly by the University College, and its Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision identifies those matters that need to be considered with respect to collaborative provision, and the additional processes that need to be applied.

Partnership selection and approval

154   In its Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision, the University College describes a two-stage approval process for partnership, the first stage of which, Institutional Approval, is a process specifically introduced into the University College's codes to address the needs of collaborative partnership. The institutional approval process is designed to establish the compatibility of partner and University College mission and educational objectives, the standing of the partner, the partner's ability to deliver programmes and the capacity of the partner to assume its responsibilities for the management of academic quality and standards.

155   All proposals for new partners are first considered by the Directorate to determine whether the intended partnership accords with the strategic priorities of the University College. Where the Directorate determine there is a case to proceed on the evidence available, and this decision is endorsed by Academic Board, the full institutional approval procedure is initiated. An institutional approval event is held at the partner with the approval panel chaired by a member of the Directorate. It is always attended by an external assessor. The approval event, in addition to considering corporate strategies and plans, reviews indicators of the effectiveness of teaching and learning and also considers documentation relating to student complaints, student discipline, and student appeals, and the partner's approach to staff development, student support and academic advice. Although not specifically defined in the Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision procedure, it was apparent to the audit team from a review of approval in practice that events also consider the capacity of the deliberative and executive structures of the prospective partner to support the effective management of quality and standards. The approval panel forms a judgement as to whether partner approval may be given, with this approval possibly subject to conditions. Final endorsement of the approval of a partner is made by the University College's

Academic Board and the Directorate. The team noted that the Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision does not describe the process for the termination of agreements although conditions relating to termination and the absolute requirement to continue to support existing students are laid out in the Memorandum of Co-operation.

Partnership agreements

156   Once a partner is approved, a memorandum of cooperation is agreed between the University College and the partner. This lays out the framework within which programmes may be approved to run at the partner institution. The agreements are valid for a maximum period fof six years after which the partnership is reviewed, with the renewal of the institutional agreement subject to satisfactory review outcomes.

157   Based on an examination of institutional approval documentation, the audit team concluded that the University College's process for establishing formal relationships with partners was sound, although the University College may wish to elaborate in its Code of Practice upon its processes for termination of agreements, so as to clarify the basis upon which such termination decisions may be made and how the closure process would be effected.

Approval of collaborative programmes

158   The validation process for collaborative programmes is that which also applies to in-house provision: namely, the University College's Code of Practice for the Validation of Programmes. This code does not specifically identify additional matters that should be considered when collaborative programmes are to be approved, nor is the indicative membership of validation panels and validation teams specifically tailored to collaborative events. Some additional collaborative requirements are, however, noted in supporting material such as the Programme Development Manual, the Collaborative Programme Proposal Form and the Notes of Guidance for Internal and External Members of Scrutiny Panels. The briefing paper stated that the focus of a collaborative validation event includes a scrutiny of the capacity of the partner institution to deliver programmes in a way that will secure standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

159   Based upon a review of documentation it was evident to the audit team that the constitution of the validation programme panel and team is appropriate, and that there is due consideration of issues related to collaborative provision. Nonetheless, the team considered that as the University College moves to approve more collaborative programmes, it should ensure that the relevant Codes of Practice and associated documentation fully reflect the specific quality assurance requirements related to the approval of collaborative programmes.

Management of collaborative links

160   The University College and partner identify a senior member of staff at each institution who will have responsibility for an overview of the collaborative arrangements and who will monitor provision. In addition, for each institutional partner, a Board of Studies, chaired by the Chair of the University College's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC), and with broadly equal representation from both partners, is established to act as the principal body maintaining oversight of the University College's programmes delivered by the partner. These boards of study meet twice a year, and report to the University College's QAEC.

161   At programme level, the partner identifies a course leader who has responsibility for the programme and its operation, and who acts as first point of contact for the University College in matters connected with the programme. The University College in turn, identifies a link tutor who is responsible for monitoring the delivery of the programme and provides support and advice. Although there is no definitive list of link tutor responsibilities, elements of the link tutor role are described in a number of sections of the Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision. There is no University College training specifically designed for link tutors. The audit team formed the view that as the University College extends its collaborative provision activity, it would be

helpful to make explicit all link tutor responsibilities, and to provide for the training for link tutors new to the role, so as to make clear the expectations placed on link tutors and to allow for consistency of practice.

162   Programme committees, responsible for the effective operation of programmes, are established for each programme or groups of related programmes at a partner, and are scheduled to meet three times a year. The course leader chairs the programme committee, which has a membership that includes all tutors contributing to the programme, student representative(s) from each stage of the programme, and a University College representative (normally the link tutor). The minutes of the programme committees are received by the appropriate board of studies, and by the University College's Quality Assurance and Enhancemt Committee (QAEC).

163   The audit team noted that although, in general, programme committees met with a frequency as required by the Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision, and that they dealt effectively with quality issues as they arose, in the case of one of the programmes, the programme committee did not meet as frequently as intended by the Code. As a consequence, the programme committee was not in a position to completely fulfil its role in ensuring the effective operation of the programme, which had experienced recurrent problems concerned with access to the virtual learning environment.

Monitoring and review of collaborative arrangements

164   Collaborative programmes are subject to the same annual monitoring arrangements as those adopted for programmes delivered directly by the University College and follow the format as described in the University College's Code of Practice for the Annual Monitoring of Academic Programmes. The partner programme Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) are considered and agreed by the programme committee, and received by the Board of Studies, after which they are submitted to the University College's QAEC. In addition, the reports are considered as part of the overview of Annual Monitoring authored by the Vice Principal (Academic Affairs). The audit team saw examples of collaborative AMRs and confirmed that that the University College's process for producing and considering collaborative AMRs achieved the stated objective of the process in 'reaching an evidence-based judgment on the effectiveness of a programme in achieving its stated aims and the success of its students in attaining the intended learning outcomes'.

165   Collaborative programmes are described in the University College's Code of Practice on Collaborative Provision as being subject to the same programme review and revalidation arrangements as for those adopted for programmes delivered directly by the University College. These University College Codes of Practice do not specifically identify additional issues that should be considered when collaborative programmes are to be reviewed, and the required membership of review panels and review teams is not tailored to the requirements of a collaborative event. However, the audit team saw an example of a review that included a partner programme and consideration of collaborative programmes was apparent. The audit team formed the view that the University College should amend the programme review and revalidation documentation so as to fully reflect additional requirements associated with collaborative programmes so as to assure that future events will be similarly comprehensive in their scope.

166   Overall, the audit team considered that the arrangements for the management of collaborative links had the capacity to form an effective means of assuring quality, and that where fully implemented, were effective in addressing quality management issues arising out of partnership.

External examining and student transcripts

167   An external examiner is appointed by the University College to each programme or group of related programmes. In order to affirm comparability of standards and learning opportunities

the external examiner is appointed to all runs of a programme, wherever it may be delivered. Additionally, a sample of the students' assessed work from all partners is moderated by University College staff. External examiners follow the University College's Code of Practice for External Examining. This Code does not specifically mention arrangements particular to collaborative programmes, although the external examiner reports themselves do explicitly provide comment on comparability of standards. A board of examiners is established for each programme or group of cognate programmes as per the University College's Code of Practice for the Conduct of Boards of Examiners and membership includes all course tutors contributing to the programme, the Link Tutor and the External Examiner. The boards of examiners review collaborative student work and relevant progression and achievement data. The audit team formed the view that arrangements for external examining and conduct of assessment boards are effective in practice, but that it would nonetheless be prudent to update the relevant Code of Practice so as to reflect the specific requirements of collaborative provision.

168   The University always produces the collaborative award certificates and transcripts are the responsibility of the University College. The audit team examined a number of these documents and found that they reflected the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning).*

The role of students in quality assurance

169   Arrangements for the involvement of students in quality assurance and the obtaining of student feedback are broadly similar to those that pertain to programmes delivered at the University College. Written feedback is obtained from students on the collaborative programme and this informs the annual monitoring process. Additionally, student representatives attend the programme committees. The audit team heard from students of the generally responsive and helpful attitude of staff. Based on a review of the documentation and from discussion with students, the audit team formed the view that students do inform the quality assurance process in an appropriate manner.

Student support and learning resources

170   There is an expectation that student support is provided by the partner. These responsibilities are articulated in the memorandum of agreement. Arrangements for student support are approved as part of institutional approval, and reviewed as part of the annual monitoring process. Student support is also considered during periodic review. Resources for learning are generally provided by the partner, although partner students do have access to the facilities of the library at the University College. Provision of learning resources is established as part of the validation process, and reviewed as part of the annual monitoring process and during the periodic review. The audit team saw evidence of this process being applied and noted that the issues relating to access of students to the partner institution's virtual learning environment had been identified through both annual monitoring and periodic review as being an issue that should be addressed.

Staff support and development

171   Memoranda of agreement make clear the requirement placed on the partner to assure that staff are suitably qualified and have appropriate expertise. The institutional approval process includes an examination of the partner's arrangements for staff development. Staff CVs are reviewed as part of programme validation and details of any new staff are provided to the University College before the new staff commence teaching. In addition, the University College provides staff development opportunities to partner staff, who are, for example, routinely invited to learning and teaching conferences at the University College. This kind of support has been commended by partners. The audit team considered arrangements for staff support and development to be appropriate.

Information produced by partner organisations

172   Student handbooks, and advertising and publicity material are sent to the University College prior to publication. The content of programme handbooks is agreed at validation and the collaborative programme handbooks are similar to those produced for in-house programmes. Given the diversity of approach across partners to items such as student complaints, academic appeals and student misconduct, and arrangements for institutional services such as student support, the audit team formed the view that the University College should review its guidance for producing handbooks in partners so as to assure that they include, or direct students to, services, procedures and regulations specific to the partner.

173   In conclusion, the audit team would generally agree with the University College's assertion that 'the academic standards and quality of collaborative provision are securely managed' and that there is appropriate engagement with the Academic Infrastructure, particularly the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. However, the team also considered that the University College's procedures and associated documentation do not always reflect the particular requirements of collaborative provision, or that the collaborative procedures were always followed to the extent intended. The team therefore considers it advisable that the University College should review its Codes of Practice and associated documentation to ensure appropriate recognition of the specific needs of collaborative provision. The team also considered it advisable that the University College also review the operation of its quality management processes for collaborative provision to ensure they are fully implemented.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

174   While the University states in its Corporate Plan that it 'will remain a teaching-led institution', it also sets out a clear commitment to increase research activity, so that teaching is embedded in research and scholarly activity, and in the longer term, an application for research degree awarding powers becomes possible. A key element of the institutional strategy to grow research is the introduction of research degrees and the creation of a small number of research studentships for PhD and EdD students. The University College is in the very early stages of implementing this aspect of its Corporate Plan and it has built on its relationship with the University of Leicester to establish validation arrangements for the award of research degrees. At the time of the audit visit three PhD research studentships had been awarded, and one student had formally commenced studies. In addition, the validation of an EdD programme was nearing conclusion, with plans to recruit an initial cohort of around eight part-time students for a biannual intake.

175   The introduction of research degree studentships in 2009-10 is the outcome of efforts over a number of years to build the research profile of staff, so that there is sufficient capacity to provide high quality authoritative supervision. The audit team heard that this strategy was deliberately slow and focused, so that students could be carefully selected and matched to authoritative supervisors and be part of a strong research informed environment. Ten staff have been approved as eligible to provide supervision, and in the first instance it has been decided that funded studentships will be directed to students wishing to take doctoral research in specific aspects of education. The intention is that there will not only be a strong relationship between staff and student research interests based on the greatest area of research strength, but to maximise the potential for peer support networks and a sense of common purpose. Training for research supervisors has been provided through an external consultant.

176   Regulations Governing Research Degrees and a Code of Practice for Research Degrees have been approved by the University College's Academic Board and the Senate of the University of Leicester. These follow closely those of the University of Leicester and take careful account of

the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. Given the very early stage in the introduction of research degrees, it is only those parts of the *Code* relating to selection and admission, induction and the start of research training that have been implemented.

177   Formal responsibility for oversight of research degree matters lies with the University College's Research Committee, which includes two student representatives. A subcommittee, the Research Students Committee is charged with considering recommendations from the Head of Research regarding admission, progress, transfer from advanced postgraduate status and matters pertaining to student registration for awards. The audit team found the processes as set out in the University College's Code of Practice and Regulations, and the terms of reference for the Research Committee, to be comprehensive in taking account of the precepts of QAA's *Code of practice*, providing a sound basis for the management of research degrees, together with a clearly articulated strategy for future development.

178   The audit team heard that the selection and admissions process had been implemented robustly and had operated smoothly for the research student. Applicants for research studentships are interviewed by the Head of Research and potential first supervisor following a two-day process involving the completion of tasks designed to test applicants' readiness to undertake research at doctoral level. Recommendations of the interview panel to admit candidates as Advanced Postgraduate Students are referred for confirmation to the Research Students Committee.

179   Research students are allocated two supervisors, with the first supervisor taking primary responsibility and having extensive knowledge of the proposed field of study and successful experience of supervising theses. The second supervisor will be an experienced researcher in a relevant field. Students are also allocated a mentor, who is not a member of the supervisory team, and they are able to use staff facilities. A comprehensive student handbook with information about the research degree student experience, rights and obligations is available; this includes a progress file for planning and recording training and development activities.

180   The Head of Research is responsible for the research student induction and training programme; undertaking a training needs analysis and developing a training plan for both discipline-specific and generic skills is an important part of this. Students are encouraged to develop their plans by making use of opportunities provided by the University College and also externally. In addition, there is an arrangement with the University of Leicester for students to participate in their research training programme; aspects of this are compulsory. Internal and external networking through participation in staff research seminars and attendance at conferences are encouraged and supported. The audit team heard from both the Head of Research and the research student that both formal and informal processes for induction and training were working effectively to provide a positive, supportive and welcoming experience. The team formed the view that carefully planned induction and support arrangements were in place to ensure that the current small number of research students will be part of a research community at the University College.

181   A Research Centre has been established by the University College, providing a physical base for students, and dealing with all administrative matters relating to registered research degree students, and research more generally. This includes the organisation of research-related events and seminars, and oversight of research funding. The Centre is managed by the Head of Research who has the lead role in coordinating research student support, including the organisation of the progress monitoring procedures, monitoring student participation on the research student training programme and ensuring appropriate supervisory and support arrangements for students. The Head of Research, working with the University College's professors and trained supervisors, has the lead role in managing the research student experience and promoting a research environment.

182   The audit team considered the arrangements in place and planned for the current and future development of research degrees to be appropriate, and the thorough and well-conceived plans for securing the research degree experience of the initial intake of students to be a feature of good practice.

Section 7: Published information

183   The institution provides a wide range of information for prospective and current students on its website and in printed form. The briefing paper explained that while there is no single process to check accuracy of published information, in all cases the primary responsibility rests with the head of section in which the information is generated and, in many cases, further independent scrutiny takes place. All materials for the web are passed through the Web Development Officer. The Web Development Officer has undertaken an audit to record the originator and the date the item was due for revision to ensure the currency of the materials held.

184   The prospectus is overseen and coordinated by the marketing section of the institution. Text from the previous edition is circulated to the academic coordinator and amendments returned to the marketing section. The draft sections are then checked at 'progressively higher levels', through the Head of Department, Dean, Vice Principal (External Affairs) and in parallel, Assistant Academic Registrar (Quality) to ensure consonance with the regulatory framework. Information on entry requirements is checked by the admissions section of Academic Registry, with the final draft checked by the Principal.

185   The briefing paper notes that although the process appears robust, a new formal checklist and sign-off for each stage of production of the prospectus text is to be introduced in 2009-10, partly as a means of commissioning work, to confirm that materials used will not infringe copyright issues and to check accuracy. The audit team was able to confirm these arrangements through an examination of a sign-off form for prospectus page content and a comprehensive sign-off checklist held by marketing.

186   The student written submission generally viewed the prospectus as accurate, although it reported that some students viewed the content to underestimate the workload. The students met by the audit team generally viewed the information as an accurate representation of what happens on the courses. The audit team reviewed the prospectus and the institution's website, as well as the entries on the Unistats and UCAS websites. The team found clear evidence that the institution was making publicly available the documentation suggested in Annex F of *HEFCE circular 2006/45*.

187   Course handbooks and module handbooks are produced for all courses and the briefing paper noted that although there is some variation in content reflecting the nature of individual courses, there is an agreed minimum set of information the documents should contain. New undergraduate and postgraduate students receive separate versions of an information booklet called 'What Next?', which provides details of the induction programme and the main sources of advice and support. The audit team noted the booklets contained comprehensive information. Students who met with the team said that they had found the 'What Next?' booklets useful.

188   The student written submission viewed course handbooks as 'easy to follow' and overall viewed them accurate. Students also confirmed that they found module handbooks to be accurate. Students met during the audit visit also confirmed that the handbooks contained programme specifications. However, students from a partner institution suggested they would benefit from further explanation of content of the handbooks by staff.

189   The briefing paper noted that the Assistant Academic Registrar (Quality) had checked a sample of handbooks annually and a more wide-ranging check had been carried out (in 2008-09) on handbooks by the Dean of the School of Culture, Education and Innovation, the Quality Enhancement Academic and the Assistant Academic Registrar (Quality).

190   The audit team confirmed during meetings that module documentation had been checked and as part of that review inconsistencies had been identified. As a consequence the quality office has produced a checklist of expected contents and guidance notes to support a new process for the academic coordinators. The team confirmed that the new process in place to check the contents of a module booklet and student handbooks was effective.

191   The audit team further confirmed that the Doctoral Research Student Handbook 2009-10 was comprehensive in nature. For example, it included rights and responsibilities as a research student (codes of practice and key policies), academic and pastoral support (learning support, careers, pastoral support and personal development planning, research student induction and training programme, administrative matters, thesis submission and examination).

192   The procedure for notifying changes to validated programmes includes sections on module housekeeping, whereby it is expected that changes will be incorporated in student handbooks, unit study guides or other information for students as appropriate. It also specifies that changes will be incorporated in the programme specification at the next cycle of revision. Through an example of recent changes that had been made to regulations for the award of honours and Foundation Degree awards, the audit team was able to confirm that the publicly available information had been updated accurately in line with the institution's procedures.

193   As a result of sampling the published information, and from what the audit team heard from students and staff, the team concluded that reliance can be reasonably 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.