

York St John University College

OCTOBER 2006

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.

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

Background

1 The origins of York St John University College (the College) lie in St John's College York, a diocesan teacher training institution founded in 1841, and Ripon College, a women's teacher training college. These institutions merged to become the College of Ripon and York St John in 1975. On its withdrawal from Ripon in 1999, the College took the name York St John College.

2 The College's programmes have been validated by the University of Leeds since the 1970s. The College was designated a College of the University in the 1990s and became a fully accredited institution in 2001. It was awarded taught degree awarding powers at the start of the present academic year, which it intends to activate with effect from academic year 2007-08 on the basis of a detailed migration plan approved by Academic Board. It has subsequently applied for the granting of/been awarded university title.

3 The College is a Church of England foundation, but, other than in the case of the principalship, the incumbent being required to be a communicant member of the Church, is open to staff and students of any or no faith. Building on its Mission Statement, which stresses the provision of excellent, open and progressive higher education (HE), embracing difference, challenging prejudice and promoting justice, the College claims to provide widely accessible opportunities for lifelong learning and to promote the personal and professional development of students and staff. Hence it aims, by delivering an

employment-relevant curricula in a secure but stimulating environment, to demonstrate the relevance of a Christian value base to the predominantly secular world in which the majority of its students live and work.

4 The College's academic provision grew from its roots in teacher education which, particularly in the fields of primary and religious education, is still a core element of its academic provision. Nonetheless, the College now offers a portfolio of programmes, ranging from foundation studies, short certificate programmes, Foundation Degrees, first degrees and taught postgraduate programmes to research degrees, which it delivers under University of Leeds arrangements. The core of the College's undergraduate offering is its portfolio of undergraduate programmes, primarily specialist degrees with a range of joint honours degrees, deriving from them. Reflecting the College's vocational orientation, all programmes contain work-related modules and a work experience element, and an increasing number are professionally accredited.

5 The College also claimed in its documentation to be extending and deepening its external engagements regionally, nationally and globally. Regionally its main contribution is through partnerships with providers of further and higher education, where it emphasises facilitating student access to HE, including access for those from under-represented groups whose potential is less likely to be fulfilled in a traditional HE environment. Since 2001 the College's distinctive contribution to the Higher York project (now a Lifelong Learning Network sponsored by the Higher Education Funding Council for England) has been the main vehicle for its regional widening participation strategy. Nationally the College can claim to have made some contributions to pedagogic knowledge and development, but acknowledges that it will fulfil its potential, which may include the development of a range of collaborative partnerships, only when it can act and promote itself as a university awarding its own taught degrees. Globally its involvement appears to the assessor team predominantly aspirational,

although its current activities include an MA International Studies, taught in Japan and Poland by a combination of distance learning and off-site delivery.

The structure of the College

6 Under the College's Instruments and Articles, the Governing Body whose members include diocesan, staff, student and non-aligned representatives, exercises responsibility for determining its mission and ethos and for overseeing its academic and corporate activities. The majority of business regarding the efficient use of resource and the financial status of the College is carried out through the Strategy, Planning and Resources Committee; the Audit Committee exercises its statutory brief with the help of an internal audit service; the other main governors' committees are the Human Resource Development Committee, Health and Safety Committee and Remuneration Committee. The Nominations Committee is charged with ensuring the Board has access to an appropriate range of skills and experience through its members; new members are offered induction and full briefing materials; and the College holds regular development days for the Board.

7 Academic Board, the supreme College committee in respect of academic policy, contains staff and student representatives sitting alongside a range of College officers. It engages in policy development through direct discussion, but also discharges its detailed responsibilities for planning, academic standards and the quality of the student experience through its four main subcommittees: Academic Planning and Resources Committee (APRC), Academic Standards Committee (ASC), Student Services Committee and the Board of Examiners for Progress and Award. Each year, both alone and in a shared meeting with the Governing Body, it addresses the Annual Quality Report (AQR) (see paragraphs 16 and 19) as the summative element of the College's annual evaluative cycle.

8 The Principal is the College's chief executive and accounting officer, although the College claims to have a dispersed system of academic leadership. It stated in its documentation that the Principal's academic leadership is manifested, in particular, in her chairing of Academic Board and her role in the process for selecting or appointing professors, readers and heads of school. The Deputy Principal chairs Research and Enterprise Committee and APRC has early sight of outline proposals for all new programmes and leads the academic planning process. The heads of school, two of whom also have senior chairing responsibilities, are responsible for identifying, planning and overseeing academic opportunities for their schools, and for providing academic leadership on curricular development. The Director of Learning and Teaching works with the relevant principal lecturers to ensure that the College's academic community engages fully with innovation and best practice. The Director of Quality Innovation works similarly with the principal lecturers for quality and the Office of the Academic Registrar to ensure that every opportunity for enhancing the quality of the College's academic provision is identified and exploited. Each school has a designated research coordinator who, with its professors and readers, provides academic leadership in research. Many heads of programme demonstrate academic leadership through the conceptualisation and development of new programmes.

9 While noting with interest both the extent to which academic leadership as a concept permeates many organisational levels within the College, and the College's inclusive approach to it, the assessor team was unclear how, precisely, the College defines academic leaders, concluding that the term is a loose definition and not a formal role or post. While the team was encouraged by the collegial spirit and determination to secure universal engagement with its aims and objectives which appear to underpin the College's approach, and while its enquiries did not uncover any confusion arising from it, the team is of the view that the potential for future uncertainty exists unless the College is clear about every line of accountability and the extent of its

strategic or operational devolution. Accordingly the team considers it desirable for the College to undertake a formal review of its approach to academic leadership, particularly to ensure the effectiveness of its accountability procedures.

10 The Principal is supported by an Executive Group both to advise her on strategic vision and operational management and to provide a linkage between the Governing Body and College staff for delivery of the Corporate Plan. This Group currently comprises a fairly large academic and professional membership of managers of schools and service departments. The College claimed in its documentation that its breadth facilitates the linkage of strategy and policy on the one hand and effective implementation on the other. Nonetheless the assessor team became aware in the course of its visit that the College is giving further consideration to these stated virtues, and undertaking a management review designed to improve the capacity of senior College and school-level managers to give greater attention to strategic, in particular external, matters; to give a more powerful voice to school-level staff in College development; and to improve decision-making. These objectives appear to the team to carry widespread support within the College.

11 At College level the changes are likely to involve replacing the Executive Group with a smaller College Executive Group supported by a wider Senior Management Group, and instituting two dialogue groups, one focusing on academic strategy and delivery, the other on academic and professional services. At school level the intentions are, first, to redesignate the present five schools as faculties (with two small schools amalgamating in the process) and, second, to create a new post of deputy dean in each faculty to deal with day-to-day operational issues, freeing deans to operate more strategically.

12 One member of the Executive Group informed the assessor team that, as informal meetings of relevant members are currently held to deal with issues as they arise, the College-level proposals essentially formalise and give greater transparency to existing practices. The team, while noting this point, formed the

view that the complexity of the proposals may be disproportionate to the size of the College. In particular the team was unable to ascertain the exact contribution to management to be made by the proposed dialogue groups, and is concerned that, should that contribution transpire to be more apparent than real, there would be a possibility of collegiality giving way to cynicism. Replacing five schools with four faculties, however, appears to the team an appropriate response to the small size of the schools being amalgamated. The team also assumes that the College will have reflected at length on whether introducing an additional layer of management at faculty level by appointing four deputy deans is the most efficient use of its resources.

13 Overall, the review of management arrangements provided the assessor team with a useful insight into the Principal's consultative approach to institutional developments. Senior staff at College and school level expressed their views in a manner which gave credence to the College's claim to have an inclusive and collegial culture. The team, while accepting that the proposed College Executive Group has the potential to provide more strategic and efficient decision-making, and that governors and senior managers will work together to ensure that the new faculty-level arrangements provide value for money, is aware of a number of possible pitfalls in the proposed new arrangements, and considers it advisable for the College to keep the clarity and effectiveness of its new arrangements under formal review.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

14 The College claimed in its documentation that its quality procedures place great emphasis on programme approval (validation), monitoring and review. Validation is a two-stage process concerned, first, with the place of a proposed programme in the academic strategy and the linkage of resource planning to academic development and, second, with

quality and standards. The College sees the specification of learning outcomes linked to appropriate assessment instruments and to its generic level and award descriptors as a central feature of the process.

15 New programme development begins with a range of internal discussions of varying levels of formality, culminating in the presentation of programme documentation to a validation panel constituted of internal and external academic peer and professional reviewers. As far as possible the College perceives the validation event developmentally, seeking not only to assure quality and standards but also to use the advice of experienced reviewers to enhance the proposal and to engage in constructive debate with the programme proposers. The College is currently piloting a change to the process designed both to integrate the two stages of the process and to give the programme specification a more central place in the documentation.

16 The College's annual evaluation procedure, which covers all academic provision, begins with the production of school annual evaluative reports (AERs), which contain a school action plan and an evaluation of modules and programmes, drawing appropriately on student opinion and external examiner reports. The AERs collectively contribute to the AQR, which contains a complementary College action plan, an evaluation of the work of ASC, an overview of external examiners' reports, commentaries on the work of the main service departments and an identification of lessons deriving from complaints and appeals heard during the year. Areas for concern arising from the AQR, which is scrutinised and approved by Academic Board and Audit Committee and, as noted above, discussed in a joint annual meeting of Academic Board and the Governing Body, are referred for action; good practice is identified for wider dissemination.

17 The periodic review procedure, which involves external peer reviewers, is currently linked to a six-yearly revalidation designed to ensure the continued currency of programmes. The College is currently consulting on revised

arrangements, to be implemented in academic year 2006-07, to separate review from revalidation. The procedure is likely to delegate the review of quality arrangements and the student experience to schools, with revalidation handled centrally on the basis of a procedure yet to be determined but involving appropriate externality. The assessor team concurs with the College's view that the present arrangement leaves something to be desired, and accordingly welcomes the consultation process, the success of which will doubtless form a part of future external reviews of the College's quality system.

18 As already indicated (paragraph 16) the annual evaluation of academic provision culminating in the production of the AQR is an important feature of the College's approach to academic quality management. The assessor team was encouraged to learn that the College had responded positively to uncertainties expressed in an earlier QAA evaluation report as to the rigour of the process used to produce, and the quality of internal debate on, the AQR. The team noted in particular that a lively debate in ASC had led the College to identify the need for a well-focused action plan and the introduction of procedural improvements, including achieving greater inter-school consistency in the production of AERs.

19 The College provided the assessor team with the unconfirmed draft AQR for academic year 2004-05 and the action plan following the previous year's report. The 2004-05 AQR, which was similar in structure to that of the previous year and appeared to the team both comprehensive and evaluative, identified areas of good practice and areas for development. It referred to plans for an Internal Quality Network intended to encourage staff to benefit from the experience and expertise of others in internal and external quality activities, including external examiner and programme validation and review, and noted revisions to the terms of reference of school curriculum and quality enhancement panels, an area of concern to a previous QAA team.

20 The action plan provided evidence of the College's action on issues identified in the AQR for academic year 2003-04. For example, the external examiner for the Joint Honours programme had questioned the adequacy of central resources allocated to this large and complex programme, causing the Academic Planning and Resources Committee to initiate an urgent review of the Joint Honours budget in April 2005. In the view of the assessor team, both the draft report and the previous year's action plan support the College's claim that it assures itself of its own academic health by means of an extensive, rigorous and effective annual evaluation of academic provision.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the standards of awards

21 Schools are responsible for assessment at modular level on the basis of policy and procedures as set out in the College Assessment Handbook. Assessment is undertaken by a module team guided by school and College procedures for matters such as double-marking and moderation. These activities are monitored and calibrated by subject external examiners together with the relevant school assessment panel (SAP). The outcomes of module assessments are determined at SAP and forwarded to the Registry, which oversees the consideration of the full profiles of marks for students with a view to progression and award. The assessor team notes that, while University of Leeds representatives sit on the College Board of Examiners for Progress and Award, under the terms of the accreditation agreement they no longer sit on SAPs as internal examiners, although the University does consider assessment results in the course of annual reporting.

22 Assessment details are disseminated to students in module handbooks. The College claimed in its documentation that it emphasises the matching of assessment activities to module and programme outcomes. These in turn are set in the context of its Cognitive Capability Matrix (CCM) and Qualifications Descriptors, grids which define the College's understandings

of level outcomes, and which relate to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and subject benchmark statements. The assessor team also notes that all assessment procedures have been mapped against the relevant section of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, published by QAA, which is available electronically and as hard copy to all members of academic staff.

23 Assessment regulations are disseminated to students through the Student Guide and drawn to their attention in programme handbooks. Assessment tasks range from formal closed examinations and traditional essays to presentations, performances and assessed placements. Schools are required to have open and transparent marking criteria relating both to the College scale of marks and degree classes and to the CCM. The College, while confident that its approach to assessment is rigorous and equitable, acknowledged in its documentation that its procedures were until recently elaborate and burdensome, relative to the situation in comparable institutions. Accordingly it has undertaken a review of its assessment requirements with a view to simplifying them, and has also committed funding to staff training to ensure greater uniformity of practice at school level. As part of this latter project it has produced an Assessment Handbook, allocated funds to schools to document their assessment procedures and archive their assessed work, and added a Registry representative to all SAP memberships. The assessor team welcomes these initiatives, which offer further evidence of the College's responsiveness to change and its self-reflective culture.

24 External examiners, which the College considers key to the maintenance of standards and the guardianship of its assessment procedures, are approved jointly by the Chair of ASC and a University of Leeds representative on the basis of nominations from schools, and inducted by means of a central College event and individual school and subject area

briefings. External examiners' reports are received by the Registry and circulated promptly to relevant schools, senior College officers and the University of Leeds. Their contents are addressed at school and College level, with any matter of exceptional concern being addressed immediately at College level through circulation to senior College officers. The overall contents of external examiners' reports are reviewed at College level as part of the annual evaluative process which culminates in the production of the College AQR. The assessor team is satisfied that the College is in a position to assure itself that all issues of significance raised in external examiners' reports are properly and effectively addressed throughout the institution.

25 Until relatively recently subject-level external examiners were involved only at the SAP, the overall degree classification process being handled at College level. This two-stage approach unavoidably excluded such examiners from a closer review of individual student profiles and from an overall review of cohort performance. Since academic year 2004-05, however, in a move which the College claims has been widely welcomed, SAPs have also been provided with provisional mark profiles and degree classifications to enable them to form a better overview of student achievement prior to making recommendations to the College Board of Examiners. The College has also invited all external examiners to the College Board, although take-up of this offer has thus far been very limited.

26 In addition, since the academic year 2003-04, the College has appointed from among its external examiners a Chief External Examiner (CEE) with responsibility for overseeing the overall award process at the College Board. Both AQRs produced subsequent to this innovation were made available to the assessor team, and record the CEE's satisfaction with arrangements. They note, for example, that the CEE complimented the College for the efficiency with which its new student record system had been introduced and for its handling of mitigating

circumstances claims, which, in response to previous concerns about equity of practice, are now considered by a College-level Concessions Committee.

27 The assessor team scrutinised documentation relating to and stemming from the activities of the CEE, and discussed the rationale for her appointment with senior staff of the College. The team saw evidence of the value of the CEE role and the seriousness with which the College addresses issues raised. Overall, therefore, the team concludes that the appointment of a CEE to oversee the College's award process is a feature of good practice.

28 Nonetheless, in the course of its scrutiny the assessor team also identified two aspects of the operation of the role where it believes its value could be enhanced. First, the team was unable to locate any document detailing her responsibilities; and, while it can be inferred from documentation that the post holder's duties relate to the efficiency of the College's examination board procedures, including the administrative support underpinning them, and not to the academic standards of awards, a formal job specification would be of value to future CEEs and those liaising with them. Second, the CEE reports annually to the College on matters falling within her remit, but only in a separate section of the external examiner's report. The team noted that although the two reports prepared thus far distinguish these roles, the CEE section was noticeably brief, and it believes a bespoke CEE report, possibly written to a College template, would increase its standing and value. Accordingly, the team considers it desirable for the College to enhance the role of the CEE by providing a written specification of the duties involved and by requiring the submission of a separate and more detailed CEE's Report.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

29 The first National Student Survey placed the College in a mid-position overall, with strong performances in personal development, academic support and teaching: positive features confirmed in the assessor team's discussions with students. The College reported in its documentation that it was reasonably pleased with this outcome, its particular strengths reflecting both its teaching-led mission and the opportunities deriving from its small size. The College has identified as particular areas for attention the effectiveness of timetabling, communication with students regarding changes to courses, and general course organisation.

30 Students who met the assessor team confirmed that these matters are already being addressed, and commented positively on their involvement in the process as well as, more generally, on their overall experience in an institution described by one of them as a 'learning community' which actively encourages them to achieve their potential. International students spoke in complimentary terms about the support and advice given to them both before joining their programmes and at the College, and students in general praised the accessibility of individual staff and the College's flexibility in responding to student circumstances. These included one situation involving students who had been allocated to distant professional placements and a second in which the student body had encountered difficulties in organising the election of programme representatives.

31 Sabbatical officers of the Students' Union (SU) spoke similarly positively about their ease of access to the Principal and senior managers. Both the Academic Board and the Governing Body appear active in seeking student views, and the President of the SU particularly appreciated the fact that the Chairman of the Governing Body had sought his views on a specific matter in advance of a Board meeting.

The assessor team formed the view that the SU adopts a professional approach to its responsibilities, and that its ability to do so in part reflects the manner in which the College conducts its relations with the SU.

32 The AQR includes an annual evaluation of different aspects of the student experience, including student complaints (appropriately adjusted to make reference to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator). The AQR for academic year 2003-04 noted a small decline in the number of complaints from the previous year, only a very small number of which involved academic concerns, and from an analysis of which no recurrent themes were discernible. The sections on student services, which appear to the assessor team comprehensive in coverage and action oriented, identify as areas for further development aspects of counselling, disability and writing support, and finance. In the light of this report and the 2004 curriculum review, the College undertook a review of student services in academic year 2004-05 which, inter alia, resulted in the introduction of service level standards either ab initio or to underpin existing service level agreements. The review has also led to improvements to the provision of information to students and induction arrangements. The team believes the College provides a caring and helpful environment for its students who reciprocally appreciate the commitment and expertise of the teaching staff.

33 Overall, the assessor team is of the view that the College provides an appropriate and strong learning environment for its students. The students who spoke to the team appreciated both the resources available and the manner in which they are supported in deploying them to optimal effect. The team considers the College's claim that its ethos is simultaneously caring and challenging is well founded, and accepts that the quality of the services provided has been considerably enhanced following the 2004-05 review. Overall, in the view of the team, the College's integration of learning resources together with training in their use, and the balance of

challenge with support for its particular student population, are sufficiently consonant and coherent for the College's provision and support of learning resources to be considered a feature of good practice.

Conclusions

34 The assessor team believes 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. Overall the team considers the College has a clearly defined set of committees and quality assurance systems, with appropriate student representation at institution and school level. Committee reporting lines are explicit and well understood, and the fact that support staff as well as academics serve on appropriate committees facilitates the integration of academic planning and resource allocation.

35 Nonetheless the assessor team is also aware that the College is going through a period of significant change. Its assumption of taught degree awarding powers with effect from academic year 2007-08 in an uncertain climate will present new challenges, and the results of its managerial restructuring were uncertain at the time of the team's visit. The present arrangements provide an integrated approach to academic and student service planning, and the creation of a smaller Executive and the introduction of an additional tier of management at faculty level may, unless carefully managed, have unintended consequences for the culture and ethos of a small and intimate institution. The team therefore considers it advisable for the College to keep the clarity and effectiveness of its new arrangements under formal review.

36 The assessor team also noted the extent to which responsibility for academic leadership is devolved to different personnel in different ways. While appreciating the importance of ensuring the engagement in College policies and developments of all levels of staff, the team was of the view that there is a danger that in a

small number of cases this engagement may have been achieved at the expense of clear lines of accountability. While one desirable consequence of the proposed changes may be that greater levels of clarity are achieved, for the present the team considers it desirable for the College to undertake a formal review of its approach to academic leadership, particularly to ensure the effectiveness of its accountability procedures.

37 The assessor team considers the College's validation and review processes sound and effective. The team is especially conscious that the College has kept these under review and has made appropriate modifications to policy and practice in the light of experience and external comment, and regards the College's responsiveness and flexibility as significant institutional characteristics.

38 The Annual Quality Report draws appropriately on school-level experience and the views of students and external examiners. Its findings are rigorously addressed and the procedures to ensure that significant recommendations are pursued appear robust. Overall it can be said that the College maintains a high level of awareness of, and engagement with, the institutional implications of external examiners' comments; at school level there is evidence that matters raised by external examiners are appropriately considered and acted upon, and that the College has mechanisms to ensure that any derelictions are brought to institutional attention.

39 The assessor team considers the external examiner system sound at both College and school levels. The introduction of a Chief External Examiner appears imaginative and constructive, and is considered a feature of good practice. Nonetheless the team also notes certain areas where there is scope for development, and considers it desirable for the College to enhance the role of the Chief External Examiner by providing a written specification of the duties involved and by requiring the submission of a separate and more detailed Chief External Examiner's Report.

40 The College's procedures for supporting learning, not least in its achievement of complementarity between formal learning support and pastoral care appear to the assessor team a significant strength. The College has taken considerable pains to enhance its procedures for learning support and to integrate the provision of new facilities with training in their use. Students advised the team that they felt simultaneously supported and challenged in what they described as a genuine 'learning environment', and the degree of consonance between this view and the College's stated policy to nurture and develop students who might not thrive in a traditional higher education environment leads the team to conclude that the College's provision and support of learning resources together constitute a feature of good practice.

