

Institutional audit

University College Falmouth

Annex to the report

March 2007

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Annex to the report

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited University College Falmouth (the University College) from the 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 University College offers.

Outcomes of the institutional audit

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

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

The University College is taking a range of coherent steps towards quality enhancement, some of which were at a relatively early stage of development at the time of the audit. The audit team would strongly encourage the University College to consider ways in which the range of activities being undertaken might be better captured and recorded so as to inform its institutional oversight of enhancement-led activities.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit found that the University College's arrangements for postgraduate research students were in alignment with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes* and were operating as intended.

Published information

The audit team noted the formal procedures to ensure that external information was scrutinised for accuracy and consistency prior to publication and concurs with the view of the University College that its documentation is correct and reflects what is distinctive and special about the institution. The team concluded that reliance can reasonably be placed in the integrity and reliability of the information that the University College publishes about its educational provision.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as good practice:

- the way the University College has implemented a strategy for developing staff so that they are better able to engage proactively with strategic objectives, while building capacity within the institution (paragraphs 28; 88)
- the new process for Annual Strategic Review; the strategic focus of which makes an important contribution to the institutional management of the quality of learning opportunities and of academic standards (paragraph 31)
- the process of strategic engagement with Cornwall's priorities for social and economic regeneration (paragraphs 51; 60)
- processes for implementing a widening participation strategy that involve students as mentors and ambassadors (paragraphs 115; 148).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- continue to develop the style in which the meetings of its main committees are minuted to better convey the richness of the developments taking place (paragraphs 10; 68; 89)
- through its review of student feedback, ensure greater consistency in the use of both quantitative and qualitative feedback in its Annual Strategic Review reports, and give careful consideration to the explicit inclusion of written student feedback (paragraphs 30; 55; 72; 73)
- systematically capture empirical information from students at unit level (paragraph 70).

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- continue to reflect on the fitness for purpose of its 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 (paragraph 17)
- secure better institutional oversight of the range and diversity of its enhancement-led activities (paragraphs 67; 126; 156).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and mission

1 The University College Falmouth (the University College) is a designated specialist higher education institution providing education in the areas of design, media and art. In March 2004 the Privy Council granted the institution taught degree awarding powers and the name University College Falmouth was assumed in 2005. The University College is accredited to deliver postgraduate research programmes by the University of Plymouth, since 1992, and the University of the Arts, London, since 2005.

2 The University College is a founder member of the Combined Universities in Cornwall (CUC) initiative which is a partnership between Cornwall's higher and further education providers to promote the economic, social and cultural regeneration of the area by creating more study and research opportunities. In line with the CUC objective to expand higher education in Cornwall, the University College plans to increase student numbers from its current approximately 2,100 to 3,000 students by 2011-12.

The information base for the audit

3 The information available for the audit included the following recent document:

- the report of an institutional review in connection with the application for taught degree awarding powers, conducted by QAA, January 2006.

4 The University College provided QAA with a series of documents and information including:

- an institutional briefing paper (the Briefing Paper) with appendices
- access to the University College's intranet.

5 In addition, the president of the Students' Union of the University College prepared a written submission on behalf of the University College's students. The audit team is grateful for the students' engagement with the process.

6 During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was given convenient access to a range of the University College's internal documents. The team identified two programmes for which sampling audit trails were requested to illustrate further aspects of the University College's provision, and additional documentation was provided for the team during the audit visit. The team is grateful for the prompt and helpful responses to its requests for information.

Developments since the last audit

7 The previous institutional audit report, dated January 2006, was based on the evidence gathered by QAA in the academic year 2002-03 in connection with the institution's successful application for taught degree awarding powers. Although there are no recommendations issued with this type of report, the University College has been responsive and formulated an action plan derived from the report.

Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning

8 Executive decisions at institutional level fall within the remit of the Strategy Group which comprises the most senior staff in the institution and is chaired by the Principal. The Strategy Group has a number of subgroups that include the Resources Monitoring Group and the Course Development Group.

9 The formal responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities lies with the Academic Board which is chaired by the Principal. The Academic Board delegates certain responsibilities to other committees and groups, as well as to key individuals such as course leaders and quality officers. The two key committees with respect to the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are the Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee (ASEC) and the Learning, Teaching and Access Committee (LTAC).

10 The primacy of the Academic Board in the management of standards and the quality of learning opportunities was emphasised to the audit team in meetings with staff. It was clear to the team from studying documentation that the Academic Board discharged its responsibilities assiduously and that the links with ASEC and LTAC worked as intended. However, the team found that the minutes of these committees, the Academic Board in particular, did not capture in full the detail and the richness of the developments that are clearly taking place, and would advise the University College to address this.

11 ASEC was introduced in September 2005 to replace the former Academic Quality Committee and develop its work. ASEC's remit is to oversee the implementation, operation, modification and development of the University College's approved academic quality assurance and enhancement policies and procedures (as detailed in the Quality Handbook) through systematic monitoring and review. ASEC also advises the Academic Board on other matters relating to academic quality assurance and enhancement.

12 It was clear from the minutes of its meetings that ASEC does review the institution's performance, policies and procedures and refers actions not only to the Academic Board, but to the Strategy Group or named senior managers as appropriate. The minutes of LTAC made it equally apparent to the audit team that this Committee also operated as described most effectively. The team noted in particular that LTAC meetings now conclude with a workshop focused on a particular theme relevant to the institution.

Learning and teaching strategy

13 The Learning and Teaching Strategy, which was presented to Strategy Group in April 2006, set out a five-year development pathway to build upon the University College's commitment to the scholarship of teaching, with the student learning experience as a focus. This Strategy, together with the Widening Participation Strategy, is monitored and developed

under the ægis of LTAC, which is chaired by the Director of Learning and Teaching, who is also responsible for widening participation. The audit team was of the opinion that the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy was being well monitored and progressed by LTAC.

14 The University College believes that the responsibility for day-to-day academic management and ensuring quality is best located at the point of delivery. Consequently, course committees, chaired by course leaders, are central to the effective delivery and management of courses of study, as they are charged with overseeing and monitoring the delivery of the course consistent with the definitive course document. Course committees are formally subcommittees of the Academic Board.

15 Student representation is regarded by the University College as a key element in the effective operation and management of courses through course committees. In addition, the President of the Students' Union is a member of ASEC and a representative of the Students' Union is a member of LTAC.

16 During meetings with staff, it became clear to the audit team how important the role of the Registry, through both the Academic Office and Quality Office, is in supporting the quality procedures of the institution. The Academic Office, for example, supports course committees in a variety of ways. Although course committees formally report to the Academic Board, the team was told that the Academic Board does not see the minutes. Actions from course committees are clearly identified in the minutes. In its meetings with staff, the team was provided with an example of how a list of action points from a course committee is compiled by a Subject Director. The team was also informed that any institutional issues are routed to the appropriate committee by staff from the Academic Office.

17 The audit team concluded that the framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities was well designed, that it operated effectively and the University College had appropriate mechanisms to keep it under review. The team strongly encourages the University College to continue to keep its policies and procedures under review, especially should the institution change in size and/or scope.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

External examiners

18 The University College describes its system for external examining as 'robust and reliable and [it] ensures the quality and suitability of external examiners and that they are competent to undertake their tasks'. The audit team found evidence to support the University College's description of the operation, appointment and reporting mechanisms for external examiners.

19 The University College's Quality Handbook describes the purpose of the external examining process, including external examiners' responsibility for ensuring comparability of academic standards. The external examining process allows for at least one external examiner for each undergraduate and postgraduate course and two where there are larger student cohorts.

20 Examiner proposals are considered by a subgroup of the Academic Board; External Examiners Nominations Subcommittee (EENS). The minutes of the EENS provide evidence of an established and consistent process for examiner nomination that includes consideration of the University College's criteria for appropriate externality, and systems for induction and mentoring support for new examiners. The University College's criteria are in turn referenced to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 4: External examining*, published by QAA. The nomination and appointment process has produced an appropriate range of examiners from a number of Universities and higher education institutions and from the creative industries. Examiners report to a standard pro forma, using a consistent set of questions upon which to comment.

21 The University College's response to external examiners' reports was reviewed as part of Teaching Quality Information (TQI) arrangements and consequently support for external examiners was centralised. From January 2007, a new Assistant Registrar post has been created, with responsibility for external examiner administration. From meetings with staff, it became evident to the audit team that the quality support function offered to the institution would be enhanced by this post. Annual reports are received and recorded centrally and then passed to course teams. The dates of receipt show that most are received a short time following the Examination Board. Formal response is by the course leader, or the University College if required. As part of the process examiners each receive copies of the other examiner's report (as appropriate) and a copy of the most recent course Annual Strategic Review (ASR) report. At meetings with staff, the team heard that appropriate processes to address late submission of reports, or those without sufficient detail, were in place.

22 All external examiner reports for the academic year 2005-06 had stated that the examiners were able to confirm their agreement with marks awarded and with the academic standards of the courses. All examiners had completed a common reporting template, which also met TQI reporting requirements, and all reports for the academic year 2005-06, except one, gave comprehensive feedback upon the course being examined and offered an appropriate range of comments to the University College. A summary of examiner reports is received by the Academic Board and this overview, summarising the previous year's reports, stated that all examiners were able to confirm the academic standards of the University College's awards.

23 The audit team used sampling trails to identify the ways that specific points raised by external examiners had been addressed within the ASR process and the annual Action Plan. The team found evidence that not all examiner comments had been identified, including those relating to the equitable access to central University College resource areas and those relating to support for staff to develop their own research. These comments had been mentioned in both the previous two years' reports. However, the summary of examiner reports from the Registry to the Academic Board in January 2007, contained a comparative analysis of all reports and did identify all the points the examiner had raised. This summary report from the Registry to the Academic Board was comprehensive, and used a 'traffic light' system to outline, by course, those points raised by examiners as strengths and those areas requiring action or further consideration. This report also included the responses of the Course Team to the areas of concern.

24 The University College identifies a process for monitoring examiner comments in action plans through course committee meetings. The audit team found examples of this in operation through the reading of course committee minutes. In a meeting with a selection of students from undergraduate and postgraduate awards, the team was also able to confirm that course committees did review external examiners' reports as part of their discussions, although the students reported that they did not find the reports to be of particular help or relevance to them.

25 The University College's Quality Handbook describes a 'good practice forum' for external examiners appointed to similar subject areas; designed to 'share ideas and good practice with each other and with the [University] College's academic staff'. However, in a meeting with staff it became clear to the audit team that this was still in a very early stage of development.

26 The University College states that external examiners 'play a pivotal role in ensuring comparability of standards' and the audit team found evidence to support this view. The team concluded that the University College's strong and scrupulous use of external examiners in summative assessment supported a judgement of confidence in the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

27 Through its meetings, sampling trails and other documentation made available to it, the audit team was able to examine course life cycles from proposal, through approval, monitoring and review to closure. The Course Development Group scrutinises all proposals before they are

submitted to the Strategy Group. The documentation produced by course teams is well presented and thorough. Internal validation is a rigorous process and the team saw evidence of internal validations that had not been successful. All external validations examined by the team had appropriately constituted panels with two members external to the institution. From the sampling trails provided, the team was able to confirm that the chair of external validation panels formally signs off the process when all validation conditions have been met. The team was told that validation conditions were always time limited and that the Quality Office was proactive in supporting course teams to meet the conditions.

28 From meetings with staff, it was clear to the audit team that the broadening of the constituency of panel chairs and panel members, with the mentoring put in place, plays a significant role in the development of those staff which in turn contributes to the University College's wider development of staff.

29 The audit team saw a recent example of a proposal to the Academic Board to close a course, an action that had been approved earlier by the Strategy Group. The proposal to the Academic Board detailed an exit strategy designed to secure the student experience and illustrated how students had been consulted.

30 All ASR reports for 2005-06, together with the summary reports of the subject directors are available on the University College's intranet. The audit team found that, notwithstanding the standard pro forma, there was variability in the approach taken to completing it. In particular, the direct use of feedback from students was not always easy to see, although it is required that the reports incorporate input from students. The team considered it advisable that the University College, through its review of student feedback, ensures greater consistency in, and gives careful consideration to, the explicit inclusion of written student feedback, both quantitative and qualitative, in its ASR reports. The subject directors' summary reports for 2005-06 were also variable, a point that had been picked up by the Academic Board which noted the need for a consistent format.

31 The Annual Monitoring Subcommittee of the Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee (ASEC), through a sample of three representative course ASR reports, reviews the effectiveness of the ASR process. At its meeting in May 2006, this Subcommittee concluded that the introduction of the new ASR process had been successful, and that it would contribute to quality enhancement. While noting the variability referred to above, the audit team would concur with the view that the relatively new ASR process does encourage more strategic thinking and makes an important contribution to the management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and academic standards and would be a key component of an enhancement strategy.

32 Through sampling trails, the audit team found the periodic review process to be rigorous. As found with validation, the documentation produced by course teams for periodic review is well presented and thorough. The team heard from a student member of a periodic review panel how students contribute to the process and how they learn from it. The team was also told by staff how the student representative is trained, as the role requires being a conduit for the student voice.

33 The audit team concluded that the University College's processes for approval, monitoring and review were sound and contributed to the effective management of academic standards.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

34 The audit team found that the validation and review reports provided to it did not always specifically mention *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) or any relevant subject benchmarks. However, course proposal documents and course specifications do note relevant subject benchmarks, and course documents for validation do address level. The University College has appointed a Course

Development Fellow to support course teams during course development; to achieve consistency of practice across the institution, and ensure that subject benchmark requirements are addressed. The team was told during meetings with staff that ensuring alignment with the 'Academic Infrastructure', through course development, was one of the responsibilities of the Course Development Fellow.

35 Through its scrutiny of committee minutes, the audit team was able to confirm that revised sections of the *Code of practice* were given to the appropriate Director, who prepares a report for ASEC which, in turn, reports to the Academic Board.

36 The audit team concluded that the University College's use of the Academic Infrastructure was appropriate in the context of the management of academic standards.

Assessment policies and regulations

37 Although the University College has no separate assessment policy; its Learning and Teaching Strategy was revised in 2006 and this policy aims to promote 'high quality research informed teaching' in which 'assessment is an integral part of the educational experience'. The University College is currently reviewing its approach and policy on the role and use of assessment stimulated by the January 2006 taught degree awarding powers report. The report identified the need to 'tighten up' aspects of assessment regulations and, in consequence, a University College-wide 'borderline zone' between classifications has been identified along with a progressive standardisation of the Assessment Regulations.

38 A 'strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats [SWOT]' summary of issues arising from the previous year's external examiner reports, prepared by the one of the University College's teaching fellows, identified areas of further work that would be of help to the University College as they considered the development of assessment. The audit team would encourage the University College to use this report as the basis for further development.

39 The arrangements for course assessment and degree classification are outlined for all courses in the Student Handbook, with specific unit requirements described within the individual course Unit Handbooks. At a meeting with undergraduate and postgraduate students the audit team was able to confirm that students were clear about the Assessment Regulations and the requirements upon them in terms of assessment.

40 All external examiner reports for 2005-06 stated on the University College cover sheet that the examiners were able to confirm their agreement with the summative assessment marks awarded and their associated reports confirm that assessment processes at examination boards are operating consistently and appropriately. In the past year, several external examiners offered commendations on the assessment process, for example, the double-marking procedures.

41 Several external examiners praised the rigour of the approach to assessment and highlighted a lengthy and staff intensive process, especially associated with student dissertations. However, the audit team saw evidence that some external examiners felt that it might be difficult to sustain current assessment approaches as student numbers increase. In this regard, the team heard about a new Teaching Fellowship project designed to consider alternate 'Visual Dissertations'.

42 Assessment policies and regulations map to the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* and are clearly articulated. Responsibility for consideration of, and response to, the *Code of practice, Section 6* is discharged by the Learning, Teaching and Access Committee.

43 Evidence reviewed by the audit team supports the view that assessment policies and regulations are appropriate and operate in support of the maintenance of academic standards.

Management information (including progression and completion statistics)

44 The University College ASR process requires progression and achievement data to be considered and evaluated by course teams using a standard pro forma. The Quality Handbook outlines the data considered as 'feedback from external examiners; feedback from student cohorts and student representatives; statistical evidence regarding recruitment, progression and achievement, issued during the summer from Admissions'. The University College's Briefing Paper stated that the Admissions Office produces statistical information to support course leaders in the compilation of ASR reports. This was confirmed by the audit team in their scrutiny of the ASR reports for a range of awards.

45 The ASR process requires course teams to reflect upon and comment on a range of data. After reading ASR reports for the academic year 2005-06 the audit team was able to confirm that such data were considered. However, there was some variability in the extent and degree of reflection upon data and in the use made of these statistics within ASR reports. In consequence, some courses do not offer comment on data on which others do, and analysis using 'hard data' is sometimes sparse, including areas where trends appeared, to the team, to be worthy of consideration.

46 The Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment is responsible for the development of management information with respect to recruitment, progression, graduation and destinations. In the academic year 2006-07 a system was introduced whereby the Course Development Group (CDG) was asked to analyse student application and student numbers to 'inform the development of new and existing courses'. The minutes of CDG confirm that in making decisions the Group considers both target numbers and current enrolment to inform new course developments.

47 A set of data entitled Annual Monitoring Statistics presented and analysed by course is available to staff on the University College intranet. This is a comprehensive set of information that identifies student enrolment, progression, retention and achievement along with a breakdown of results by classification.

48 The Academic Board receives an annual overview review of course performance data which it considers as part of the overall quality review process. The Strategy Group also considers longer term planning issues for the University College informed by data analysis and trends.

49 The University College references management information in its review of the academic standards of its awards and expresses 'confidence that its approach to the management of the academic standards of its awards is effective and fit for purpose'. The process of the audit enabled the audit team to support this view.

Other modes of study

50 The Strategic Plan notes that e-learning is a key component of the University College's strategy for several reasons, such as enhancing the student experience, while also providing more flexible provision for students unable to study full-time. The importance of e-learning is reflected in the e-learning Strategy, which is accompanied by an action plan for the achievement of shorter and longer term objectives that were approved, along with the Strategy, in the academic year 2005-06. Progress in embedding the e-learning Strategy has been helped significantly by the use of a learning technologist together with learning and teaching fellowships awarded to those staff introducing innovation. Different courses are using the virtual learning environment (VLE) in different ways. The audit team learnt from its meetings with staff and students that, although embedding of the VLE is variable across the University College, significant progress has been made and that more than 50 per cent of courses have already been web-enhanced. The requirement that all courses have a VLE presence is now emphasised in the course approval process. Part-time students praised the opportunity to gain remote access to learning resources, although they noted that access to the University College's intranet could be difficult owing to technical reasons. The University College was aware of these problems and had discussed the issues with the students concerned.

51 From its meetings with staff and students, the audit team learnt of a variety of ways in which students are able to gain work experience with local organisations. The team also learnt of ways in which the VLE was being used to support students on placement as well as developing other links with industry. The team saw this as one indication of a proactive approach to forging strong links with local communities and organisations, which it regarded as a feature of good practice. See also Section 3, paragraphs 80 to 92.

52 The audit team concluded that the University College's approach to other modes of study is appropriate in the context of managing academic standards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

External examiners

53 Through their oversight of the assessment and examination process, articulated in their annual reports, external examiners provide comment to the University College on the learning opportunities available to students. External examiners are explicitly invited to comment on five areas, namely: Teaching and Learning; Curriculum; Progression and Achievement; Learning Environment and Strategic Enhancement. Reports reviewed by the audit team consistently confirmed that the learning opportunities provided were appropriate, and managed effectively by the University College.

54 External examiners' reports are used to inform the Annual Strategic Review (ASR) reports for each course, which must refer to external examiner reports in the response by course teams. The ASR process includes an analysis of issues related to learning and teaching, and any concerns expressed would be considered and addressed through this mechanism.

55 The overview report on the reports of external examiners for the Academic Board also contains a SWOT analysis of the reports and identifies any recurring themes. Whilst these processes did give the University College some examples of ways in which student learning opportunities might be improved, neither provided a narrative suggesting that external examiners had significant concerns about the management of student learning opportunities. However, as a means of developing further the ASR process, the audit team would encourage the University College to review the standard ASR template and to consider including a section that specifically requests the course teams' response to examiners' comments and includes a progress report upon the previous year's action plan. The University College might also consider how the ASR process allows for examiners to comment upon student feedback, including National Student Survey (NSS) data, given that the reporting template does not require the formal capture of this data.

56 All ASR reports reviewed by the audit team referenced external examiners' reports and comments and, hence, external examiners play an appropriate role in assuring the quality of learning opportunities, and their effective management by the institution.

57 It is not a formal requirement of the examining process that examiners meet with students but in meetings with staff, the audit team was able to confirm that it was the case that such meetings did almost always occur. The audit team would encourage the University College to consider whether it would be helpful to have a formal position on such meetings, given their potential to identify areas upon which examiners could advise the University College to improve the management of the student learning opportunities.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

58 See Section 2, paragraphs 27 to 33.

59 The audit team concluded that the University College's processes for approval, monitoring and review were sound and contributed to the effective management of learning opportunities.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

60 In addition to the QAA Academic Infrastructure, other influences inform the learning opportunities offered to students. Documentation studied by the audit team illustrated how the University College engaged positively with professional bodies. The team also heard how the Business Relations Office and Business Fellows engaged proactively with local organisations, which not only informs the curriculum but also provides students with opportunities for work experience, placement and live projects. Other examples of these interactions are disseminated through an intranet page maintained by the Business Relations Office. See also Section 3 paragraphs 80 to 90.

61 The audit team concluded that the University College's use of external reference points contributed positively to the management of the quality of learning opportunities.

Assessment policies

62 As noted in Section 2, the University College has no separate assessment policy and, at the time of the audit, was in the process of a significant review of its approach and policy on the role and use of assessment. The review is being led by the Director of Learning and Teaching who is also leading on a general survey of the student experience, designed to 'capture the student voice'. In support of the assessment review the University College has also initiated a series of student meetings, established by the Course Development Fellow, which are intended to help students see assessment as part of the learning experience.

63 Meetings with level 1 students have been held and recorded and separate meetings are scheduled for levels 2 and 3. The meetings include specific questions on assessment as it is understood at present by students. In its meetings with students the audit team found little knowledge among those present of the assessment review and the team would encourage the University College to consider, within the range of activity already planned, how to ensure that students are made more aware of the formative functions of assessment that the meetings with staff articulated.

64 Amongst a wide range of other activity associated with this review the audit team became aware of the following work in progress: a National Student Survey LTRC teaching fellowship project that is considering assessment across the College; a day on assessment with external presentations; an externally funded project on 'Assessing Visual Practice'; work with staff teams at validation and Periodic Review led by the Course Development Fellow and a project on the BA Illustration being prepared as an example of good practice for a Higher Education Academy Case Study. The review of assessment will also encompass the need to diversify assessment methods to meet the needs of non-traditional learners.

65 The SWOT analysis of the previous year's external examiner reports also referenced those points on assessment that the University College should incorporate into the review of assessment. A formal review paper on assessment was to be presented to the Learning, Teaching and Access Committee (LTAC) in May 2007. Those external examiner reports considered by the audit team did not specifically refer to the formative role of assessment, but several did offer commendations on the assessment process.

66 At meetings with the audit team, staff demonstrated clarity of understanding of the assessment requirements of students and the balance between summative and formative work. Student progress is recorded in tutorial notes, and formative work may include opportunities for the presentation of work such as a 'practice essay'. Any students who are significantly underperforming can also be supported through an individual learning agreement.

67 The range of assessment-related activities being initiated and already under way, and the motivation for them as described by staff in meetings, allowed the audit team to conclude that the University College has a clear understanding of the role and uses of formative assessment

within the curriculum. Meetings with staff enabled the team to have confidence that the University College's aspiration to develop this work further will continue. However, the team concluded that with such a wide range of initiatives the management and coordination of them would need careful managing and monitoring.

Management information (including completion and progression statistics)

68 The University College's Briefing Paper stated that management information was used to enhance the quality of decision-making by its committees and to inform the deliberations of the Academic Board. The audit team was able to confirm that management information ranging from analysis of external examiners' reports and annual monitoring statistics, to analysis of comparative degree classification and other performance indicators, had been received and noted by the meetings of the Academic Board, although the abbreviated format of Academic Board minutes often provided little indication of attendant discussion.

69 The audit team also read minutes of the Course Development Group which indicated use of information about student numbers, actual and projected, to clarify existing provision and planned developments. Statistical data collected in the course of annual monitoring was also used effectively to inform sections of the ASR reports. The team concluded that the University College made appropriate use of statistical management information data to inform its decision-making and strategic review processes.

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

70 Although the University College states in its Quality Handbook that student feedback should be an integral part of the ASR process, the audit team found only limited consideration of student feedback in the course ASR reports for 2004-05 and 2005-06 delivery, and attributed this to the ASR template which requires comment on the methods by which feedback is collected, rather than on its content. In addition, ASRs reported on student feedback in rather different ways and provided little evidence of a consistent approach to student evaluation of units. Some ASR reports provided a synoptic and abbreviated account of student feedback, while others provided a brief account of comments made by external examiners about student feedback they had received, and yet others made no comment on student feedback.

71 The feedback reported in ASRs was almost entirely positive, although one ASR which did report student concerns omitted to carry them forward into the action plan. The audit team noted that a number of University College committees had identified the need to ensure that action points were identified in action plans and that it should be clearly indicated who was responsible for undertaking each action. The team encourages the University College to act on these proposals and, in addition, to consider the inclusion of the previous year's action plan, with an update on action taken, in the following year's ASR.

72 The ASRs identify the range of course-level feedback sought from students as well as the wide variety and in some cases informality, of the methods used to obtain it. While acknowledging the value of varied and informal feedback, the audit team notes the observation made in the 2005-06 ASR for the Art Subject Group that 'the lack of "objective" evidence of student views is clearly a weakness' and welcomes the University College's decision to consider taking a more consistent and holistic approach to the way in which student feedback is obtained, with a view to identifying the most effective methods and standardising practice.

73 Despite its reservations about the implications for smaller higher education providers of the methodology employed by the NSS, the University College acknowledges that the NSS is gaining significance and credibility and recognises that its ability to use the NSS as an enhancement tool would be significantly increased if it could obtain a more detailed internal gathering of student feedback to identify specific issues. Nonetheless, the audit team found very

little awareness of the NSS amongst the students with whom they spoke. The team encourages the University College to consider ways in which it might further promote a more systematic awareness of the NSS amongst its students and greater prominence for its outcomes in ASR and related processes.

Role of students in quality assurance and quality enhancement

74 In its meetings with students the audit team learnt about the various formal and informal ways in which student feedback contributes to quality assurance and enhancement. These ranged from formal Students' Union representation on the University College's key committees to participation in course committees, periodic year group meetings and informal termly meetings with subject directors.

75 Course committee minutes indicate good levels of attendance by student representatives and appropriate consideration of issues they raise. Although the staff the audit team met provided examples of courses where year group meetings met very frequently and were a critical method of obtaining student feedback, students told the team that the usefulness of year group meetings varied from course to course. In contrast, there was consensus among students that the termly meetings with subject directors provided useful additional opportunities to make their views known. Notes are taken at these meetings and circulated to course representatives, with an update on action taken being provided at the following meeting. Students echoed the views expressed in the students' written submission (SWS) that meetings with subject directors were particularly useful, not only because they were able to provide a response quickly to student concerns, but also because they provided a forum within which students learnt about wider issues within the University College. Staff stated that they deliberately resisted over-formalising these meetings and used techniques such as open agendas to provide students with opportunities to raise issues that might not have been raised at course committees.

76 The SWS noted some concern about the cessation of User Groups relating to central services such as the library and information technology. The audit team found widespread ignorance of User Groups among the students it met but understood from Students' Union and staff representatives that User Groups continued to exist, and that confusion regarding the nomination of student representatives had now been resolved.

77 The audit team was able to confirm the participation of students in periodic review. Although panel members do not meet student representatives, panels include a student representative and the review documentation provided to the team contained a number of references to feedback from students. At a meeting with students, the team heard an example of how a course leader had convened students from different year groups into focus groups to evaluate the present provision and propose enhancements, and that the latter had been reflected in the review documentation.

78 The University College recognises the important role played by student representatives and provides training to support them in representing the views of the student body. A number of the student representatives the audit team met had received this training.

79 The audit team concluded that the formal and informal opportunities for student representation in the University College's committees and processes enabled students to make a useful contribution to quality assurance and enhancement.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

80 The University College's Research Strategy recognises the key role of research in enhancing creative practice and professional development and the need to ensure continued intellectual rigour at honours degree and postgraduate level. The Strategy therefore prioritises research and scholarly activities which inform and enhance teaching and have a direct impact on the practice in subject areas.

81 The Research Strategy is closely aligned with the Learning and Teaching Strategy in that both place learning and teaching at the core of the University College's activity with a vision to establish research informed teaching as 'Falmouth's brand'. A further driver for scholarly activity is the University College's strategic aim of 'making a significant contribution to the cultural, economic and social regeneration of Cornwall' by providing research, development and consultancy services which involve staff and students.

82 Research and Business Relations are brought together under the Research and Enterprise Committee whose role it is to advise the Academic Board on matters relating to research and business and to approve initiatives that directly increase staff research activity, knowledge transfer and links with external partners. To that effect the University College has taken considerable steps to create an infrastructure to stimulate an 'institution-wide commitment to a scholarship of teaching'. It organises its many emerging activities through research clusters, the Learning and Teaching Research Centre (LTRC), the Teaching Fellows and through the Business Relations Office.

83 The term 'Business Relations' encompasses all activities that connect the University College with employers, industry and practitioners, and incorporates applied research in collaboration with employers. These activities are described by the University College as an integral part of its mission and are expected to enhance learning opportunities and teaching quality.

84 Subject-specific research has been organised in three research clusters: 3-D Production; Interactive Art and Design; and Art, Nature and Environment. The clusters' activities are promoted widely to staff and students through the University College intranet. The responsibility for the preparation and content of the University College's submission to the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2008 lies with the Research and Enterprise Committee which is chaired by the Director of Research and Enterprise.

85 The purpose of the LTRC, founded in 2006, is to encourage staff who are not organised in the research clusters to engage in pedagogic research within the undergraduate curriculum. The Annual Strategic Review - Research 2006 noted the lack of engagement of non-cluster staff as a key risk for the University College's research agenda and the LTRC is therefore designed to complement the existing research clusters.

86 The Director for Learning and Teaching oversees the activities which are organised by the LTRC and the newly appointed Learning and Teaching Research Fellow. The LTRC disseminates its activities widely through the 'Learning Space' on the University College intranet, and it disseminates its research through bi-annual Learning, Teaching and Access Days. Activities range from organising lectures, conferences, support for research and funding bids to the development of an in-house higher education teaching qualification.

87 Educational research is particularly promoted through the Teaching Fellowship Scheme. The University College offers mini-teaching fellowships to allow staff to engage in smaller scale project work. Priority is given to applications which address learning and teaching issues directly in line with the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the action plan. Examples of research activities are Researching EFL Support in HE, Review of Dyslexia Practice, Student Experiences of Assessment in Art, Design and Media, Distance Learning Pathway for Journalism, Positioning yourself in the contemporary Art Market (a joint venture with Business Relations) and Enterprise Partnerships, linking design students with external clients through an online dissemination point for 'live' project briefs.

88 On the basis of the information available to it, the audit team concluded that the University College has taken deliberate steps to encourage staff to contribute to pedagogic and subject practical research and scholarship which has a direct impact on learning opportunities for students. It has implemented an infrastructure which is capable of encouraging and disseminating good practice and research activities in line with its core mission of a research informed learning and teaching strategy.

89 The audit team heard many examples of a lively and emerging practical research and scholarship agenda. However, due to the condensed reporting style of minutes it was at times difficult to evidence the depth or richness of discussions taking place at committees. Some of the initiatives are at an early stage, and it was not possible to find evidence that they had already made an impact on the learning opportunities. However, the team is confident that these developments will, in time, inform the curricula and learning and teaching practices. While the team agrees with comments made by staff that the University College has made good progress in strengthening the visibility of staff research through the newsletter, the open lecture series and the University College intranet, students nevertheless commented that not all courses made them aware of their tutors' professional practice. The team would encourage the University College to make these activities more explicit to students.

90 The audit team concluded that research and scholarly activity were linked directly to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities and contributed positively to the management of quality of learning opportunities.

Other modes of study

91 See Section 2, paragraphs 50 to 52.

92 The audit team concluded that the University College's e-learning strategy contributed effectively to the management of the quality of learning opportunities.

Resources for learning

93 Service departments of the University College publish service level agreements that define the nature and levels of support they can provide. Through its meetings, sampling trails and other documentation the audit team formed the view that resources were fit for purpose, kept up-to-date and effectively managed, starting with an initial consideration at the point of validation and followed by annual resource plans for each course. The recent introduction of service level agreements for all services has clarified the nature as well as the level of support expected from all centres or facilities.

94 Resources are discussed at course committees and at the appropriate user groups; any issues are reported to central Academic Services. Ex officio members from the library are invited to course committees to inform the committee of any changes.

95 At an institutional level the Resources Monitoring Group which is a subgroup of the Strategy Group considers budget, facilities and estates planning as well as staffing issues, informed by the Annual Report from Academic Services.

96 In meetings with the audit team students expressed overall satisfaction with learning resources and gave praise to student support services, in particular the dyslexia and widening participation support services. They confirmed that resources had increased in line with the growth in student numbers and that the University College had reacted appropriately to this increase by expanding studio space, buying more equipment or improving the organisation of access. However, the team heard from students that access to resources which were shared across courses might disadvantage smaller courses. The SWS described the facilities at the Tremough Campus as offering great opportunities to students, but commented that the technical support had not improved in line with the enhancement of the facilities themselves.

97 Through its meeting with staff the audit team learnt that student access to resources was managed through prioritisation of courses, timetabling and the need for appropriate induction in the use of equipment. The team was told that the University College was considering new ways of managing access to resources and suggests that the College might wish also to consider how it manages student expectation. The team was provided with evidence supplied in meetings and documentation that the University College was aware of resource related issues and was reacting to the issues raised flexibly and keeping resources under review.

98 In its Learning and Teaching Strategy the University College places strong emphasis on employability. Considerable steps have been taken to create opportunities for students to gain experience through working on live briefs and external projects. The Design Centre brings together enterprise, research and teaching by housing the research clusters, the Business Relations Office and media businesses under one roof which aids networking and visibility of opportunities for students and staff. It is the responsibility of the Head of Business Relations with the help of Business Fellows, one for each subject area, to advise and support staff and students in external project work and placements, provide contact for businesses, support staff and students wishing to start up a business and assist staff involving businesses in course design and delivery.

99 The audit team heard how Business Fellows supported staff in organising requests from local businesses for live projects, aligning those with the curriculum, and approaching new business ventures coming into Cornwall. Three media businesses are operating from the Tremough Campus (one graduate start-up business) offering placements to students. Students who are expected to find work as freelance professionals, for example, students on the BA Illustration course, are taken to agents in London or New York to present their portfolios.

100 The Careers Advisory Service, which has Matrix Standards accreditation, is shared between the University College and the University of Exeter and offers a range of services such as individual guidance interviews, induction talks, lectures within the curriculum, a careers library, website and online guidance. It reports its activities to the Academic Board, LTAC and the Widening Participation Committee.

101 Some of the objectives of the Employability Strategy for 2004 to 2006 have not yet been met, such as the installation of 'employability tutors'. At the time of the audit the University College was investigating the inclusion of work experience on transcripts and the development of a 20-credit Employability Unit across Media courses. The audit team wishes to encourage the University College to continue its work on embedding employability into the curriculum.

102 Professional development planning (PDP) was piloted in September 2004 for first-year undergraduate students and forms part of the institution's Learning and Teaching Strategy. At meetings with students the audit team heard how helpful PDP was for compiling curricula vitae, while other student representatives commented that PDP had not been followed up proactively by all staff. While the University College stresses its commitment to developing reflective practice and employability as a strategic goal and points to the fact that individual subject disciplines embed PDP within the curricula in the form of professional practice, critical self-reflection, portfolio work, career plans, the implementation of PDP may appear to be somewhat hidden from students' awareness. The University College confirmed that PDP was under development to integrate better with the specifics of professional practice and to create a visible link between PDP and the course content.

103 The University College has an e-learning/virtual learning environment (VLE) which is publicised through the 'Learning Space' on the University College intranet. The VLE was piloted in the academic year 2005-06 with the intention of offering advice and guidance to all subject areas. Materials were first piloted for the Journalism course and those students praised the use of the VLE on their course.

104 The VLE is gradually being rolled out to all courses while the University College has taken deliberate steps to support staff in the development phase in line with its e-learning Strategy and Action Plan. A Learning Technologist has been appointed who is supported by a Learning Space administrator. The Learning Technologist reports to the Director of Academic Services and has responsibility for the development of the VLE by offering support, training and project management for the development and production of new materials.

105 From its meetings with staff and students and on the basis of the information available, the audit team formed the view that the University College has created a distinctive learning environment based upon the creative exploitation of space, facilities and, increasingly, of its VLE.

The team concluded that the management of learning resources contributes effectively to the management of the quality of learning opportunities.

Admissions policy

106 Although, at the time of the audit, the Undergraduate Admissions Policy was being revised to take into account the revision to the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*, the latest draft and guidance notes on the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) were made available to the audit team. The policy, which is scheduled to go to the Academic Board for approval in May 2007, evinces the University College's clear commitment to widening participation, as does its admissions practice.

107 Through meetings and exploring the University College's intranet, the audit team learnt how the Widening Participation Office coordinated a number of activities to support students before and after arrival at the University College. The team noted in particular the use made of students as recruitment ambassadors, online mentors to applicants, and mentors to new students.

108 In January 2007, the Academic Board reaffirmed the policy that the minimum International English Language Testing System score of 6.5 remains mandatory for all international students whose first language is not English or who have not been taught in English. Minutes of the meeting also noted the need to consider the feasibility of introducing a mandatory pre-sessional English language course. The audit team was told that the Academic Support Tutor had been awarded a Teaching Fellowship to investigate good practice in English language support, the findings of which would be reported to LTAC. From a meeting with staff, it was clear to the team that the University College recognised the similarities between support required for international students and those from non-traditional backgrounds.

109 The audit team concluded that the University College's admissions policy and practice contributed positively to the management of learning opportunities.

Student support

110 The students the audit team met were generally very satisfied with the levels of support available to them through the learning resource centre and other services. They spoke highly of the support they received with regard to personal finance and hardship, of the University College's strategies for dealing with dyslexia and of the individualised support that was quickly made available to students identified as being dyslexic. This information correlated with comments made by student support staff who provided detailed information about the ways in which they communicate with course leaders regarding the specific requirements of students identified as having learning difficulties. The promptness and efficacy of these interventions confirmed the claim made in the Briefing Paper that Student Services worked with course teams to ensure that the learning needs of individual students were identified early and support put in place.

111 In meetings with the audit team, both staff and students confirmed that the Careers Advisory Service supported the integration of employability into the curriculum by providing presentations and workshops for courses. Students were also appreciative of the individual support provided by the Accommodation, Counselling and Careers Advisory Services.

112 The University College formally reviews levels of student support on an annual basis through the ASR process which requires courses to report on the extent to which support mechanisms are appropriate and adequate. The audit team found that comments made in the ASRs concurred with comments made to them by students about forms of study skills support they found particularly helpful, such as essay writing workshops.

113 A number of ASR reports identified a concern with English language support for international students who are non-native speakers of English. The audit team learnt that in response to such concerns the University College had taken steps in recent months to review

and revise the role of its International Office and to formulate precise recommendations about the provision of support for courses in 'English for Academic Purposes'.

114 The audit team noted with interest the University College's pre-entry support package which includes an online 'HelpMe' forum. The team was particularly interested in the way in which the University College had used the forum to enable second and third-year students to support, through mentoring, prospective and first-year students. The team met a number of students who had been trained as mentors and who had interacted with new students in the run-up to, and during, their first year of study. University College staff explained how the work of over 70 student mentors was structured and reviewed by the Mentor Co-ordinator who is a member of academic staff.

115 In both the SWS and their meetings with the audit team, students expressed appreciation of the opportunity to act as ambassadors at events promoting the University College's courses to prospective students, and to participate in volunteering activities organised through the Students' Union.

116 On the basis of evidence gained from meetings with students and staff, and from the information available to it, the audit team concluded that the University College provides good levels of support tailored to the specific needs of its student body.

Staff support, development and reward

117 The University College is committed to the training and development of all its staff to prepare the organisation for the future. The Strategy Group has overall responsibility for the level of expenditure on staff development and receives a quarterly synopsis of training activities. The Strategy Group agrees the priorities for the institution and delegates action to the Director of Personnel. Responsibilities are cascaded down to line managers and programme leaders.

118 The main vehicle to identify staff development needs is the annual Performance Development Review (PDR). This process includes all staff, including hourly paid staff and staff on fixed term contracts. The processes are clearly documented in a Guide for Staff Managers and Reviewers. Reviewers are trained and briefing sessions are offered to staff.

119 This process is key to establishing development needs, aligning them with institutional and subject area needs and feeding back whether development targets have been met. The PDR forms are evaluated by the Personnel Office to inform the planning of staff development initiatives. The audit team was told that course leaders conducted the PDR with teaching staff and reported to their subject directors who formulate a plan and approve a schedule of training programmes. A review evaluating the effectiveness of this process is expected after the next PDR cycle.

120 A new Performance Review Committee mentioned in the Briefing Paper has recently been established. Its proposed remit is to consider promotion and staffing matters under the new pay framework.

121 The Probation Policy and Procedures describe the support mechanisms for staff newly appointed to the University College. New staff undertake a probation period of 12 months with three-monthly interim reports and a final report confirming the probationer in the post. New staff receive an induction at which training needs are identified. Staff that are new to teaching receive an additional two day induction to teaching and are offered the opportunity to study for a Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert), Diploma or master's in Education qualification at local colleges or the University of Plymouth. The University College is in the process of validating its own PgCert, PgDiploma and MTeach Pedagogy in Higher Education (Art, Design and Media).

122 A new Peer Observation Scheme was launched in March 2006. Participation is on a voluntary basis and the audit team heard that at the time of the audit it had yet to be fully embedded.

123 The main source of professional staff development is the new LTRC offering a series of professional development events and a number of Learning and Teaching Days which are widely publicised and well attended. A permanent appointment of a Learning, Teaching and Development Officer has been made to organise and oversee these activities.

124 The teaching fellowships are well received and 10 additional teaching fellowships have been awarded across all categories of staff which offer opportunities to take part in national debates and networks.

125 On the basis of the information available, the audit team concluded that the University College had a comprehensive system for the support of its staff and that it had invested significantly in staff development with a clear emphasis on teaching quality. The team noted the significant changes over recent years which had contributed to a clear and systematic infrastructure. The team formed the view that there was a shared understanding amongst staff of structures, roles and responsibilities. The team endorses the views expressed in the Briefing Paper that the University College is supporting its staff at senior management level, and its academic staff as well as its support and administrative staff in the process of change and strategic development of the institution.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

126 The audit team concluded that the framework for managing the quality of learning opportunities provided a good platform for enhancement and that the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and the oversight by the Learning, Teaching and Access Committee (LTAC), contributed significantly to quality enhancement. However, the team felt that it would be desirable for the University College to have more overt oversight of the many enhancement activities planned and in place.

External examiners

127 In the academic year 2005-06 the University College reviewed and then revised the standard report template required from external examiners, to encourage an increased focus upon the student learning experience. In reviewing the revised pro forma the audit team was able to confirm that the emphasis in the form was not simply on academic standards but also on ways that the student learning experience might be enhanced. This information is requested through questions that specifically ask for 'suggestions and recommendations on the enhancement of the course' relating to five separate aspects, including learning and teaching. External examiner reports considered by the team show that the majority of examiners had completed these areas fully and were able to offer the University College views not only on academic standards but also on methods of enhancement. This finding supports the view of the University College that external examiners not only 'play a pivotal role in ensuring comparability of standards' but also act as 'critical friends' who are 'encouraged to focus on the student experience'.

128 The University College Quality Handbook states that external examiners are a part of the enhancement strategy of the University College. The audit team was able to confirm this view.

129 The University College's Action Plan arising from the Taught Degree Awarding Powers report of January 2006, included an action to address a point in the report that stated 'the external experience of academic staff is unevenly spread and somewhat limited in the specific area of external examining'. The Briefing Paper identified this as a priority action for the institution and has led to a section in the Annual Strategic Review (ASR) report that asks staff to list their current external examining experience. A summary of this activity in the academic year 2006-07, derived from the amended ASR template, was presented to the audit team. The summary identified that 20 staff were currently engaged as external examiners, which represents approximately 16 per cent of the 129 full-time equivalent academic staff. This degree of external engagement was considered by the team to be a positive response to the report.

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards and programmes

130 The audit team concluded that the University College's processes for approval, monitoring and review were sound and, through ASR in particular, could contribute significantly to quality enhancement. See also Section 2, paragraphs 27 to 33.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

131 See also Section 2, paragraphs 34 to 36.

132 The audit team concluded that the University College's proactive and ongoing use of external reference points contributes to the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities through its positive contribution to graduate employability.

Assessment policies

133 The University College stated that assessment was increasingly seen as a key part of enhancement and the achievement of 'parity, consistency and transparency'. The University College has considered assessment practice in a number of ways. A formal review of assessment strategies and processes has been initiated by the Director of Learning and Teaching and a consequent paper on Assessment at University College Falmouth is to be presented to the LTAC in May 2007.

134 The audit team was also told at meetings with staff that the review of assessment would encompass the need to diversify assessment methods to meet the needs of non-traditional learners, in tandem with the consideration of new modes of delivery. See also Section 2, paragraphs 50 to 52.

135 Dissemination of good practice (in assessment) is the responsibility of the LTAC. A University College Learning, Teaching and Assessment Day in December 2006, led by three external contributors, was used to promote the sharing of good practice on assessment.

136 As, at the time of the audit, the assessment review was still in progress, it was not possible for the audit team to confirm how, and to what degree, it would enhance the student experience. However, meetings with University College staff confirmed that the process was being led and managed by the Director of Learning and Teaching, with the aspiration of developing assessment as an element of enhancement, through seeking and responding to students' views. Although this work was at an early stage, the audit team would applaud the range of the activity and its reflective approach.

Management information (including completion and progression statistics)

137 See also Section 2, paragraphs 44 to 49 and Section 3, paragraphs 68 to 69.

138 The audit team found evidence that the University College has in place processes to use management data such as progression and completion statistics within a managed and peer-reviewed process of ASR. Some courses clearly took advantage of the data provided to suggest ways that the courses might evolve or address specific issues. Other courses did not use data in such a full and strategic way. Thus, while it is possible to confirm that the process is clearly managed and embedded, it is not yet operating consistently as an enhancement tool.

Management information (including student feedback and National Student Survey outcomes)

139 See also Section 3, paragraphs 70 to 73.

140 In order to obtain richer information from the National Student Survey (NSS) the University College has added five supplemental questions to the 2007 NSS and commenced work, through the LTAC, on a project entitled Capturing the Student Voice. This work commenced with focus group interviews with level 1 students in autumn 2006 and will be extended to level 2 and level 3 students later in the academic year.

Role of students in quality assurance and quality enhancement

141 The audit team found evidence that the University College was using student feedback to inform the periodic review process and to thereby enhance provision.

Links between research and scholarly activity and the enhancement of learning opportunities

142 The audit team concluded that the University College had made considerable progress in creating a practice-based research and scholarship environment by setting up an infrastructure which actively promotes and disseminates pedagogic and practice-based research. The team noted many examples of research projects disseminated through the campus intranet, seminars and staff development days which contribute directly to the enhancement of the learning and teaching environment. The team saw evidence of staff engagement with research and scholarship opportunities through the Teaching Fellowship Scheme, the Learning and Teaching Research Centre (LTRC), the research clusters and the Business Relations Office.

Other modes of study

143 See also Section 2, paragraphs 50 to 52.

144 The audit team concluded that University College's strategic goal of introducing more flexible learning through its e-learning strategy contributed to enhancement.

Resources for learning

145 See also Section 2, paragraphs 50 to 52 and Section 3, paragraphs 93 to 105.

146 The audit team concluded that the University College's management of learning resources contributes to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities.

Student support

147 See also Section 3, paragraphs 110 to 116.

148 The University College is able to demonstrate, through ASR reports, the success of the pre-entry retention package in improving retention rates among first-year students in 2005-06. The University College intends to develop opportunities for student ambassadors, volunteers and mentors to receive institutional credit for their work.

Dissemination of good practice

149 The University College stated that, 'the identification, adoption and dissemination of good practice is integral to the College's quality enhancement procedures'. In support of this aim, the University College reorganised its management and committee structure in spring and summer 2005.

150 The restructuring introduced into the senior team a new role, the Director of Learning and Teaching. The Director of Learning and Teaching leads on learning and teaching development and support and also has the remit to facilitate engagement with the Higher Education Academy and other external agencies. The audit team were told of the strategic intent behind the recruitment to this post, in order to enhance the scholarship of learning and teaching and of a Human Resources Strategy to secure such external expertise in support of the Strategic Plan of the University College. The team was able to review examples of this work beginning to develop.

151 Following the appointment of the Director of Learning and Teaching, the University College's LTRC was established in summer 2006 to 'lead the development of a culture of research-informed teaching and disseminate good practice to enhance learning opportunities'. The LTAC is the representative academic group which oversees this work.

152 LTRC has the remit to coordinate the dissemination of good practice and organises staff development workshops and away days. Meetings with staff showed that they were aware of the role of the LTRC and were able to provide examples of its work and positive impact, such that the audit team could confirm the effectiveness of the LTRC's method for the dissemination of its activities.

153 Through its meetings with staff the audit team also confirmed that a wide variety of other activity is in place to identify, celebrate and disseminate good practice, both within the University College and to the wider sector. One of the principal means for achieving this has been the creation of a number of teaching fellowships, which range from full postholders to mini-fellowships to undertake smaller projects. Activity extends from a full-time Course Development Fellow, who assists with course teams in the dissemination of good practice in relation to approval and validation, through to course and student specific projects, such as one that used external consultancy to give students advice on the context of working in the contemporary fine arts.

154 The audit team also noted the introduction of a new agenda structure for the LTAC, such that committee business was limited to one hour, with the latter part of the meeting devoted to workshops on themes relevant to the committee remit. A Learning and Teaching newsletter is also produced.

155 The audit team noted with interest the use made of Business Fellows to support employability within the curriculum. This includes the work of a Business Fellow with a regional visual arts organisation to enable University College students to gain paid 'internships' in a contemporary visual arts organisation, through a tripartite agreement between Tate St Ives, Newlyn Art Gallery and University College.

156 The University College stated that 'Institutional level guidance and learning opportunities for staff ensure that good practice is identified, shared and disseminated'. Whilst the audit team was able to confirm that a wide and relevant range of good practice projects were being fostered by the University College, with a good awareness of them demonstrated by staff and students, the evidence for such activity seemed often to be held by individuals or groups of staff rather than centrally recorded. The team would strongly encourage the University College to consider ways in which this wide range of activity might be better captured and recorded.

Staff support, development and reward

157 See also Section 3, paragraphs 117 to 125.

158 The audit team concluded that the PDR process provides a solid platform to ascertain staff development needs. The process provides encouragement to staff to engage in their own development and it has the potential to promote research activities. The new Service Level Agreements support the understanding of the responsibilities attached to services and roles and their impact on the organisation as a whole.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

159 The University College Briefing Paper stated that the University College does not have any formal collaborative arrangements as defined under the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA, and the audit team can confirm this statement.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Selection, admission, induction and supervision of research students

160 The Research Degrees Handbook specifies that the Research Degrees Management Group (RDMG) is responsible for managing the admissions process including interviews, and for ensuring that the University College is able to provide appropriate supervision and other resources. Students may only be admitted to a research degree in subject areas where appropriately qualified supervision can be provided and the supervisory team must be approved by both RDMG and its equivalent at the accrediting institution prior to registration. New students receive an induction tour and presentation on learning resources during their first week.

161 In its meetings with students, the audit team heard from a part-time research student who had been admitted several years previously and who had reached the writing-up stage at the time of the audit. Given this, and the fact that there were no references to postgraduate study in the students' written submission (SWS), it was difficult for the team to form a view on the student perspective of current procedures for the selection, admission and induction of research students.

Progress and review arrangements

162 The minutes of the RDMG confirm that the review of student progress is a standard agenda item and that actions are minuted and completed as necessary. The audit team saw examples of research degree annual monitoring reports for University College students enrolled with the University of Plymouth.

Feedback arrangements

163 Research students provide formal feedback through their representation on the RDMG, although given the small number of research students the ability of representatives to act as conduits of student views is currently restricted.

Assessment of research students

164 From its meetings with students and reading of the Research Degrees Handbook, the audit team was able to confirm that it was made clear to research students that assessment was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the accrediting institution.

Representations, complaints and appeals arrangements for research students

165 The rights and responsibilities of research students are specified in the College's Student Charter and the General Regulations for Students. Complaints are handled by an internal University College procedure consisting of four stages. A written complaint and response must be made at each stage before moving to the next, and the Director of Studies is responsible for keeping RDMG informed of the progress of a complaint. Appeals against assessment decisions are handled under the appeals procedure of the accrediting institution.

Section 7: Published information

Accuracy and completeness of published information, including Teaching Quality Information

166 The University College regards the availability of clear and accessible information as one of the components of its quality framework and the Briefing Paper described its commitment to providing 'clear, concise and accessible information that also reflect[ed] what [was] distinctive and special about the University College and the student experience it offer[ed]'. To achieve this aim,

the University Colleges has implemented formal procedures to ensure that information intended for external use is filtered and checked extensively before publication. Staff confirmed to the audit team that course-level information, such as prospectus entries and course leaflets, was checked for accuracy by course leaders and subject directors prior to publication. The Brand Strategy Group consists of senior managers and the President of the Students' Union, and its minutes confirm the importance attached by the University College to establishing a consistent approach to the style and presentation of published information in a range of media.

167 The University College responded to the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) initiative by identifying processes and responsibilities for the preparation and timely publication of external information. In the academic year 2005-06 the University College adapted the external examiner report format to fulfil TQI requirements. The audit team had access to the University College's intranet and was able to confirm that it played an important role in the dissemination of TQI.

168 The audit team was interested to learn about the University College's review of the ways in which it provides information to students. The purpose of the review, which was still in progress at the time of the audit, is to consider possible solutions to the problem of duplication of information and information overload by, for example, the introduction of template-based course documentation. The University College intends to use the review's findings to inform changes to the induction process for the academic year 2007-08.

169 The audit team concluded that the University College was taking appropriate steps to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information it publishes and encourages it in its efforts to eliminate duplication in the communication of information to students.

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

170 The students the audit team met confirmed the usefulness of the information provided by the prospectus and website during the application and admissions stage. Although the SWS voiced slight concern about areas of new development where opportunities described in the University College's promotional literature had failed to materialise, the students whom the team met did not regard this as a significant issue and were generally satisfied with the accuracy of the University College's published information. Conversely, students expressed surprise that they had not been informed prior to entry about the planned move of Photography from the Woodlane Campus to the Tremough Campus. There was also some concern among students the team met that the physical challenges to mobility-impaired applicants posed by the Woodlane Campus were not adequately described in the prospectus. The team would encourage the University College to address this concern.

171 Students confirmed the usefulness of the course-specific leaflets available to applicants, which provide an overview of the approach to learning, teaching and assessment adopted by individual courses, of progression from year-to-year and of teaching staff.

172 Students also indicated their satisfaction with course/student handbooks and associated Unit Guides; the audit team saw examples of both. Student Handbooks are written in clear English and introduce students to the aims and outcomes of their course and its curriculum. They contain an overview of progression through the course in terms of curriculum content and learning, teaching and assessment methods, as well as information about the teaching team, details of generic and specific learning facilities and student services. Although there are some differences in format, Unit Guides provide a useful introduction to individual units, indicating the learning outcomes, the learning and teaching programme on a week-by-week basis, available resources, assessment details and, in some cases, assessment criteria.

173 On the basis of information gained from meetings with students, the promotional literature, course handbooks and Unit Guides they read, the audit team concluded that students were generally satisfied with the information they received from the University College.

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