



# **Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication**

**March 2007**

## **Annex to the report**

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## 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.

### 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 (paragraph 23)
- the College's deliberate and systematic involvement of undergraduate students in multiple aspects of its academic activities (paragraph 84)
- the approach to the annual monitoring of support services which has the potential to contribute to the enhancement of the student learning experience (paragraph 103)
- the integration of employability within the undergraduate curriculum and the preparation of students for the world of work (paragraph 108)
- the provision of clear, informative induction material for new staff (paragraph 114).

## 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 (paragraph 55)
- review and revise the quality assurance, reporting and management structures for its taught postgraduate provision to secure parity with those for the undergraduate courses (paragraph 72).

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 (paragraph 73)
- make explicit and formalise the institutional approach to enhancing the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 130).

## Section 1: Introduction and background

### The institution and mission

1 Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication (Ravensbourne; the College) 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 of Sussex (the University) which is the awarding body for the higher education programmes.

2 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.

3 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.'

4 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'.

### The information base for the audit

5 Ravensbourne provided the audit team with a Briefing Paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The index to the Briefing Paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the institution's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of awards and the quality of its educational provision. The audit team had hard copies of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper; in addition the team had access to the institution's intranet.

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

7 In addition, the audit team had access to the report of the previous institutional audit (December 2003) and reports of reviews at the subject level in the six years prior to the audit.

### **Developments since the previous audit**

8 The previous institutional audit in December 2003 found 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.

9 The audit report noted the following areas of good practice:

- the academic and personal support for students provided by course teams at programme level
- the support for students provided by central services, including the learning resources centre within the context of widening participation and diversity.

10 There were two recommendations considered to be matters of urgency:

- set in place an overarching framework for the management of quality and standards at the institutional level, including mechanisms to engage more actively with the current higher education agenda for quality and standards
- analyse critically its procedures for internal communication in order to establish clear structures for the discussion, recording and communication of institutional academic business.

11 Ravensbourne was also advised to:

- identify its own needs for quality management within the context of the requirements of its validating partner
- provide active support for all staff to encourage understanding and participation in quality management processes and outcomes
- clarify the relationship between executive action and committee deliberations
- find a coherent system for student representation which formally links course level representation with that at institutional level
- make fuller use of information in the effective management of quality and standards.

12 In responding to the audit report, Ravensbourne accepted fully that it represented an accurate assessment of the arrangements for the management of academic standards and the quality of provision at the time of the audit visit.

13 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 the institutional audit 2003 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 current audit.

14 One of the College's Foundation Degrees, FdA Creative Sound Design, was subject to Foundation Degree review in April 2005. The report of the review was positive, expressing confidence in both the emerging standards and achievements, and the quality of learning opportunities. During the academic year 2005-06 all undergraduate courses at the College were subject to successful internal and external revalidation by the College and the University respectively.

15 A significant development in the College's long-term strategy is the decision to relocate the College to the Greenwich Peninsula. In the Briefing Paper the College explained that it had concerns about its longer-term sustainability at its present size, concerns exacerbated by the fact that its current buildings were nearing the end of their economic life, were poorly located to support fulfillment of the College's Mission, and did not allow for the kind of academic developments which the College regarded as desirable. In the Briefing Paper the College commented that in the run up to relocation it would, 'continue to develop and consolidate its portfolio and strengthen its core activities of learning teaching and knowledge transfer, and the systems which support these'. At the time of the audit the College had plans for significant development of its taught postgraduate provision.

### **The institution's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities**

16 The Academic Board, accountable to the Board of Governors and chaired by the Director, is the premier academic and deliberative committee within the College's governance structure and has overall responsibility for the setting and maintenance of academic standards. Membership of the Academic Board includes representatives of academic and support departments of the Students' Union and the University.

17 The Quality Development Committee advises the Academic Board on policies and procedures in relation to academic standards and quality assurance. 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 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 the one of the heads of faculty.

18 Two faculty committees, chaired by the relevant head of faculty, are the main organisational subcommittees and report directly to the Academic Board. They are responsible for the delivery and development of all courses offered by the faculty and for compliance at local level with policies and initiatives for quality assurance, learning, teaching and assessment and diversity. Membership of the faculty committees includes academic and support staff and student representation. Oversight of the delivery and development of specific courses or groups of cognate courses is delegated to course committees. Course committees for undergraduate programmes report to the relevant faculty committee.

19 The area of Postgraduate Studies, under the remit of the Director of Postgraduate Development and Innovation, sits outside the formal faculty structure and has a course committee only, the minutes of which are received by the Academic Board on the same basis as those from the faculty committees. This reporting line for the postgraduate course committee is not as stated in the terms of reference for course committees, which stipulate that course committees are subcommittees of, and report to, faculty committees.

20 The Director of the College chairs the Management Committee, comprising the senior management of the College, which maintains the necessary executive and managerial focus with a particular emphasis on strategic and budgetary planning.

21 The Academic Board is generally effective in maintaining an institutional overview of the College's academic provision. As stated in the Briefing Paper, much of the detailed consideration of the College's academic business and development of policy takes place in the subcommittees before ultimate approval at Academic Board. The minutes of the Quality Development Committee

demonstrate a systematic and thorough approach to the oversight of academic standards and record the discussion and development of relevant quality assurance policy and procedures, with due consideration of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. The minutes of the Learning and Teaching Review Committee record discussion of a wide-ranging agenda concerning internal and external developments in learning and teaching. Both subcommittees adopt an inclusive approach to their business referring matters to faculty and/or course committees for wider discussion where necessary. The College also makes use of working groups, such as the E-Learning Advisory Group, that draw on expertise from the wider College community. There is clear reporting up and down the committee structure and actions are monitored.

22 The faculty committees discharge their responsibilities thoroughly and provide a valuable conduit between course committees and the Academic Board, particularly in relation to the management of learning opportunities and the resolution of issues raised by students in course committees. In the case of Postgraduate Studies where the course committee minutes are presented directly to the Academic Board there is much less opportunity for detailed discussion and resolution of issues raised in discussion at the lower level.

23 The claim made in the Briefing Paper of an open committee culture is substantiated: the agenda, papers, with the exception of some reserved items, and minutes of all meetings are made available on the Committee section of the Quality intranet and are accessible to all staff and students, supporting effective communication of the College's academic policies and business. In the view of the audit team, the comprehensive Quality intranet pages contribute significantly to the effective communication of policy and procedures to staff and are identified in the audit as a feature of good practice.

24 The 'Towards a Framework for Quality' document, dated 2005, outlines policies and procedures and the key roles and responsibilities of staff and committees in the setting and maintenance of academic standards and in quality assurance. The College recognised that, whilst this document was still largely relevant at the time of the audit, some aspects were out of date, notably the development of the Quality team, with the Director of Quality and Academic Services having strategic responsibility for the development of the College's quality management systems and regulatory framework rather than the (then) Director of Postgraduate Development and Quality. At the time of the audit there had been recent discussion at the Quality Development Committee about the development of a Quality Strategy, but no timescale was specified.

25 The Learning and Teaching Strategy 2006-07 - 2011-12 identifies the College's key strategic aims for teaching and learning as 'Relocation to the new Ravensbourne; Developing staff capability; Quality assurance and enhancement; Continued innovation in delivery; Widening participation in a supportive learning environment; Enterprise and employability; and Continued innovation in digital technology'. The Strategy determines the agenda for the development of learning and teaching within the College, for example, driving some of the associated staff development priorities. The Learning and Teaching Review Committee is responsible for monitoring the activities outlined in the Strategy.

26 In response to advice in the previous audit report, responsibility for the monitoring of assessment policy and standards was assigned to the Quality Development Committee. The College Assessment Policy sets out underlying principles and the purposes of assessment. Academic Regulations provide the frameworks within which assessment is conducted and include a common grading and marking scheme. Programme and unit specifications include the diet of assessment for each course, including assessment requirements and criteria. Each course has a separate Examination Board attended by the external examiner and chaired by a representative of the University.

27 External examiners for the College's provision are appointed in accordance with the requirements of the University as the awarding body; the relevant policies and procedures are set out in the External Examiner Handbook. Each of the College's courses has at least one external examiner (some courses seek to appoint an examiner from industry as well as an examiner from higher education) appointed for a fixed tenure.

28 In the Briefing Paper the College stated that it now had in place, 'an appropriate framework for the setting and securing of its academic standards and for maintaining the quality of its learning opportunities and that its policies, procedures and regulations reflect[ed] the expectations of the QAA Academic Infrastructure'. The Briefing Paper continued, '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 evidence available to the audit team supports the College's view that, in general and particularly in the case of its undergraduate programmes, there is an appropriate framework in place which makes a significant contribution to the College's management of the quality of learning opportunities for students. The team also concludes that the framework makes an effective contribution to the assurance of academic standards within the College.

29 The College's approach at institutional level to enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities is less well-developed than the framework for the management of academic quality and standards. 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"'. In meetings with senior staff of the College the audit team heard that the next phase of development for the College in terms of its quality assurance policy and procedures was embedding and enhancement. There are individual elements of the institution's framework for the management of learning opportunities which have the potential to lead to improvement and enhancement but, at the time of the audit there was no systematic institutional approach to quality enhancement.

## **Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards**

### **External examiners**

30 The report of the previous audit suggested that the College review various aspects of its procedures for external examining. In responding to the report the College paid particular attention to the section of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards (Code of practice), Section 4: External examining*, published by QAA.

31 The External Examiner Handbook sets out clearly the policies and procedures for external examining. Whilst the approach is influenced by the requirements of the University there is evidence that procedures within the College's discretion have been adapted to take account of the specific characteristics of Ravensbourne's academic provision. An example of this is the expectation that external examiners meet students in the course of the academic year to allow them to gather direct feedback on the context for the delivery of the provision and about the nature of the student experience.

32 The College Criteria for the Nomination of External Examiners, which have been approved by the University, state that 'teaching experience is not a pre-requisite for appointment although it is an advantage, and at least one member of a course external examining team should have substantial teaching experience'. Just prior to the audit the University required that an additional academic external examiner be appointed to the MA provision to ensure that this criterion was met. The audit team noted that this related to a specific set of circumstances and that the College policy was that courses had to have external examiners with a balance of professional and academic experience.

33 External examiners attend final examination boards, which are chaired by a representative of the University, but do not attend internal progression boards. The audit team read a range of minutes of final examination boards which confirmed that external examiners were actively and appropriately involved in carrying out their duties as described in the External Examiner Handbook, including explicit comment on comparability of standards with cognate higher education provision, marking patterns, the appropriateness of the assessment criteria and the soundness and fairness of assessment processes.



34 External examiner reports are forwarded from the University to the College for circulation and production of an action plan in accordance with a standard template. The Director of Quality and Academic Services produces a College External Examiner Action Plan in relation to issues of institutional significance. The action plan is included in an annual Examination Board Report to the Academic Board.

35 Course committees receive external examiner reports and action plans, which are agreed between course teams and the Quality Team, as a standing item on the agenda and these are updated termly as matters are progressed. External Examiners' reports are considered at faculty committees which also receive the relevant course committee minutes. External examiners' reports are required to include comment on whether issues from previous years have been resolved. The Examination Board Report also identifies for attention any such matters outstanding.

36 The College is 'confident that its external examiner system meets the expectations set out in the Section 4 of the QAA Code of Practice'. The College is also of the view that, overall, external examiners 'play a key role within the College's quality systems' and 'contribute to the improvement of standards...at the College level as well as the course level'. The audit team concurred with this view and found that the College's procedures for external examining were operating as intended and that the College made effective use of external examiners in its management of academic standards. Ravensbourne's strong and scrupulous use of external examiners on its own account supports 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 of Sussex.

### **Approval, monitoring and review of award standards**

37 The College's course approval process requires explicit appraisal and confirmation of the alignment of the provision with all elements of the Academic Infrastructure before proposals are submitted to the Management Committee. At each stage of consideration of course proposals, panels give specific consideration to the assurance of the standard of the awards in accordance with structured guidelines provided by the Quality Team. All of the College's approval panels include at least one external subject expert.

38 At the time of the audit the College had recently revalidated all of its undergraduate provision, in accordance with its principles for course review. The audit team read a range of internal validation and revalidation documents and found that the procedures in course approval for the assurance of award standards were applied consistently and in accordance with the stated requirements. The team found that the internal validation process was rigorous, involving detailed scrutiny which resulted in recommendations for improvement and a schedule for action. The fulfilment of any conditions attached to approval is confirmed before programmes proceed to external validation by the University.

39 A new process for annual course monitoring was introduced in the academic year 2004-05. The audit team read a number of annual course monitoring reports and logs which are produced to a standard template. The team found that the process for annual course monitoring was well defined but not always observed consistently: for example, not all reports included evidence and comment about whether the course content was still appropriate in relation to the level of the course and in terms of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The College will wish to keep under review observance of its detailed requirements for annual course monitoring to ensure that the process contributes as effectively as possible to the College's assurance of academic standards.

40 Annual course monitoring reports for undergraduate courses are considered by course committees and faculty committees. While the recording of consideration of annual course monitoring in the minutes of faculty committees is limited, it is clear from the action logs that required actions are identified and monitored for effective response.

41 Annual monitoring reports for the taught postgraduate courses are considered by the Quality Development Committee. The reports include consideration of external examiner comments about academic standards, the assessment process and data about student achievement. Minutes of the Committee are cursory in recording of discussion of the reports for postgraduate provision; there is no explicit mention of discussion of the academic standards of the awards.

42 The audit team is of the view that the location of the taught postgraduate provision outside the faculty structure has the potential for the process of the monitoring of the award standards of those courses to be less thorough than that applied to undergraduate courses. Annual monitoring reports for the undergraduate provision are subject to detailed scrutiny and action planning at the faculty level before consideration at institutional level. Given its aspirations to expand its taught postgraduate provision, the College should review the contribution of the current approach to annual monitoring of taught postgraduate courses to the assurance of award standards.

43 The College operates a system of course review on a three-year cycle. Course review is intended to be a comprehensive review of provision at the midpoint between validation and revalidation. The course review procedure document is explicit in stating the requirements for consideration of award standards. Discussion with staff established that they understood the need to review award standards in the process. The process was made mandatory in January 2005 and was piloted in a slightly scaled down form prior to being applied to the revalidations of the undergraduate provision. Course review reports are discussed at faculty committees.

44 The College established a process of Periodic Review in March 2005: guidance notes require consideration and reporting of the extent to which courses are aligned with external reference points, including the FHEQ, in order to provide an appropriate level of challenge to students. Reports should also discuss how the courses are aligned with, and informed by, relevant subject benchmark statements, where appropriate, and compliance with any professional or statutory body requirements. The process was applied to the postgraduate provision prior to revalidation.

45 There is significant overlap in the specifications for the processes of course review, periodic review and revalidation; this is particularly marked in the case of course and periodic review. Individually these structures for assurance and confirmation of the academic standards of awards are sound and meet the expectations of the relevant elements of the Academic Infrastructure but they are resource intensive and it is not clear that each process has a distinct function in the assurance of academic standards. The audit team considers it desirable that, in refining its approach to the assurance of academic standards, 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.

### **Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points**

46 The Quality Development Committee is responsible for ensuring that the College's policies and procedures take account of the requirements of external bodies and relevant reference points. The College's procedures for course development, approval, validation and revalidation and annual course monitoring stipulate requirements for provision to be calibrated against the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in support of the establishment, confirmation and maintenance of academic standards.

47 The audit team read a range of course documentation, including that supplied for the sampling trails and discussed the College's approach to external reference points with staff at all levels in the College. Validation documents follow a common format which requires explicit attention to the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in determining award standards; in particular, the College has a pro-forma for course teams to appraise course proposals against the FHEQ. Programme specifications are referenced to the *Code of practice*, the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements in defining the academic standards of individual awards. External examiners are required to consider whether provision is in alignment with the Academic Infrastructure. Staff whom the team met were clear about the College's requirements for reference to the Academic Infrastructure in consideration of academic standards.

48 The audit team concluded that the College was meticulous and consistent in its use of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its stewardship of academic standards.

49 The College is also aware of the need to consider the European Standards and Guidelines in its assurance of the academic standards of awards.

### **Assessment policies and regulations**

50 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. Academic Regulations and course handbooks set out clear information on assessment procedures including submission deadlines, extensions and mitigating circumstances; procedures; marking definitions; progression and failure regulations; examination procedures; and academic appeals. Students whom the audit team met confirmed that they were aware of the assessment regulations and procedures and the requirements on them; they were also clear about where to seek advice on matters associated with assessment. There is additional guidance for staff on assessment regulations in the Guidance on Examination Boards for Postgraduate and Undergraduate Courses document. The assessment regulations are clear and fit for the purpose and meet the expectations of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*.

51 Coverage of plagiarism in the Academic Regulations is limited to some paragraphs on Academic Offences, and a section on 'Guidelines for staff reporting cheating by plagiarism'. The Regulations make reference to an 'existing College policy on cheating and plagiarism' but the audit team was unable to locate such a policy in the evidence available to it. There are materials about plagiarism on the Learning Resource Centre website and Personal and Professional Development Units include guidance on referencing and avoidance of plagiarism. Students whom the audit team met were aware of issues associated with academic dishonesty; nonetheless, as a further safeguard of academic standards, the College may wish to consider collating all of the existing material in this area to provide a central authoritative source of guidance on cheating and plagiarism.

52 The annual Examination Board Report compiled from external examiners' comments on individual courses evaluates assessment policies and regulations and is both comprehensive and detailed. The Report for the academic year 2005-06 identified several cross-College concerns around, for example, the timeliness of assessment feedback and the clarity of procedures for consideration of mitigating circumstances. In response to the latter the Academic Board issued additional guidance for staff and students on requirements for the handling of mitigating circumstances.

53 Under the institutional policy on coursework extensions course leaders are responsible for granting extensions 'in exceptional circumstances'. The Registry's routine monitoring of the relevant forms found evidence of inconsistency across courses in the approval of coursework extensions, illustrating the effectiveness of the College's internal processes in identifying matters for action. Accordingly, the College plans to review its approach to coursework extensions, an intention which the audit team would support in the interest of equitable treatment of students.

54 Unit specifications set out the assessment requirements for each course with more detail being provided in assessment briefs. The Academic Regulations include information on generic College grading descriptors for each type of award. In response to the report of the previous audit which found variability in approaches to assessment information given to students, the College established Faculty Project Brief Verification Groups to review each project brief and make recommendations for modification as necessary. The minutes of the Faculty Project Brief Verification Groups demonstrate significant and thorough work undertaken in promoting a consistent and effective approach to the setting of assignments. The audit team found that the establishment of the Faculty Project Brief Verification Groups with a remit to promote clear and consistent practice was an effective response to the concerns identified in the previous audit, and had secured the requisite compliance with the relevant guidelines. The team considers that the

work of the verification groups in establishing a shared and uniform understanding and observation of assessment requirements provides a sound basis for a move towards a more proportionate approach which seeks to embed effective practice in routine course and subject group procedures.

55 Reading of minutes of final examination boards confirms that the boards fulfil their role in ensuring adherence to institutional assessment regulations and in securing academic standards. Internal progression boards formally ratify student progression to the next level of study. 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 boards had been conducted in contravention of the quoracy regulation; in some cases it appeared that only one member of academic staff had been present. The audit team considers that the quorum for the internal progression boards does not provide for breadth of input into discussion of student performance and that, taken with the non compliance with even the current 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. The College may find the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* a useful point of reference in this respect.

56 Notwithstanding the concerns about the quoracy arrangements for internal progression boards, the audit team is of the view that the College's assessment policies and regulations help to support 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 of Sussex.

### **Management information (including progression and completion statistics)**

57 The report of the previous QAA institutional audit advised the College to make more extensive use of information in the effective management of quality and standards'. The Briefing Paper noted that 'appropriate use [was] made of quantitative information in determining that standards set by the College [were] being met'.

58 The Briefing Paper also mentions a Student Data Report on Achievement, Admissions and Progression which is considered at the Diversity Committee which is a subcommittee of the Board of Governors. The audit team considers that the information in the student data reports might be pertinent to the business of other committees in the College in their work on academic standards. The team was told in meetings with staff that cross-representation of members ensured that items discussed at the Diversity Committee and of potential relevance to other committees were picked up and disseminated across committee boundaries. The College may wish to give further consideration to formalising its approach to ensuring that matters with implications for the work of more than one of its deliberative bodies are referred to all of the relevant committees for discussion.

59 There is a range of ways in which the College uses management information to confirm the academic standards of awards. Comprehensive admission, progression and award data, by socio-economic classification, including retention, final achievement and employability data, related to internal and external benchmarks, for example, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Performance Indicators and Higher Education Statistics Agency data, are made available at course, faculty and institutional level to feed into annual monitoring. The institutional Annual Monitoring Report includes a comprehensive appendix of statistics at the College, faculty and course levels. The annual monitoring report template includes a section 'Summary of Strengths and Issues' which gives some consideration to statistics.

60 Annual course monitoring reports demonstrate that achievement data are considered routinely as part of the process. A reading of minutes of faculty committees shows some, but in the main limited, consideration of data, for example, spread of classifications, provided centrally; it is not clear from the minutes whether such discussion is a requirement and systematic and

routine. Discussion at faculty committees of data arising from annual course monitoring reports is also limited. Final examination boards and internal progression boards receive full course profiles and the spread of results, but the minutes do not indicate the extent of any discussion of summary data. College systems identified a lack of data at the MA Internal Progression Board in December 2006, indicating vigilance in monitoring compliance with the College's requirements in this area. The annual Examination Board Report provides the Academic Board with a comprehensive analysis of patterns of award across the College but, as in the case of faculty committees, the minutes do not indicate whether performance data are interrogated systematically at that level in support of institutional management of academic standards.

61 The College stated in its Report on Developments Since the QAA institutional audit of 2003, that development of its Management Information Systems had made 'management information in relation to academic performance 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', a claim that is supported by the findings of the audit. The College produces and analyses a wide selection of quantitative data in interrogating and confirming the academic standards of the awards that it delivers but the depth of analysis is variable. The audit found that the College's use of statistical information made a positive contribution to the management of academic standards. As the College has established a reliable approach to the gathering of data there is potential for development of the current approach to secure consistent and more analytical use of data in the management of academic standards at local and institutional level.

### **Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities**

#### **External examiners**

62 The External Examiner Report Form seeks comment on a number of matters relating to the quality of the student learning experience, including resources, in so far as they affect student performance, and the aims, content and delivery of the curriculum. A reading of external examiner reports confirms that such issues are raised and carried forward in the annual course monitoring exercise. Review by the audit team of committee minutes at faculty and course level confirmed that external examiner reports and resulting action plans were subject to careful consideration; student members of the committees are able to contribute to discussion of the reports. Progress against issues arising is measured in annual course monitoring logs which specify clear responsibilities and timelines. The audit found numerous examples in the minutes of all undergraduate course committees of action taken in response to matters raised by external examiners; for example, sharpening of the industry focus in the BA Animation programme.

63 The external examining process is effective in identifying matters for further consideration and action at the local level; the annual course monitoring process is effective in prosecuting and monitoring the necessary actions. The findings of the audit are that the College is making effective use of external examiner reports in the management of learning opportunities.

#### **Approval, monitoring and review of programmes**

64 The Management Team is responsible for the appraisal of new course proposals in the context of resource provision, market position and alignment with the institution's mission. A comprehensive suite of guidance documentation promotes a consistent approach to internal validation across the institution. The College undertakes internal validation of new programmes prior to their submission to the University for formal approval. Internal validation documents are comprehensive in their evaluation, and are complemented by information about issues identified for further consideration and the resultant actions.

65 In the academic year 2004-05, the evaluation of the impact of new course development, or the revalidation of an existing course, on resources, became a fundamental part of the internal validation system. Heads of faculty are now required as part of Course Development Approval to identify the resource impact of a new course or the redevelopment of an old course, and

requirements for additional resources must be agreed by the Management Committee in advance of (re)validation. The relationship of resources to delivery is subject to further scrutiny at internal and external (re)validation, both of which incorporate a tour of the relevant facilities for the external peers on the panel. There is also a meeting with students to seek their views on the resources available. The Annual Course Monitoring process also requires course teams to comment on whether the learning resources remain adequate for the course.

66 The audit found that internal validation was a sound process, operating as described and in accordance with the guidance of the *Code of practice*. The process is effective in undertaking critical analysis of submissions, resulting in recommendations for improvement and amendment prior to submission to the external validating agent. 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 help ensure consistent implementation and identify and share good practice.

67 The audit team reviewed a range of annual course monitoring reports and logs; the reports include statistical data, sections on most course activities for evaluation, which include statements of strengths, opportunities, issues, risks, evidence and proposed actions. Annual course monitoring is intended to '...[help to]..ensure that courses are maintained in good standing and delivered in a manner specified in the College's Programme Specifications...'. It has three datasets: one is applications and admissions; the next a retention summary table, and finally graduation rates and grades, all of which are outcome (lagging) measures; there are no predictor (leading) measures. While the reports do inform decision-making about how courses can be developed and learning opportunities improved, the College may also wish to consider whether it could draw on additional quantitative data in its identification of opportunities to improve the student learning experience.

68 Annual course monitoring reports for the undergraduate provision are scrutinised at course committees and faculty committees; this arrangement allows for comment from a range of staff and student representatives on the learning opportunities. Consideration at both course and faculty level provides for discussion of issues from the operational to the more strategic in a deliberative forum constituted appropriately to the issues under consideration.

69 The relevant documentary guidance and discussions with staff demonstrated a well defined and far sighted approach to course review, which has consideration of the course curriculum and consequent learning opportunities as one of its main four points of focus. At the time of the audit, the College had recently introduced a process of periodic review which, as in the case of assurance of academic standards, involves considerable overlap with the specification for course review.

70 The College's postgraduate courses were subject to periodic review in 2005. 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 agrees that the academic standards of the provision were secure. The report also identified nine matters for action which collectively, in the view of the audit team, put the quality of the provision in jeopardy, and four areas of strength. A significant recommendation was that 'the Course Team should consider strategically the nature, relationship and balance of the major project and the dissertation and clearly articulate this in a manner appropriate to courses in the area of creative critical practice for the coming validation'. The report of the periodic review was submitted to the Course Committee in April 2005. The minutes recording an oral report to the following meeting of the Committee in October 2005 noted that there were 'still some unresolved issues in this area but it was hoped by the Course Leader that these [could] be resolved quite quickly, the matter [was] therefore still ongoing'.

71 The internal revalidation of the programmes took place in November 2005 and resulted in 10 requirements for action, some of which echoed those identified in the periodic review, before the proposal could proceed to external validation. The report of the internal revalidation was received by the Quality Development Committee in January 2006, with no discussion recorded in the minutes. The minutes of the October 2006 meeting of the course committee do not record any reference to the review and revalidation of the programmes. The annual monitoring reports of March 2007 for the postgraduate courses makes only limited reference to the matter. It is therefore not clear where, if anywhere, matters arising from the periodic review were considered and 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 Committee and the Quality Development Committee.

72 The audit team concluded that the positioning of the management of the postgraduate provision outside the faculty structure had militated against detailed consideration of the outcomes of the periodic review and resulted in insufficient action being taken on issues for further consideration identified in the report. In the view of the team this also contributed to a number of these issues being unresolved when the postgraduate courses went forward for combined external validation in February 2007. 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 revalidation, but the students also reported that issues of assessment, learning opportunities through contacts with industry, tutoring and student representation, for example, remained unresolved. The audit found that the College was belatedly acting on these 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 team considers it advisable that the College review and revise the quality assurance, reporting and management structures for its master's provision to secure parity with those for the undergraduate courses.

73 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 audit found considerable overlap in the requirements for each of the processes, particularly in the areas of review subsequent to the original validation, including review of the curriculum and educational aims and the need for peer review. The audit team heard a number of differing views of the purposes of course review and periodic review from staff at all levels in the College, indicating a lack of shared understanding of the function of these processes. 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 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.

### **Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points**

74 In 2005, the College undertook an appraisal of its policies and procedures in the context of the *Code of practice*. The resultant report recorded current practice and proposed amendments and improvements in the College's approach to the provision of learning opportunities for students. The Quality Team provided guidance on implementation of the recommendations; in meetings with the audit team, undergraduate students who had been at the College throughout the period of the appraisal and consequent action confirmed and were enthusiastic about the resultant improvements. There was clear evidence in course documents and minutes of committees at all levels that the College's alignment with the *Code of practice* and the FHEQ,

and the use of subject benchmark statements were embedded in the culture, policy and procedures of the institution. Routine quality assurance processes such as approval, monitoring, review and revalidation all require reference to the relevant elements of the Academic Infrastructure in consideration of matters related to learning opportunities. In addition, programme specifications and course documentation are clearly related to industry and business expectations which contribute to the fittingness of learning opportunities.

75 The large number of professional practitioners engaged by the College is a distinctive point of external reference for levels of attainment and currency of the curriculum; their contribution to learning opportunities is greatly valued by students and staff. The College has a number of Course Industry Advisory Committees: while the purpose of these is consistent with the institution's mission and close collaboration with industry, the audit team found only limited evidence of the committees' influence on the College's provision. The team considers the long-standing and continuously nurtured relationships with industry an example of good practice of the College in relating its provision to the world of work, and suggests that the College may wish to consider how it could derive greater benefit from the committees in its management of learning opportunities.

76 The audit found that the College made systematic and structured use of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of learning opportunities.

### **Assessment policies**

77 Unit specifications set out the overall assessment regime with detailed information being provided in assessment briefs. It is a College requirement that each unit provide students with opportunities for both formative and summative assessment. Students whom the audit team met were clear about the expectations on them in terms of assessment and confirmed that they received the necessary guidance from staff about assessment requirements.

78 The College's annual Course Experience Questionnaire, the student written submission and the National Student Survey all identified problems with the quality and timeliness of assessment feedback. In meetings with the audit team both undergraduate and postgraduate students reported considerable variability in the promptness of feedback across different courses but were positive about the overall arrangements for feedback. The issue of deficiencies in the provision to students of assessment feedback was reported in the College Annual Monitoring Report for 2005-06 and debated at faculty committees, but the minutes did not record any proposals for remedial action.

79 In meetings with the audit team, staff provided an account of ways in which the timeliness issue was being addressed at both course and College levels with, for the former, specific strategies such as students being provided with more frequent updates on their work and, for the latter, the scheduling of staff development events on giving feedback and the proposed development of an assessment feedback template based on learning outcomes. The annual monitoring process for the last two years records the intention to produce this common assessment feedback form for all courses, but there was no evidence of action having been taken and the follow up to annual monitoring did not pick the matter up as an outstanding issue.

80 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'. The College may wish to consider whether a greater degree of specification in the regulations of requirements in this area might assist in improving both consistency and timeliness in the provision of formative feedback to students.

81 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 such feedback results in variability of practice which limits the contribution of assessment policies to institutional management of learning opportunities.



### **Management information (including completion and progression statistics)**

82 The College uses management information in a number of ways to improve the quality of learning opportunities. Comprehensive admission, progression and award data are considered in annual monitoring, and the Annual Monitoring Report analyses issues such as recruitment and retention against HEFCE performance Indicators. The Diversity Committee, a subgroup of the College's governing body, has undertaken a wide-ranging analysis of admissions to consider recruitment trends amongst specific target groups. The Learning Resource Centre produces an annual report that contains comprehensive quantitative data on user satisfaction with resources and services. A summary of the report is provided to the Quality Development Committee but the relevant minutes suggest that discussion is not extensive.

83 Course and faculty committee minutes record frequent instances of data being discussed in the context of the Annual Course Monitoring Report. The audit team considers that in some cases there was scope for further systematic analysis of data, and the College might wish to consider means of securing such analysis. The team also noted that, on occasion, valuable management information and analysis was produced in different contexts - for example, the Annual Course Monitoring Report, the annual Examination Board Report and the May 2006 Student Data Report on Admissions, Achievement and Progression in relation to Gender, Ethnicity, Age and Disability - and it was not immediately clear to the team whether these sources of information were integrated. Nevertheless, the team is of the view that a robust set of data is made available within the College and that the institution is in a good position to make further analytical use in the management of learning opportunities of the management information available.

### **Management information (including student representation, feedback and National Student Survey outcomes)**

84 Students are represented at all levels of the College's deliberative structures. 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. 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 the 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.

85 Representatives from each level of each course are members of course committees, and delegates from this group are members of the faculty committees. Reading of the minutes of course committees confirms active student participation in these meetings; it is clear that issues raised by student representatives are discussed and actions are agreed. The actions are tracked between meetings and, where appropriate, issues are referred to faculty committees or other bodies and individuals for action.

86 The College draws on a number of sources of information relating directly to the experience of its students in its management of learning opportunities. First, it uses data gathered through the National Student Survey. An annual report is presented to the Academic Board on the College's performance in the survey. Although in the first year of the survey the response rate was such as to make it impossible to disaggregate the 'open' comments provided by students by course, a higher response rate in the second year of the survey made this possible and the results were considered by course teams. The results of the survey were considered at the Academic Board in January 2007 where assessment feedback was noted as the main issue.

87 The College administers an annual Course Experience Questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire are tabulated and analysed by course and also at faculty and College level so that general as well as specific issues can be identified. Relevant results of this exercise are discussed at course committees and faculty committees as appropriate. Results of the National Student Survey and the College's own annual Course Experience Questionnaire are discussed at course committees, faculty committees, and at the Academic Board and its subcommittees.

88 The College uses unit feedback forms administered on a rolling basis to seek feedback on the quality of learning opportunities at unit level. The results of this exercise are discussed at course committees and there is evidence from the minutes of the committees that appropriate actions are taken as a result of these discussions.

89 The College also operates a programme of 'snowball discussions' at course level, led by a staff member unconnected with the course in question. Summaries of these discussions, which seek to elicit information about positive and negative features of the student experience of each course, feed into the annual course monitoring process along with the results derived from the unit feedback forms. In meetings with the audit team, staff and students commented positively on the value of these discussions in raising issues which might not be identified in other ways.

90 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.

### **Role of students in quality assurance and quality enhancement**

91 There is effective student involvement at all stages of the course approval, monitoring and review processes in support of the management of learning opportunities. The role of students in the quality assurance processes of the College includes routine meetings of students with external examiners who take account of student views in the preparation of their reports.

92 The audit found that the College made effective use of the student voice in its quality assurance processes for the management of learning opportunities.

### **Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities**

93 The College defines its approach to linkages between research and scholarly activity and learning opportunities as research informed teaching which essentially involves structured engagement with specialist practitioners and leaders in relevant fields of work to ensure that staff are up to date with developments in their subject areas. Discussion with staff at all levels of the institution and reading of the relevant policy documents established that the expectations for research informed teaching were well aligned with the College's mission and core values: 'we recognise staff as fundamental to our success and we encourage the creative sharing of knowledge and expertise across disciplinary boundaries' and 'we are committed to working collaboratively in support of the region and the industries we serve'. The learning from the interaction with the latest developments in the College's specialist areas helps to develop the curriculum and produces material and knowledge to maintain the currency of student learning. All academic staff are expected to engage in research informed teaching which is considered in staff appraisal and in identifying staff development needs.

94 The audit found that the policy on research informed teaching was a key contributor to staff scholarship, the currency of the curriculum and to student employability, but its management is at the individual or local level with no systematic central appraisal of levels of activity. This point was acknowledged by staff in discussion with the audit team: the College, therefore, may wish to consider building on the good practice in this area by securing an institutional overview and appraisal of the effect of research informed teaching on the quality of learning opportunities.

95 The audit found that the College's policy and practice in the area of research informed teaching made a positive contribution to the quality of the learning opportunities afforded to its students.

### **Resources for learning**

96 The Briefing Paper noted that the College had 'an open access policy to all resources' which were 'treated as common College assets and [were] normally accessible by all courses'. The Learning Resource Centre is a central facility housing the Reprographics Centre, an Audio-Visual/Media Centre and some of the College's general computing facilities.

97 The Learning Resource Centre conducts an annual user survey: the most recent survey at the time of the audit had found 'general satisfaction' with the facilities which was in line with the results of the contemporaneous Course Experience Questionnaire and the National Student Survey on library resources and services. The College benchmarks its Learning Resource Centre against general learning and library resource provision in the higher education sector and particularly that of similar small specialist colleges. The Briefing Paper noted spending being 'slightly biased towards electronic resources rather than traditional media' because of the institutional focus on the creative exploitation of digital technology. The provision of IT and specialist resources is evaluated internally via the Course Experience Questionnaire: results from the most recent surveys at the time of the audit show a slight improvement on the previous year.

98 The Learning Resource Centre has been central in developing e-learning at the College which relates to a key aim of the learning and teaching strategy to develop more flexibility in the way that students access the College's curriculum. The College operates a virtual learning environment 'Learn@rave'. The Briefing Paper reported that 'at this stage in its development, the degree to which individual courses blend[ed] e-learning into their learning and teaching strategies [was] variable'. This aspect of the Learning Resource Centre's work is monitored by the E-Learning Advisory Group, a working party of the Learning and Teaching Review Committee.

99 The general development of the College's information and computing technology infrastructure is guided by the ICT Strategy. In order to prepare students for industry, courses are delivered in an environment that 'mirrors industry practice' including industry specification television studios, a working virtual reality studio and extensive production and post-production facilities.

100 The student written submission described the library provision as 'varied and extensive' and the staff as 'friendly, helpful and proactive'. The document indicated that computing facilities were 'excellent' and workshop/studio space was 'comprehensive, well-maintained and flexible'. In meetings with the audit team students expressed general satisfaction with the quality of the learning resources, in particular the structured contacts with industry and the way in which courses were organised to mirror professional contexts. Undergraduate students were very enthusiastic about the 'Rave on Air' show, evening 'master classes' with industry professionals and live pitches to potential employers. The postgraduate students were largely positive about the library, equipment and the commitment of tutors but there was mixed feedback about contacts with industry, with some students suggesting that it was non-existent at the postgraduate level.

101 The Enterprise and Innovation Centre provides effective support for placements. The Annual Enterprise and Employability Report, 2005-06, provides a comprehensive description of the activities of the University, including the approach to placements with reference to work placement guides for both students and employers and procedures for enhancing quality and receiving feedback about the work placement scheme, indicating that practice in this area matches the expectations of the precepts in the relevant section of the *Code of practice*. The Report on Developments Since the QAA audit of 2003 indicated the intention to undertake a periodic review of placement learning which had not taken place at the time of the audit.

102 The audit team's preliminary reading of the Briefing Paper and documentation provided by the College suggested that the proportion of sessional to permanent staff had the potential to be problematic in ensuring effective course delivery. The student written submission expressed the view that sessional lecturers sometimes 'found it difficult to teach effectively' while acknowledging that such staff were 'highly skilled in their fields'. Undergraduate students reported that there was no difficulty in contacting sessional staff. Permanent academic staff clearly valued the input of practitioners to the courses. The team concluded that the College was alert to the potential difficulties associated with drawing on large numbers of sessional staff in the delivery of programmes and that the use of such staff was providing a valuable practice-related element to course delivery.

103 In part, because of National Student Survey results in respect of timetabling and unit planning, the College is seeking to ensure that its support functions are fit for purpose and to establish processes to promote continuous improvement. In autumn 2006 it introduced an Annual Service Monitoring Procedure so that all service areas are now required to produce a report evaluating their performance in the previous academic year and identify areas for improvement. The process results in comprehensive reports which are posted on the Quality pages of the College intranet. 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.

104 Annual monitoring reports at course and faculty level both have sections requiring critical evaluation of learning resources; the annual monitoring logs provide clear evidence of action taken in response to matters associated with the provision of learning resources. Representatives of support services sit on relevant committees; by way of example the Heads of Registry, ICT and Student Support and Access sit on the Quality Development Committee, and Learning Resource Centre representatives attend termly course committee meetings to ensure that they are aware of, and can contribute to, discussion of the adequacy and efficacy of learning resources.

105 The audit team found that the College's approach to the oversight and development of its learning resources made a positive contribution to institutional management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

### **Admissions policy**

106 The College revised its Admissions Policy in 2006 to support its Mission and Values as stated in its 2006 Corporate Plan. The revised policy is in alignment with the Learning and Teaching Strategy which includes the aim of providing '...a specialist education that prioritises enterprise, innovation and employability...and that is accessible to a widely differentiated body of students'. The policy is well understood by staff and students. Current students are employed to represent or assist other students, including during interviews, and contribute to the design of the prospectus. This approach is an example of the College's good practice in the deliberate and systematic involvement of undergraduate students in multiple aspects of its academic activities. Students endorse the approach to admissions with particular mention of the attention offered to international students, students from non-traditional backgrounds, and the efforts made by the College to provide prospective students with full information throughout the admissions cycle. Individual course reports and the College's collated datasets on admissions provide clear evidence that the opportunity to learn at the College was offered to students of diverse academic backgrounds and irrespective of gender, ethnicity, age or disability. Overall, the audit team considered the admissions process was effective in achieving its aims of providing access to its provision to a 'widely differentiated body of students' and that the College was making effective use of the relevant policy and procedures in its management of the learning opportunities available to current and potential students.

### **Student support**

107 A range of mechanisms is in place to support students. The College has a Tutorial Policy which provides for all undergraduate students to be offered two to three individual tutorial sessions in an academic year. Specialist advice is provided by the Student Services department; this includes disability advice; general welfare and individual mentoring support; financial advice and guidance, and general and specific learning support. Students receive a general introduction to the Learning Resource Centre as part of their induction and additional sessions on subject specific resources during the year. Students at all levels commented favourably on the quality of support provided by Learning Resource Centre staff.

108 The Enterprise and Innovation Centre provides information to students on the industries to which the institution relates, and offers guidance on what potential employers seek in the graduates they recruit. The Centre assists students in achieving work experience and placements,

and in making applications for employment, and also supports the development of employability in the curriculum. The audit found that the Centre was highly efficient in assisting students to secure relevant work placements and employment and that the service provided was highly valued by undergraduate students.

109 The audit found that at undergraduate level there was an effective and embedded approach to personal tutoring, and that students felt well supported by this process, as reported in the student written submission. Undergraduate students find academic staff, including part-time and sessional staff, accessible and responsive to their needs. Undergraduate students also confirm that referral to specialist support services, for example, language support for international students, is straightforward and effective.

110 The approach to Personal Development Planning for undergraduate students is set out in the course handbooks. Personal Development Planning is integrated into mandatory Personal and Professional Development Units at each level of study. Students reported satisfaction with these units which they found to be helpful in developing their personal and professional skills for employment.

111 At the time of the audit, tutorial arrangements for postgraduate students had recently been changed in response to student concerns, and the audit team noted that these were not yet fully embedded. The new system involves each student having 30 minute meetings with three tutors to 'ensure a more coordinated approach to feedback'. It is recognised by the College that these arrangements may not be sustainable if numbers increase in the future and, accordingly, will wish to keep the efficacy of the arrangements under review.

112 Postgraduate students made adverse comment on the provision of specialist language support for master's level students whose first language was not English, and the audit team noted the absence of differentiated specialist student support services for postgraduate students, particularly in respect of international students. As it develops provision in this area, the College may wish to keep under review the provision of specialist support for its postgraduate students with particular reference to specialist English language support for international postgraduate students.

### **Staff support, development and reward**

113 The audit confirmed the College's view as expressed in the Briefing Paper that it had appropriate human resources for the delivery of its higher education programmes. The Human Resources Strategy and the Learning and Teaching Strategy both work to promote the quality of staffing: the former has wide-ranging objectives related to the College's mission, Corporate Plan, quality assurance processes and to the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The Learning and Teaching Strategy focuses more on the professional development of staff. In meetings with the audit team, academic staff showed clear awareness of the Learning and Teaching Strategy's role in shaping their own and the institution's staff development. The Human Resources department is represented on the Learning and Teaching Review Committee by the Training Coordinator who provides regular updates to the Committee on staff development activity.

114 The College has sound arrangements for staff induction: all new members of staff, including sessional staff, receive an information pack from the Human Resources office, a clear, informative and comprehensive induction document, and a DVD outlining College structures and processes. Sessional staff receive additional material setting out essential terms relating to learning and teaching and quality assurance. Academic staff spoke positively about the quality of their induction, both formal and informal. The provision of clear, informative induction material for new staff is identified as a feature of good practice in the audit.

115 All full-time permanent academic staff are subject to annual appraisal which will be extended to apply to sessional staff in the academic year 2007-08. The incidence of appraisal is monitored by the Human Resources which uses appraisal forms to assess training needs in the context of the Corporate Plan.

116 The College's Peer Observation of Teaching scheme, instituted in 2004, sets out expectations that peer observation should be annual, linked to appraisal and, therefore, to staff development needs. Peer observation forms are forwarded to the Director of Quality and Academic Services. Significantly poor performance in a peer observation would be reported to the relevant line manager but this had never occurred up to the time of the audit. Academic staff are familiar with the processes and are clear about the benefits of the scheme in providing opportunities to share good practice and identify areas for improvement in teaching quality. The Learning and Teaching Review Committee minutes indicate that the 2005-06 academic year was 'the most successful observation period since [the scheme's] inception'. Minutes of College committees suggest that, notwithstanding this observation, participation is not as comprehensive as the College would like.

117 The Director of Quality and Academic Services and the Quality Team produce an annual summary of issues and good practice derived from the peer observation reports; the most recent report alludes to problems with securing full participation but does not include proposals for remedial action. The summary report is discussed at the Learning and Teaching Review Committee and is included in the College Annual Monitoring Report. The audit team endorses the value of an annual report derived from the peer observation scheme but is of the view that the addition of an action plan would improve its efficacy. Nonetheless, it is clear that there have been advances in this area since the previous institutional audit in that a formal scheme has been established and it is reported at the College's most senior committees. The team would encourage the College in its efforts to embed the scheme further, including its extension to sessional staff.

118 The College offers a full and varied staff development programme with events targeted for particular groups of staff as well as, on occasions, for all staff. In particular, a number of events cover key issues relating to quality assurance, academic standards and the Academic Infrastructure. Whilst applauding the staff development programme and the rigorous monitoring of attendance, the audit team also found that some events were singled out for 'mandatory attendance' but that participation in these events was not universal. The team heard that the College had taken some steps to promote better attendance, such as scheduling events for lunch time and encouraging line managers to 'follow up' non-attenders.

119 The College has an aspiration to achieve 100 per cent membership of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). Whilst the audit team met few members of staff who were members of the HEA, those who were involved, either as members or applicants, spoke positively about the benefits of membership. The Learning and Teaching Strategy makes reference to HEA membership in the context of the goal to 'promote professional standards and continuing professional development for teaching staff'.

120 Overall, the audit found that the College's approach staff support and development made a positive contribution to the management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

#### **Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement**

121 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: to enhance internal academic quality systems by developing a review system for support; to engage fully at faculty and at course level with Ofsted's quality framework at further education level and with the FHEQ, *Code of practice* and national benchmarks at higher education level, and with the wider further and higher education agendas and provide this activity with appropriate support; 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, continue to develop formal use of statistical information in course evaluation and planning.

## External examiners

122 The audit found that the external examining procedures focused on issues arising and their remedy rather than the systematic improvement of learning opportunities. The external examiner report form asks external examiners whether there are 'enhancements which could reasonably be made' but, in practice, reports seen by the audit team tended to identify matters for remedy rather than improvement. The report template also invites external examiners 'to list any particular strengths, and distinctive or innovative features...that would be worth drawing to the attention of external audiences'. The Briefing Paper noted that consideration of external examiners' reports by faculty committees was 'an opportunity for noting and disseminating good practice'. It also acknowledged that 'the College's external examiner action plan template focuse[d] attention on issues raised in the reports and the action to be taken in response to these' seeing this as a missed opportunity for celebrating and disseminating good practice. The College has this matter under review.

123 Further, this is reflected in the way in which external examiner reports are considered in annual monitoring. It was clear that issues requiring action are pursued in the cycle of annual monitoring but it was not evident to the team how individual examples of good practice identified by externals were used systematically to improve the quality of learning opportunities. The College might wish to consider how it might establish a more strategic approach to make use of good practice where it is identified through the external examining system.

124 Two potential vehicles for enhancement with respect to assessment include the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Assessment Policy. As framed at present, neither of the documents is oriented to strategic development of the institutional approach to enhancement. The former does not cover assessment whilst the latter is designed to provide 'a common understanding of the broad purposes of assessment and the principles which underpin our procedures and practices' rather than identifying particular assessment-related objectives. The audit team considers that the College's approach to annual monitoring and, in the context of assessment, the production of an annual Examination Board Report are sound, and have the potential to support a systematic approach to the development of explicit use of assessment policies and procedures in enhancement of the management of learning opportunities.

## Management information (including completion and progression statistics)

125 The College produces a range of data to monitor the quality of the learning experience and to secure the standards of awards delivered by the College. The audit team considers that the College is now well positioned to direct its use of management information to the systematic improvement of learning opportunities.

## Management information (including student feedback and NSS outcomes)

126 The College draws on a comprehensive range of student feedback data in its approach to quality assurance. Whilst the audit team found many examples of discrete quality improvements arising out of actions taken in response to student feedback, by way of example, improvements in the clarity of assessment briefs, at the time of the audit it was not demonstrable that the information was harnessed in a systematic way as part of an institution-level approach to quality enhancement of learning opportunities. The team would encourage the College to consider ways in which student feedback might be incorporated into an institution-level approach to quality enhancement.

## Resources for learning

127 The College takes an evaluative approach to its provision of learning resources, particularly through the introduction of Annual Service Monitoring, and service representatives are involved in the College's deliberative structures. The College may wish to consider how it could build in a structured way on current good practice in assuring the quality of learning resources to feed into institutional approaches to enhancement of student learning opportunities.

## **Dissemination of good practice**

128 The terms of reference of the Learning and Teaching Review Committee include the identification and dissemination of good practice, and there was some evidence in the minutes of the Committee that this did happen although it was not always clear from the minutes how much emphasis was given to this element of the Committee's business.

129 In discussions with staff and through the reading of minutes of committees and reports of validation and review events, the audit team did find opportunities identified by the College for the dissemination of good practice. For example, in the case of annual course monitoring, as stated in the Briefing Paper, the template encourages the identification and dissemination of good practice, with subject leaders being prompted to identify strengths and opportunities under each of the headings within the template. Additionally, these matters are reported up through faculty committees to the Academic Board. The team also heard in meetings with staff of the annual staff management conference where the sharing of good practice took place.

130 The audit found a range of existing mechanisms for the identification and sharing of good practice but that there was no systematic College-wide approach to the identification and sharing of good practice. In discussion with the audit team, the College was frank in acknowledging that to date its efforts had been concentrated on establishing sound procedures for quality assurance; staff consider, and the team would concur, that the College is now in a position to move to a systematic appraisal of how individual instances of good practice might be used in a structured way to contribute to institutional management of learning opportunities.

## **Staff support, development and reward**

131 The audit team noted several elements of sound practice in institutional arrangements for staff support, development and reward. There are a number of strategies and policies which, in the view of team, have the capacity systematically to enhance the quality of learning opportunities; by way of example, the Human Resources Strategy and the Learning and Teaching Strategy, the latter monitored on an annual basis, are designed to ensure the quality of staff in the longer term.

132 At the time of the audit these various initiatives were not totally integrated: as an illustration, the College produces an annual summary of peer observation but the impact of the scheme in the context of the strategic enhancement of learning opportunities was not immediately evident to the audit team. Similarly, at the time of the audit, the College was planning to introduce a teaching fellowship scheme but it was not entirely clear how this might relate to the capturing of best practice in learning and teaching, the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the annual peer observation process. The College may wish to reflect on the potential for these separate initiatives to be structured to provide an integrated approach to support for its staff to contribute to the enhancement of learning opportunities.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

133 At the time of the audit the College did not have any collaborative provision.

## **Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students**

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

## **Section 7: Published information**

135 The College publishes a range of marketing and pre-admissions material in hardcopy and online. The Marketing and Communications Department is responsible for the development and maintenance of this material. The Quality Team supplies the Marketing and Communications Department with approved information about the College's provision. The Quality Team is



responsible for ensuring that information contained within marketing and other pre-admissions materials accurately reflects the courses as validated.

136 Course Handbooks contain information on regulatory matters, the curriculum and assessment and student support systems; the handbooks are prepared by the Quality Team to ensure that the information they contain is accurate.

### **Accuracy and completeness of published information**

137 The audit team found evidence of comprehensive and accurate information on the provision offered and the facilities available at the College for undergraduate students. Course handbooks for undergraduate courses are accurate and comprehensive and contain relevant and precise information about intended learning outcomes, course structure, assessment and the range of support services available to students. The College's intranet also provides clear and complete information on support services.

138 All students are issued with a Student Contract Handbook which contains full information about the obligations and responsibilities of students. It also contains detailed information on the complaints and appeals procedures which are also included in the Academic Regulations for courses. The Academic Regulations are similarly presented in a clear and accessible way in award specific documents. The 'Coming to Ravensbourne' series of documents provides information on the range of services for new students. These documents are detailed, accurate and accessible.

139 There is also a sound approach to publishing information on the College's intranet, including external examiners' reports, committee minutes, policy documents and detailed information on the College's quality assurance procedures. The accessibility of complete and accurate information about the College's policy and procedures is identified as a feature of good practice in the audit.

140 There is evidence of some shortcomings in the accuracy and completeness of documentation provided to postgraduate students. Students were not informed either in the course handbooks or in other pre-entry material issued in advance to students about an intensive 'pre-entry' course arranged for new MA students at very short notice. There was also evidence that inaccurate fee information in respect of the postgraduate courses had been posted on the College's website.

141 In meetings with the audit team, senior staff of the College stated that details of the MA Course Leader's position in the management structure was published in the MA Course Handbook should students wish to pursue any matters to a more senior level. In practice, the handbooks refer misleadingly to the Head of Faculty as the person to contact in addition to the Subject Leader. This lack of clarity in the published information about the management arrangements for the MA course provision was confirmed by postgraduate students, who considered that this had contributed to an insufficiently timely response by the College to their concerns about aspects of course organisation.

### **Students' experience of published information and other information available to them**

142 Undergraduate students confirmed that the pre-entry material issued by the College, both in print and online, was clear, complete and accessible. They reported a similar experience of information provided on Open Days and in other pre-entry contacts with the College. Undergraduate students reported that their expectations derived from such sources were largely met in their subsequent experience of their courses and the College in general.

143 Postgraduate students commented adversely on the absence of timely information on the requirement to attend a pre-entry course and the lack of accurate information in the Course Handbooks on the line management arrangements for their Course Leader. As the College develops its approach to the management of its taught postgraduate provision it should review its arrangements for the provision of information to students on taught postgraduate programmes.

**RG333a 09/07**

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ISBN 978 1 84482 731 2

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786