



University College Falmouth

Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

February 2012

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About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at University College Falmouth. The review took place on 20-24 February 2012 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Sally Bentley
- Miss Sarah Riches
- Miss Kate Wicklow (student reviewer)
- Mr Gregor Douglas (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by University College Falmouth and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
 - threshold academic standards¹
 - the quality of learning opportunities
 - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- identifies features of good practice
- makes recommendations
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take
- provides commentaries on public information and the theme topic.

A summary of the [key findings](#) can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

In reviewing University College Falmouth, the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The theme for the academic year 2011-12 is the First Year Student Experience.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.² For background information about University College Falmouth see page 3. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for [Institutional Review](#) of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland³ and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

¹ For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

² www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx

³ www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/IRENI/pages/default.aspx

Key findings

This section summarises the QAA review team's key findings about University College Falmouth.

QAA's judgements about University College Falmouth

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at University College Falmouth.

- Academic standards at University College Falmouth **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at University College Falmouth **requires further improvement to meet UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at University College Falmouth **meets UK expectations**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at University College Falmouth.

- The high quality student support services in the area of dyslexia, academic skills and careers (paragraph 2.8.3).
- The considerable enhancement of established good practice in the area of student mentoring (paragraph 4.8).
- The development of a growing and cohesive research community and environment (paragraph 2.10.3).

Recommendations

The QAA review team recommends that University College Falmouth:

- develop policies and procedures, which reflect the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), to assure the quality of programmes employing flexible or distributed learning, before the start of the 2012-13 academic year (paragraph 2.12.3)
- develop policies and procedures, which reflect the *Code of practice*, to secure current and prospective collaborative provision, before the start of the 2012-13 academic year (paragraph 2.11.2)
- develop comprehensive work-based learning and placement policies and procedures, which reflect the *Code of practice*, to support the development, approval, delivery, monitoring and review of the wide range of existing and proposed provision, before the start of the 2012-13 academic year (paragraph 2.13.4)
- annually review the Student Charter with the Students' Union (paragraph 2.14.1).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following actions** that University College Falmouth is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The action being taken to ensure the availability of module component marks to assessment boards in order to confirm that intended learning outcomes have been achieved (paragraph 1.3.4).

- The steps being taken centrally to improve timetabling (paragraph 2.2.9).
- The development of a range of initiatives to engage students in quality assurance and enhancement (paragraphs 2.3.8 and 4.4).
- The development of the Management Information Systems capability (paragraph 2.4).

Public information

The information University College Falmouth provides about its higher education is current, reliable, useful and accessible to students.

The first year student experience

The University College Falmouth manages the first year student experience carefully and effectively.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the operational description and handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland](#).⁴

About University College Falmouth

University College Falmouth (UCF or the University College) has the following mission: 'To be a world class arts university that gives creative minds inspiring futures'.

There have been two significant changes since the last QAA review.

- The merger of University College Falmouth with Dartington College of Arts took effect from 6 April 2008. The transfer of all academic provision from Dartington to Falmouth was completed by September 2010. The merged institution established a new Board of Governors and Academic Board.
- Professor Anne Carlisle, Rector and Chief Executive, took up her post from 3 September 2009, following the retirement of Professor Alan Livingston. The new Rector established a new Directorate and Management Board in autumn 2009.

A revised academic structure followed, which established two Schools: the School of Media and Performance and the School of Art and Design. The two Deans of School were appointed (both external) and took up their posts in the summer and autumn of 2010. Each School has established a School Executive Team.

From April 2008 UCF operated across three campuses: Dartington (near Totnes, Devon), Tremough (Penryn) and Woodlane (Falmouth). UCF secured funding during this period to build a new Performance Centre at Tremough and shares its Tremough campus, under a partnership agreement, with the University of Exeter. In autumn 2010 the move from Dartington to Tremough and Woodlane was completed.

Having successfully completed a large number of academic and structural change projects, UCF states that the key strategic challenges will be to put the University College into a strong position to exploit its specialist status, unique combination of academic disciplines, first class facilities, and geographical location. Its goals are to gain university title and research degree awarding power by 2014, and to be recognised as one of the top five specialist arts universities in the world by 2017.

⁴ www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/IRENI/pages/default.aspx

UCF states that it has a strategic focus which will deliver the key challenges:

- to expand and diversify what they do
- to be celebrated for their research and innovation
- to produce graduates who get great jobs
- to help grow Cornwall
- to be internationally significant.

Collaborative activity is currently limited to a small partnership to deliver part of a Foundation Degree. The international strategy promotes the aspirations of formalising links and creating collaborative partnerships with international establishments.

Explanation of the findings about University College Falmouth

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail. It supplies sufficient evidence to support and clarify the review team's judgements, statements and recommendations.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#)⁵ is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.⁶

1 Academic standards

Outcome

The academic standards at University College Falmouth **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 The review team found that programmes at UCF are aligned to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and UCF's new modular framework used in recent validation events explicitly discusses the level of the programmes.

1.1.1 Systems are in place to ensure that levels and credit weighting conform to the expectations of the FHEQ, and students have access to module content in their programme handbooks, including learning outcomes. Students studying abroad bring back appropriate credits and the regulations are clear on how these are taken into account in the calculation of the degree classifications.

Use of external examiners

1.2 The University College's scrupulous use of external examiners ensures that the academic standards of its programmes are maintained at the appropriate levels. The role and duties of the external examiner are clearly articulated and there is an established system for the nomination and approval of external examiners. Their induction and preparation has recently been strengthened through the opportunity to attend a briefing at a location more easily accessible than Falmouth. The review team confirmed that the external examining system is in line with the *Code of practice*.

1.2.1 The external examining process is being strengthened through new arrangements to appoint examiners into teams for each programme or into subject-related clusters, rather than to specific awards, so strengthening the current process. This restructuring is designed to improve the flexibility of the external examining system and enable it to cope effectively with the development of a range of new awards at different levels. It will also increase support for relatively inexperienced examiners.

1.2.2 A well-structured template exists for external examiners' reports and this prompts detailed responses from the external examiners. Student representatives have access to these reports on UCF's virtual learning environment, known as Learning Space. All Staff-Student Liaison Groups see and some discuss the reports, though the University

⁵ www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx

⁶ www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/IRENI/pages/default.aspx

College is working to improve consistency across all programmes to meet the expectations of its *Quality Handbook*.

1.2.3 There is a clear system in place for identifying and responding to issues that are raised in external examiners' reports. Annual reporting requires staff to take full account of feedback from external examiners. The Quality and Standards Team ensures that appropriate letters of response are sent to examiners and writes an overview report allowing institutional monitoring to be undertaken.

1.2.4 Students normally meet external examiners, as expected in UCF's External Examiners' Handbook.

Assessment and standards

1.3 The University College's procedures for the design, approval, monitoring and review of assessment strategies are broadly effective in ensuring that students have the opportunity to demonstrate the learning outcomes of their programmes.

1.3.1 UCF considers student progression, and provisionally approves marks at the end of semester one. Staff and students were clear that these can lead to specific learning agreements being drawn up with students whose progress is causing concern, which strengthen the link between assessment and approaches to learning.

1.3.2 When the progression boards and associated learning agreements are set alongside the initial check on dyslexia, the semester one health check process, improvements in the monitoring of registers, and the monthly check of student enrolment data, UCF is enhancing a potentially strong system for monitoring and supporting retention.

1.3.3 UCF has previously experienced difficulty in maintaining the accuracy of its student records, leading to problems in producing reports. In order to meet the requirement of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), an internal audit was undertaken. The implementation of its recommendations have been carefully monitored by the University College, leading the institution to draw 'substantial assurance' that there is a basically sound system of control and that 'controls are operating effectively', though there remains 'some scope for improvement'.

1.3.4 The University College had problems at the end-of-year assessment boards for the former Dartington programmes in June 2011. Equally, component marks were not available at the 2011 assessment boards, resulting in boards being unable to confirm from the evidence formally presented that students had passed all components and that they had met the learning outcomes. Reliance was placed on informal assurances. The review team **affirms** the action being taken by UCF to ensure the availability of module component marks to assessment boards, enabling examination boards in the future to directly confirm that intended module learning outcomes have been achieved.

1.3.5 Assessment is considered during the validation and review process, and information for students on assessment is available which indicates the link between learning outcomes and the assessment strategy. The distribution of assignments across the semester and matters relating to formative assessment are all embedded in the design, approval and review of programmes.

1.3.6 There is clear guidance in UCF's *Quality Handbook* on expectations for the marking and moderation of student work. Staff demonstrated a secure understanding of the rationale for their chosen method for sampling in their subject area, and external examiners appear satisfied with the moderation process.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.4 The review team found that the design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes enabled standards to be set and maintained. The approach has recently been reviewed to give the Schools a greater role now that they are business centres. The team considered that the documentation relating to the design and development of programmes was comprehensive. The University College maintains a consistent oversight of the monitoring, validation and review cycles, though it recognises that a more systematic review by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) of engagement with professional and statutory bodies is needed.

1.4.1 The previous QAA audit made a desirable recommendation that 'the University College should reflect on policies, processes and procedures in relation to institutional management of academic standards and quality of learning opportunities as the institution expands in size and scope'. The implementation of this recommendation is clearly evident in the reviews of the University College's *Quality Handbook* and the ongoing review and updating of its policies and procedures. However, there are still some areas, as identified in the recommendations, where further development would be beneficial.

1.4.2 The previous QAA audit also made an advisable recommendation that UCF should further support and develop committee secretaries. Since then, the University College has run committee secretary training through workshops, and successfully strengthened its recording of the work of its committees. In addition, papers presented to committees, such as progress reports on the Road Map proposals and review and validation reports, all now provide a very clear record of meetings with actions that can easily be tracked through to completion. The committee structure has also been reorganised and is now closely aligned to the executive structure, is well-served and provides an effective deliberative framework for a small higher education institution.

1.4.3 The introduction of a new modular framework was planned and implemented in an effective and appropriate manner. While it was recognised that the process was not, in the majority of cases, a significant change to the curriculum, there was still appropriate use of academic reference points. There were careful judgements about when to involve external advisors and detailed discussion about whether requested changes warranted full revalidation or fell within the minor adjustments allowed within this process, which was predominantly to align different academic structures and regulations. Interim reports presented to the Academic Board enabled the institution to assure itself that the process was done with due rigour and, where necessary, further consultation and discussions were undertaken.

1.4.4 The postgraduate students who the review team met were generally clear about the various stages of their studies and their progress. The students were pleased with the level of support and guidance from both academic and support staff.

1.4.5 The undergraduate students who the review team met had received clear headline information about assignments and deadlines, though they felt it would be more helpful to have earlier, detailed advice and guidance. However, in the meeting they were not clear what happens if they fail work. They indicated their normal source of information to be the Students' Union, despite the *Quality Handbook's* commitment to publishing clear assessment rules and some student handbooks containing guidance. In practice, there is in-course retrieval of failed work following the progression boards at the end of semester one, though there are no details on in-course retrieval in the *Quality Handbook*.

1.4.6 There is a clearly understood 'academic integrity' policy to deal with plagiarism and collusion, which is, from this year, being strengthened by the use of Turnitin by the University College.

1.4.7 The University of the Arts London is responsible for the academic quality and standards of research degree awards and it acts as the authority for the formal registration,

progression and examination of UCF's research degree students. UCF's Research Programmes and Degrees Committee oversees and supports the development of its research programmes.

Subject benchmarks

1.5 The review team found that subject benchmark statements and qualification statements are used effectively in programme design, approval, delivery and review to inform the standards of awards.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at University College Falmouth **requires further improvement to meet UK expectations**. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 Through its appointment procedures, UCF ensures that staff involved in delivering and supporting programmes are appropriately qualified. Although role specifications set out essential and desirable criteria, the institution does not have minimum criteria for the appointment of academic staff. All new staff receive an induction pack and are expected to attend a one-day University College induction event. More informal arrangements are made to provide ongoing inductions at departmental level.

2.1.1 All staff appointments are subject to a probationary period, normally lasting for one year. However, in the case of academic staff with no experience of teaching, the probationary period lasts for three years. All probationers are expected to have a supervisor, whose role is to provide advice, guidance and feedback to the probationer. Academic staff subject to a three-year probationary period must demonstrate satisfactory engagement with teaching, administration and scholarly development, and at least one of: research, business and community outreach, or income generation. They are also encouraged to complete the institution's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education, and teaching observations are a formal part of the programme. Hourly paid lecturers teaching more than 90 hours a year are also eligible to undertake the programme.

2.1.2 UCF also offers a one-day 'Introduction to teaching' course, which will become part of the postgraduate research student training programme from 2012-13. All staff, including those on fixed term contracts and hourly paid lecturers teaching more than 200 hours a year, participate in annual Performance Development Reviews. Although there was evidence of poor review completion rates for the 2010 round, staff who met the review team reported an improvement in participation in 2011, helped in part by the inclusion of refresher training in the Institutional Briefing Week. In respect of other teaching staff, UCF has a voluntary peer teaching observation scheme, which at the time of the review was being 'rolled out organically'. The review team noted that progress in meeting this objective is slow and encourages UCF to speed up its roll-out.

2.1.3 The Education Development Lecturers' role includes: developing best practice guides and disseminating best practice; developing a web resource for pedagogic research; and the delivery of lunchtime staff development events on learning and teaching priorities.

2.1.4 Learning and teaching is supported at School level by an Associate Dean. Enhancement of learning and teaching is promoted through the availability of Learning and Teaching Enhancement Grants of £5,000 for the development of innovative learning and teaching projects in priority areas. UCF also operates a Teaching Excellence and Learning

Support Excellence Award scheme to recognise significant contributions to the student learning experience. At the time of the review a Training and Staff Development Policy was being developed.

Learning resources

2.2 In April 2008 UCF merged with Dartington College of Arts. The review team saw reports of a lack of staffing in some subject areas during the merger and restructuring period. These issues are now reported as having been addressed.

2.2.1 In 2009 UCF established 25 priority projects for change, which included: proposals for an academic restructuring into two Schools, which was completed during 2010-11; and the introduction of a Resource Allocation Model and a Work Allocation Model. At the same time as the academic restructuring was underway, UCF also undertook a review of its technical support services. The outcomes of these reviews are currently being implemented.

2.2.2 Some of the student services, for example the library and IT services, are provided through Tremough Campus Services Group, a company jointly owned by UCF and the University of Exeter.

2.2.3 UCF does not have a single strategy for the deployment of learning resources, with its strategy articulated and embedded in a number of plans and policies. At the time of the review, UCF was also developing a Technology Enhanced Learning Strategy.

2.2.4 The effectiveness of UCF's learning resources is monitored by a range of committees, which draw upon the National Student Survey (NSS), Library and IT Service surveys, the early first year student experience survey, and student focus groups. The students noted in their written submission that students can feed back comments on learning resources in a number of ways, including directly to staff and through committee representation, and that the library and Combined Academic Services have robust systems for responding to student issues.

2.2.5 In the 2011 NSS, UCF respondents recorded high levels of satisfaction for both questions relating to library and IT resources. However, respondents expressed lower levels of satisfaction with access to specialist equipment, facilities or rooms. These concerns and the sufficiency of technical support were reflected in both the Students Written Submission and during the review at meetings with students.

2.2.6 UCF's prospectus notes that students will work in multi-disciplinary creative teams, mirroring working practices in the creative industries, and that 'all our students have access to our staff's expertise and industry-standard facilities...whichever course you are studying on'. However, students who the review team met expressed particular frustration with their attempts to access specialist resources outside of their own department. Access to facilities and technical support for cross-disciplinary work appeared to be dependent on the persistence of the student. The ongoing technical review (see paragraph 2.2.1) may contribute to finding resolutions to these concerns.

2.2.7 The University College established a Budget Advisory Group in October 2011 to identify and address students' concerns about resource issues. The group is jointly chaired by the Deputy Rector and the President of the Students' Union. At the time of the review, the Budget Advisory Group had met twice, and there was evidence from the minutes of a constructive and realistic approach to securing additional resources to resolve short-term issues.

2.2.8 UCF has an Estates Strategy which identifies its requirements up to 2013-14. At the time of the review visit, there were two major building developments taking place at the Tremough campus: the Academy for Innovation and Research, which is due to open in May 2012, and the Exchange (a joint venture with the University of Exeter, to provide additional

learning, teaching, study and library facilities), which is due to open in August 2012. Students had been consulted and confirmed their satisfaction with the developments.

2.2.9 A recent UCF report, called the 'Student Journey', noted students' concerns about the availability of timetables and advanced notice of the cancellation of lectures. Students who met the review team confirmed that, although timetables were available, they were insufficiently precise, were not set far enough in advance for students to make personal arrangements, and were prone to last-minute changes. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken centrally to improve timetabling.

2.2.10 Students expressed their satisfaction with the quality of learning materials available to them through the Learning Space, but commented that it could be difficult to navigate. The review team was informed that the University College was planning to develop a new virtual learning environment, Falmouth Online, which would address these concerns.

Student voice

2.3 The review team considered that the student voice was making an effective contribution to quality assurance. Students are represented on institutional committees, including the Board of Governors and Academic Board.

2.3.1 A new system of student representation at local level was introduced during the 2010-11 academic year. Staff-Student Liaison Groups are the main vehicle for students to raise issues and to receive feedback. Appropriate arrangements are made for distance learning students to also engage. There is also one departmental student representative on each School's quality and enhancement committee, appointed from among the award student representatives. Students are also members of periodic review panels, but do not sit on validation panels.

2.3.2 Support for student representation is provided at both registry and departmental level. The annual training session for student representatives was held in October 2011, but staff and student representatives who met the review team shared the view that the training had not been fully effective, and in response additional training was offered in January 2012. Acting on feedback, a Student Representative Working Group has been formed with a view to revising the election system for student representatives and developing a new training package. At the time of the review visit, the group had met on one occasion, when it was agreed that the scope of the group's terms of reference should be extended to include student engagement. There is a special section on the Learning Space website for student representatives, which provides a range of resources including access to external examiners' reports.

2.3.3 The Students' Union prepares a report for each meeting of the Board of Governors, and the Students' Union President attends the Management Board once a term to discuss issues. The President is also a member of Academic Board and presents a report to the Academic Board for discussion.

2.3.4 UCF uses a range of methods to obtain feedback from students, including: participation in the NSS, module evaluations, focus groups and focussed professional service department surveys.

2.3.5 In 2007, the QAA Institutional Audit team recommended that it was advisable that the institution 'systematically capture empirical information from students at unit level'. At the time of the review in February 2012, the institution had just implemented its first round of module evaluations using a standard template, which were administered by tutors in hard copy format. The results of module evaluations are summarised and analysed by tutors, who produce an action plan. The *Quality Handbook* states that the summary of the module evaluations will be analysed and reported, and that responses will be published and communicated to students. The review team notes the slow progress in addressing this recommendation of the 2007

audit, but believes that once the system of obtaining and acting on module feedback is fully implemented systematically across the institution, it will have the potential to enhance students' learning opportunities.

2.3.6 UCF participates in the NSS and a report on the outcomes is presented to the Management Board and the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee (LTEC). Action plans are drawn up for any award with an overall satisfaction score of less than 60 per cent, and awards with scores of between 60-74 per cent for two years running. The action plans are reviewed through an appropriate mechanism, and UCF was considering whether there would be any additional value in developing an institutional action plan.

2.3.7 UCF monitors the experience of new students using a number of mechanisms, including a survey relating to the first two weeks, and health check focus groups. During 2011 the institution also commissioned a research project relating to the 'Student Journey' involving 21 second-year undergraduates drawn from each of the five academic departments. In addition to the timetabling issues noted earlier, issues raised in this research are being processed and acted upon by the University College (see paragraph 2.2.9).

2.3.8 The review team notes the relatively recent enhancement through a range of student engagement initiatives. Some of the processes were not fully embedded at the time of the review and consequently the institution has not had the opportunity to consider their effectiveness. The team **affirms** the development of a range of initiatives to engage students in quality assurance and enhancement.

Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.4 The review team noted the substantial progress that has been made by UCF to address the weaknesses in its systems for collecting and disseminating management information. The team **affirms** the ongoing development of the University College's Management Information Systems capability.

2.4.1 In May 2010 reports to UCF's Management Board noted 'recent experience had highlighted difficulties in obtaining reliable, accurate information from the University College's student records systems in student admissions and enrolments, assessment and progression, and retention'. This raised concerns about whether the University College could meet its obligations to external funders and stakeholders, manage its affairs and deliver on its strategic objectives. In response the Management Board created a new team within the Registry to assume responsibility for student records and enrolment.

2.4.2 The review team noted that the Management Board now receives a range of information, including: student recruitment targets; internal data on recruitment trends; monthly retention and progression statistics; NSS response rates, results and action plans; institutional and subject league table data; key performance indicators; and key risk indicators.

2.4.3 The Registry produces annual monitoring statistics for use by award teams in completing annual reviews. This data includes entry qualifications, degree classifications, graduate destinations, geographical origin of students, and widening participation and equal opportunities monitoring. Annual reports on complaints, appeals and disciplinary cases are also produced.

2.4.4 UCF produces an annual Equality and Diversity Report, which contains an analysis of student data by protected groups. The 2010-11 report noted 'problems in trying to collate the correct and up to date data', and action to improve the processes of data collection and dissemination is in place.

Admission to the University College

2.5 The policies and procedures under which UCF admits students are set out in its Admissions Policy, which was approved in principle in September 2011. The Policy sets out the external and internal reference points which impact on fair admissions, including Section 10 of the *Code of practice*, equalities legislation and UCF's Equal Opportunities Policy. The Equal Opportunities Policy states that it will be reviewed annually in September and is subject to regular monitoring. The policy under which students may be admitted with recognition of previously gained credits was revised in July 2011.

2.5.1 As a specialist arts institution, UCF's recruitment and selection procedures and criteria are designed to ascertain candidates' creative as well as academic abilities. Many awards require applicants to submit a portfolio, or equivalent, and to attend an interview or audition, which may be conducted by Skype in the case of international students. Interview feedback forms set out the criteria for selection and provide feedback to applicants. The review team considered the selection process to be very clear.

2.5.2 Student recruitment statistics are reviewed regularly by UCF's Management Board and School Executive Teams. Annual Monitoring Statistics on the enrolled student population include data relating to entry qualifications and widening participation indicators.

2.5.3 Information is provided on UCF's website for applicants and those in receipt of an offer. This includes information about how to apply and the application process, pre-arrival preparation, and guidance for new students.

2.5.4 UCF has a strong commitment to widening participation and providing higher education opportunities in the creative industries for those living in Cornwall and the South West, and has been awarded the Buttle UK quality mark for its outreach activities in support of children in care and care leavers.

Complaints and appeals

2.6 The review team concluded that complaints and procedures were considered with care, and encourage the University College to reflect on the most recent annual report's proposals.

2.6.1 The University College has a two-stage appeals procedure and a three-stage complaints procedure. Appeals against the decisions of assessment boards in relation to postgraduate research degrees are dealt with by the University of the Arts London or the University of Plymouth. Both procedures are available on the University College's website, are signposted in the online *Student Handbook* and are referred to in the Student Charter. Advice and support on both procedures is provided.

2.6.2 Registry provides general briefings to staff on the complaints and appeals procedures in its sessions during the Institutional Briefing Week. Ongoing advice and support to staff in the handling of complaints and appeals is also available.

2.6.3 Annual reports on complaints, appeals and disciplinary cases are very detailed and include a summary of each case and an evaluative section. The most recent report relating to the 2009-10 academic year notes the introduction of a new process for considering appeals and changes to the extenuating circumstances procedures. The report concluded that the complaints procedures is in need of review and the disciplinary procedures were 'due for a thorough review'. However, neither comment is noted in the relevant committee minutes' action lists.

2.6.4 In their written submission, students commented that the procedures were considered to be fair, but that clearer timescales to resolve complaints would alleviate the stress for those making use of the procedures.

Career advice and guidance

2.7 In the University College's Draft Strategic Plan 2012-17, one of the key objectives is 'to produce graduates who get great jobs'. At the time of the review visit UCF's arrangements for the provision of careers advice and guidance was in transition as the institution developed its Strategy for Employability and Student Engagement.

2.7.1 From 2003 a combined careers advisory service has operated to both UCF and University of Exeter students at the Tremough campus. The careers service has external recognition and the service is working towards Matrix re-accreditation later in the year.

2.7.2 The service levels for stakeholders are set out in separate statements for students, employers and staff. The service uses a wide range of measures to monitor its effectiveness and reports regularly to the Tremough Campus Services Group. It communicates with students in various ways, including through its website, Facebook and Twitter. The University College exceeds its benchmark for the employability of its graduates, as measured six months after graduation.

2.7.3 The Employability and Employer Engagement Strategy 2012-17, which at the time of the review was still subject to formal approval, has the objectives of: producing high-quality, employable graduates; ensuring industry-informed curricula; supporting graduate business start-ups; establishing industry mentoring, placement and internship schemes; and supporting professionally connected staff.

2.7.4 The careers service has been disaggregated since 2011-12 to allow the service to meet the different needs of each institution. The review team considered the high quality support provided by the careers services to be a **feature of good practice**.

Supporting disabled students

2.8 The review team concluded that UCF produce a very comprehensive Equality and Diversity annual report, which fairly reflects the high quality of this aspect of the provision.

2.8.1 The admission process has robust mechanisms for capturing disabled students' needs and the accessibility service supports students through this, including offering students a campus tour to assess access requirements.

2.8.2 During induction students are screened for dyslexia. This is a timetabled activity and approximately 80 per cent of new students were screened in this way in 2011-12. If diagnosed, students are given access to the necessary equipment, although some students have commented that there may be delays due to the high demand placed on the service, while recognising that the service was generally prompt. A range of resources are available to support dyslexic students, such as Visual Thinking Techniques, a support forum and a specific webpage for help and support. Students appreciate this service and commented on its usefulness.

2.8.3 During 2010-11 the careers service worked with a number of students with a range of disabilities. All specific vacancies for disabled students are placed on the careers vacancy website and students are offered one-to-one support in careers guidance and finding suitable employment. The review team finds the high quality student support services in the area of dyslexia, academic skills and careers to be a **feature of good practice**.

2.8.4 The institution has identified that the Tremough campus has some accessibility issues for disabled students and are working on an accessibility campus map. UCF have also acknowledged that there are still some problems with undertaking Equality Impact Assessments.

Supporting international students

2.9 The University College provides a programme of activities which introduce international students to the UK. As well as social trips and community-building activities, the institution offers practical support sessions, including advice on visas and bank accounts.

2.9.1 An international student handbook is available online and provides information to prospective and current international students. However, the Student Written Submission commented on dated material in the international handbook and on the website.

2.9.2 UCF assists international students with their language skills and is also developing ways to screen international students for dyslexia more efficiently.

2.9.3 The University College's draft Internationalisation Strategy proposes a large increase in international students in 2012. This strategy includes statements on influencing curriculum design, monitoring international student progression and student satisfaction. The review team heard from international support staff that their focus of activity will not be on curriculum development, but on providing the same service level to the proposed larger population of international students.

2.9.4 Staff who the review team met recognised that there is a lack of parity of support offered to international students who come from the EU. They have less access to the support provided by the international office, but increasing the support provision for EU students is under consideration, and the team encourages UCF to implement those expansion plans.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.10 Postgraduate research programmes are delivered at UCF under a partnership agreement with the University of the Arts London. Induction was seen as valuable and there were compulsory sessions which students attended in London. The review team considered the *Postgraduate Research Handbook* introduced at induction to be very thorough, and it was reported as a useful resource by students.

2.10.1 In May 2011, the University of the Arts London carried out a review of its partnership with UCF. The review report noted that: 'UCF plans to effectively monitor research degree completion rates, as this had not previously been robustly managed in the past.' The institution produced evidence to demonstrate its monitoring of the progress of individual research degree students, but did not provide evidence of analysis of the data or monitoring against appropriate external indicators and targets. These shortcomings are recognised by the institution and are being addressed through its Road Map action plan.

2.10.2 Postgraduate students who the review team met were generally clear about the various stages of their studies and understood the progression requirements. They welcomed the good level of support and guidance from both academic and support staff. Students also commented positively on their learning facilities and interactions with the UCF learning community. The purpose-built research facility has been successful in contributing to a cohesive research community, and students felt that they were very well supported by each other and were able to collaborate and share ideas effectively.

2.10.3 The review team finds the development of a growing and cohesive research community and environment to be a **feature of good practice**.

2.10.4 Research students are given opportunities to teach, and since 2012 there has been a one-day training programme to guide the teaching. Students are also given support by their supervisors and departmental staff.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.11 UCF stated that it does not currently undertake collaborative provision and that no collaborative provision is currently under consideration. However, the review team noted that the University College currently delivers a Foundation Degree in Radio Production which has an associated Memorandum of Understanding for a third party to resource, teach and assess part of the programme. The team found no evidence that this programme's validation referenced Section 2 of the *Code of practice on Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. Nor did UCF have a collaborative policy upon which to ground such developments.

2.11.1 In June 2010 UCF started the process of potentially expanding its collaborative provision, creating a road map for future developments. Proposals have been explored and several courses were identified for delivery through a potential partner. The review team read the original validation process for one of these identified programmes, the BA Communication Design. This validation was the institution's first undergraduate distance learning course. Within the potential partnership discussions, this programme was planned to be the first course to be validated for delivery by a partner. While this partnership plan was being discussed, and noting that collaboration continues to remain a strategic priority, no policies and procedures have been developed. The team formed the view that there was a general lack of awareness of issues related to the development of collaborative provision and Section 2 of the *Code of practice*.

2.11.2 The review team therefore **recommends** that the institution develop policies and procedures, which reflect the *Code of practice*, to secure current and prospective collaborative provision before the start of the 2012-13 academic year.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.12 UCF has made a strategic decision to further develop their provision to offer new, online awards. Recent consideration has focused on how to translate the pedagogic practice associated with arts provision into online delivery, and the staff teams feel they are making good progress in this regard. UCF has also established a unit to support the growth of short courses. UCF currently has one online master's programme, and three further online courses are currently being developed.

2.12.1 UCF does not see the validation arrangements for flexible and distributed learning to be different from its traditional campus-based provision, as described in its *Quality Handbook*. Therefore, it does not have any explicit written guidance about the validation, development or delivery of distance or online learning. Staff did not show an awareness of the detailed requirements or demands for the validation, delivery or monitoring of such provision beyond the on-campus approach.

2.12.2 While developing and implementing its first distance learning postgraduate programme (MA Professional Writing), the lack of e-learning infrastructure has meant that the University College has had to react to significant issues, raised during validation, about the general infrastructure for online learning, and, once implemented, to issues raised by the external examiner about staffing resources.

2.12.3 The review team **recommends** that the institution develop policies and procedures, which reflect Section 2 of the *Code of practice*, to assure the quality of programmes employing flexible or distributed learning, before the start of the 2012-13 academic year.

Work-based and placement learning

2.13 The University College's formal position is that it undertakes no work-based learning, having adopted a narrow definition of this area of their academic activity. However, the review team noted that the Foundation Degree in Radio Production had a considerable emphasis on

work-based learning. Teaching staff indicated that work-based learning is integral to the programme's delivery and academic integrity.

2.13.1 When validating this first Foundation Degree, the University College discussed the work-based learning component and explored the risks associated with relying on a single third party in delivering what is a significant proportion of the programme. A collaborative provision agreement was consequently drawn up with the third party. The validation panel also considered whether there should be institutional support for students seeking to find placements during later stages of this programme, but decided that support was not necessary. Students met by the review team reported difficulties in securing the placements in the current semester.

2.13.2 The approval process documents make no reference to Section 9 of the *Code of practice for Work-based and placement learning*, and senior members of staff were unable to indicate how these sections of the *Code of practice* related to this provision. There is no institution-wide policy, procedure or guidance for the validation of work-based and placement learning, although the institution has working drafts of documents, and good practice at award level was acknowledged.

2.13.3 In addition to the Foundation Degree, the University College offers a wide range of other types of work-related learning, including both compulsory and optional placements, live projects involving employers, and other kinds of professional practice.

2.13.4 The review team **recommends** that the institution develop comprehensive work-based learning and placement policies and procedures, which reflect the *Code of practice*, to support the development, approval, delivery, monitoring and review of the wide range of existing and proposed provision, before the start of the 2012-13 academic year.

Student Charter

2.14 UCF currently has a Student Charter available to students online. It outlines both what is expected of students and what students can expect from the University College. Students were alerted to the existence of the Charter during enrolment and through follow-up correspondence. However, students were broadly unaware of the Student Charter, and course representatives informed the review team that they had only found out about the Charter the previous month.

2.14.1 The Students' Union approved of the content of the Charter but was not part of a consultation process when drawing the document together. The review team therefore **recommends** the institution annually review the Student Charter with the Students' Union.

3 Public information

Outcome

University College Falmouth **makes information about academic standards and quality publicly available** via its website. The information is clear, accessible, accurate and up to date. Students find the information useful, both in helping them make an informed choice when applying to the University College, and in preparing for what they might expect when they join. The review team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

Findings

3.1 The University College's website provides a range of information for stakeholders, such as prospective and current students and graduates. The information includes UCF's mission statement, the Strategic Plan and league table results. Students have access to an online student handbook and the regulations, policies and procedures relevant to students.

3.2 The *Quality Handbook* is available on an intranet page, and the Learning and Teaching Strategy is available on the Learning Space. Course specifications are available for all awards on the institution's website.

3.3 UCF has strengthened its capacity to ensure the accuracy and completeness of its external data returns. The review team were informed that preparations were underway to supply the data required for the Key Information Set. The Academic Board and the Management Board exercise oversight of publicly available information.

3.4 Many students who the review team met indicated that the information contained in the prospectus, while generally helpful, did not always accurately reflect their subsequent experiences on the course. Information for prospective postgraduate students in particular required attention. A particular concern for students was that the additional costs in undertaking a programme were not always clearly indicated in the prospectus or on the website.

3.5 Student representatives have access, through the Learning Space, to external examiners' reports and annual monitoring reports. Student representatives who met the review team were aware of these reports and a few had read them.

4 Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at University College Falmouth **meets UK expectations**. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Findings

4.1 The University College has an annual enhancement plan, with a wide variety of activities taking place at both a School and institutional level. The review team found that much of the content overlaps, and the clarity of the way in which the activities were coordinated was not clear.

4.2 The previous QAA Institutional Audit team recommended that UCF improve its institutional oversight of the range and diversity of its enhancement-led activities. Since then it has reshaped its committee structure to take account of this. Schools also have oversight for local enhancement projects.

4.3 As well as an annual learning and teaching conference, UCF disseminates good practice through the committee systems, the staff management structure and through Educational Development Lecturers. They disseminate the practices of the Teaching Excellence and Learning Support Excellence Awards and the Learning and Teaching Enhancement grants, and also undertake research, such as the student health checks, to support the development of learning and teaching practices within their Schools.

4.4 Students play a role in developing practices through feedback to the liaison meetings, health checks, and through the committee structures. The introduction of module evaluation should strengthen their voice in the enhancement agenda as well as other student engagement activities which are currently being developed. The review team **affirms** the development of a range of initiatives to engage students in quality assurance and enhancement.

4.5 Students are allocated a mentor before joining the University College. Current students apply to become a mentor and receive training and support for this role. At UCF there are currently around 200 student mentors.

4.6 Students who are mentors and those who are mentees appreciate this activity, reporting that it makes students feel at home when they arrive. The majority of students met by the review team commented positively on their experiences as mentors and mentees.

4.7 The system has been systematically enhanced since the last audit, including the introduction of formalised mandatory training, an interview process, and the role of Head Mentors. There has also been an increase in administration support through a new appointment. UCF is also talking about future developments of the scheme, including establishing stronger Peer-Assisted Student Support and creating postgraduate mentors.

4.8 The review team finds the considerable enhancement of established good practice in the area of student mentoring to be a **feature of good practice**. The further development of the student voice would be of benefit to UCF.

5 Theme: First Year Student Experience

Each academic year a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for especial attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams. In 2011-12 the theme is the **First Year Student Experience**.

The review team explored the first year student experience at University College Falmouth. The review team concluded that University College Falmouth manages the first year student experience carefully and effectively.

Supporting students' transition

5.1 There is a student mentoring scheme available to all first-year students which pairs first-years with existing students. Student mentors are trained and supported by dedicated staff. The scheme is well received by students. Staff resources have increased to meet demand, all student mentors receive training, head student mentors have been appointed, and the scheme is due to be rolled out to postgraduate students.

5.1.1 There is a thorough two-week induction period. Students are provided with guidance on welfare and how their course operates.

5.1.2 International students receive a tailored induction process, and as international student numbers grow, UCF may wish to enhance this induction process.

Information for first-year students

5.2 First-year students receive programme handbooks, module information and timetables at induction, giving a wide range of information.

5.2.1 Students reported some variable experience with pre-course information, including lack of clarity on cost of materials to be purchased, the nature of assessments and opportunities for inter-disciplinary collaboration.

Assessment and feedback

5.3 Progression boards have been introduced to monitor student progression and provisionally approve marks at the end of semester one. Staff and students were clear that these can lead to specific learning agreements being drawn up with students whose progress is causing concern.

Monitoring retention and progression

5.4 UCF monitors the experience of new students using a number of mechanisms, including a survey relating to the first two weeks, and 'health check' focus groups in week five.

The health check system was piloted in 2009-10 and then rolled out to all first-year students from 2010-11. The introduction of health checks has coincided with improved retention rates in year one.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions. For example, pages 18-19 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of: threshold academic standards, learning opportunities, enhancement and public information.

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx.

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:

www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.

Academic Infrastructure Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **Code of practice**. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

academic standards The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Code of practice *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

credit(s) A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

enhancement Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

feature of good practice A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

framework A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

framework for higher education qualifications A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

learning opportunities The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

learning outcome What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

operational definition A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

programme (of study) An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

programme specifications Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes of programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

public information Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is being developed from 2011 to replace the **Academic Infrastructure** and will incorporate all its key elements, along with additional topics and overarching themes.

subject benchmark statement A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

threshold academic standard The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

widening participation Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

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The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
Email comms@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk

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