

Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication

MARCH 2007

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ISBN 978 1 84482 731 2

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Printed copies are available from:

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

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Preface

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

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

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

The aims of the revised institutional audit process are to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of:

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

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

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

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

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

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

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary and the report, without the annex, are published in hard copy. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (*Institutional audit handbook: England and Northern Ireland 2006 - Annexes B and C* refer).

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication (the College) from 26 to 29 March 2007 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the College offers on behalf of the University of Sussex.

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

The words 'academic standards' are used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK.

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

In institutional audit, both academic standards and academic quality are reviewed.

Outcomes of the institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the College 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 delivers on behalf of the University of Sussex
- 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 found that there were individual elements of the institution's framework for the management of learning opportunities which had the potential to contribute to improvement and enhancement. There was also evidence of activity that could be harnessed systematically in enhancement of the College's management of its provision. The audit team concurs with the College's own estimation of its approach to quality enhancement as embryonic, but notes the College's clear intention to give attention to this area.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

At the time of the audit there were no postgraduate research students enrolled at the College.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as good practice:

- the comprehensive and accessible Quality intranet pages that contribute significantly to the effective communication of policy and procedures to staff

- the College's deliberate and systematic involvement of undergraduate students in multiple aspects of its academic activities
- the approach to the annual monitoring of support services which has the potential to contribute to the enhancement of the student learning experience
- the integration of employability within the undergraduate curriculum and the preparation of students for the world of work
- the provision of clear, informative induction material for new staff.

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- review the requirements for quoracy for internal progression boards and ensure that they are observed for all meetings of the boards
- review and revise the quality assurance, reporting and management structures for its taught postgraduate provision to secure parity with those for the undergraduate courses.

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- review the arrangements for course review, periodic review and course revalidation to eliminate duplication and to establish clarity of purpose for each process
- make explicit and formalise the institutional approach to enhancing the quality of learning opportunities.

Reference points

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

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

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

Report

1 An institutional audit of Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication (Ravensbourne; the College) was undertaken during the week commencing 26 March 2007. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the College's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers on behalf of the University of Sussex (the University) and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Dr N Casey, Professor D Meehan, Dr K Sharp and Professor P Sullivan, auditors, and Mr D Batty, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mrs S Patterson, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 Ravensbourne is a specialist higher education college located in Chislehurst, Kent. In the academic year 2006-07 there were 1,155 full-time equivalent students enrolled on higher education programmes of study. Ravensbourne is an affiliate college of the University which is the awarding body for the higher education programmes. At the time of the audit Ravensbourne offered 15 undergraduate programmes organised in two faculties: the Faculty of Design and the Faculty of Communication Media, and two postgraduate courses managed outside the faculty structure.

4 Ravensbourne's Mission Statement, Core Values and Strategic Aims were approved by the Board of Governors in July 2003. The Mission Statement is as follows.

'Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication aims to provide innovative and dynamic educational opportunities through high quality teaching and student support. We are a national institution with international perspectives but we attach particular importance to contributing to London's social and cultural vibrancy and its economic prosperity. We encourage creativity and enterprise in our students and staff and champion the creative exploitation of digital technologies in design and communications.'

Through its Mission Statement, Ravensbourne is committed to 'maintaining and expanding its niche position in the creative exploitation of technology in the converging areas of design, the delivery of high quality education in its specialist areas, and to working collaboratively to achieve its aims'.

5 A significant development in the College's long-term strategy is the decision to relocate the College to the Greenwich Peninsula. The decision to relocate was prompted by concerns about the College's longer term sustainability without expansion, concerns exacerbated by the fact that its current buildings were nearing the end of their economic life, were poorly located to support fulfilment of the College's Mission and did not allow for academic developments which the College regarded as desirable. At the time of the audit, plans for significant expansion of the College's taught postgraduate provision were under consideration.

6 The College was subject to an institutional audit in December 2003 which concluded that limited confidence could be placed in the soundness of the College's present and likely future management of its programmes, and the academic standards of the awards it made on behalf of the University. The College accepted that the audit report represented an accurate assessment of its arrangements for the management of both the academic standards and the quality of provision at the time of that audit. The College prepared an action plan in response to the findings of the audit and subsequently provided evidence that the actions had been progressed. QAA accepted that appropriate action had been taken to address the recommendations and the audit was formally signed off by the QAA Board in March 2006. The present audit team confirmed that the College had given careful consideration and responded thoughtfully to the report of that audit and had fully implemented the action plan so that the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities was secure, as reflected in the findings of the audit.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

7 The College has in place a range of explicit policies, procedures and regulations for the setting and maintenance of academic standards which appear on the Quality team's section of the staff and student intranet. Staff have a clear understanding of the College's policies, procedures and structures which are generally applied with proper consistency across the institution. The Quality section provides information about the College's processes on comprehensive and readily accessible intranet pages that contribute significantly to the effective communication of policy and procedures to staff and, as such, are identified in the audit as a feature of good practice.

8 Overall responsibility for the setting and maintenance of academic standards rests with the Academic Board which is the College's premier academic and deliberative committee; its membership includes representatives of the College's academic and support departments, the University and the Students' Union. The Academic Board is supported by a clear subcommittee structure, with the Quality Development Committee making recommendations and giving advice to the Academic Board in relation to the policies and procedures for the setting and maintenance of standards. The Learning and Teaching Review Committee maintains a strategic overview of developments in learning and teaching. The membership of both of these subcommittees includes provision for representation of both permanent academic and support staff and sessional staff and students. The Quality Development Committee and the Learning and Teaching Review Committee are each chaired by a head of faculty.

9 The Academic Board is largely successful in meeting its responsibilities; in practice it is reliant on detailed consideration of the College's academic business and development of policy by its subcommittees before ultimate approval at the Board. The minutes of the Quality Development Committee demonstrate a systematic and thorough approach, including due consideration of external reference points in calibrating academic standards. The agenda, papers (with the exception of some reserved items) and minutes of all committees are made available on the Quality section of the intranet. The College routinely produces and analyses a wide selection of quantitative data in its interrogation and confirmation of the standards of awards, for example, through annual course monitoring reporting thereon to the University.

10 There are two faculty committees which are subcommittees of, and report directly to, the Academic Board. The faculty committees are a useful conduit between course committees and the Academic Board offering, for example, additional scrutiny of award standards through their consideration of annual course monitoring reports and external examiner reports. The area of Postgraduate Studies sits outside the faculty structure so that the operation of the taught postgraduate provision is considered only at course committee level with no intermediary consideration before receipt of the minutes at Academic Board. Given its plans for the expansion of its taught postgraduate provision, the College may wish to consider whether scrutiny by the Academic Board of the detail of the operation of the taught postgraduate provision would be sustainable and provide the requisite assurance of academic standards if significantly more student numbers were involved.

11 The College's course approval and validation processes make effective use of the Academic Infrastructure at all stages, initially in new course proposals and then in internal and external validation processes, which involve the development of programme specifications in line with the University's requirements. At each stage of the course validation process the academic standard of awards is scrutinised by appropriately constituted panels which include at least one external peer. The internal validation process is noteworthy in its rigour and results in recommendations for improvement and a schedule for action to be taken prior to external validation taking place.

12 The College deploys a range of course monitoring and review mechanisms in its management of academic standards; these mechanisms meet the expectations of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher*

education (Code of practice). Annual course monitoring and processes for review of the operation of courses generally give the necessary attention to consideration of award standards; the requirements for annual course monitoring are well defined but not always observed consistently. The College has procedures for quinquennial revalidation and periodic review of programmes, with a process of course review being applied three years after initial approval, and, in due course, revalidation. There is considerable overlap in the specifications for these processes and their separate functions and interrelationship are not well defined. The College's use of approval monitoring and review procedures in its management of academic standards is sound, but the audit team thinks it desirable that the College review its arrangements for course review, periodic review and course revalidation to eliminate duplication and to establish clarity of purpose for each process.

13 The Assessment Policy provides a framework and general principles for the relevant regulations and procedures and is not intended to provide a strategic direction to the operation of assessment. The Academic Regulations set out clearly the requirements for the conduct of assessment. The College reviews the Regulations annually before submitting them to the University for approval. Assessment requirements are outlined in course handbooks and unit specifications, with additional detail being provided in individual assessment briefs. Students are aware of the assessment regulations and procedures and understand what they have to do to succeed. The approach to mitigating circumstances is fair and consistently applied but there is variability across the College in the granting of extensions to deadlines for the submission of coursework; in the interests of equity the College will wish to secure a uniform approach in this area. Coverage of plagiarism in the Academic Regulations is limited but includes reference to an 'existing College policy on cheating and plagiarism' which was not included in the evidence available for the audit. There are materials about plagiarism on the Learning Resource Centre website and Personal and Professional Development Units include guidance on academic honesty and referencing. Overall, the College's approach to assessment is clearly defined, is in alignment with the relevant guidance in the *Code of practice* and, with the exceptions noted above, is operating as intended.

14 The External Examiner Handbook, which was drafted taking account of the section of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*, specifies the College's policies and procedures for external involvement in assessment. The procedures meet the University's requirements but are also tailored to the characteristics of the College's academic provision. External examiners are required to report on a range of matters including, the standards of the awards and their comparability with cognate provision at other higher education institutions, the appropriateness of the assessment criteria, and the soundness and fairness of assessment processes. Minutes of final examination boards provide evidence that external examiners play an active part in the assessment regime at the College. The effectiveness of assessment policies and regulations is evaluated annually through the College's annual Examination Board Report. The audit found that the College made strong and scrupulous use of independent external examiners in its management of academic standards, supporting a judgement of confidence in the College's current and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers on behalf of the University.

15 The College operates internal progression boards to consider student performance. The quoracy requirements for the internal progression boards stipulate that the boards must 'as a minimum, have present the Chair (or Deputy) and two other members'. Examination of the minutes of the internal progression boards established that a significant number of the internal progression boards had been conducted in contravention of the quoracy regulation. The audit team considers that the quorum for the boards does not provide for breadth of input into discussion of student performance and that, taken with the non compliance with even this limited requirement, it has the potential to put academic standards at risk. Accordingly, the team advises the College to review the requirements for quoracy for internal progression boards and to ensure that they are observed for all meetings of the boards.

16 In its Briefing Paper the College claimed that it had in place, 'an appropriate framework for the setting and securing of its academic standards...and that its policies, procedures and regulations reflect[ed] the expectations of the QAA Academic Infrastructure'. The Briefing Paper continues, 'the roles and responsibilities of individuals and Committees within the framework are clear and the College seeks to ensure that these are adequately communicated to staff, students and other stakeholders'. The findings of the audit support the College's own evaluation of the effectiveness of its management of academic standards. In addition, the audit team acknowledge the responsiveness of the College to the previous audit through a comprehensive review and action plan and the successful translation of this plan into subject level and institution-wide improvement.

17 The audit found that confidence could reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

18 The Learning and Teaching Strategy, which is published on the College's intranet, identifies the College's key strategic aims which include 'enterprise and employability and continued innovation in digital technology'. Implementation of the Strategy was supported by staff development and is monitored by the Learning and Teaching Review Committee. Internal and external validation, annual course monitoring, course review and periodic review are the key processes through which the College assures itself of the effectiveness of its management of learning opportunities.

19 The Management Team is responsible for appraisal of new course proposals in the context of resource provision, market position and alignment with the institution's mission. The course approval process is sound and implemented with consistency. Internal validation documents are comprehensive in their evaluation, and are complemented by a statement of issues and actions taken by course teams prior to submission of course proposals to the University for formal validation. The active involvement of the Director of Quality and Academic Services throughout the validation process provides a managed overview of implementation of the procedures to promote consistency and to identify and share good practice.

20 Approval, monitoring and review reports for the undergraduate provision are discussed at course committees and faculty committees before consideration at the Quality Development Committee. As the taught postgraduate provision is managed outside the faculty structure, reports on the provision pass direct from the Postgraduate Course Committee to the Quality Development Committee without the benefit of scrutiny at the faculty level. In the view of the audit team, there is therefore potential for the taught postgraduate provision to be afforded less detailed scrutiny than that applied to the undergraduate courses.

21 The College's taught postgraduate courses were subject to periodic review in 2005, resulting in the identification of nine matters for action and four areas of strength. The report from the periodic review concluded 'based on the evidence seen by the Team and their engagement with staff and students that the standard of the provision was broadly in line with what might be expected on similar provision...in peer institutions'. The audit team concurs with the view that the academic standards of the provision were secure but considers that, collectively, the matters identified for action indicated that the quality of provision was in jeopardy. There is little evidence of response to significant recommendations from the review up to and including the annual monitoring reports of March 2007. It is not clear where matters arising from the periodic review were considered nor where responsibility was assigned or assumed for ensuring that the requisite action was taken. This situation appears to the team to indicate that, as in the case of assurance of academic standards, the reporting route for the postgraduate provision means that there is potential for significant issues associated with learning opportunities to fall between the remits of the course committees and the Quality Development Committee.

22 The audit team came to the view that the positioning of the management of the postgraduate provision outside the faculty structure had militated against detailed consideration of the outcomes of the review and resulted in insufficient action being taken on issues identified in the report of the periodic review. The team considers that this also contributed to a number of these issues being unresolved when the courses went forward for combined validation in February 2007. The report of the internal validation resulted in 11 requirements for action, some of which echoed those identified in the periodic review, before the proposal could proceed to external validation. Discussion with students during the audit visit established that some progress had been made in responding to the exigent requirements of both the periodic review and the internal validation. The audit found that the College was belatedly acting on the recommendations in the reports and discussion with senior staff and evidence of the stringency of responses to matters for action in other areas of the College's provision gave the audit team confidence that the necessary action would be taken. Nonetheless the audit team considers it advisable that the College review and revise the quality assurance, reporting and management structures for its taught postgraduate provision to secure parity with those for the undergraduate courses.

23 The audit found that the College had established a range of approval, monitoring and review procedures for the management of learning opportunities: the processes are stringent, meet the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure and, in the case of the undergraduate provision, are demonstrably effective in the management of learning opportunities; the support for learning opportunities in postgraduate provision is less straightforward, given its position in the College's management and committee structures. The overlap in the requirements for each of the processes in relation to the assurance of academic standards noted above applies equally to the management of learning opportunities. The College may wish to consider whether the combined contribution of its review processes to the management of learning opportunities is proportionate to the demand on staff time and other resources. Accordingly the audit team considers it desirable that the College review the arrangements for course review, periodic review and course revalidation to eliminate duplication and to establish clarity of purpose for each process.

24 In 2005 the College undertook an appraisal of its alignment with the *Code of practice* resulting in amendments and improvements to the approach to the provision of learning opportunities for students. The *Code*, the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements are used as points of reference, alongside consideration of the requirement of industry and business, in appraisal of learning opportunities in approval, monitoring, revalidation and review. The use of professional practitioners in course delivery makes a positive contribution to ensuring the currency of learning opportunities.

25 The Assessment Policy and Academic Regulations support the College's approach to formative assessment. The Academic Regulations state that 'students will normally receive written feedback...during the course of the year' and that 'the student will also receive a provisional result, normally within three to four weeks of the assessment deadline, but no later than six weeks'. Results of the College's Course Experience Questionnaires and the National Student Survey indicate student concern about the quality and timeliness of assessment feedback. Students are clear about the requirements on them and about the contribution of formative assessment to their learning experience, but both undergraduate and postgraduate students reported considerable variability in the promptness of feedback across different courses.

26 The College is taking some action to improve the timeliness of feedback through a requirement that students be provided with more frequent updates on their work, with the proposed development of an assessment feedback template based on learning outcomes, and the scheduling of staff development events on giving feedback. Reporting on the annual monitoring process for the last two years has identified an intention to produce a common assessment feedback form for all courses. The audit team would encourage the College to act to secure consistent and timely provision of formative feedback on assessment to its students. The inexactitude of the College's expectations for the provision of formative feedback results in variability of practice which limits the contribution of assessment policies to institutional management of learning opportunities.

27 The College makes systematic use of external examiner reports in its management of learning opportunities. External examiners report on the quality of the student learning experience, resources, student performance, and the aims, content and delivery of the curriculum, and the reports are considered at course and faculty committees. The reports are analysed by the Director of Quality and Academic Services who produces a report on good practice and issues for further consideration identified in the reports which is considered at the Quality Development Committee.

28 The College draws on a range of management information in its management of learning opportunities. Comprehensive segmented data are used by the institution for annual monitoring purposes with progress against identified issues evaluated through the year. These data include recruitment and retention against the Higher Education Funding Council for England's performance indicators, student achievement, admissions and recruitment trends amongst specific target groups, and attendance at staff development events. The College makes sound use of management information at many levels but information and analysis are produced in different contexts limiting the scope for a totally integrated approach. There is evidence that the College's assertion that '...management information in relation to academic performance is more readily available and accessible...' to the extent that '...the use of statistical information has been incorporated in the reform of the College quality systems...' was justified.

29 There is considerable evidence to demonstrate that the College takes effective account of the views of students in its management of learning opportunities. At course level this includes students' active participation in course committee meetings; actions are taken at all levels in response to student issues. Further views are taken from the National Student Survey and the College's annual Course Experience Questionnaire, which are discussed at course committees, faculty committees, the Academic Board and its subcommittees as appropriate, and by the Board of Governors; these views also contribute to the annual course monitoring process. The College offers 'Snowball' discussions at course level, which are led by a staff member unconnected with the course in question, who gathers information about the positive and negative features of the student experience of each course, to feed into the annual course monitoring process.

30 Students are represented at all levels of the College's deliberative structures. There are no sabbatical posts within the Students' Union. The Students' Union Co-Presidents are members of the Board of Governors, and there is Students' Union representation on the Academic Board and its two policy subcommittees. Representatives from each level of each course are members of course committees, and a delegate from this group attends faculty committees; issues raised by student representatives are discussed and actions are agreed and implemented. In meetings with the audit team, students confirmed that they were actively encouraged to contribute to discussion at all levels of the central committee system and that their views were taken into account in decision-making. In this context students cited examples of modifications to the plans for the new campus in response to their feedback. This is an example of the College's deliberate and systematic involvement of undergraduate students in multiple aspects of its academic activities which the audit identified as a feature of good practice.

31 There is evidence of effective student involvement at all stages of the course approval, monitoring and review processes including, where feasible, at the validation stage. The role of students in the quality assurance processes of the College is further enhanced by external examiners routinely meeting groups of students, and taking account of their views in the preparation of their reports.

32 The audit found that the College was making effective use of student representation and internal and external feedback mechanisms to take account of the views of students in its management of learning opportunities.

33 The College has established 'research informed teaching' which the audit team found was aligned with the College's mission, helped to develop the curriculum, maintained the currency of student learning, and supported student employability. Research informed teaching is linked to appraisal and staff development and takes many forms, including practitioner based interactions with industry, engagement with postgraduate and doctoral programmes and Higher Education Academy membership. Research informed teaching is a key contributor to staff scholarship, but is managed at individual or local level with no institutional overview of activity or outcomes. The College may wish to consider whether central oversight of activities associated with research informed teaching might contribute to institutional management of learning opportunities.

34 In meetings with the audit team, students expressed general satisfaction with learning resources and spoke enthusiastically of the extensive contacts with industry, of College facilities and support, of the Learning Resource Centre, the Enterprise and Innovation Centre, 'Rave on Air', the virtual learning environment and 'master classes' with industry professionals. Permanent academic staff clearly valued the input of practitioners to courses.

35 Learning resources are evaluated at course, faculty and college levels through annual course monitoring and feedback from the Course Experience Questionnaire and National Student Survey results, with actions taken as a result. Since autumn 2006 the College has operated an Annual Service Monitoring Procedure. The process results in comprehensive reports which are posted on the Quality pages of the College website. The audit found that the approach to the annual monitoring of support services was a feature of good practice in the management of learning resources which had the potential to contribute to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

36 At undergraduate level there is an effective and embedded approach to personal tutoring, as well as informal access to full and part-time staff as an additional source of guidance which is much valued by students. Referral to specialist support services, for example, for language support for international undergraduate students, is straightforward and effective. There is an effective and integrated approach to Personal Development Planning, which students find helpful in developing their skills for employment. As noted, students also spoke highly of support from the College's Enterprise and Innovation Centre. The integration of employability within the undergraduate curriculum and the preparation of students for the world of work are identified as features of good practice in the audit.

37 At the time of the audit tutorial arrangements for taught postgraduate students had recently been changed in response to student concerns and the revised arrangements were not yet fully embedded. Taught postgraduate students consider that the provision of specialist language support for master's level students whose first language is not English is inadequate and there are no differentiated specialist student support services for postgraduate students, particularly in respect of international students. This apparent lack of consideration of the specific learning opportunity needs of taught postgraduate students reinforces the need for the College to review its approach to the management of its taught postgraduate provision.

38 The Human Resources Strategy and the Learning and Teaching Strategy both contribute to assurance of the quality of staff. The former has wide-ranging corporate objectives, the latter focuses more on the professional development of staff. Academic staff are clear about how these strategies shape their own and the institution's development.

39 There are sound arrangements for staff induction, supported by clear and comprehensive documentation. Sessional staff receive an induction pack which covers a range of material including essential matters relating to learning and teaching and quality assurance. The provision of clear, informative induction material for new staff is identified as a feature of good practice in the audit. All permanent staff receive an annual appraisal that contributes to the assessment of training needs against the Corporate Plan; with effect from the academic year 2007-08 the appraisal scheme will be extended to some sessional staff. Since 2004 the College has operated

a peer observation of teaching scheme; participation is not as comprehensive as the College would wish and the audit team would encourage the College to embed the scheme further and to extend it to sessional staff.

40 The College offers a comprehensive staff development programme, including events that cover key issues in relation to quality assurance, academic standards and the Academic Infrastructure. The College aims to achieve 100 per cent membership of the Higher Education Academy. The audit team noted the College's commitment to this goal, but there was limited information and clarity about how this related to the institution's wider aims in learning and teaching.

41 The Briefing Paper stated that, '...an appropriate framework...for maintaining the quality of [the College's] learning opportunities was in place and that its policies, procedures and regulations reflected the expectations of the QAA Academic Infrastructure...'. Evidence available to the audit team supports this view; particularly concerning the undergraduate programmes where an appropriate framework makes a significant contribution to the College's management of the quality of learning opportunities for students.

42 The audit team found many sound policies and examples of effective implementation of the institution's management of learning opportunities. Since the previous audit, clear improvements have been made, many of which are well integrated into the College's systems and deployed across the institution, in systematic and effective ways in support of the institutional mission. The team noted the routine use of data to assist in the College's decision-making concerning, for example, learning resources and new learning opportunities for students, and found that data analysis was used to help share best practice and identify improvement opportunities. The team found that the College's management of learning opportunities for undergraduate students was effective, although further attention to its comparatively small postgraduate provision is advisable.

43 The audit found that confidence could reasonably be placed in the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

44 In the Briefing Paper the College stated that 'given the context of the QAA Report of the Institutional Audit 2003, the emphasis ha[d] been on the identification and solution of issues. The identification of strengths and the dissemination of good practice has received less emphasis than might be the case within "normal running"'.

45 One of the strategic aims outlined in the Learning and Teaching Strategy is quality assurance and enhancement, namely to embed a robust framework for assuring the quality and enhancement of learning and teaching at faculty and course level. There are four objectives associated with this aim '(i) to enhance internal academic quality systems by developing a review system for support; (ii) to engage fully at faculty and at course level with Ofsted's quality framework at FE [further education] level and with QAA's FHEQ [*The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*], Code of Practice and Subject Benchmark Statements at HE [higher education] level and with the wider further and higher education agendas and to provide this activity with appropriate support, (iii) to continue to develop tools to facilitate the implementation of sound quality systems including peer observation, the personal tutorial system, unit delivery planning, individual learning plans and student feedback mechanisms and, (iv) to continue to develop formal use of statistical information in course evaluation and planning'.

46 The audit found that there were individual elements of the institution's framework for the management of learning opportunities which had the potential to contribute to improvement and enhancement in this area. There was also evidence of activity that could be harnessed systematically in enhancement of the College's provision. The audit team concurs with the

College's own estimation that its approach to quality enhancement was embryonic but noted the College's clear intention to give attention to this area. The team considers it desirable that the College make explicit and formalise the institutional approach to enhancing the quality of learning opportunities.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

47 At the time of the audit the College did not have any collaborative arrangements for delivery of higher education provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

48 At the time of the audit there were no postgraduate research students enrolled at the College.

Section 7: Published information

49 The College provides a full and accurate range of published information for staff and for prospective and current students. Information provided for undergraduate students about their courses, obligations and academic regulations, College facilities and support services is accessible, complete and correct. Comprehensive information and guidance on policies and quality management processes, and committee minutes and external examiner reports are provided on the College intranet. Some elements of the published information for taught postgraduate students do not meet the same high standards as those for undergraduate students; the College will wish to review the information provided to its postgraduate students for accuracy.

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

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

51 As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the College 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 delivers on behalf of the University of Sussex
- 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.

Features of good practice

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

- i the comprehensive and accessible Quality intranet pages that contribute significantly to the effective communication of policy and procedures to staff (paragraph 7)
- ii the College's deliberate and systematic involvement of undergraduate students in multiple aspects of its academic activities (paragraph 30)
- iii the approach to the annual monitoring of support services which has the potential to contribute to the enhancement of the student learning experience (paragraph 35)
- iv the integration of employability within the undergraduate curriculum and the preparation of students for the world of work (paragraph 36)
- v the provision of clear, informative induction material for new staff (paragraph 39).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action the team considers advisable:

- i review the requirements for quoracy for internal progression boards and ensure that they are observed for all meetings of the boards (paragraph 15)
- ii review and revise the quality assurance, reporting and management structures for taught postgraduate provision to secure parity with those for the undergraduate courses (paragraph 22).

Recommendations for action the team considers desirable:

- iii review the arrangements for course review, periodic review and course revalidation to eliminate duplication and to establish clarity of purpose for each process (paragraphs 12 and 23)
- iv make explicit and formalise the institutional approach to enhancing the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 46).

Appendix

Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication's response to the institutional audit report

Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication welcomes the QAA Report of Institutional Audit 2007. The College has devoted considerable energy and resource since its last QAA Audit to the fundamental reform of its quality systems, committee structure and the embedding of these changes in the academic life of the College.

The College is delighted that the auditors place confidence in both our management of the academic standards of the awards that we deliver and our management of the quality of the learning opportunities we offer to students. The College is also pleased to note that the Audit highlights five features of good practice.

Ravensbourne graduates have an excellent reputation in the creative industries to which the College relates. Ravensbourne student successes in prestigious national competitions and in gaining graduate employment in the industries to which we relate is disproportionate to our size. As the College prepares for its relocation to the Greenwich peninsula, the Audit Report gives us great confidence that we can continue to deliver and enhance the high quality specialist education for which we are already renowned.

The College takes seriously the recommendations outlined in the Report though none were identified as essential and will take these into account as we review, build upon and further improve our current systems. Indeed, the College has already acted on a number of the recommendations.

In respect of those recommendations considered advisable, the College was already redeveloping its postgraduate provision at the time of the Audit and is now taking forward for revalidation a new postgraduate framework in the 2007-08 academic year. This will provide us with a suite of postgraduate courses highly tuned to the needs of the creative professions in the twenty first century. We will put in place appropriate quality reporting and management structures appropriate for assurance of these courses. In response to the second recommendation the College has already reformed its arrangements for internal Progression Boards.

In respect of those recommendations considered desirable, the College will review its course review, periodic review and revalidation processes in order to reduce perceived duplications within these. These systems for programme approval, monitoring and review have served us well to date ensuring our courses are of high standard, fit for purpose and underpinned with clear student facing documentation. However, since the Audit of December 2003, the College has focussed on the quality assurance of its provision. The College's systems are mature and embedded so that the emphasis can move towards the systematic enhancement of the student experience as well as its assurance. The College therefore welcomes the audit team's recommendation in respect of defining our approach to quality enhancement.

Overall, the College welcomes the Report and its findings and it will form an important part of our considerations as we now set our quality assurance and enhancement strategy for a new relocated Ravensbourne focused on the higher education needs of the twenty first century creative industries.

