



Royal College of Art

MARCH 2007

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2007

ISBN 978 1 84482 715 2

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk

Printed copies are available from:

Linney Direct
Adamsway
Mansfield
NG18 4FN

Tel 01623 450788

Fax 01623 450481

Email qaa@linneydirect.com

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Contents

Preface	iii
Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex	iv
Summary	1
Introduction	1
Outcomes of the institutional audit	1
Institutional approach to quality enhancement	1
Postgraduate research students	1
Published information	1
Features of good practice	1
Recommendations for action	2
Reference points	2
Report	3
Section 1: Introduction and background	3
Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards	3
Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities	4
Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement	6
Section 5: Collaborative arrangements	7
Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students	8
Section 7: Published information	9
Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations	10
Appendix	11
The Royal College of Arts' response to the institutional audit report	11

Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To this end, QAA carries out institutional audits of higher education institutions.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

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

the standards of its awards.

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

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

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

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

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Royal College of Art (the College) from 12 to 16 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.

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

In institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the United Kingdom (UK). The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for the students.

Outcomes of the institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the Royal College of Art is that:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards
- 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

Overall, the audit team found that the institution was engaging in enhancement activities at institutional and departmental levels, but considered that there is scope for a more proactive and strategic approach at the institutional level.

Postgraduate research students

The audit team concluded that the institution's arrangements for its postgraduate research students met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and secured appropriate academic standards and quality of provision for its postgraduate research programmes.

Published information

The audit team found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution published about its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as good practice:

- the College's commitment to ensuring that the research students' voice is heard through its student representation mechanisms
- the proactive approach taken by the College to develop and maximise its network of contacts to support and enhance student learning opportunities

- the commitment of the College to the provision of a range of staff development opportunities in support of learning and teaching across the College
- the students' opportunity to participate as members of admissions boards in support of both the applicant and their own personal development
- the additional benefits accruing from the internal moderator system in terms of departmental, institutional and interdisciplinary understanding
- the content of the Research Methods Course and its leadership, management and currency which equips students with excellent skills and research methodology.

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- develop a mechanism by which the College can assure itself that it has a systematic, ongoing, timely and effective engagement with all elements of the Academic Infrastructure
- appraise the timeliness with which the College responds to, and/or implements changes in, key areas relevant to the institutional leadership and management of learning opportunities
- further develop and strengthen the College's policies and procedures for collaborative arrangements
- review, develop and enhance its quality assurance procedures and consider the merit of publishing them in a single, comprehensive, readily accessible source.

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- ensure that the tutorial system regulations are implemented consistently across the College, including the issuing of written feedback to all students after each formal assessment
- establish a personal tutor network for MPhil/PhD students separate from the supervisory team
- provide training, guidance and support for all PhD students who are granted the opportunity to teach and assess.

Reference points

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

- the *Code of practice*
- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

The audit team found that the College took account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students, although the team considered that a more systematic engagement is advisable.

Report

1 An institutional audit of the Royal College of Art (the College) was undertaken during the week commencing 12 March 2007. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the College's management of the academic standards of its awards and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Mr C Caine, Dr K King, Miss R Pelik, Professor D Shellard, auditors, and Miss C Smith, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mr M Cott, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The Royal College of Art was founded in 1837 as the Government School of Design. It became the Royal College of Art in 1896 and was awarded its Royal Charter, conferring the right to award degrees, in 1967. It is the only entirely postgraduate higher education institution of art and design in the world.

4 At the time of the audit the College had approximately 830 full-time equivalent postgraduate students, with an average age on entry of 27. The majority of students undertake a two-year taught MA programme, although one in nine studies for a postgraduate research degree. Students are taught by over 100 members of staff, including artists, designers and writers who are practitioners and researchers.

5 The College is organised into six schools, each containing a number of departments. The College's main site is in South Kensington, with the Sculpture Department located just south of Battersea Bridge. The College has plans to expand its estate in Battersea.

6 The previous institutional audit took place in 2003 and resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the College's management of the quality and standards of its academic programmes. A number of important developments to the executive and deliberative structures have taken place since the previous institutional audit. The institutional audit report contained a number of recommendations, most of which the present audit team considered had been responded to satisfactorily.

7 In 2006, the College's research degree provision was reviewed by QAA. The College's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programmes was considered to be appropriate and satisfactory.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

8 Within the College, Senate is the body with ultimate responsibility for academic standards. Two subcommittees in particular support Senate in exercising this responsibility. The Academic Board for Concessions and Discipline is responsible for student admissions, progression, examination and academic appeals, and oversees adherence with College regulations. The Academic Standards Committee has prime responsibility for academic quality assurance, including the approval, monitoring and review of programmes and collaborative arrangements, and also takes an overview of external examiners' and internal moderators' reports.

9 The rigorous admissions procedure for MA and research students is a key strategy within the College for ensuring that its students are able to achieve the academic standards set for its awards. The College makes full and appropriate use of external examiners in the final assessment of students and of independent external advisers in the approval of new programmes and in their periodic review. Effective use is also made of internal staff independent of a department in assessment, approval and review.

10 The audit team considered that a more detailed statement of the role of the external examiner would assist everyone involved in the examination process. Together with published

induction or briefing guidelines, such a statement would help the College to assure itself that there is a consistent understanding of the role among students, external and internal examiners, and those acting as internal moderators.

11 College-wide assessment criteria were introduced for all formal assessments for MA students in the academic year 2006-07. Although at the time of the audit, the criteria were in the early stages of implementation, the audit team concluded that the use of the criteria would make a significant contribution to consistency in decision-making between disciplines and to the assurance of academic standards.

12 The quality assurance procedures used to approve new programmes and to monitor, review and revalidate them enable the College to be assured of the academic standards of its awards. However, several improvements could be made to improve consistency of reporting and to ensure appropriate formal approval and oversight of programme changes. The audit team would also encourage the College to ensure that its quality assurance procedures enable it to be completely assured of the academic standards of programmes delivered using other modes of study.

13 In setting and maintaining the academic standards of awards the College makes use of a range of external reference points. The standards of awards align with the level descriptors in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). However, the College may wish to revisit the way in which learning outcomes and level descriptors are articulated across its documentation to ensure that the MA standards described in the College's Regulations, through course objectives in departmental handbooks and the College-wide assessment criteria are consistent with each other and with the FHEQ.

14 Overall, the audit team found mixed evidence of a systematic engagement with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (Code of practice). In addition, the College has no single document for each of its programmes containing all relevant course information which is also publicly available to employers, prospective and current students. This information is located in a variety of places and publications but it would be beneficial, particularly for prospective students, for the College to develop programme specifications, or their equivalent. In light of these various reservations about the extent of its engagement with these important external reference points, the College is advised to develop a mechanism by which it can assure itself that it has a systematic, ongoing, timely and effective engagement with all elements of the Academic Infrastructure.

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

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

16 The Academic Standards Committee, supported by the Learning and Teaching Committee, creates the framework for the management of student learning opportunities, while the Planning and Resources Committee has responsibility for resource allocation. Management of learning opportunities is principally the responsibility of departments, although where appropriate the College has been developing a more strategic College-wide approach. These developments aim to strike an appropriate balance between central College control and local departmental autonomy.

17 In the previous institutional audit, the College was advised to 'strengthen the effectiveness of the leadership and management in the dissemination and implementation of centrally determined policies and procedures'. One of the areas where a College-wide approach would be beneficial is that of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. Through meetings with staff, the audit team found confusion over the status, validity and currency of the College's Learning and Teaching Strategy. This uncertainty coupled with concerns relating to the pace of updating the Strategy, along with other similar examples (see paragraph 19), suggested that the recommendation from the previous institutional audit is still relevant. The team therefore

considers that it would be advisable for the College to appraise the timeliness with which it responds to and/or implements changes in key areas relevant to the institutional leadership and management of learning opportunities.

18 The College's quality assurance systems are based on validation of new programmes, their periodic review through revalidation and annual monitoring through Departmental Review. These processes are fit for purpose and include appropriate external input through panel membership and from external examiners. While, in general, the College is actively using quality assurance processes to identify issues relating to the institutional management of learning opportunities, Departmental Review is used mainly as a mechanism to assure standards. The College may wish to consider extending the scope of Departmental Review to increase the emphasis on evaluation of learning and teaching in order to provide additional assurance of the management of learning opportunities at programme level. The College is encouraged to reassess Departmental Review's value as an annual programme monitoring process. Additionally, the audit team found evidence of recurring themes of concern in Departmental Reviews that indicated a need for a more proactive, timely and consistent response to issues raised.

19 The College has effective mechanisms for ensuring that the student voice is heard in the development of learning opportunities in validation, Departmental Review and revalidation. Student views are also gathered formally, through student questionnaires and through representation on institutional committees, and informally through meetings with members of staff. The College's commitment to ensuring that the research students' voice is heard through its student representation systems is identified as a feature of good practice in the audit. The College's mechanisms for the evaluative use of student feedback as a management information tool are potentially very effective. However, the audit team considered that the Academic Standards Committee's ability to draw out common threads across departments, thereby maximising the use of the information for development and improvement, was compromised by the lack of consistency in the format and content of evaluation and commentary on student feedback within Departmental Review reports. The audit team acknowledges that the College has given consideration to student feedback mechanisms but encourages the College to continue to explore additional means of securing student feedback so as to raise overall levels of student engagement with the process.

20 The College has a particular and distinctive academic staffing profile of full-time and fractional appointments and a large number of visiting staff. Together with technical and administrative staff, they form a key element contributing to the quality of the learning opportunities, with face-to-face contact at the core of the College's philosophy of learning and teaching. Additionally, the College's proactive approach to developing and maximising its network of contacts to support and enhance student learning opportunities is identified as a feature of good practice in the audit.

21 The Human Resources Strategy 2006-09 covers the size and composition of the workforce; recruitment, retention and remuneration; skills profile, staff development and performance management; and staff health and welfare. The Strategy is achieving its purpose and contributes effectively to the College's management of learning opportunities. The College is actively striving to develop a research culture and engage in teaching pedagogy. The College's commitment, through a number of initiatives and activities, to providing a wide range of staff development opportunities in support of learning and teaching (see also paragraphs 30 and 31) across the College is identified as a feature of good practice in the audit.

22 The challenges of increasing studio space, improving the library and developing the virtual learning environment have been engaging the College in recent years. The College's plans for increasing studio space through the expansion of its estate in Battersea were close to fruition at the time of the audit. The significant changes brought about in library provision demonstrated to the audit team the College's capacity to implement an active and effective institutional response to concerns identified through its quality assurance processes.

23 The MA admissions process, a two-stage process in which the second part involves a panel interview, is fair and rigorous and a key element of the College's strategy to ensure that the students accepted are able to take full advantage of the learning opportunities offered. The audit team considered the membership of students on admissions panels, and the value this brought to the process for both the applicant and the student taking part, to be a feature of good practice.

24 Student support is generally effective at College and departmental level. There is good support for College and course induction, careers and professional practice provision, as well as for specific student groups such as international students and those with dyslexia and dispraxia. The College recognises the need to extend disability support provision and to make this support explicit to students.

25 Students are generally well supported with regard to the provision of formative feedback through the tutorial system, but the team noted variability in the issuing of written feedback. While the College is considering strategies to address the inconsistency, the team considers it desirable that the College ensure that the regulations on the tutorial system are implemented consistently across the College and that the regulations require the issue of written feedback to all students after each formal assessment to enable students to improve their work.

26 Overall, the processes in place enable the College to manage learning opportunities, however, their effectiveness could be increased through the review, development and enhancement of some elements of the College's quality assurance procedures. The audit team found that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the College's present and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

27 The Learning and Teaching Committee is responsible for supporting and enhancing postgraduate learning and teaching. At present, the College does not have an enhancement strategy, an agreed definition of enhancement or, as noted above, a current learning and teaching strategy. Historically, the College's approach to enhancement has been to identify areas for improvement through the quality assurance processes of validation and Departmental Review. The audit team found some evidence of these quality assurance processes leading to initiatives, such as interdisciplinary learning opportunities, academic writing and dissemination of good practice. In developing its enhancement agenda, the College may also wish to consider how the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points can be incorporated into a more comprehensive enhancement strategy.

28 The College requires cross-departmental internal moderation in the assessment of students. This process provides additional benefits at departmental, institutional and interdisciplinary levels, and was identified as a feature of good practice in the audit.

29 The College supports a number of programmes aimed at enhancement, such as Teaching Fellowships and projects linked to the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund. The audit team found that while individual projects had impact in their own departments, the College had not yet established mechanisms by which the outcomes could be widely disseminated so as to affect the institutional enhancement of student learning opportunities.

30 The audit team found that the College's arrangements for the training of new and more experienced research student supervisors and the mandatory Research Methods Course for research students, made a very positive contribution to the area of quality enhancement. Both of these initiatives were considered by the team to be features of good practice.

31 Overall, the audit team found that the College was engaging in enhancement activities at institutional and departmental levels, but that it could be more proactive and strategic at the institutional level.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

32 The College has a small number of collaborative arrangements established to extend its academic provision and to enable it to provide access for students to facilities, resources and academic expertise that are not available in-house. The College's collaborative arrangements include a dual award in partnership with another local higher education institution; partnership agreements with a prestigious local museum, which contributes to two jointly-taught awards; and a validation of another partner's own programme. In addition, there are relationships with a range of 'host institutions' to provide 60 per cent of the learning experience for a small number of students on one of the College's awards.

33 Collaborative arrangements are formalised in memoranda of agreement: some of which were drawn up a number of years previously and are recognised by the College as not representing best practice. At the time of the audit these older agreements were in the process of being renegotiated. The audit team formed the view that the College could be more proactive in developing memoranda of agreement with collaborative partners with reference to the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. The team found that the procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of its formal collaborative arrangements and the other numerous informal collaborations fall short of the practice described in the *Code of practice*. The team consider it advisable that the College further develop and strengthen its policies and procedures for all collaborative arrangements.

34 Assessment arrangements are appropriately conducted and overseen by the College in its collaborative arrangements. The use of external examiners and their reports within collaborative arrangements is in alignment with internal practice and with the section of the *Code of practice* on external examining, and demonstrates appropriate use of independent and external persons in the final assessment of students studying for the College's awards through collaborative arrangements. The audit team suggest that more formalised briefing and training of those staff in host organisations that have a substantial role in assessing the final award should be considered.

35 There is no separate consideration of statistical indicators for awards offered through collaborative arrangements but, given the nature and scale of the College's collaborative provision, the audit team considered that the use of statistics was appropriate. Student feedback for the dual award and the partnership agreements is collected in the same ways as for all other College awards. In respect of its validated programme, the audit team could see no evidence of systematic collection of student feedback, and recommends that the College ensure consistency in the format and content of evaluation and commentary on feedback received from students within the annual review. Similarly, the team could find no overt evidence of sharing or disseminating good practice between the staff associated with collaborative provision. The College may wish to consider the benefits of facilitating such an exchange.

36 The College's collaborative arrangements, including those with other host organisations, enable students to gain access to important facilities, resources and expertise that the College would not otherwise be able to provide, and thus extend the resources and opportunities for learning. The collaborative arrangements make a significant contribution to the quality and reputation of the programmes and provide students with excellent research expertise, practitioner contact, resources and learning environments at the cutting edge of their disciplines. In addition to the opportunities provided through the formal collaborations, the College has a wide range of informal relationships that contributes to the learning experience and the opportunities provided for its students, including relationships established to provide access to specific technical resources; opportunities for work experience during vacations; and external involvement in setting project briefs.

37 The audit team found that the College secures appropriate academic standards and quality of learning opportunities for its collaborative provision, but considered that the College's

policies and procedures require further development in order to bring them in line with the *Code of practice*.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

38 Following a period of rapid growth, at the time of the audit, approximately one in nine of the College's students were studying for an MPhil or a PhD. The College has aspirations to increase this number. The arrangements for postgraduate research students are overseen by the Director of Research and the Research Office and take account of the Academic Infrastructure, including the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

39 The Research Committee, chaired by the Director of Research, is responsible for developing and implementing staff and student research policy across the College (including the recruitment policy), advising Senate on research strategy, keeping a College-wide record of research degree activity, and ensuring that the provision for research students enhances the College's research infrastructure and accords with good practice.

40 Strong support from staff and students was expressed to the audit team for the work of the Director of Research and her team in the Research Office, with many staff expressing a desire for the College to ensure that the needs of the growing postgraduate research provision and research activity were met fully. The Director of Research provides effective leadership in this area. The College may wish to consider how the good practice evident in this area can be shared throughout the institution.

41 Admission to an MPhil or PhD programme is via an MPhil/PhD admissions board that includes a minimum of three members of staff as well as a student representative. The student's participation is highly valued by the students and their inclusion on the board is considered by the audit team to be a feature of good practice. Effective oversight of the admissions process is maintained by the Research Office, the Academic Board for Concessions and Discipline and, ultimately, Senate.

42 Student induction is thorough, with the offer letter detailing the support and resources that a postgraduate research student can expect. Each student is allocated a minimum of two supervisors and students have a minimum of six supervisions a year. Supervisors carry out the dual roles of supervision and personal tutor. The audit team formed the view that there was potential for tension to arise between the two roles and considers it desirable that the College establishes a personal tutor network for MPhil/PhD students separate from the supervisory team. At the time of the audit, the College was piloting a personal development planning system.

43 High quality research training is provided by the Research Methods Course that is mandatory for all first-year postgraduate research students. Coordinated by the Research Office, the Course offers a range of workshops, seminars and mentoring services to enhance and develop the transferable and career skills of postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers. The content of the Course and its leadership, management and currency are identified as a feature of good practice in the audit. The College also provides optional training for PhD students who teach. The audit team formed the view that PhD students, those they teach, as well as the College's ability to assure the learning opportunities provided, would all benefit from making this training mandatory. The audit team consider it desirable that training, guidance and support be compulsory rather than optional for all PhD students who are granted the opportunity to teach and assess.

44 In its aspirations to extend the area of postgraduate research provision, the College will wish to ensure that the needs of postgraduate research students are clearly incorporated into the developing Learning and Teaching Strategy. The audit team concluded that the College's arrangements for its postgraduate research students meet the expectations of the section of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and secured appropriate academic standards and quality of provision for its postgraduate research programmes.

Section 7: Published information

45 The College aims to ensure that all printed or electronic documents that it publishes provide useful, accurate, reliable and consistent information for the benefit of students, potential students, external stakeholders and the public. All publications produced by the College are signed off by a member of the Senior Management Group. The audit team examined a range of published information, including the College-wide Handbook, departmental handbooks, the College regulations, the College website and intranet, the prospectus and the policy for online publications and internal College committee minutes.

46 The audit team noted the progress made since the previous institutional audit in improving the consistency of the departmental handbooks and ensuring that they are stylistically compatible with the College-wide Handbook. A strong house style was evident in both types of handbook. As noted already in Section 2 above, the team identified a degree of variability within the College-wide and departmental handbooks with regard to the articulation of course aims and objectives.

47 With regard to online material, the audit team noted that the website was under development during the previous audit and at the time of the present audit it was in the final stages of this process. It is intended that the College-wide Handbook and departmental handbooks be made available online during the early part of the academic year 2007-08 to ensure that programme information will be available to a wider audience including employers and prospective students. However, as already noted in Section 2, the audit team considers that information on individual courses could be more readily accessible within a single comprehensive programme specific document, with particular benefits to employers, potential and current students.

48 The audit team found that various centrally determined policies, procedures and guidance, such as induction and briefings for external examiners; definitions of minor and major course changes; procedures for making ongoing course changes; and templates for validation/revalidation, were not available or required further development. The audit team considered that these policies and guidance could further strengthen the College's capacity to manage academic standards and learning opportunities. There may also be benefits in publishing these, together with other relevant College policies and guidance in an academic quality handbook or equivalent. The audit team therefore considers it advisable that these guidelines and policy documents are developed and that the College considers the merit of publishing these, together with its other reviewed and enhanced quality assurance procedures, in a single, comprehensive, readily accessible source.

49 As noted in Section 5, the College is in the process of reviewing its memoranda of agreement with some of its partners. The audit team found an equivocal statement within one of these, regarding the partner's responsibility to acknowledge the College as the awarding body in its published information. The College will wish to clarify the statement in order to ensure that the partner is aware of the College's expectations.

50 The College met HEFCE requirements for Teaching Quality Information (TQI) on the Higher Education and Research Opportunities website until the closure of the site in December 2006. The external examiners' report form contained three lead questions for TQI. The College has outlined its intention to consider over the summer and autumn of 2007 how best to make such information available publicly through the College's website. Student representatives involved in the College's committee structure and in departmental reviews consider external examiner reports. Additionally, the College publishes its periodic research on the destination of graduates.

51 Overall, the audit team found that the College has appropriate mechanisms to ensure the accuracy and reliability of its published information.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the College's commitment to ensuring that the research students' voice is heard through its student representation mechanisms (paragraph 19)
- the proactive approach taken by the College to develop and maximise its network of contacts to support and enhance student learning opportunities (paragraph 20)
- the commitment of the College to the provision of a range of staff development opportunities in support of learning and teaching across the College (paragraph 21)
- the students' opportunity to participate as members of admissions boards, in support of both the applicant and their own personal development (paragraph 23)
- the additional benefits accruing from the internal moderator system in terms of departmental, institutional and interdisciplinary understanding (paragraph 28)
- the content of the Research Methods Course and its leadership, management and currency that equips students with excellent skills and research methodology (paragraphs 41; 43).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- develop a mechanism by which the College can assure itself that it has a systematic, ongoing, timely and effective engagement with all elements of the Academic Infrastructure (paragraph 13)
- appraise the timeliness with which the College responds to, and/or implements changes in, key areas relevant to the institutional leadership and management of learning opportunities (paragraph 17)
- further develop and strengthen the College's policies and procedures for collaborative arrangements (paragraph 33)
- review, develop and enhance its quality assurance procedures and consider the merit of publishing them in a single, comprehensive, readily accessible source (paragraph 48).

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- ensure that the tutorial system regulations are implemented consistently across the College, including the issuing of written feedback to all students after each formal assessment (paragraph 25)
- establish a personal tutor network for MPhil/PhD students, separate from the supervisory team (paragraph 42)
- provide training, guidance and support for all PhD students who are granted the opportunity to teach and assess (paragraph 43).

Appendix

The Royal College of Art's response to the institutional audit report

The Royal College of Art welcomes the outcome of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's Institutional Audit and the audit team's judgement that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the College's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The College is particularly pleased that the audit team recognised the following features of good practice:

- the proactive approach taken by the College to develop and maximise its network of contacts to support and enhance student learning opportunities
- the commitment of the College to the provision of a range of staff development opportunities in support of learning and teaching
- students' opportunity to participate as members of admissions boards in support of both the applicant and their own personal development
- the additional benefits accruing from the internal moderator system in terms of Departmental, institutional and inter-disciplinary understanding
- the College's commitment to ensuring the research students' voice is heard through the student representative mechanisms
- the content of the Research Methods Course and its leadership, management and currency which equips students with excellent skills and research methodology.

The audit report makes a valuable and constructive contribution to the internal discussion of quality assurance and enhancement. On behalf of the Senate, the Academic Standards Committee has agreed an action plan to review and implement the audit team's recommendations and will report to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education on progress in March 2008.

