Bishop Grosseteste College, Lincoln

SEPTEMBER 2005

Preface

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

To do this QAA carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In England and Northern Ireland this process is known as institutional audit. QAA operates similar but separate processes in Scotland and Wales.

The purpose of institutional audit

The aims of institutional audit are to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges are:

- providing HE, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard, and
- exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

Judgements

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

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

These judgements are expressed as either **broad confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence** and are accompanied by examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement.

Nationally agreed standards

Institutional audit uses a set of nationally agreed reference points, known as the 'Academic Infrastructure', to consider an institution's standards and quality. These are published by QAA and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), which include descriptions of different HE qualifications
- The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of the what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. They outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the FHEQ.

The audit process

Institutional audits are carried out by teams of academics who review the way in which institutions oversee their academic quality and standards. Because they are evaluating their equals, the process is called 'peer review'.

The main elements of institutional audit are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution nine months before the audit visit
- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the audit visit
- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the audit visit
- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the audit team five weeks before the audit visit
- the audit visit, which lasts five days
- the publication of a report on the audit team's judgements and findings 20 weeks after the audit visit.

The evidence for the audit

In order to obtain the evidence for its judgement, the audit team carries out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, such as regulations, policy statements, codes of practice, recruitment publications and minutes of relevant meetings, as well as the self-evaluation document itself
- reviewing the written submission from students
- asking questions of relevant staff
- talking to students about their experiences
- exploring how the institution uses the Academic Infrastructure.

The audit team also gathers evidence by focusing on examples of the institution's internal quality assurance processes at work using 'audit trails'. These trails may focus on a particular programme or programmes offered at that institution, when they are known as a 'discipline audit trail'. In addition, the audit team may focus on a particular theme that runs throughout the institution's management of its standards and quality. This is known as a 'thematic enquiry'.

From 2004, institutions will be required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance,* published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The audit team reviews progress towards meeting this requirement.

A report in lieu of institutional audit, based on enquiries undertaken in the academic years 2004-05 and 2005-06, in connection with Bishop Grosseteste College, Lincoln's (the College) (now Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln) application for taught degree awarding powers.

Following an application by the College to the Privy Council seeking the grant of its own taught degree awarding powers, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was asked to advise the Privy Council as to whether such powers should be granted, based on the Government's criteria. A team of QAA assessors visited the College in 2005 to review its application. Following scrutiny of the institution's application and QAA's subsequent recommendation to the Privy Council, the College was granted taught degree awarding powers in April 2006.

To arrive at its conclusions the assessor team reviewed quality assurance procedures in operation, spoke to members of staff throughout the College, spoke to current students and read a wide range of documents relating to the way the College manages the academic aspects of its provision.

At the same time that the College was undergoing QAA scrutiny, it was also due to be engaged in a QAA institutional audit. The purpose of audit is to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards it offers. Audit leads to a judgement of confidence in the management of the quality and standards of the awards being offered by the institution. However, when an application for taught degree awarding powers has been successful, it can also be concluded, on the basis of the evidence reviewed, that a judgement of broad confidence can be made on the management of quality and standards, therefore no further institutional visit is required.

Academic standards is a way of describing the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK.

Academic quality is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided for them.

This report provides a summary of the findings of the assessor team, focusing on those areas that are relevant to institutional audit. The report also highlights some matters that a future institutional audit team may wish to review.

Outcome

As a result of its enquiries, the view of the assessor team is that:

- broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the College's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

The structure of the College

1   The College originated in 1862 when it was founded by the Church of England to train women as teachers in primary schools. In the 1960s men were admitted on to the College's teacher education programmes, and these programmes remain its principal focus. Since the mid-1990s the College has diversified its provision with three awards in the arts and humanities; it has also developed its portfolio of teaching qualifications in the primary and secondary spheres, as well as providing a Foundation Degree and continuing professional development for serving teachers. In 2005-06 the College added a Foundation Degree in Cultural Events Management to its portfolio. The College is currently designated a specialist institution by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in recognition of the high proportion of its work which is related to teacher education.

2   The College currently offers undergraduate and postgraduate awards from the University of Leicester. This relationship forms part of a strategic alliance between the College, the University of Leicester and Newman College of Higher Education in Birmingham. The purpose of the alliance was to offer continued independence but with opportunities for shared working.

3   There are about 1,382 students at the College, of which 81 are on taught postgraduate programmes (excluding the Postgraduate Certificate in Education). The College employs 57 academic staff of which four are part-time. There are also 35 visiting tutors employed by the College.

4   During the period of the scrutiny the College changed its academic structure and created two schools: the School of Culture, Education and Innovation, and the School of Teacher Development. In addition to these schools there is a third area of activity: Educational Development Services.

5   Within the higher education sector, the College's ethos, with values derived from its Christian foundations and its small size, are two of its distinctive features.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

6   Programme teams, headed by programme leaders, take day-to-day responsibility for quality assurance of the College's provision. Their work is supported by a clearly defined regulatory framework and subject to annual monitoring procedures and scrutiny from a deliberative committee structure culminating in the Academic Board.

Committee structure

7   In February 2004, the College Academic Board considered a review of the deliberative committee structure undertaken by the Vice-Principal (Academic Affairs). Academic Board accepted proposals, for implementation in September 2004, for the simplification of the structure and a reduction in the number of subcommittees reporting directly to Academic Board from eight to three with several from the existing structure (Recruitment Committee; Academic Staff Development Committee; and Research Committee) re-constituted as Standing Groups, and others (Learning and Teaching Committee; Staff Student Committee; and Student Progress Committee) discontinued. These were replaced by: the Academic Planning Committee (APC), responsible for the development and review of the academic portfolio, the operation of the College Resource Allocation Model and the development of the Learning and Teaching Strategy; the Academic Standards Committee (ASC) with delegated responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards and quality); and the Academic Services Committee (to coordinate the work of the range of academic and support services). The review also recommended the strengthening of the Programme Committee structure responsible for the effective operation of the academic programmes.

Regulatory framework

8   The College does not simply rely on the regulatory framework offered by its validating partner, but has in place a comprehensive set of Codes of Practice which describe the various processes and procedures related to the assuring of standards and of the quality of the student experience. These are available electronically on the College website and, taken together, form a clearly written and comprehensive quality manual. A full review of the Codes started in 2003-04 to ensure that procedures aligned with those of the University of Leicester. Reviews of specific Codes are also carried out in response to revisions of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA. The process of review was being completed during the scrutiny and the assessor team observed the presentation of Codes to major College committees and the opportunities offered, both at these committees and more generally for

staff to understand and comment on proposed changes. The team concluded that the College had systematic and effective procedures in place for the continual review and updating of its regulatory framework based on the *Code of practice,* published by QAA.

Annual review

9   All programmes are required to conduct an annual review. A template is provided for this and procedures are clearly stated in the College's Code of Practice on Annual Review. Annual reviews are substantial and the subsequent reports include sections on recruitment, admission and induction, progression, outcomes, curriculum design, teaching effectiveness, the student learning experience, student guidance and support, assessment, programme management and delivery and resources for learning. Particular importance is attached to feedback received from students. The degree-awarding powers scrutiny coincided with the making of significant changes to both the process and the timing of collecting such feedback. The new timing led to some difficulties which were reported by programme committees leading to a decision to review the process for gathering student feedback for future years.

10   Each Annual Programme Review Report and its associated action plan is analysed by the Vice-Principal (Academic Affairs) in order to produce the College Annual Review Report-Executive Summary, which is considered by ASC and Academic Board before being presented to the University of Leicester Board of Colleges. The report allows the College to satisfy itself that the process of annual review is being carried out appropriately and also to identify any actions necessary at the institutional level.

11   Annual Programme Reviews examined by the audit team indicated a high level of engagement with the process with a reflective and self-critical view taken by programme teams of their work. Analysis of cohort data is currently limited, but this will improve with the implementation of a new management information (MIS) system.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the standards of awards

Validation and review

12   The College's application document states that 'one of the most significant processes through which standards are defined and secured is the validation of new programmes'. While the University carries out the formal process of validation, any programme submitted for such validation is first subject to a detailed and comprehensive internal scrutiny process in the College.

13   The process for programme validation and review is outlined in the College's Code of Practice for the Validation of Programmes. This particular Code was substantially revised in 2003-04 both to allow for changes in the College's committee structure and to align the process with validation arrangements at the University of Leicester.

14   The scrutiny process is in two parts. In the first, using the initial sections only of a standard proposal form, an outline programme proposal is presented to the APC which considers the nature of the proposal, its rationale, likely market and place within the overall portfolio of the College. The membership of this committee includes the Director of Library and Knowledge Services, allowing library and information technology (IT) resource needs of proposed new programmes to be challenged at this stage, before development takes place. The committee also includes the Vice Principal (External Affairs) and the Assistant Registrar for Marketing and Recruitment ensuring both marketability and the availability of student numbers are discussed. Any queries are communicated to the programme development team for further consideration and clarification. Meetings of the committee were observed by the assessor team who found its operation to be efficient and effective and who were impressed by the level of debate and the clarity of strategic understanding of the College's priorities in planning, resourcing and academic development.

15   Once approval has been received from the APC the remaining sections of the proposal form are completed and the form is presented to the ASC which decides whether the proposed programme is likely to meet the required academic standards for the level of award and to offer an appropriate quality of experience to students. At this stage signatures are needed from all heads of support departments indicating that any extra resource requirements can be met; thus this stage plays a key part in determining the risk associated with a new proposal. The ASC reports the outcome of its discussions to Academic Board which then takes a formal decision as to whether the proposal should be permitted to proceed to validation. In cases where the decision is favourable the programme is placed on the schedule for validation, normally for the following session, concluding the first part of the process.

16   In the second stage of the process a draft programme document is prepared. This comprises (i) a programme specification, completed following the College template which matches QAA guidelines, (ii) an introduction including the rationale for the programme, a statement of the learning, teaching and assessment strategy and an overview of the resources available to support the delivery and (iii) a specification, on a standard template for each module.

17   The draft programme document is reviewed for ASC by a College Scrutiny Panel, normally chaired by the Vice-Principal (Academic Affairs) and consisting of three other members of the College who are unconnected with the programme and an external member who must be approved by the Vice-Principal (Academic Affairs). The panel meets for a scrutiny event which includes a meeting with the presenting team and whose outcome is a recommendation to the ASC either to (i) approve the programme (ii) approve the programme with conditions or (iii) reject the proposal. The Vice-Principal (Academic Affairs) is responsible for confirming that any conditions have been met by the programme

team. Scrutiny event outcomes are reported to ASC, but it is the Academic Board which gives final approval for documentation to be sent to the University of Leicester for validation. Notes of guidance are provided to scrutiny panels and these remind panel members of the need to assure themselves that the learning outcomes of the proposed programme reflect the appropriate level of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and that any relevant subject benchmarks have been taken into account. In the observation of one scrutiny event the audit team became aware of the College's practice of including members of staff new to the scrutiny process as observers for a panel meeting. The assessor team considered this was good practice in terms of staff development.

18   In observing the scrutiny panels the assessor team was able to confirm the scrupulous attention to detail paid by all panel members to the process and the care taken to challenge programme team members about standards and the quality of the student experience. The team also noted good practice in the range of institutions (colleges of higher education and both pre and post-1992 universities) from which external panel members were drawn. The team judged the process to be robust in general, but had a concern about the high number of conditions which resulted from many events. Common conditions were related to typographical errors and inconsistencies in programme documentation or to the need to update bibliographies. This suggested to the team that there is a need for staff development for programme teams to ensure that they do not regard the scrutiny event as a part of the development process rather than an independent check on that process.

Assessment

19   Assessment procedures for all provision are set out in the College's Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students which was revised in 2003-04 and implemented in 2004-05. During

the validation process one of the duties of the scrutiny panel is to confirm that there is a clear and comprehensive assessment strategy covering all modules. Details of the assessment scheme are included in programme handbooks and both Annual and Periodic Review processes require the programme team to review the effectiveness of the assessment scheme. A working group recently recommended that measures should be taken to re-establish the link between learning outcomes and assessment criteria; this, and other recommendations, will be introduced as programmes are reviewed and revalidated.

20   The College does not at present require anonymous marking of student work, but this remains under consideration with all programmes asked to pilot anonymous marking in at least one element of assessment in 2005-06. This is an extension of earlier piloting in one programme and was the outcome of a working group which reported through the committee structure.

External examiners

21   Another key process in assuring standards is the use of external examiners for assessments leading to awards. The College Code of Practice on External Examining is one of those recently revised and, although the University of Leicester formally appoints external examiners, the College has in place a rigorous process for the scrutiny of nominations. The audit team noted good practice in the range of institutions (colleges of higher education and both pre and post-1992 universities) from which external examiners are drawn.

22   Newly appointed external examiners are issued with the College's Code together with extra notes for guidance. The College has developed its own pro forma for the use of its external examiners in order to ensure external examiners focus their comments on key aspects of the process. From 2003-04 this has included a section to meet the requirements to publish information from external examiners on teaching quality on the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website. On receipt of the

external examiners' reports the Vice-Principal (Academic Affairs) scrutinises them and writes to programme leaders drawing their attention to any matters of concern or commendations for good practice. Programme committees consider the external examiners' report and agree an action plan to address any recommendations; a copy of this action plan is then sent to the external examiner. Progress on the actions is reported to the external examiner mid-session and, following the final programme committee of the session, the programme leader makes a formal report on the outcomes of actions: this also forms part of the Annual Review Report. In observing programme committees the assessor team noted that discussion of the action plan included detailed and effective working through of actions and progress set out in the paper on developmental changes.

23   The overview report prepared by the Vice Principal (Academic Affairs) is considered first by the ASC and then Academic Board. From there it goes to the University of Leicester's Board of Colleges where it forms part of the College's Annual Report to the University.

24   The assessor team undertook an analysis of a three-year set of external examiners reports which showed that the reports were generally very positive about the programmes examined and the standards reached by students at the College. The analysis also noted that external examiners indicated that action was taken in response to issues they had raised. Meetings between the assessor team and the external examiners also confirmed that appropriate standards were being met.

The College's use of the Academic Infrastructure

25   The College's Codes of Practice mirror the sections of the *Code of practice,* published by QAA and, as indicated above, specific College Codes are reviewed and revised, where appropriate, in response to revisions of the *Code,* published by QAA. In the view of the assessor team the *Code* is deeply embedded in the College's regulatory framework.

26   Programme specifications are available for all programmes and are produced using a College designed template which matches QAA guidelines, and form part of the required documentation for validation and review. The template includes specific reference to the alignment of learning outcomes to the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements, and scrutiny panels are asked to assure themselves that this is the case. The College is adopting an agreed set of externally recognised level descriptors to assist programme development teams in determining that the learning outcomes for each module are appropriately differentiated by level. The report produced as a result of a QAA developmental engagement with the College's English Literature programme commented positively on the form of the programme specification and the way it was used. The assessor team, based on their reading of a number of programme specifications, wholly concur with these comments and consider that the institution has developed these documents in a way which is clear, effective and results in information which is of value to students.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

27   Recent enhancements to the College Estate have ensured an increasingly high standard of learning and teaching accommodation. Considerable work has also been carried out in the library which offers general support to the College's programmes plus specialist collections relevant to College provision (for example, children's literature). The new appointment of a Director of Services with responsibility for both library and IT provision has led to improvements in the library including the development of a collection policy. Students who met with the assessor team stated that the library generally met their learning needs, although they sometimes needed to borrow books from the University. There was evidence that the library is responsive to student issues, and the team were given an example of discussion at a programme committee leading to more copies of key texts being provided with two retained in the library to be used for reference only.

28   Students indicated that generally learning resources, including access to IT, were very good. Interactive whiteboards are available for those training as teachers and laptops can be borrowed. While the College is not involved in distance learning, a virtual learning environment (VLE) has been introduced in order to offer extra support and access to learning material through the internet. This is still at an early stage of development, but is well supported and has produced some successful pilots.

29   The audit team were impressed with the progress made towards the creation of a modern learning environment appropriate to the needs of the College's students. In particular the appointment of the Director of Library and Knowledge Services is an example of the vigorous and forward-looking leadership which appears characteristic of this College. The Director has been supported in her agenda for modernisation by carefully planned use of HEFCE funds for the support of teaching and learning and there is evidence of value for money in the way such funds have been used.

Feedback to students

30   The College stated in its application document that it 'places a high priority on providing detailed and constructive feedback to students on their assignments'. A standard feedback sheet has been in use since 2004-05 and the revised College Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students includes a Marking Policy. Students who met with the assesor team were wholly satisfied with the standard of feedback they received, however, the College notes in its Application that timeliness in feedback remains an area for improvement and the new Code of Practice includes the requirement that a return date (normally not more than 20 days from the submission date) should be published for each assignment.

Student support

31   The College offers a range of services in support of students. These have been enhanced in recent years by the appointment of a Head of Student Support and a Learning Support Co-ordinator. These services are in Student Support House which provides good accommodation and an environment offering a high level of confidentiality.

32   Student Support provides a wide range of professional advice for personal problems including debt and legal issues. It coordinates services for disabled students and can refer students to a professional (external) counselling service. Students who met with the assessor team commented on the speedy and effective response of the service in a crisis. It also makes available information from employers seeking to recruit graduates and has recently been enhanced with the appointment of a careers officer. Student Support is complemented by the College Chaplaincy with the College Chaplain (an Anglican Minister working closely with associate chaplains who are local ministers from all denominations). The Chaplain plays an important part in the pastoral care of students of all faiths and none, and actively engages with students during induction and afterwards.

33   The Learning Support Co-ordinator works with programme teams to offer students the advice and help they need to develop the skills that will allow them to progress successfully with their studies. Such support can be on a one-to-one basis or by means of group workshops. Sessions can be booked and are complemented by access to on-line resources and a variety of study guides.

34   Both the Student Support and Learning Support Services keep confidential records of the students who seek help in order to monitor needs. Students are also issued with a questionnaire which seeks to evaluate the quality of support received. Service staff provided a number of examples where feedback had led to changes and improvement to the service offered.

35   In the view of the assessor team, Learning Support and Student Support together with the Chaplaincy provide an effective, holistic framework for the academic and personal support of students within a small and clearly caring college community. There is evidence that the best use is made of potentially scarce resources with monitoring of, and qualitative feedback from, customers used to guide future developments in the services.

Induction

36   Student induction and registration is the responsibility of the Recruitment Committee chaired by the Vice-Principal (External Affairs). Students are issued with an introductory information pack, have an opportunity to meet course tutors and are introduced to the course itself and any associated arrangements. Feedback from each year's induction is used to inform the process for the following year. The assessor team considered the process to work effectively and the feedback process ensures that the induction process develops to meet the needs of the College's student population.

37   The College is committed to offering equal opportunities to students and, in particular, to increasing educational opportunities through widening access to its programmes to people from groups currently under-represented in higher education. It is the lead institution for AimHigher in Lincolnshire. The success of these policies is demonstrated by the increasing diversity of students with the HEFCE performance indicators for 2001-02 showing that it had the highest proportion of first degree students from the Registrar General's classification of social classes IIIM and below, of any higher education institution in the country. The proportion of mature students rose from 14 per cent in 1999 to 36 per cent in 2003. However, the recruitment of students from a minority ethnic group continues to be a challenge and the Corporate Plan indicates ways in which this is being addressed.

Staff

38   The College was able, for the most part, to demonstrate that it had an appropriately qualified, committed and cohesive group of staff operating in a well-managed environment. Some limitations were noted in their specific qualifications and development priorities for teaching in higher education. The practices associated with appointment, induction, review and staff development are generally satisfactory with the exception of the questions relating to the appointment of hourly-paid staff where, at least, some concerns remained about the management of the 'pool' of external expertise on which some programmes were particularly dependent. The assessor team considered that the College may wish to examine how best it can manage this situation.

Feedback from students and external stakeholders

39   Feedback from students is sought by end of module evaluations and course questionnaires. In addition, a number of deliberative committees include student members and from 2004-05 student representatives have been elected to the programme committees (the forum in which detailed course issues including student evaluations are discussed). The assessor team observed a range of meetings in which students were present and wish to commend the ways in which committee chairs brought students into the discussions and ensured that their views were heard and discussed. The team also noted good practice in one programme committee: when a representative was unavoidably absent the Students' Union President was briefed on issues and deputised.

40   The continuing predominance of teacher education within the College portfolio leads to schools being major employers of College graduates. College staff regularly visit trainees during their time on placements in schools; conversely, school-based mentors go to College training days aimed at ensuring they understand the nature of their role and, hence, there is ample opportunity for informal

discussion and feedback with school representatives. More formally the programme committees for the relevant programmes include school representatives as members, and the assessor team noted this as good practice with student representative members playing a full role in the liaison between students and staff.

41   Outside the teacher training area other programme areas such as drama and heritage studies have also established strong links with employers as their students take part in a range of placement opportunities with various arts and heritage organisations.

Student experience of published information

42   All programmes provide a detailed student handbook offering a comprehensive guide to the course and including as a minimum an agreed standard set of contents such as the programme specification, staff list and learning, teaching and assessment strategy. The assessor team was supplied with copies of these handbooks which appeared clear and easy to use.

43   The College has in place a comprehensive set of information to allow it to meet the requirements for the publication of TQI data. Responsibility for maintaining and confirming the accuracy of this data is vested with appropriate sections of the College. In addition the Assistant Academic Registrar (Quality) monitors the sufficiency and accuracy of data issued to students in programme handbooks and similar documents. In their meetings with students the assessor team was informed that the information received in documents such as the prospectus was accurate.

Conclusions

44   The assessor team considered that the College is well managed with effective processes and procedures in place to maintain academic standards and assure the quality of the student experience. The 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; and the systematic actioning of tasks and issues arising from committee deliberations.

45   Further strengths include 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 and effective procedures for the appointment and induction of external examiners and consideration of their reports.

46   The environment for supporting student learning is effective and carefully monitored. Good practice was noted in the range of opportunities for the student voice to be heard and the effective ways in which these opportunities are used, in the personal and academic support available to meet student needs and enable individual students to achieve their full potential, and in the active engagement of staff and students in the establishment and implementation of the VLE supported by a concerted programme of development and training.

47   While there is every reason for general satisfaction with the quality of learning opportunities available to students and the standard of awards there are a number of issues to which future institutional auditors may wish to give consideration. In particular: installation of the new MIS/student records system in order to ensure accurate and timely data are 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.

48   Further, while the assessor team acknowledge that the new committee structure needs to be fully embedded, there remain some concerns about the ability of the College to sustain a structure (despite its recent rationalisation) which remains somewhat disproportionate to its scale and heavily dependent upon a small number of key staff. The team considered that the College may 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.

Bishop Grosseteste College, Lincoln's response to the report in lieu of institutional audit

Bishop Grosseteste College welcomes this report based upon enquiries undertaken in connection with its successful application for taught degree awarding powers. The College is gratified by the judgement that broad confidence can be placed in its current and likely future management of academic quality and standards.

We are pleased to note that the assessor team concluded that the College is well-managed with effective processes and procedures in place, and that the report commends several specific aspects of our practice. These include the capacity to manage change effectively, good internal communications and the systematic way in which tasks are actioned. We note that the assessors concluded that there is an appropriate regulatory framework supported by a robust internal scrutiny process for the approval of new programmes and an annual monitoring process that is thoughtfully and effectively applied. We particularly welcome the recognition that College offers students a modern learning environment which meets their needs appropriately and that there is an effective and holistic framework for their academic and personal support.

The College has already begun to address the small number of matters which the assessors suggest require consideration.

The College has devoted considerable attention over the last year to the evaluation of MIS/Student Records systems. It expects to make its final assessment in the near future and to install the system which best meets its needs. The student record system will complement a new finance system which is also expected to be in place shortly.

The College will be considering its arrangements for the approval of new courses as part of a more general review associated with the exercise of taught degree awarding powers. It is expected that a two-stage process of School and institutional scrutiny will be adopted. This will achieve a clear separation of programme development and programme approval, the second stage replacing that currently carried out by the validating university.

The College will continue to attach importance to providing appropriate staff development opportunities and will continue to encourage staff members to engage in external commitments in the HE sector. The level of such activity has increased and this process will be given further impetus by the appointment of a Head of Research and, more recently, a Head of Learning and Teaching. It is acknowledged that the arrangements for the induction of hourly-paid visiting tutors, many of whom contribute important specialist professional expertise, need to be placed on a more formal footing and we are currently reviewing our procedures.

The College will monitor the operation of its committee structure. However, as significant changes have been made relatively recently, we would wish to allow time for the present arrangements to become established before reaching a judgement on the need for further change.

In conclusion, the College would like to thank the team of assessors for the professional and invariably courteous nature of their interactions with the staff of the College over a period of some months.