

Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies

FEBRUARY 2006

Preface

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

To do this QAA carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In England and Northern Ireland this process is known as institutional audit. QAA operates similar but separate processes in Scotland and Wales.

The purpose of institutional audit

The aims of institutional audit are to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges are:

- providing HE, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard, and
- exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

Judgements

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

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

These judgements are expressed as either **broad confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence** and are accompanied by examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement.

Nationally agreed standards

Institutional audit uses a set of nationally agreed reference points, known as the 'Academic Infrastructure', to consider an institution's standards and quality. These are published by QAA and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*, which include descriptions of different HE qualifications
- *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of the what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. They outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the FHEQ.

The audit process

Institutional audits are carried out by teams of academics who review the way in which institutions oversee their academic quality and standards. Because they are evaluating their equals, the process is called 'peer review'.

The main elements of institutional audit are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution nine months before the audit visit
- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the audit visit
- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the audit visit
- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the audit team five weeks before the audit visit
- the audit visit, which lasts five days
- the publication of a report on the audit team's judgements and findings 20 weeks after the audit visit.

The evidence for the audit

In order to obtain the evidence for its judgement, the audit team carries out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, such as regulations, policy statements, codes of practice, recruitment publications and minutes of relevant meetings, as well as the self-evaluation document itself
- reviewing the written submission from students
- asking questions of relevant staff
- talking to students about their experiences
- exploring how the institution uses the Academic Infrastructure.

The audit team also gathers evidence by focusing on examples of the institution's internal quality assurance processes at work using 'audit trails'. These trails may focus on a particular programme or programmes offered at that institution, when they are known as a 'discipline audit trail'. In addition, the audit team may focus on a particular theme that runs throughout the institution's management of its standards and quality. This is known as a 'thematic enquiry'.

From 2004, institutions will be required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The audit team reviews progress towards meeting this requirement.

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Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies (the College) from 20 to 24 February 2006 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the College offers on behalf of the University of Birmingham, which formally awards the College's degrees.

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

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

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

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

Outcome of the audit

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

- broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the College's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes
- the findings of the audit suggest that there can be broad confidence in the College's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its programmes.

Features of good practice

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

- the well-integrated support systems, including the Study Support Centre, which give all students the opportunity to realise their full potential
- the organisation of placement activity, and the support for students prior to, during and subsequent to their placements
- the embedding of staff development in the institution, as evidenced by the wide range of opportunities and the high level of participation by all categories of staff
- the high level of collaborative commitment of academic and support staff to the achievement of the College's aims, leading to the enhancement of the student experience
- the strong engagement of the College with industry, as evidenced through the involvement of employers in curriculum design, delivery and review.

Recommendations for action

The audit team also recommends that the College should consider further action in a number of areas to ensure that the academic quality and standards of the awards it offers are maintained.

The team advises the College to:

- revise the roles and responsibilities of external examiners with regard to the establishment and verification of the standards of individual modules shared between programmes which lead to different awards.

It would be desirable for the College to:

- review the regulations for the awards of the Foundation Degree and honours degrees in the same subject area to ensure that the degrees are suitably differentiated, and that students may receive only the award (or its fall-back award) for which they are registered

- continue the College's development of systematic and comprehensive recording of action taken in response to issues in order to ensure that appropriate progress continues to be made
- continue the development of systems and policies to facilitate staff engagement in scholarly activity and research.

Discipline audit trails

Two discipline audit trails were conducted, covering the following programmes:

- BA (Hons) Culinary Arts Management
- FdA Culinary Arts Management
- BSc (Hons) Food and Consumer Management
- FdSc Food and Consumer Management
- FdA Adventure Tourism Management
- FdA Tourism Business Management (full-time (FT))
- BA (Hons) Tourism Business Management
- BA (Hons) Adventure Tourism Management (FT)
- BSc (Hons) Tourism Management (FT)
- MA/Postgraduate Diploma (PgDip) Adventure Tourism Management
- MA/PgDip Tourism Business Administration (FT/part-time/block).

The standard of student achievement in the programmes is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), published by QAA. The quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for a programme of study leading to the named awards.

National reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings the audit team also investigated the use made by the College of the Academic Infrastructure which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of

nationally agreed reference points which help to define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the audit suggest that the College has responded appropriately to the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements, programme specifications and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic standards and quality in higher education*, published by QAA

The institutional audit process included a review of the information set published by the College in the format recommended in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document HEFCE 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, regarding Teaching Quality Information (TQI). The audit team was able to confirm that the College had made appropriate progress towards fulfilling its responsibilities in relation to TQI requirements.

Main report

Main report

1 An institutional audit of the Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies (the College) was undertaken during the week commencing 20 February 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the College's programmes of study and on the discharging of its responsibility for the degrees of the University of Birmingham.

2 The audit was carried out using a process developed by QAA in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and Universities UK (UUK), and has been endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills. For institutions in England, it replaces the previous processes of continuation audit, undertaken by QAA at the request of UUK and SCOP, and universal subject review, undertaken by QAA on behalf of HEFCE, as part of the latter's statutory responsibility for assessing the quality of education that it funds.

3 The audit checked the effectiveness of the College's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of the academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study leading to those awards; and for publishing reliable information. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, the audit included consideration of an example of institutional processes at work at the level of the programme, through discipline audit trails, together with examples of those processes operating at the level of the institution as a whole. The scope of the audit encompassed all of the College's HE provision.

Section 1: Introduction: Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies

The institution and its mission

4 The College is situated in the centre of Birmingham and is a specialist provider of education and training for the hospitality and other related service industries with a history stretching back to the late nineteenth century. The College operates from two sites. It moved to its present, purpose-built premises (Summer Row) in central Birmingham in 1968 and expanded into Richmond House, a six-storey block close to the main building, in 2002.

5 While originally a further education (FE) college, higher education (HE) work has been part of the College's curriculum portfolio since the late 1960s. Collaborations with three universities (University of Central England, De Montfort University, and the University of Birmingham) increased the scope of development of bachelors and master's provision in the 1980s. In 1996, the College became an Accredited College of the University of Birmingham, collecting together all the College's undergraduate and postgraduate provision within a single partnership. In 2002, HE provision having been in excess of 55 per cent of students for a number of years, the College was re-designated as an HE institution. The College does not have degree awarding powers. The accreditation agreement with the University of Birmingham allows for the College to propose, devise, staff, teach and assess undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, leading to the award of degrees of the University. All of the College's undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are now validated by the University of Birmingham.

6 In common with many specialist institutions the College has a relatively small student population. In 2004-05, the College had 4,720 full-time equivalent (FTE) students - 2,836 (60 per cent) of whom were HE students and 1,884 (40 per cent) were FE students. Of

the 2,836 FTE students in HE, 2558 (90 per cent) were undergraduate and 278 (10 per cent) were postgraduate. Approximately 320 FTE students in HE were studying part-time. There were over 600 FTE international students registered on HE courses in the College.

7 The operational management and delivery of HE and FE provision is quite separate. On the HE side of its provision, the College has five schools: Recreation, Sports and Tourism; Hospitality, Food and Retail Management; Childhood and Education; Business and Marketing; Salon, Spa and Complementary Therapies. Approximately 75 per cent of the full-time HE students in the College are attached either to the School of Recreation, Sports and Tourism or to the School of Hospitality, Food and Retail Management.

8 Schools comprise groupings of programme. Each is led by a Director. Programme coordinators, who report to a Director of School, are responsible for a related group of programmes. The Directors of Schools and the programme coordinators (together with staff responsible for the College's FE provision, and other key staff) are members of the Academic Management Team (AMT), led by the Vice-Principal (VP) Academic Affairs. The AMT plans and coordinates all matters relating to teaching, learning and assessment and provides a collective forum for liaison with other functions within the College.

9 A distinctive feature of the College's academic provision is its specialist curriculum which focuses primarily on learning and teaching in subjects related to hospitality, tourism and the 'services to people' sectors. The College is a provider of vocational HE. Most full-time programmes include an element of industry placement, which may be compulsory. While the College has been a provider of HND programmes for over 30 years, Foundation Degrees (FDs) have been a recent major academic development at the College. These have sought to encourage new student groups into HE, particularly in part-time modes. As a result, the College has almost completed the phasing out of HND and HNC

provision. The College has been active in the development of its e-learning provision. A commercial virtual learning environment (VLE) has been introduced and, according to the self-evaluation document (SED), usage in 2005-06 increased significantly.

10 The SED indicated that the vision for the College envisages slow growth in student numbers. The intention is not to create new disciplines but rather to introduce curricular developments through extending the boundaries of the College's current provision.

11 The College states in its Corporate Plan that its mission is 'to maintain an environment that encourages and supports participation in the learning process by all those with the ambition and commitment to succeed. As a specialist provider of further and higher education vocational programmes, we will promote a culture of scholarship and opportunity that equips students with appropriate skills, knowledge and quality standards to enable them to compete, with advantage, at all levels within the sectors we serve'.

Collaborative provision

12 The College does not franchise or subcontract any of its HE work to other institutions. It does offer block teaching mode programmes in a number of other countries. Members of the same teams which teach the subjects in the UK deliver these programmes using an 'intensive teaching blocks' model. All programmes are administered with the help of a local partner organisation. A formal agreement between the partner and the College lays out responsibilities with the partner organisation providing solely administrative links between the students and the College.

13 The College also has 29 agreements with other institutions (mostly international) which recognise one or more of the existing programmes of another institution as providing entry to one or more of the College's foundation, bachelors or postgraduate programmes.

Background information

14 The published information available for the audit included: information on the College's website; information on the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website; an Ofsted FE in HE report of an inspection conducted in 2004; a report of a review by QAA of provision at subject level published in December 2001. An unpublished report relating to a developmental engagement (DE) conducted in 2004 was also made available to the audit team.

15 The College provided QAA with an institutional SED and annexes; a discipline self-evaluation document (DSED) for both disciplines selected for the discipline audit trails (DATs); the Guide to the College's Academic Systems; the Students' Handbook 2005-06; and a CD-ROM containing various documentation referenced in the SED.

16 During the briefing and audit visits the audit team was given ready access to a range of the College's documentation, both in hard copy and electronic form, and to a range of documentation relating to the selected DATs, including examples of assessed work. The team was grateful to be provided with intranet access between the briefing visit and audit visit which allowed the team to view a range of documentation referenced in the SED.

17 The Guild of Students provided the audit team with a students' written submission (SWS). The team was grateful to the Guild of Students for its agreement to provide the SWS.

The audit process

18 A preliminary meeting with senior representatives of the College was held in September 2005. At that meeting it was agreed that the audit team would conduct a total of two DATs. The DATs were selected from the Schools of Recreation, Sport and Tourism; and Hospitality, Food and Retail Management and comprised a subset of the programmes offered in those Schools. The institution's SED and the DSED documents were received in November 2005.

19 A briefing visit to the College took place from 11 to 13 January 2006, during which meetings were held with the Principal, representatives of the Guild of Students and the College's 'senior layer' of staff with cross-institutional responsibility for the assurance of quality and standards. No areas were selected for thematic enquiry.

20 There was full involvement of the Guild of Students prior to and during the Briefing Visit. The students provided a written submission which had been shared with the senior staff of the College.

21 The audit visit took place from 20 to 24 February 2006 and included two DATs, together with a series of meetings with academic staff at all levels, and with representatives of the student body.

22 The audit team comprised Mr P Devlin, Dr K King, Mr N Pratt, Professor R Usherwood (auditors) and Dr D Dowland (audit secretary). The audit process was coordinated on behalf of QAA by Dr P Hartley, Assistant Director (Reviews Group).

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

23 The College had not previously been subject to institutional level audit by QAA, since it only officially became an HE institution in 2002. It had undergone a subject review of provision in 2001, a DE in 2004 and an Ofsted FE in HE inspection in 2004.

24 The College achieved a high aggregate grading in the subject review of Hospitality, Leisure, Recreation, Sport and Tourism in 2001. The report identified a significant number of positive features. Two areas where improvements could be made were identified: there was a need to clarify and enhance the intended learning outcomes in relation to the level of study for some units, and to reflect this in the content of those units and their assessment; transferable skills as defined by the College were not consistently identified or fully developed across all programmes. The SED explained the measures that had been taken to address these areas.

25 The DE in 2004 focused on Hospitality programmes. The report was positive, particularly with respect to the College's internal review procedures. The SED explained the measures taken to address the areas for further development which the report had suggested the College might wish to consider. The audit team was provided with evidence of the action plans which had been developed.

26 In addition to the aforementioned reviews, the College had been subject to a re-accreditation visit in 2005 by the University of Birmingham. The re-accreditation panel recommended that the Accreditation Agreement with the College should be renewed for a further five years. The audit team noted that, while it referred to the outcomes of the visit, the SED contained no detailed information on the findings of the re-accreditation panel or on the College's intentions with respect to its response to the areas identified as being worthy of further attention.

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

27 The SED stated that the relatively small size of the College and its focused curriculum provision has facilitated both a simple and effective management structure and in effect a 'single faculty'. It is the College's view that these characteristics have simplified both the implementation and monitoring of regulations and policies. Moreover, the College's small size makes it possible to quickly gather together all those needed to make a decision. According to the SED, this enables the College to be very responsive, makes minuted meetings far less necessary, and results in a close networking-style communication structure. This in turn facilitates proactive development of services and quick responses to situations as they arise.

28 The College stated in its SED that its quality policy and strategy show that it values:

- a culture of continual improvement for both staff and students;
- externality in evaluating and confirming standards;
- benchmarking with the Academic Infrastructure and industry/vocational best practice.

29 The College expressed the view that it has in place a sound framework for managing academic quality and standards. The SED stated that policies, systems and procedures have developed through validation and accreditation interaction with three universities and through interaction with the wider HE sector. It is the College's view that, as a result, its policies, systems and procedures are closely aligned with the principles of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA.

30 The SED stated that the College's Learning and Teaching Strategy is the starting point for all work on academic standards. This informs all programme design, redesign and implementation. It also informs assessment plans and practice. Its principles are expected to be reflected in the content of Programme Specifications.

31 It is the College's view that it has in place a comprehensive set of systems, committees and activities which are involved in the application of the quality cycle of monitoring, reviewing, developing and enhancing provision. The Curriculum and Quality Development Unit (CQDU) manages the quality systems of the College. CQDU supports programme and support teams in their implementation of the quality systems, and works with programme teams to resolve issues arising from the application of policies and procedures.

32 The College has developed a Quality Manual. The CQDU seeks wherever possible to reduce the administrative burden on staff. Thus, the Quality Manual is not distributed in its entirety to all staff. Instead, the approach taken is to provide staff with detailed information about those parts of the quality systems which are relevant to them, and for other sections of these systems to be available on-line.

33 Component elements of the College's regulatory framework have been developed over a number of years. In the College's view, the complexity and extensive nature of some parts of the framework did not make it easy for new staff to quickly gain a clear understanding. A Guide to Academic Systems, which references all relevant policies and procedures and where they can be found, was published in 2005, to assist staff in the identification and maintenance of standards.

The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision

34 The College has an accreditation agreement with the University of Birmingham which allows it to develop, teach and assess undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes leading to the award of degrees of the University. The joint University of Birmingham/College Accreditation Committee is an important part of the quality framework of the College, and is comprised of a Pro Vice-Chancellor (chair) and three deans from the University and the Principal, Deputy Principal and Vice Principals of the College. It meets three times a year and is the channel through which the College's programmes are recognised by the University's Senate. Guidance from the Accreditation Committee is treated as mandatory and the College must respond to any recommendations within six months. The College follows the University's guidelines on quality and standards issues.

35 The Academic Board of the College is ultimately responsible for maintaining academic standards and monitoring and approving the main policies and processes. It has five key sub-committees, Curriculum and Quality, Equal Opportunities, Academic Regulations, Professional Development and Validation and Approvals which review and monitor the main policies and processes. The College Corporation endorses policy and through its Student Services and Standards Committee oversees the effectiveness of quality assurance and service delivery arrangements

36 There are boards of study for both HE and FE programmes which undertake a number of tasks delegated to them by the Academic Board, in particular they are the principal route through which the academic development of programmes is reported. Subject boards are the forum for discussion of matters that affect groups of related programmes and they report to the relevant board of study.

37 The Senior Management Team (SMT) is responsible for the direction and application of the quality strategy and the setting and review of performance measures and targets. The academic work of the College is carried out in a 'single faculty' and the centralised management simplifies both the implementation of regulations and policies and their monitoring.

38 The Quality Manual provides a relatively brief outline of the main quality processes and systems, which are set out in detail in its appendices. The Quality Manual is not distributed in its entirety to all staff, in order to reduce the administrative burden on them, but it is readily available on-line. All documentation relating to the management of Quality and Standards is accessible to staff and students via the College website. A new publication, 'Your guide to the College's academic systems', was produced in September 2005, and provides website references to all relevant policies and procedures.

Framework for managing standards, including student assessment

39 Assessment regulations for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are modelled on those of the University of Birmingham, adapted for the context of the College. A guide for staff, HE Assessment Procedures Folder, explains the assessment procedures and provides advice on designing assessment to suit particular levels of study, and ensuring that marking accurately assesses student performance. For honours degree dissertation supervisors a support and guidance system includes training and annual updating, standard student tracking pro forma and a double-blind marking system. The SED stated that assessment is carried out in line with the *Code of practice for academic standards and*

quality in higher education (Code of practice), published by QAA and, where relevant, the requirements of specific awarding bodies. Detailed generic grading criteria have been recently introduced to inform assessment at each level of undergraduate and postgraduate study.

40 Discussions with staff and evidence from committee minutes indicated that the committee functions had been carefully designed to enable the proper scrutiny of quality and standards issues, and to provide an opportunity for a significant proportion of staff and student representatives to be involved in the management of quality and standards. The College's claim that it has a flat management structure was found to be justified and has benefits in enabling it to operate as a single faculty which helps to ensure that policies and processes are consistent across all programmes. The staff the audit team met were well informed about the quality policies and procedures which reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice*, and the CQDU takes an active role in briefing staff on their responsibilities within the quality processes. However, the team formed the view that the absence of an obvious single documentary source of quality processes and procedures makes it difficult to easily locate the detail of policies.

41 The College has acknowledged in its SED the need to record more comprehensively its reporting of responses to issues and the audit team found that in some cases the minutes of committees were very brief and recorded little more than the formal actions of the committee and not the details of the discussions leading to decisions. The team formed the view that it would be desirable for the College to review the style and level of detail of committee minutes.

The institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards

42 The SED stated that high quality learning and teaching opportunities are a key priority and that this is reflected in both the College's Corporate Plan and the Learning and Teaching

Strategy. While it is the College's view that a sound framework is in place for managing academic quality and standards the SED identified areas for development including initiatives which the College saw as enhancement activities in respect of quality management.

43 The SED referred to a number of strategic issues being addressed by the College: the effect of the introduction of 'top up' fees; the need to acquire additional accommodation; the continued development of Knowledge Transfer activity; and the impact of the introduction of job evaluation and the framework agreement. The SED also identified opportunities for cooperation and collaboration with other local HE institutions and FE colleges as a strategic issue. The College is the lead partner in the regional Local Lifelong Learning Network, and works closely with many institutions on small scale projects. The College intends to play an active role in convening and supporting such activity while retaining its status as an independent HE institution.

44 Planned enhancements identified in the SED were:

- review and embedding of the new Personal Development Portfolio following its introduction in 2005. This will be complemented by a redesigned academic transcript which is intended to provide fuller information on student achievement and the skills, knowledge and other aptitudes developed on programmes
- piloting of a new module incorporating volunteering activity. If successful, it is planned to make this available to all undergraduate students with a view to providing students with opportunities to enhance their employability
- redesign of the College's long-standing student satisfaction monitoring activity to ensure closer alignment with the National Student Satisfaction Survey. The aim is to provide a richer evidence base for the monitoring of standards

- introduction of an 'active sports' policy, promoting recreational sports for all students
- increasing the size of the research centre
- further integration of the College's separate database systems. The next phase aims to fully integrate exams data with the main student record system
- continuing development of new programmes.

45 The SED stated that the College believes that it has in place a sound framework for managing academic quality and standards. Reports of reviews in recent years by various external agencies would appear to confirm that this is the case. While the SED identified strategic areas to be addressed and intentions for enhancement it did not clearly cross reference those areas to show how the problems were identified by the College's systems. The SED listed both strategic issues being addressed by the College and what were stated to be intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards. In the view of the audit team some of the initiatives in the latter list did not represent enhancement activities with respect to quality and standards - for example, the plan to introduce an active sports policy which will promote recreational sports for all students. The team concluded that the College defines enhancement in broad terms to refer to all planned initiatives.

46 The audit team gained the impression of an institution where enhancement (in its broader sense) informs all its activities. Minutes of the AMT and AMT Directors' meetings showed that enhancement (including enhancement with respect to quality and standards) is regularly discussed. Documentation regarding staff development events such as the Insights Conference in 2004 and the Staff Development Symposium in 2005 provided evidence that the College seeks to disseminate ideas and information. Areas discussed at these events included e-learning; skill identification in hospitality management; and the sharing of experiences in teaching, learning and assessment.

47 The College's Learning and Teaching Strategy 2005 to 2010 also provided evidence that the College actively engages in enhancement activity. The Learning and Teaching Strategy 2005 to 2010 document is comprehensive. It identifies four strategic aims for learning and teaching, each of which is supported by a number of objectives. The Professional Development Plan similarly is concerned with enhancement, aspects of which relate to the enhancement of quality and standards. The Professional Development Plan addresses development needs in terms of individual level needs (for example, the need for staff to constantly update their subject knowledge), departmental-level needs (for example, the development of innovative learning techniques through e-learning training), and collates these in order to identify the development needs of the College as a whole (institutional-level needs). In the view of the audit team the SED failed to adequately describe much of the evaluative aspects of the College's activity and did not fully convey the reflective stance adopted in both the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2005 to 2010 and the Professional Development Plan.

48 While the evidence contained in the documentation provided to the audit team showed that the College concerns itself with enhancement, it was less clear which enhancement activities were to be prioritised. The team would therefore encourage the College to further strengthen its approach to enhancement - in particular, with regard to quality and standards - through the establishment of a clearer sense of priorities.

49 During the audit the audit team was provided with documentation showing many areas of development, not all of which were fully described in the SED. The team was informed that, while the Curriculum and Quality Committee played a significant role in relation to enhancement, all committees and groups within the College played a role. Staff indicated that informal mechanisms also contributed to enhancement, particularly with respect to sharing of good practice. For example, 'live' projects, which were developed

initially in the School of Recreation, Sports and Tourism, were extended to being used in all schools in the College. It was evident to the team from the available documentation and from meetings with staff that enhancement, broadly defined, featured prominently in the College's priorities and the team would encourage the College to continue to pursue this agenda.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Programme approval

50 A standard format is used for all new programme and module proposals (adapted from University of Birmingham documentation) which is designed to meet the requirements of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme approval, monitoring and review*, published by QAA, and the need for Programme Specifications. Proposals for new or amended programmes or modules are made to the Validation and Approvals Committee (of the Academic Board). A validation event is held at which programme teams make a presentation of the proposal to the Validation and Approvals Committee, whose membership includes senior academic managers and heads of services, the President of the Guild of Students and external representatives with relevant academic and/or vocational experience.

51 If the programme proposals are approved by the Committee they are forwarded to the joint University/College Accreditation Committee where they may be approved, normally for a period of five years. This Committee tests the degree of fit with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and other external benchmarks. The Curriculum and Quality Committee monitors progress against any conditions or recommendations flowing from approval decisions and reports to the Validation and Approvals Committee if conditions have not been met. Specifications for each module are agreed at the validation stage and any amendment to these requires the approval of the Module Review Board and, if

the amendments are substantial, also the subsequent agreement of the Validations and Approvals Committee. External participants are used in the validation process at various stages, the relevant Industrial Liaison Committee or a group of specialist employers are consulted at an early stage of the programme development and employers are canvassed on their likelihood of offering themselves as placement hosts.

52 The SED stated that the College's procedures for internal monitoring and review are sound, contribute to the maintenance of standards, and assist in ensuring vocational relevance which should enhance student employability.

53 The audit team found that the programme approval process reflected the *Code of practice* and operated in the way described by the SED. The composition of the Approvals Committee is drawn from a wider group than is customary and the inclusion of the service heads of Finance and Marketing enables a deeper scrutiny of the vocational relevance of programmes. The process is rigorous and in one case seen by the team, it resulted in a programme proposal being rejected at its first submission but being approved following some significant changes in modules and in the structure of the programme.

54 The audit team noted that that the commonality of modules and programme learning outcomes of some FDs with the first two years of the honours degrees in the same subject area may allow a student, who has passed the first two years of an honours degree but has failed to achieve sufficient credit for an honours degree, to claim successfully a FD award rather than the fall back award of a Diploma in Higher Education as the regulations allow. The team formed the view that it would be desirable for the College to review the Foundation and honours degree regulations and the programme learning outcomes for Foundation and honours degrees in the same subject area to ensure that the degrees are suitably differentiated so as to ensure that students may receive only the award (or its fall-back award) for which they are registered.

Annual monitoring

55 Annual review and evaluation of teaching and learning activities are carried out at module, programme, school and institutional level and also by support units. These activities are undertaken to promote the development of a self-critical community. The Quality Systems Manager (located within the CQDU) ensures that the procedures are carried out at the appropriate level of detail and analysis although the requirement for committee consideration of the results of monitoring is kept to a minimum.

56 Each module is reviewed annually by its teaching team and a report of any changes needed is provided to the Module Review Board, which is composed of senior academic staff, a CQDU representative and the HE Assessment Coordinator. The committee considers the evidence from module teams and uses this information to approve or reject proposals for change.

57 Programme Review (PR) is designed to meet the needs of all validating and funding bodies and it results in the identification of programme strengths and areas for improvement, and a structured action plan. The PR process was devised by CQDU in consultation with AMT to respond to changes in the *Code of practice* and to streamline the reporting and evaluation process. The PR process results in a working folder of live information including performance indicators, student feedback, External Examiner/Verifier feedback, and a series of nine PR sheets which require specific information and must be completed according to a timetable. The PR is completed by the nominated programme representative who may be the Programme Manager, nominated Year Manager or the Coordinator of Programmes. The programme team is involved in the process of PR completion and contributes through team meetings or direct input to PR sheet completion. The progress of the PR is discussed at each subject board meeting and it is completed by the end of August except for the audited programme statistics which become available the following February. The completed

PR is validated and signed off by the senior manager with responsibility for the programme area. The validated PR folder is reviewed by a member of the Curriculum and Quality Committee and written feedback is provided to the programme team with regard to the satisfactory completion of the PR folder.

58 The relevant Director of School and Coordinator of Programmes identifies the main themes and issues from the PRs within the curriculum area and complete a School Review indicating the main strengths and issues of school performance and linking them to an enhancement plan. The School Reviews are reported to a meeting of the AMT. School Review is a new process which has had one year of operation and the SED stated that it appears to be proving useful to AMT and others in the reporting of standards and in the planning of programmes.

59 Institutional Review was carried out in 2003-04 for the first time, and the SMT produced a report on the progress of the institution in a similar format to the SED required for QAA institutional audit. The report is taken to Academic Board and the College Corporation.

60 All 'student facing' units review their practice through the production of an Annual Quality Review (AQR) at the end of each academic year, which evaluates the effectiveness of the service and concludes with an action plan for the following year. AQRs are monitored by the Quality Systems Manager, following their signing off by the appropriate line manager.

61 The SED stated that the College believes that these procedures for the annual monitoring of standards and activity are rigorous and extensive. They encourage an openness to self-evaluation, support a continuous improvement culture and enable the gathering of data to make evaluation against external criteria accurate and reliable. The procedures are kept under review and changes are made where necessary, for instance there is currently an awareness that the new

module review process may need adapting to ensure that cumulative small changes to a module do not affect a programme's ability to fulfil its aims and objectives.

62 It was evident to the audit team that monitoring at the module and programme level is very detailed and results in action plans which are closely scrutinised. The team saw examples of minor and major changes to modules following the annual review and in all cases the approval process was carried out effectively. In the case of major amendments to modules the Validations and Approvals Committee checks that the cumulative effective of module changes does not result in the programme intended learning outcomes not being met. The production of the annual PR folder is an effective approach to monitoring programmes which enables information to be collected about the health of the programme in an efficient and timely manner. The examples seen by the team indicated that many issues were quickly identified and resolved, while longer term issues were reflected in an action plan which was monitored in the subsequent report.

63 The school-level reporting process is new and while the main purpose of the process was achieved the audit team found some variation between the level of detail and analysis in the two School Reports scrutinised. The College may wish to review the style and approach of School Reports in order to make more clear how they reflect the issues raised in the programme reviews and how the process might result in developing good practice being spread across all schools. At the institutional level the outcome is a document which is similar to the SED produced for QAA institutional audit purposes and therefore will help the College to prepare for future audits. In the view of the team, however, a greater emphasis on reflection rather than description would make the document even more useful. The annual reports of the Support Units are well formulated and identify and produce action plans for issues which need to be addressed.

Periodic review

64 The periodic review of programmes is a new process to be used for the first time in 2005-06, and programmes will thereby undergo a quinquennial review. The University of Birmingham also reviews its Accreditation Agreement with the College every five years, but this process does not include revalidation of programmes

65 As part of the periodic review programme teams will prepare a written Evaluation Report, using a standard pro forma, to be considered by the Validation and Approvals Committee. The Committee will then decide whether the programme, its Evaluation Report and the Action Plan is to be approved unconditionally, or conditionally, or it may decide that fundamental changes are required or that the programme be replaced or suspended from the College's portfolio. The Committee may also make recommendations, which unlike conditions are not binding, but are made in the interests of quality improvement and should be considered by the Programme Team.

66 Internal Audit, which is additional to the processes described above, is a form of subject review process and is used by the College to develop and improve the quality of College provision through the independent identification and reporting of observed strengths and weaknesses in subject provision and College operation. Audit of the HE provision closely follows the criteria of QAA subject review and covers groups of programmes in a cognate subject area, for example HE Business and Marketing programmes. The AMT identifies staff to train as auditors and carry out internal audits and the Curriculum and Quality Committee is responsible for the approval of the internal audit schedule, which now covers a three-year rolling cycle of review activity, previously two years. The Curriculum and Quality Committee is responsible for receiving and reviewing internal audit reports, Response Reports and Actions Plans to address quality improvement

67 A sample of internal audit reports read by the audit team provided evidence that the process assesses course documentation, external examiners reports, student work and teaching sessions. While the assessment of the six aspects under review was favourable it indicated that subject areas were less successful in the Quality Management and Enhancement aspect of provision which in two cases achieved an outcome of confidence while other aspects generally achieved broad confidence. There is a three-year rolling schedule of audits running up to 2008 which will cover all of the College's subject areas at HE and FE level. The programme periodic review process is new and will be used in 2005-06 for the first time. The team reached the conclusion that the design of the programme periodic review process was sound and in conjunction with the Internal Audit process should provide a robust mechanism for the College's monitoring of quality and standards.

68 The audit team found that the College's policies and processes for the approval of modules and programmes, the annual monitoring of modules, programmes and schools, the periodic review of programmes and the Internal Audit of Subjects were well designed and reflected the precepts of the *Code of practice*. Other than the programme periodic review process which is yet to be implemented, the approval and monitoring processes were carried out effectively with issues which have been identified resulting in action plans which are carefully monitored and reported in subsequent committee minutes.

External participation in internal review processes

69 As a result of the College's vocational mission, exposure of its programmes and practices to employers and industry representatives is regarded as being at least as important as gaining external academic views. External participation in internal review processes is effected through external academic and industry members of internal audit teams, validation and approval panels. Industrial

Liaison Groups and individual employers are also consulted during the planning stages for new programme proposals. Satisfaction monitoring of industrial placement employers contributes to module reviews, and a number of employers contribute to the assessment of students, enabling the vocational relevance of programmes to be tested.

70 The audit team scrutinised a range of minutes of the Validation and Approvals Committee, the Industrial Liaison Group and the Internal Audit and was able to confirm that both academic and vocational external participants played an important part in the design and approval of programmes and the review of subject areas. It was evident that the processes used an appropriate degree of external input. The College's periodic review process was new and had yet to be implemented.

71 The audit team formed the view that the use of external academic and vocational representatives in the design, approval, and internal audit of programmes was well established and was a feature of good practice of the College's approach to the management of quality and standards.

External examiners and their reports

72 The College stated in the SED that the systems in place for external examiners including appointment, examiner report form and response procedures are those of the University of Birmingham and fully reflect the precepts within the appropriate section of the *Code of practice*. The SED also stated that difficulties in appointing examiners within the specialist areas of the College's programmes has resulted in the University extending the external examiner appointment period from three to four years. In addition, from 2002, a mentoring system has been introduced whereby new external examiners, with either no previous experience in examining or who are from outside HE are supported by an experienced external examiner.

73 In the SED, the College indicated that external examiner reports go to the College and University of Birmingham and that the University's academic office and the College Registry review reports and send them to programme managers. Formal reply to reports is made at the next meeting of the external board. The College stated in the SED that external examiner reports are favourable.

74 The College values external examiners as 'critical friends' and for the role they play in ensuring that its teaching, learning and assessment are of a sound standard. External examiners also exercise a role in programme development through discussion of planned changes to learning, teaching and assessment with programme teams. External examiners have consistently praised the effectiveness of examination boards and the quality of feedback given to students on their performance. The College has recently responded to external examiner comments to encourage full use of the grade range in assessments.

75 The audit team was able to confirm that the appointment of external examiners was approved by the University of Birmingham Senate, following nomination by the College to the Accreditation Board and hence the University Academic Board (recently changed to the Portfolio Development Committee). External examiners are appointed to programmes and it appeared to the team that it was possible for individual 'core' modules taken in the majority of undergraduate programmes to be examined by a number of external examiners. There is therefore no opportunity for an effective overview of the standards achieved in such 'core' modules since no single external examiner is designated as having overall responsibility. The team came to the conclusion that this had the potential to lead to differences of opinion between external examiners with regard to the establishment and verification of standards at module level, and that it would be advisable for the College to revise the roles and responsibilities of external examiners in respect of the standards of individual modules shared between programmes leading to different awards.

76 The audit team examined the College's Guide for External Examiners and was able to confirm that it reflects University of Birmingham procedures and clearly describes the duties and responsibilities of external examiners. The Guide contains information on appointment, materials to be provided by the College including general and programme specific documents, the role of external examiners in the assessment procedure, external examiners report requirements and feedback by the College on their reports, lists of key contacts and copies of the external examiner report forms.

77 In their reports, external examiners confirmed that they received all appropriate information and assessments and that the assessments procedures of the College met the stated requirements. These reports also confirmed that the external examiners were involved in discussions regarding the assessment strategies of the programmes and many commented favourably on the wide range of vocationally orientated assessments used within their programme.

78 The audit team also saw evidence that a structured programme, including collectively being informed of College developments and any responses required to their comments from the previous session, was arranged for external examiners when they attended the College.

79 The College External Examiner Code of Practice indicates that external examiner reports are sent to the University of Birmingham and then to the College VP for Curriculum Quality and Development, who copies to the Principal, the VP Academic Affairs, the appropriate Coordinator of Programmes and Director of Studies. Following discussion with the course team a summary report, including action to be taken, is presented at the next Programme Board. The action plan is then reported to the VP Academic Affairs who forwards to the VP Curriculum Quality and Development for consideration at the Curriculum and Quality Committee and reporting to Academic Board.

80 The audit team was able to confirm that external examiner reports were submitted to the

University of Birmingham, who forward the reports to the College for direct response, with a requirement that the response be copied to the University. On receipt of the report, the College responds directly to the external examiners indicating their comments will be considered. The programme team considers the external examiner report and a summary report and any action required is reported in the enhancement action plan within the PR. This action is further considered at school level within preparation of the school review. External examiner reports are also considered by the Curriculum and Quality Committee and the Academic Management Team, along with summary comments from the VP Curriculum and Quality Development. The audit team found the consideration of external examiner reports at programme and College level to be appropriate, enabling both programme-level and College-wide consideration of issues arising from the reports, and contributing to maintenance of quality and standards at programme, subject and college levels.

81 The audit team was informed that assessment procedures for the 'block' teaching were the same as for the equivalent College-based programmes and evidence was seen which demonstrated that the external examiners had visited overseas institutions where off-campus 'block' delivery of programmes occurred.

82 On the basis of the information made available during the audit visit, and the meetings held with staff at institutional level and in the DAT process, the audit team was able to confirm that the College had in place appropriately robust processes for the appointment of external examiners and for the evaluation of their reports, and that it was making effective use of those processes.

External reference points

83 The College indicated in the SED, that subject benchmarks are used in programme development and review, that the FHEQ is reflected in all programmes, that the *Code of practice* was rapidly adopted by the College, and that external examiners 'confirm that

programmes meet the expectations of the FHEQ and relevant subject benchmarks'. Within the College, the Validation and Approvals Committee evaluates the degree of fit of programmes with the benchmark statements and the FHEQ, and Academic Board's Curriculum and Quality Committee periodically reviews consistency of practice with sections of the *Code*. The SED stated that the format for module and programme specifications closely reflects QAA guidance.

84 The College encourages staff to participate in external academic review activities in other institutions and external partnerships and several College staff were involved in QAA benchmark deliberations. Industrial partners and industrial liaison boards are seen by the College as important mechanisms for maintaining programme relevance. It is a Department for Education and Skills Centre of Vocational Excellence and has undergone successfully a range of external audits such as the Charter Mark, Investors in People, Hospitality Assured and Matrix assessment.

85 The integrity of the accreditation agreement with the University of Birmingham is ensured through the Accreditation Committee, through which the University monitors standards, make requests and imposes requirements on the College. In the SED, the College stated that its approach to enhancement has always included a willingness to seek external review and assessment wherever possible. The audit team examined programme specifications and external examiner reports and was able to confirm that the College had engaged with the appropriate subject benchmark statements.

86 The audit team examined 'Your Guide to the College's academic systems', a summary document of College procedures for staff, which includes references to both College and external documents, many through web addresses, and including numerous references to the appropriate documents on the QAA website. The team also found that within the Quality Manual, those documents related to HE referred to the appropriate Academic

Infrastructure documents. It was also evident from meetings with staff that the Academic Infrastructure had been widely used.

87 The audit team was informed that the process for consideration of external documents was through the Curriculum and Quality Committee, and was able to confirm this through reports from this committee to the AMT. However, the team was unable to determine the level of discussion with regard to this process due to the rather minimalistic approach to recording minutes within these committees.

88 The audit team was informed that the Programme Specification was considered to be the definitive document for each programme. The team noted that although the format was similar, the content of the College programme specifications examined was significantly different to those of the University of Birmingham in that learning outcomes were in the language of objectives rather than learning outcomes and that the link between learning outcomes and teaching and assessment was unclear. Whilst the students do not have access to the programme specifications, the programme learning outcomes are translated into their programme handbooks.

89 The College 'Assessment procedures for Higher Education programmes 2005-06' document reflects the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*, and the audit team heard that it was regarded by staff as a very helpful document in relation to assessments at different levels of HE. The team saw clear evidence of the application of the FHEQ within the undergraduate generic grading criteria/feedback sheet used for all HE assessments. On the basis of the documentation consulted and meetings with staff and students during the audit, the team was able to confirm that the College was making appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

90 The College has not had a previous institutional audit by the QAA since it only became an HE institution in 2002. In 2001 it had a subject review covering a large proportion of the College's HE provision, the outcome of which was positive.

91 A DE took place in May 2004 which focused on the Hospitality programmes. The findings were that there was confidence in the academic standards set and achieved for all programmes and for the quality of the learning opportunities. The DE concluded that: the College's internal review procedures are soundly formulated, clearly stated and well understood by all interested parties.

92 The College is accredited by the University of Birmingham to award its qualifications and applied for re-accreditation in March 2005 and a re-accreditation panel visited the College in May 2005. The panel recommended that the Accreditation Agreement with the College should be renewed for a further five years and the report identified 11 areas of good practice and a number of areas for further attention. The College has produced a detailed action plan to address the areas for further attention and the action plan is being monitored by the AMT and the Curriculum and Quality Committee of the Academic Board.

93 The College submits its programmes to the Hotel, Catering and International Management Association (HCIMA) and the Society of Sports Therapists (SST) for approval against their membership criteria. Ofsted is carrying out their first formal inspection of the Postgraduate Certificate in Early Years Education, Initial Teacher Training, programme in 2005-06 and will complete it in May 2006.

94 The process for considering and responding to the reports of external agencies requires the preparation of a detailed action plan by the AMT and monitoring of the plan by the Curriculum and Quality Committee of the Academic Board. The audit team scrutinised the audit trail relating to the reports of the DE in Hospitality

Management and the re-accreditation report of the University of Birmingham and found that action plans were produced covering each of the points raised in detail and effective monitoring of the plans was carried out by CQDU. On the basis of the evidence available the team was able to conclude that the College has effective processes in place for considering the reports of external agencies and for taking action on their findings.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

95 Students are represented at many levels in the College by the Guild of Students. This is funded by a grant from the College Corporation. The President of the Guild is a sabbatical post; elected annually, and the postholder has full membership of the College Corporation and its Student Service and Standards Committee. Other members of the Guild Executive are members of the Academic Board and its subcommittees for Validation and Approvals, Academic Regulations and Standards, and Equal Opportunities. At programme level there is a system of 'group representatives' who attend subject boards and boards of study. The subject boards are the first tier of the committee structure and represent a 'related 'cluster' of programmes of learning'. They meet once per term and are described as having 'a semi structured agenda' which includes standing items and additional items where appropriate. Boards of study are the next tier. Students are able to participate fully in their work and are only excluded when the academic progress of an individual student is under discussion

96 A formal complaints procedure exists but the emphasis is on 'the speedy and informal resolution of problems. The audit team heard that complaints tend to be addressed quickly with the help of the CQDU, and that there is not excessive use of formal procedures.

97 The SED stated that student contribution to the planning and review of activities is welcomed and encouraged. Boards of studies are thought to be 'particularly valuable in

providing forums for the discussion of quality and standards issues that affect a number of programmes'. The audit team heard examples of action taken as the result of student feedback raised at subject boards. At the same time it is acknowledged by the College that there are some challenges in encouraging group representatives to take a more active role in the work of the various committees. As from 2005, the Guild of Students has been offering training for representatives and it is hoped that this will help rectify this problem.

98 The SWS confirmed that, 'the College ensures that the Guild of Students and the student body have a voice at every level of the decision making process'. The meeting with representatives from the Student Guild indicated that the College/student relationship is both formal and informal, with an emphasis on the latter. There are formal links between the Guild and the Deputy Principal, which provides a conduit with the SMT. The audit team also heard that student representation is effective at programme level, and that the College provides feedback on issues promptly and systematically.

99 Representatives from the Guild of Students confirmed that complaints are dealt with quickly and that there is relatively little use of formal procedures. Students met as part of the DATs were aware of the formal procedures but confirmed that they were rarely used

100 It appeared to the audit team that there was a good relationship between the student representatives and the SMT. The team heard that the Principal meets regularly with students although the Deputy Principal is the main formal point of contact. The team also heard examples of action taken as the result of the formal and informal relationships that are in place at the College. The SWS confirmed the description given in the SED, although the meeting with the Guild of Students suggested some confusion about the role(s) of the boards of study and subject boards. The SWS and the meetings with the Guild and other members of the student body suggest that representation on committees is at the appropriate level. The

training recently provided by the Guild, together with an informal incentive scheme, has resulted in the student representation system working more successfully over the last year. It was evident to the team that the student voice was effectively represented with appropriate input from different categories of student.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

101 The SED indicated that feedback from students is obtained through a variety of formal and informal methods. The formal methods include machine readable questionnaires and focus groups. Three cross-college questionnaires are used. These are the 'First Impressions Questionnaire' issued to new students; the 'Programme Review' issued to all students finishing a year, and the 'Final Impressions Questionnaire' issued to all students completing a programme. A report is published on the student satisfaction questionnaires each year, and the results of programme questionnaires are displayed on student notice boards together with a response from programme staff. Results are also presented at the relevant Subject Board Committee meeting. Contact with graduates is maintained through the Alumni Society which has records for over 20,000. Formal methods of gathering feedback include the Industrial Liaison Boards, and through employers providing placement. The College has a number of Industrial Liaison Groups which reflect the different areas covered by its programmes. These groups, which include employers, College managers, and staff, meet twice a year to discuss industrial trends and contemporary practice. Informal feedback is obtained during placement visits and via guest speakers. The College also has access to much soft data which it uses to keep abreast of industry developments and gauge the usefulness of its programmes to graduates.

102 The College believes that the close supportive relationship between staff and students is one of its major strengths. It is felt that student satisfaction is closely monitored

and that the contact with employers provides extremely rich information. It is also argued that industry partners are used to help identify resource requirements and that this enables the College to match equipment purchasing with the very best industry has to offer.

103 The SWS indicated that, student ideas, perceptions and complaints are dealt and resolved with ease. The Guild of Students' representatives met by the audit team said that responses from academic staff tend to be good and timely. This view was also reflected by students involved in the DAT meetings. Students also felt that it was beneficial that, in some areas, visiting tutors were also current practitioners and were therefore able to provide feedback on employment and related issues.

104 The SED, SWS, the Guild of Students' representatives and other students met as part of the audit visit all emphasised the benefits of informal arrangements. They argued that this enabled issues to be addressed quickly and flexibly. The audit team noted that although there is substantial reliance on informal feedback mechanisms, the systems in place were effective and provided an appropriate response to matters of concern. The DAT documents suggest that Schools have developed productive relationships with employers and the team saw and heard of examples of where effective and productive relationships have been established with the appropriate industrial sectors. This was evident at College and programme level. The team also noted that many former students maintain contact through, the Alumni Society, involvement with placements and the Industrial Liaison Boards, and came to the conclusion that the College was making effective use of a number of methods of obtaining feedback from a variety of stakeholders.

Progression and completion statistics

105 The College, in the SED, indicated that admissions criteria decisions are taken annually based on the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and Student Record system data, places available and demand.

Offers are made by a central Admissions Unit, which ensures all admissions practices and procedures are guided by the relevant section of the *Code of practice*. The College has a flexible admissions system which recognises diverse learning pathways and ensures that vocational qualifications and academic qualifications are given parity of treatment. The SED indicated that the Admissions Unit is active in reviewing College performance and an initiative is underway to conduct an analysis of final achievement statistics in comparison with entry qualifications.

106 The College SMT prepares a Performance Measures and Targets report annually. This report is freely available and published on the website. The Finance and Information Services Unit publish student statistics each year on retention, achievement, destinations, ethnicity, age, gender, disability, residential status and source. The SED claimed that 'some unusual factors', such as students being offered permanent positions whilst on placement, should be taken into account when considering progression and completion. The SED also stated that 'The generic nature of most published national data makes it difficult to compare national figures on classification with the College's specialised vocational programmes'.

107 In the SED, the College stated that student achievement targets for 2003-04 were met at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Student attendance is monitored, and student progression considered at programme and school level within the annual review process. Recently, Academic Board has started to consider 'reports on academic performance and trends such as classifications within and between Schools'. Information on graduate destinations is monitored with the first destination survey information collected at the College's annual awards congregations and the Higher Education Statistics Agency's Destination of Leavers from HE return in January.

108 The audit team was able to confirm that a Performance Measures and Targets report is produced annually and discussed at SMT. This information has been available on the College

website since 2003. The team heard from staff that there were several unusual factors relating to progression and completion data including the mobile nature of students in the hospitality industry, students being offered jobs whilst on placement and part-time students withdrawing due to other pressures.

109 Staff have access to Management Information Systems (MIS) data on students from which they can download individual or group student data. MIS also supply data for module review annually and staff can ask for particular reports as necessary. Module reviews include module progression data which are used in producing the module action plan. PR's also use student data and include admissions target setting for the following year. These targets are reviewed by the AMT and commented upon in the following year's PR. MIS are developing systems to achieve an integrated data system of the student database, admissions, placement, study support, and personal development planning files information.

110 At college level, the Retention Working Group established in October 2005 by the Central Advisory Group following consideration of progression, achievement and classification data from the Examinations Unit, has already agreed the introduction of more tutorials for first-year students from 2006 in an attempt to improve retention rates. Admissions send regular reports to SMT, directors of schools and programmes coordinators on programme applications and acceptances during the UCAS cycle and this information is used by the AMT to make decisions regarding student offers and clearing involvement.

111 Attendance is monitored three to four times each week for each HE cohort and the data collated by the attendance group within the Registry. Reports on student attendance are sent weekly to programme coordinators who follow up students who are not attending. The audit team concluded that the College uses student progression and completion statistics appropriately at module, programme, school and institutional level and that the information is clearly linked to the College admissions policy.

Assurance of the quality of teaching staff, appointment, appraisal and reward

112 In recruitment and appointment strong emphasis is placed on teaching ability, which is tested in the interview process by a teaching presentation to lecturing staff whose feedback is used in the appointment process. Staff are recruited with both academic qualifications and strong vocational backgrounds to ensure currency and relevance of the College's specialist programmes. All newly-appointed staff are required to hold a teacher training qualification or to obtain one via a postgraduate certificate developed in conjunction with the University of Birmingham, which is recognised by 12 months and is claimed to be a supportive and developmental process including at least one teaching observation by the line manager. All new staff receive a Training Needs Analysis review with the Training and Personnel Officer or their line manager on commencing employment.

113 The staff appraisal scheme is a developmental one and includes an annual teaching observation for academic staff by their line manager or other nominated member of staff. The appraisal meeting focuses on performance, development and allocation of teaching responsibilities and is not linked to pay. It is also used to discuss opportunities for research, consultancy and knowledge exchange activities.

114 The audit team was informed that the College had a policy of rewarding all academic and support staff if the College was successful rather than rewarding individual members of staff for individual success. Staff members whom the team met felt that they had very good opportunities for personal and professional development.

115 The audit team met academic and support staff and scrutinised the documentation relating to the appointment and appraisal procedures. The team was able to confirm that staff were well qualified both academically and in vocational experience and new staff are required to undertake postgraduate teacher training if they do not possess a teaching qualification. New staff indicated that they were

on one-year's probation and felt that they had benefited from a supportive introduction to the College and had experienced at least one teaching observation. Staff confirmed that the staff appraisal process provides effective training for the appraisee role and the process is a useful developmental one which includes teaching observation.

116 On the basis of the documentary evidence available and its discussions with staff during the audit process, the audit team concluded that the College had effective processes for the appointment, appraisal and reward of staff.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

117 The staff development programme is managed by the Personnel Unit, which encourages a wide range of updating and skills development activities, including higher degrees and industrial updating through a short placement with a company. Expenditure on staff development activity in 2003-04 was 3 per cent of the staffing budget. In-house events relating to teaching and learning take place during the year and have, for example, included Bringing e-learning Into the Classroom, Participative Learning, and Autism Awareness. Currently 25 per cent of staff are attending long courses leading to professional, teaching and academic qualifications.

118 The Staff Development Committee of Academic Board is responsible for the overall monitoring of training and development within the College. The Personnel Unit aims to ensure that training priorities are being met in accordance with the College's Corporate Plan and are monitored and evaluated for best value.

119 In order to improve the publication record of staff, three additional teaching posts were created to offer greater opportunity for releasing staff from teaching in order carry research and consultancy. Two Coordinators of Research coordinate the support given to students in research activity and promote research amongst all staff.

120 The SED stated that during 2004-05, following the departure of the Personnel Manager, the Staff Development Committee was not as effective as it had been previously and this did not help Academic Board maintain an appropriate overview of professional development. The Committee was reformatted and re-named and a new chairperson appointed in November 2005 with the aim of reviving its functions.

121 The audit team met academic and support staff who confirmed that there was a very wide range of staff development activities available including an internal programme of short courses and events as well as full financial support for undertaking postgraduate programmes. Scrutiny of the detailed staff development records, held for each member of staff, confirmed the high take up of development activities, which staff found to be very valuable. Part-time staff are given equal access to staff development activities. The team learnt that the College had developed a large programme of staff development activities and had allocated sufficient funds to support their delivery as well as funding external postgraduate courses. In their meetings with staff during the audit visit the team also noted among staff of all levels the high level of enthusiasm for and commitment to the College's aims. Both academic and support staff were appreciative of the staff development opportunities available to them, and the audit team formed the view that the embedding of staff development at all levels in the College was an example of good practice.

122 However, it was not evident to the audit team that the College had a clear and consistent view of the place of scholarly activity and research in its plans. Additional posts had been added to free up more staff for research activities and two coordinators of research support research students and staff in research activity, but while research degrees were fully financially supported no remission was given from teaching. It was not clear to the team, in the absence of a formal scholarly activity and research policy, what level of scholarly activity or

research was expected from academic staff. The team formed the view that it would be desirable for the College to continue to develop processes to further encourage staff engagement with research and scholarly activity as part of its overall development programme.

Assurance of the quality of teaching delivered through distributed and distance methods

123 The College does not have any programme delivered by distributed learning and there are no purely distance-learning programmes. However there are programmes delivered in international locations and in Birmingham using block modes and College academic staff. The quality assurance processes applied to these programmes are the same as those for full and part-time modes and the results are reported through the same PR processes. The audit team would encourage the College to continue to exercise a due degree of vigilance with regard to its programmes delivered in off-campus locations.

Learning support resources

124 The SED indicated that the College had made substantial investment (more than £21 million) in physical resources, and that continual reinvestment was reviewed by various committees. Those resources which support psychomotor skills development in hospitality-related programmes are described as 'world class' and are stated by the College to be at least as good as the best commercial facilities that exist. In terms of information technology (IT) the College has achieved a ratio of one computer to every five students FTE, and e-learning is being encouraged via the e-learning team with some emphasis being placed on the VLE. The College Library service also provides on-line services and specialist databases. Arrangements have been made to meet the needs of part-time and off-site learners. For example, all the students on the FD in Early Childhood Studies and Supporting Learning are loaned laptops to ensure that they can access the College's web site from home or work.

125 Library facilities are housed over two floors in the Summer Row building, and one floor of the Richmond House building. The library contains a large specialist collection of journals and texts. However, the College acknowledges that the current demands on the service cannot be fulfilled simply by further remodelling of the existing accommodation. The SED indicated that the College intends to redevelop a nearby site and make some substantial internal changes to the Summer Row Building to more than double the space available for the library. This will afford additional quiet study space and a resource centre providing more computers. A Subject Librarian was introduced 8 years ago and the Subject Librarians are described as playing a significant role in supporting students' individual research projects. Postgraduate Students have borrowing rights at the University of Birmingham Library.

126 The SWS gave a very positive view of the specialist resources in the College. It also confirmed the College's concerns regarding the library as expressed in the SED. It concurred that the library was overcrowded and the level of noise was a distraction to students working there. The document also indicated some unhappiness about the fines and charges for returning library books' and suggested that a 24-hour opening of the library facilities should be considered. Students who met the audit team during the conduct of the DATs indicated that, apart from the issues of noise and space, they were generally satisfied with the library service and placed a high value upon the contribution of the Subject Librarians.

127 The College recognises the present strengths and weaknesses in its provision for learning support. The physical resources are appreciated by students. Learning technologies are being developed and increasingly integrated into staff development activities, and the delivery and preparation of courses and programmes. Documentation seen by the audit team indicated that members of staff are encouraged to use and develop on line learning materials. The team heard at meetings with the senior staff, and the SED also indicated, that

the problems noted with the library service are currently being addressed, and are likely to be resolved by the summer of 2006. Although these matters have now been under consideration for three years the team saw and heard evidence to suggest that they would have been resolved earlier but for problems in acquiring suitable accommodation. The team was able to form the conclusion that the College had in place appropriate policies for the evaluation of the effectiveness of its learning support resources.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

128 Academic support in the College is effected through the Study Support Centre (SSC), specific modules at each level of study, tutorials and the Placement Team. The Study Support Centre provides a range of support for all students, including help with assignments and project work. Advice is also available to help with academic writing and presentation, literacy and numeracy. In addition, the Centre coordinates support for students with specific learning needs and has contacts with local education authorities and is able to liaise with these on a student's behalf. It will also carry out initial assessments for dyslexia and will refer students to an Educational Psychologist if such action is thought to be necessary. Subject workshops are available for those students seeking expert help on a particular topic and the Research Centre provides help for final year undergraduates and postgraduate students undertaking research projects. Such students are also supported by a member of staff and provided with Undergraduate and Postgraduate Dissertation Guides as appropriate. English Language courses and workshops in academic English skills development are available for international students. There is also provision for students to take additional short courses which will add to their vocational and personal skills.

129 The effectiveness of the SSC is monitored through the Student Services Unit Annual Quality review and student satisfaction questionnaires. At programme level Year

managers support students and provide pastoral care, with additional personal tutors assisting with larger cohorts. Students on block teaching mode have additional support mechanisms. These include email tutoring and directed reading packs. Undergraduate programmes include modules to develop skills and personal development planning. An electronic Personal Development Folder was introduced in the autumn of 2005.

130 The College acknowledges that an internal audit (2003) found that some part-time students were potentially disadvantaged because of lower staffing levels at the SSC during the evening. To deal with this issue more staff members have been added and opening hours extended. The SED mentioned a further extension resulting from a recent review in 2005 /6. The SED noted that the student satisfaction questionnaires reveal high levels of satisfaction and suggested that one of the College's key strengths was the wide range of support given to students through a very close working relationship between academic and support services.

131 The SWS stated that students were impressed with the Educational support available to them in the form of seminars, workshops and tutorials and this was confirmed by students who met the audit team. In particular, students with learning difficulties spoke very positively about the study support that they had received. Members of staff were perceived to be readily available to deal with problems. This view was supported in the meeting with representatives from the Students Guild. The SWS did however indicate a concern about the provision made for part-time students.

132 The audit team heard that the College staff regarded Study Support not just as a remedial function but as an opportunity to help students achieve their full potential and develop as independent learners. In addition, it noted that there is good sharing of practice between support and academic staff via a variety of formal and informal forums. Students appreciate the Study Support Centre and the

students met by the team spoke highly of a friendly, welcoming institution which gives them confidence and provides excellent study support. This positive view was found amongst all groups of students including international students, students on placement and those with special needs. At programme level it appeared that Year managers, and in some cases Personal Tutors, have a major role in supporting students although in practice students can and do approach a range of staff. Evidence from the DATS indicated that the PDP is developing well. The team concluded that academic support and guidance provided by the College was appropriate and effective.

Personal support and guidance

133 The introduction of a centralised Student Information Suite in 2001 brought together many of the student support functions of the College. The Student Services Unit plays a central role in the provision of non-academic information and guidance. Under the Student Services Umbrella the college offers a wide range of services to students. These include: Accommodation services; Career Development Centre, Childcare, Counselling Service, Financial Assistance; Health Care, International Students Liaison and Study Support. The level of user satisfaction for each service is recorded and evaluated on an annual basis. The audit team saw evidence of improvements resulting from student feedback. Each service is a member of, or affiliated to, an appropriate professional body. Recent internal audits, an Ofsted FE in HE inspection and a QAA DE of Hospitality have all confirmed the high standard of service and support that these areas are providing. Services are advertised on the College web site and students are also informed about the range of support and guidance available through the Higher Education Student Handbook.

134 Support services have been reviewed in light of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, and the Race relations Act 1976 (as amended by the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000) as appropriate. Although no specific mention is made in the

SED members of the team were told by staff that provision has also been informed by the relevant QAA Guidelines.

135 The SED indicated a high level of confidence on the part of the College in each of the areas, stating that the Annual Quality review reported high levels of satisfaction with the professionalism and personalised services offered, and arguing that the Student Services Unit was characterised by a friendly ethos. The SWS identified the College's equal opportunities provision as being a particular strength and stated that the Maltings student village in Broad Street, Birmingham, was an excellent environment for higher education learning. The meetings with the Student Guild representatives and those students whom the audit team met during the DATS supported these views and provided further evidence that the students appreciated the high level of support provided across a range of services.

136 The College offers a wide range of personal support, and the meetings with staff and students, together with a range of documentation seen by the audit team, such as the Code of Practice and Guidelines to the Equal Opportunities Policy Statement, and the College Disability Statement, indicate that high quality arrangements for personal support are in place for all categories of students. There is a strong ethos amongst academic and support staff for sharing information throughout the College. As a result the concern for personal support services is embedded in the culture of the institution. The team noted good practice in the well-integrated support systems, including the Study Support Centre, which give all students the opportunity to realise their full potential

Work-based and placement learning

137 The SED stated that on most programmes, work-based learning was embedded through the provision of placements and work experience, with most undergraduate programmes having either an optional or compulsory placement. Placements are organised by a professional placement team

who coordinate all placement activities for HE students. Students' needs, including those of students with disabilities, are dealt with on an individual basis. The placement team liaises with potential placement providers, allocates students to placements, and is responsible for preparing, monitoring and supporting placement students. The College believes that it has developed sound systems for coping with placement problems and is confident that any potential failure is identified early in the process. Students are visited during their placement by academic staff and/or members of the placement team. The audit team met members of staff responsible for placement learning and were able to conclude that the aims of placement were sound and clearly articulated. It is also evident that the College benefits from very strong links with employers in being able to offer high-quality work placements.

138 The audit team also examined a series of publications designed to provide guidance to students, mentors and employers involved with the placement process. Placement providers met by the team also confirmed that students are well prepared and skilled for their placement experience. Students also confirmed that there was strong support for placement students, with an emphasis on individual support. The process demonstrated sensitivity to cultural differences, and International students mentioned the excellent back up that they received and spoke with conviction about a sense of 'feeling safe'. For many students who met the team the work placement had been the highlight of their course and a key factor in their attending the College. On the basis of the documentation supplied by the College and the evidence of students and employers involved in placement activities the team identified good practice in the College's organisation of placement activity, and the support for students prior to, during and subsequent to their placements.

Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline trails and thematic enquiries

Discipline audit trails

139 In each of the selected DATs appropriate members of the audit team met staff and students to discuss the programmes, studied a sample of assessed student work, saw examples of learning resource materials, and studied annual module and programme reports and periodic school reviews relating to the programmes. Their findings in respect of the academic standards of awards are as follows.

Recreation, sport and tourism

140 The DAT, as agreed with the College, focused on the following programmes in the School of Recreation, Sport and Tourism:

- FdA Tourism Business Management (full-time)
- BA (Hons) Adventure Tourism Management (full-time)
- BSc (Hons) Tourism Management (full-time)
- MA/PgDip Tourism Business Administration (full-time/part-time/block).

141 The SED also covered:

- FdA Adventure Tourism Management (full-time)
- BA (Hons) Tourism Business Management (full-time/part-time)
- MA/PgDip Adventure Tourism Management (full-time/part-time).

142 The DSED was written by the Head of School with input from programme leaders and subsequently discussed by a wider group across the School.

143 The Programme Specifications seen by the audit team were guided by the relevant benchmark statements and, where appropriate, were also informed by the benchmark statement for awards in business and management. The DSED stated that the educational aims of each programme were

consistent with the FHEQ. It further stated that postgraduate awards offered had been guided by the FHEQ. The Programme Specifications also demonstrated extensive external input from relevant professional and employer groups and industry lead bodies.

144 The audit team heard that retention rates and targets were considered through programme and school review. The School produces an Annual Review which reports on retention, progression and achievement. The DSED claimed that progression rates within the School were amongst the highest of any School in the College. Nevertheless, the Level two award in Tourism Business management had seen a number of students required to repeat the year. Progression opportunities from one programme to another are both facilitated and promoted throughout the College. The average classification is generally Lower Second class honours. The DSED recognised that an ongoing challenge existed to further improve achievement rates, retention and progression rates, especially on the FDs. The staff who met the team said that they found it difficult to benchmark their performance against other similar institutions and acknowledged that they could make greater use of the data on student progression.

145 The School operates within the Academic structures of the College which provide a hierarchy of linked committees. The School's Director of Studies and programme coordinators sit on the Academic Management Team which plays a full part in the developing a culture of continual systems improvement. The DSED stated that the aims of programmes offered in the school were reviewed in revalidation events by the Validations and Approvals Sub-Committee of the Academic Board every five years. Programme Reviews request teaching teams to review the aims of modules in relation to the outcomes of module reviews with School Reviews picking up any need for change. The DSED acknowledged that there was nonetheless a need to more clearly check that changes did not affect the overall programme aims.

146 Module content is reviewed annually through the College-wide module review process which feeds into the APR and the School Review. This is informed by student feedback, teaching team input, external examiners and advice from liaison boards. The audit team heard in its meeting with staff that this process has resulted in significant changes. The DSED claimed that there was evidence of continuous updating and development of quality management systems within the College and provided an example. However, it was recognised by the DSED that a need existed to record such meetings more rigorously, and this is a view with which the team concurred. Block teaching assignments are subject to the same procedures and systems.

147 The School complies with College and University of Birmingham regulations when nominating external examiners and responding to and considering their reports. Reports are seen by a sub group of AMT and a spreadsheet is produced summarising points made. The audit team was supplied with a wide range of reports from external examiners and could confirm that, although some contained minor criticisms and encouragement for action, they were, in general, positive in tone. The team also saw evidence that teaching teams had responded quickly to suggestions from external examiners and that appropriate actions had been taken as the result of comments made in reports. Members of staff told the team that they had discussions with external examiners on a number of occasions, and the staff believed that they were engaged in a genuine dialogue.

148 The audit team noted that external examiners are appointed to programmes and not modules. Members of staff met by the team said that this meant that one module could be covered by as many as eight separate examiners. The module leaders saw this as a positive situation. However, the team formed the view that this could lead to differences of opinion between external examiners with regard to the standards being applied to individual modules shared between

programmes and would advise the College to revise the roles and responsibilities of external examiners in respect of the establishment and verification of the standards of individual modules shared between programmes which lead to different awards.

149 A range of assessment methods is used by the School. These include essays, case studies, live projects and examinations. The School adheres to the procedures outlined in the Colleges Learning and Teaching Strategy. The DSED claimed, and the audit team was able to confirm, that external examiners have commented favourably on the assessment methodology employed. The meeting with students indicated that students on different programmes sometimes shared lectures. Students work on commonly set assignments although these may, in some cases, be based on different case studies. The School follows the College-wide criteria for providing feedback on assessed work within 25 days. Some students expressed concern about the timeliness of feedback but others gave examples of work being returned well before the deadline.

150 The audit team was provided with a sample of assessed work taken from each level. The sample included examination scripts, term assignments, undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations. Having reviewed this material it was able to confirm that the performance of students is being judged in line with stated learning outcomes. Overall, the team was satisfied that the nature of the assessment and standard of student achievement were appropriate to the titles of the relevant awards and their location within the FHEQ.

151 The School makes use of a large amount of documentation that is published on a College wide basis. For example the DSED mentioned College communication via the prospectus, the website and Open Day presentations. In addition, as part of a College-wide policy all students receive the College handbook every year as it is updated, and it is also available on the College website. International students are able to attend an induction session organised prior to the main

induction event and tailored to their particular needs. The audit team also saw a range of programme and module level documentation. This included a week-by-week breakdown of teaching and course content, suggested readings, and details of assessment methods, including grading criteria. The students met by the team were satisfied with the quality of information supplied during their course and stated that they had sufficient information to understand what was expected of them in academic terms.

Learning resources and support

152 The DSED claimed that close links are maintained with the Students Services Unit and this was confirmed by the students met by the audit team who were all very positive in describing the level of academic and personal support made available to them. They provided examples of excellent provision. These included support for students with learning difficulties and for those requiring advice on finances, visas and placements opportunities. All students have a personal tutor. In some cases this person may be the Year manager but in practice students benefit from an 'open door' policy which provides access to a range of people. The DSED indicated that students will be guided and encouraged to complete PDPs. The meetings with staff and students suggested that this is being developed and working well.

153 The DSED acknowledged that: the library did not always provide an environment conducive to study and there had been some problems with reference to access to IT facilities. These concerns were confirmed by the students met by the audit team. Learning Support in the School appears to be sound. International students are able to submit draft assignments for grammar checks, and postgraduate students can submit draft work for comment prior to final submission. The College has a Health Club and a sports hall but many of the physical resources for UG adventure tourism programmes are off site.

154 Research work is supported through the Research Centre. Its services are appreciated by students but, as the DSED acknowledged, the

University of Birmingham Reaccreditation Audit suggest greater support could be given to staff to engage in reading and research. Some of the staff met by the audit team disagreed with this suggestion whilst other recognised it as a challenge for the School. Given the increasing number of postgraduate students recruited by the School, and the view expressed by the University of Birmingham, the team felt that it would be desirable for the School to continue the development of systems and policies to facilitate staff engagement in scholarly activity and research. Overall staff development in the School is sound. Members of staff participate in bi-annual staff development events and the team heard that all new staff receive a College induction, have mentors and are funded to undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education.

155 The DSED stated that the quality of feedback given to students had to be balanced with the challenges in consistently meeting the timing of feedback as specified in the Student Charter. Changes have been made and improved feedback distribution methods introduced. The staff met by the audit team were confident that they listened and responded to student views. They mentioned a number of formal mechanisms, such as Subject Boards and End of Year Questionnaires and the role of Year Managers. However, it was acknowledged that a great deal was communicated on an informal basis. The students who met the team had a limited knowledge of the formal mechanisms but stressed the effectiveness of the informal arrangements.

156 The DSED stated that approximately 93 per cent of students in the School claimed to be satisfied with their programmes but acknowledged that the satisfaction figure was adversely affected by a low response from BSc (Hons) Tourism Management where students had experienced problems with group work. It was evident to the audit team that these problems had been resolved.

157 The DSED claimed that: staff and students were represented at all levels and had the

opportunity to comment on the quality of programmes and the learning experience. The students whom the audit team met understood the formal arrangements and acknowledged the training for Student representatives undertaken by the Student Guild. They also appreciated the effectiveness of the various informal arrangements and said that they found the staff supportive and helpful. Overall it was clear that they understood and used the formal and informal mechanisms, and knew how to raise any concerns about academic and other issues.

158 From a study of a sample of students' assessed work, external examiners' reports and other documentation, and from discussions with students and staff the audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities was appropriate for the programmes in the School of Recreation, Sport and Tourism and the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the level of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

Hospitality, food and retail management

159 The DAT for hospitality, food and retail management included the following programmes:

- BA (Hons) Culinary Arts Management
- FdA Culinary Arts Management
- BSc(Hons) Food and Consumer Management
- FdSc Food and Consumer Management.

160 All the programmes are delivered by the School of Hospitality, Food and Retail Management. The Honours degree in Food and Consumer Management has been available for 13 years, and Culinary Arts Management commenced in 2002. In line with College strategy, the FDs replaced HND programmes from 2004.

161 The DSED was a specially prepared document for the audit, with appendices including external examiners reports, copies of the responses by the College to individual external examiner reports and a summary table of the reporting and action taken for each

external examiner report. The staff informed the audit team that the Director and Programmes Coordinator had drafted the document, which was then circulated to all staff for comment, before 'signing off' by the Curriculum and Quality Development Unit.

162 Programme specifications for each of the programmes were available through the College website. The audit team reviewed these and found them to reflect the appropriate subject benchmark statements, FHEQ and, in format, the programme specification guidelines. In common with other programme specifications, the learning outcomes were written in the language of objectives. The programme specification learning outcomes are modified for inclusion in student handbooks.

163 The DSED included progression and completion data and the School indicated that analysis of withdrawal data for the Culinary Arts programmes has resulted in amendments to the programme literature available to potential students. The audit team saw evidence of admissions and student progression data being used within Programme Review leading to the development of the enhancement action plan which feeds into the School Plan.

164 The School stated in the DSED that it adhered to College quality assurance and enhancement systems, and that proposals for new and amended programmes were approved by the Validation and Approvals Sub-Committee of Academic Board. Module review, the start of the process of programme review, ensured annual scrutiny of modules, using input from students, the teaching team, external examiners, Industry Liaison boards and external networking. It was indicated that learning outcomes were benchmarked externally against FHEQ, subject benchmarks and the FD qualification benchmark as appropriate. Internally, learning outcomes were benchmarked against the Learning and Teaching Strategy and also reflected views of the relevant liaison groups. The School carries out a Programmes review process, the outcomes of which contribute to the School Review. The internal audit report of February

2004 expressed confidence in procedures across the School and comments regarding inconsistency of module box content have been addressed.

165 The audit team was informed by staff that the School contributes to UK and overseas 'block' taught programmes at a number of sites and that the monitoring and review procedures for these programmes were identical to those delivered on campus. The team, through a reading of programme review documentation and discussions with staff was able to confirm that the School adheres to the College procedures for monitoring and review of programmes.

166 The DSED indicated that external examiners had reported favourably on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Through consideration of their reports, the audit team confirmed that external examiner comments were generally positive and that the process of responding to external examiner reports followed College procedures. External examiner comments were summarised in the Programme review and included in Programme and School action plans where appropriate. The team also confirmed through discussion with staff and review of external examiner reports, that external examiners were appointed to programmes rather than modules. The School is advised to revise the roles of external examiners to ensure that there is greater clarity with regard to the responsibility for the setting and verification of standards of individual modules shared between different programmes.

167 The School uses the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy for HE programmes (HE Assessment procedures 2005-06) to determine the delivery and assessment focus for supporting the attainment of the learning outcomes at each level at each stage of its awards. The audit team found that, whilst there were some differences in teaching methods and assessment on a limited number of first year core modules, the module and hence programme learning outcomes for the FD and the first two years of the relevant honours degree programme were the same. The team

formed the view that it would be desirable to review this situation to ensure that the degrees are suitably differentiated.

168 Assessment and grading procedures are subject to regular review and up-dating. and the School has implemented the generic grading and feedback system covering each level of study, introduced in 2004-05. The audit team confirmed that internal assessment verification and grading verification take place. The students indicated to the team that the generic marking feedback sheet was an improvement in assignment feedback and assisted their learning. They were, however, concerned about the amount of group work in final year and the effect this might have on their individual award outcome.

169 The DSED stated that student attainment is confirmed by external examiners to be appropriate and consistent with national standards, and the external examiner reports seen by the audit team confirmed this. The student work seen by the team showed an appropriate range of assessment methods, clear assessment marking criteria, including use of the College generic assessment feedback sheet, and clear evidence of moderation by a second marker.

170 Whilst the DSED made little comment about handbooks, the students the audit team met praised the College Student Handbook, module handbooks and module delivery schemes. The team found the students in agreement that these handbooks provided them with all the information they required to be clear about the requirements of their assessments. The module delivery schemes seen by the team was clear and gave details of each teaching session and appropriate references.

171 In addition to lectures, seminars and case-study work, a range of practical teaching and learning facilities including laboratory and test kitchen facilities and Realistic Work Environments are employed which are subject to a rolling programme of redesign and refurbishment. The students were impressed with the level of subject specific facilities and

for some this had been a key factor in their decision to attend the College. External examiners reports also commented on the excellent practical facilities available to the students. The College has made up-to-date practical facilities available to students, which make a significant contribution to the quality of the student learning environment.

172 The audit team was told by staff that the School has introduced Personal Development Planning (PDP) for first-year students from 2005-06. This was confirmed by the students, who indicated they had the option of either an on-line or paper-based PDP, supported through tutorials.

173 The DSED indicated the need to encourage wider adoption of the VLE, however, the audit team was informed by the students that there was widespread use of the system, which they strongly supported. The DSED raised concerns regarding the suitability of the library environment for study. These concerns were echoed by the students who explained that the main problem was due to the noise from the group working areas and the use of computers within the library. The team recognised that the College was dealing with this issue and would encourage it to move to an early resolution of the matter.

174 The Study Skills Centre and Research Centre provide support for learning skills and the research project respectively. The staff and the students were unanimous in their praise of both of these centres, where help and advice are available to all students. The DSED commented favourably on the work of the Industrial Placement Centre in relation to the quality of industrial placements attained by students. The audit team heard that many of the students undertook either year long or short (weeks) placements. The students were very positive about the quality of the placements available and the support offered by the centre, which included pre-placement, on- placement and post-placement support.

175 The DSED indicated that staff were well qualified and supported in continuing professional development, including industry updating. Individual staff training needs are identified in the annual staff appraisal or via the mentoring process and used by the Head of School to produce a Staff Development plan. Through examination of staff CVs and training undertaken, the audit team confirmed the professional expertise of the staff, however, the team found little evidence of staff engagement in research. Whilst accepting the position of the College in relation to research, the team considered that there should be more formal policies to enable staff to engage in scholarly activity and research. The team noted the enthusiasm and commitment of staff to the College, their programmes and the students.

176 Student representatives are elected from each student cohort and meet regularly with the year managers. Students are also represented on the Subject Boards. The students indicated that any problems which arose were usually dealt with informally and quickly. They felt that their voice was heard and the audit team was shown evidence of the introduction of a new module into a programme following students' comments.

177 The audit team considered that the quality of learning opportunities was appropriate for the programmes in the School of Hospitality, Food and Retail Management, and that the standard of student achievement in the School was appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

Thematic enquiries

178 No thematic enquiries were pursued in the course of this institutional audit.

Section 4: The audit investigations: published information

The students' experience of published information and other information available to them

179 The information produced by the College was discussed with undergraduate and postgraduate students including those from overseas and those attending on a part-time basis. In addition, the audit team saw a wide range of printed and electronic information. The team also heard that a large amount of information is provided at Open Days and during induction sessions. It was also clear from meetings with students, including some from overseas, that information about, and recommendations for the College are often communicated by word of mouth.

180 The printed information reviewed included the HE Students' Handbook, Prospectuses, Postgraduate and Undergraduate Dissertation Handbooks, and various Placement Handbooks. Access was given to the audit team to the College's websites including material on the VLE. These contain a wide range of information on College services, activities and facilities with the VLE also containing detailed information on modules. The team heard that the vacant post for a web journalist was to be filled. The ultimate responsibility for the content of website material rests with Directors of Schools or relevant support function managers.

181 As there is only one Faculty in the College the majority of documentation is published on a college-wide basis. The SED stated that it is the College's practice 'to regularly review information given to students, with the intention of ensuring consistency in information giving accuracy in content'. Prospectuses are reviewed annually by the Marketing Unit in conjunction with programme teams and the Curriculum and Quality development Unit. Programme handbooks are reviewed annually by programme teams. The SED indicated that the College responds to student feedback

which suggests that improvements could be made to the provision of information. Examples of this were given in the SED and also documented in minutes seen by the team.

182 The SWS expressed general satisfaction with programme handbooks and the information available on the College website, intranet and the VLE. Students who met the audit team confirmed this view. With some minor exceptions students were happy with the clarity and accuracy of information provide prior, during and, in some cases, after their time at the College. The prospectus was described as good, providing detailed information on modules through each year. Students knew where to find details of complaint and appeals procedures and those met by the team were able to identify where information could be found on the procedures for degree classifications. The College's VLE appears to have been well developed and is appreciated by students. The team heard that the Guild of Students is preparing to use it for interactive communication with students.

183 Overall, the students seen by the audit team was of the view that the information made available to them before and during their time at the College was accurate and honest. They consider the on line information to be up-to-date and full. These views reflect those of the audit team. Although there does not appear to be a formalised information strategy as such the arrangements for confirming the accuracy of information appear to be effective. The team are therefore able to confirm that students have a positive view of the information provided to them at different stages of their College careers.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

184 The SED indicated that the College had fully engaged in complying with HEFCE's requirements as contained in document 02/15, *Information on quality and standards in higher education*, and document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*. The publication of external examiner

summaries had been a main consideration for the College. Given that the external examiners are appointed by the University of Birmingham, it was necessary for the two institutions to develop a system which would enable the HEFCE requirements for summaries of external examiner reports to be met. In the event, the University of Birmingham appoints summarising examiners from amongst serving examiners for the College's programmes, and the College posts approved summaries to its TQI sections on HERO. Overall, the audit team concluded that the College was alert to the requirements of document *HEFCE 03/51*, and had taken appropriate steps to fulfil its responsibilities in this respect.

Findings

Findings

185 An institutional audit of the Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies (the College) was undertaken during the week beginning 20 February 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the College's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility for the delivery of its programmes. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals and Universities UK, two audit trails were selected for scrutiny at the level of an academic discipline. This section of the report of the audit summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and recommendations to the College for enhancing current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

186 The College has clearly defined processes for the design and approval of programmes and modules. For the approval of new programmes a validation event takes place at which the course team make a presentation to the Validations and Approvals Committee which includes senior managers, external participants as well as some service heads. Final approval of modules and programmes is given normally for five years and the Curriculum and Quality Committee monitors progress against any conditions or recommendations and reports to the Validations and Approvals Committee if conditions have not been met.

187 Annual Monitoring processes flow upwards from the module level to programmes, schools and finally to the institution level, which results in a document similar to the self-evaluation document (SED) produced for QAA institutional purposes. At each stage action plans are produced to resolve issues which have arisen out of the monitoring process, and the implementation of actions plans are reported in the subsequent annual report.

188 Each module is reviewed annually by its teaching team and a report of any changes needed is provided to the Module Review Board. The Programme Review (PR) process results in a working folder of live information including performance indicators, student feedback and External Examine Reports. The validated PR folder is reviewed by a member of the Curriculum and Quality Committee and written feedback is provided to the programme team with regard to its satisfactory completion.

189 The relevant Director of Studies and Coordinator of Programmes identifies the main issues from the PRs within the curriculum area and complete a School Review identifying the main strengths and issues of School performance and linking them to an enhancement plan. The School Reviews are reported to a meeting of the AMT. The School level process is new and the audit team found some variation between the level of detail and analysis in the two reports scrutinised. All service units, which relate directly to students, produce annual quality reviews, which culminate in an action plan monitored by the Quality Systems Manager.

190 Periodic review takes place at the subject level, known as Internal Audit, using a process similar to QAA subject review methodology. It covers a group of programmes in cognate subject areas and includes the review of course documentation, external examiners reports, student work and teaching sessions. A report of the review analyses the provision under the QAA six aspects and two of the reports read by the audit team indicated that while broad confidence was achieved in most aspects Quality Management and enhancement only achieved a rating of confidence.

191 A new programme periodic review process will be implemented in 2005-06 which will include the preparation of an Evaluation Report and a meeting of the programme team with the Validations and Approvals Committee who will probe the team on the performance of the programme. The outcome of the process will be unconditional or conditional re-approval, a requirement to make fundamental changes or

that the programme be replaced or suspended from the College's portfolio.

192 Staff are informed about the quality policies and procedures, which reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, published by QAA, via a quality manual, and a guide to the College's academic systems which provides the College website addresses of the detailed quality policies and processes.

193 The samples of reports at the module, programme, school, subject, service and institutional level which the College provided during the course of the audit, demonstrated in each case that the monitoring and review activities had been thoroughly undertaken, and had yielded reports which were searching and had been used to enhance the quality of the College's provision and its student support arrangements. Programme and module approval and Internal Audit had included, or in the case of Periodic Programme Review will include external peer participants.

194 The audit team noted that the College had acknowledged in its SED the need to record more comprehensively the reporting of responses to issues, and the team would wish to encourage the College to review the style and level of detail to which committee minutes are recorded. The team also noted the high level of commitment of the College to staff development but came to the conclusion that it would be desirable for the College to establish more explicit policies for the encouragement of staff engagement in research and scholarly activity.

Key features of the institution's procedures for securing feedback on the quality of programmes from students and other stakeholders

195 Feedback on the general quality of the learning experience has been secured from students using a variety of formal and informal methods. The formal methods include the use of three cross-College questionnaires issued to new students, to students finishing a year and to all students finishing a programme. A report

is published on the student satisfaction questionnaires each year, and the results of programme questionnaires are displayed on student notice boards together with response of programme staff. Feedback from employers is sought from employers about the development of new programmes and the currency of existing programmes via Industrial Liaison Boards and from placement providers about the preparation of students for employment.

196 Taken together, the College's informal and formal arrangements provide it with useful feedback and evaluation information from its students, those who offer them placements and their eventual employers. The evidence available to the audit team indicated that such information was used by the College to enhance its provision.

197 Although noting a number of areas for further consideration by the College as it seeks to enhance the quality of its provision further, the audit team considered that the College's procedures for assuring the quality of its modules and programmes were robust and effective. The findings of the audit confirm that broad confidence can be placed in the College's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

198 The College believes that it has a sound framework in place for managing quality and standards. The framework includes the Learning and Teaching Strategy, the College Corporate Plan and the Quality Manual. The Curriculum and Quality Committee has responsibility for monitoring standards, while Academic Board, to which the Curriculum and Quality Committee reports, has ultimate responsibility for maintaining standards.

199 The policies and procedures in place for assuring the standards of awards are those of, or closely aligned to those of, the validating institution, the University of Birmingham. The

policies and procedures regarding external examiners are outlined in the College Guide for External Examiners. The College gives careful consideration to external examiner reports at programme, subject and institutional level and the audit team saw evidence of the thoroughness of their consideration and their contribution to the standards of awards.

200 External examiners are appointed to programmes, resulting in a number of examiners considering the same module taken by students on different programmes. The audit team was concerned that this might lead to conflicting opinions between external examiners with regard to the standards being applied to students on the same module. The College is advised to revise the roles and responsibilities of external examiners with regard to the establishment and verification of the standards of individual modules shared between programmes which lead to different degrees and/or awards.

201 The audit team noted that that the commonality of modules and programme learning outcomes of some Foundation Degrees (FDs) with the first two years of the honours degrees in the same subject area may allow a student, who has passed the first two years of an honours degree but has failed to achieve sufficient credit for an honours degree, to claim successfully a FD award rather than the fall back award of a Diploma in Higher Education as the regulations allow. The team would suggest that the College review the Foundation and honours degree regulations and the programme learning outcomes for Foundation and honours degrees in the same subject area to ensure that the degrees are suitably differentiated to ensure that students may receive only the award (or its fall-back award) for which they are registered.

202 Centrally generated data is used at module, programme and institutional level for monitoring attendance, programme review processes, setting of admissions targets and specific review such as retention rates. All these processes lead to an enhancement of standards, quality and the student learning experience. Due to the vocational nature of its

programmes, the College relies on industrial input, through for example the industrial liaison boards, to ensure appropriate up-to-date vocational relevance for all the programmes. The vocational standards achieved by students are high and graduates are sought after by employers.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

203 The College claims that one of its key strengths is the wide range of support given to students in the achievement of learning outcomes, through the very close working relationships between academic and support services. Academic guidance and support are delivered through tutorials and the Study Support Centre which provides a range of support for all students, including help with assignments and project work. The audit team noted that the College staff regarded Study Support not just as a remedial function but as an opportunity to help students achieve their full potential and develop as independent learners.

204 The Student Services Unit provides a comprehensive range of support services. Members of staff in these services work closely with staff in academic departments in order to enhance the students' learning experience. The level of user satisfaction for each service is recorded and evaluated on an annual basis.

205 The College emphasises the investment that has been made in learning resources for students. More than £21 million has been spent on physical resource, and continual reinvestment is reviewed by numerous committees. Students are very satisfied with the provision for specialised resources. In terms of IT the College has achieved a ratio of one computer to every five students FTE, and e-learning is being encouraged via 'the e-learning team' with some emphasis being placed on the VLE. The College Library service also provides on-line services and specialist databases.

206 The College Library is currently housed in two buildings and contains a large specialist collection of journals and texts. The College acknowledges that the current demands on the service cannot be fulfilled simply by further remodelling of the existing accommodation. The audit team heard that the College plans to redevelop a nearby derelict site and make some substantial internal changes to the Summer Row Building. This will increase the space available for the library and will provide additional quiet study space and a resource centre housing additional computers.

207 Sound procedures for personal support are in place and these benefit all categories of students. The audit team identified good practice in the College's organisation of placement activity, and the support for students prior to, during and subsequent to their placements, and observed a strong ethos amongst academic and support staff for sharing information throughout the College. As a result the concern for personal support services is embedded in the culture of the institution.

208 Members of academic staff are appointed primarily on the basis of their teaching ability and practical experience. Their practical experience is appreciated by students who perceive that staff deliver up-to date and interesting courses that are relevant to their future employment. Overall, staff development in the College is sound. Members of staff take part in bi-annual staff development events and all new staff receive a College induction, have mentors and are funded to undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education. However the audit team concurs with the suggestion in the University of Birmingham Reaccreditation Audit that greater support could be given to staff to engage in reading and research.

Outcomes of discipline audit trails

Hospitality, food and retail management

209 From its review of students assessed work and discussions with staff and students, the audit team formed the view that whilst the standards of achievement in the individual

programmes was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their position in the FHEQ, there was a lack of sufficient differentiation between the FD and the first two years of the honours degree in the same subject. The programme specifications reflected the appropriate subject benchmark statements, but the team noted that the learning outcomes were written as objectives, and felt that the College might wish to reconsider this approach.

210 Students were very positive about their programmes, the specialist practical facilities and the information provided through the College Student Handbook, module handbooks and module delivery schemes. They felt able to raise issues informally with staff and wherever possible these were resolved quickly. Feedback on coursework using the generic assessment criteria marking sheets was effective in assisting their learning. They were very positive about the support they received from academic staff, the learning support centre, the work placement centre and the research project centre. The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for the programmes of study in hospitality, food and retail management.

School of Recreation Sport and Tourism

211 Programme Specifications are guided by the relevant benchmark statements and, where appropriate, also informed by the QAA statement for awards in business and management. The educational aims of each programme are consistent with the FHEQ and that they are also consistent with the FDQB. The Postgraduate awards offered have been guided by the FHEQ and the Programme Specifications also demonstrate extensive external input from relevant professional and employer groups and industry lead bodies. The School operates within the academic structures of the College which provide, as indicated above, a hierarchy of linked committees. It complies with College and University of Birmingham regulations when nominating external examiners and responding to and considering their reports. It was noted that

external examiners are appointed to programmes and not modules and the audit team felt that this could lead to different standards being applied to individual modules shared between programmes.

212 A range of assessment methods is used by the School. These include essays, case studies, live projects and examinations. The audit team was provided with a sample of assessed work taken from each level. Having reviewed this material it is able to confirm that the performance of students is being judged in line with stated learning outcomes. The students were satisfied with the quality of information supplied and stated that they had sufficient information to understand what is expected of them in academic terms. All students have a personal tutor and benefit from an 'open door' policy' which provides access to a range of staff. The students had a limited knowledge of the formal feedback mechanisms but stressed the effectiveness of the informal links. Postgraduate research work is supported through the Research Centre. The audit team felt that it would be desirable for the School to continue the development of systems and policies to facilitate staff engagement in scholarly activity and research. Overall, staff development in the School is sound.

213 From a study of a sample of students assessed work, external examiners reports and other documentation, and from discussions with students and staff the audit team concluded that the standard of student achievement in the degree programmes was appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. The quality of learning opportunities was suitable for the programmes of study.

The use made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure

214 The Curriculum and Quality committee has responsibility for quality policies and procedures within the College and for reviewing these in light of external documentation such as those of the Academic Infrastructure. Due to the small size of the

institution, changes can be made directly to policies and procedures as result of this committee's deliberations. The audit team found evidence that the *Code of practice*, subject benchmarks, FHEQ and programme specification guidelines had been incorporated into the quality procedures and processes within the College, either through procedural changes or by incorporation of reference to QAA's website. The team was, however, unable to determine the extent of discussion within the committee with regard to these documents due to the limited reporting of deliberations.

215 The use of subject benchmark statements, FHEQ and programme specification guidelines at programme level are confirmed at approval and monitored during programme review and by external examiners. The audit team found the programme specifications to be of an appropriate format, but the learning outcomes to be written in the language of objectives. The College might wish to reconsider this approach.

216 From 2002, the College has adopted a policy of converting HNDs to FDs. Whilst the College maintains it has matched these new programmes against the FD benchmark, the audit team saw no written evidence of this. The team was concerned that students on the honours degree and FD programmes who were achieving the same learning outcomes were apparently eligible for different awards, ie - the Diploma in Higher Education and the FD. The College should reconsider the regulations for these two awards.

217 Overall, the audit team found that the College had made appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure.

The utility of the SED as an illustration of the institution's capacity to reflect upon its own strengths and limitations, and to act on these to enhance quality and standards

218 The SED provided a useful description of the College's main committees, processes and key personnel, particularly with respect to how they apply to the management and enhancement of provision and the assurance of quality and standards. The SED contained an Annex which showed an Index of Evidence - the documents available on the CD-ROM provided to the audit team. During the briefing visit, the team was provided with an alternative Index of Evidence which cross-referenced to the various footnotes contained in the SED.

219 The audit team did not consider the SED to be comprehensive in one respect. The College had been subject to a number of reviews in recent years by various external agencies. The various review reports identified many perceived strengths to which the SED rightly referred. The SED also identified that the College had responded to those areas viewed in the reports as meriting attention. The team noted, however, that the SED contained no detailed information on the findings of the University of Birmingham's re-accreditation visit in 2005 which, while positive, identified areas for further consideration by the College.

220 The audit team noted that the SED did not explicitly identify the College's perceptions of its own limitations. Evidence was gathered during the audit of the College's capacity to self-evaluate and to reflect upon its own limitations. Documentation was provided which showed many areas of development activity within the College, not all of which was fully described in the SED. The team gained the impression of an institution whose activities were informed by a considerable degree of self-evaluation. The team concluded that including more of the evaluative aspects of the detailed documentation in the SED would have enabled it to appreciate better the extent to

which the College was able to take a self-critical stance to assist with its action planning.

Commentary on the institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards

221 The SED stated that the College believes that it has in place a sound framework for managing academic quality and standards. Reports of reviews in recent years by various external agencies would appear to confirm that this is the case. The SED listed both strategic issues being addressed by the College and what were stated to be intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards. The audit team did not consider some of the initiatives in the latter list to represent enhancement activities with respect to quality and standards. The team concluded that the College defines enhancement in broad terms to refer to all planned initiatives.

222 The audit team formed a view of an institution where enhancement (in its broader sense) informs all its activities. Documentation regarding staff development events such as the Insights Conference in 2004 and the Staff Development Symposium in 2005 provided evidence that the College seeks to disseminate ideas and information widely. Some areas discussed at these events related to enhancement in the broader sense and some to enhancement with respect to quality and standards - for example, e-learning; skills identification in hospitality management; and the sharing of experiences in teaching, learning and assessment.

223 The College's Learning and Teaching Strategy 2005 to 2010 also provided evidence that the College actively engages in enhancement activity. The Learning and Teaching Strategy 2005 to 2010 document is comprehensive. Among other things, it identifies four strategic aims for learning and teaching, each of which is supported by a number of objectives. The Professional Development Plan addresses development in terms of both individual and departmental needs and collates these in order to identify

the development needs of the College as a whole. The audit team formed the view however, that the SED failed to describe adequately many of the evaluative aspects of the College's activity. For example, the reflective stance adopted in both the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2005 to 2010 and the Professional Development Plan was not as fully conveyed in the SED as it might have been.

224 While the evidence contained in the documentation provided to the audit team showed that the College concerns itself with enhancement, it was less clear which enhancement activities were to be prioritised. The team would therefore encourage the College to further strengthen its approach to enhancement - in particular, enhancement of quality and standards - through providing a clearer sense of priorities.

Reliability of information

225 The audit process included a check both on the College's progress towards production of the information set in the format recommended in HEFCE's document 02/15, *Information on quality and standards in higher education*, and document 03/51, *Final guidance*, and on the reliability of the information provided by the College. The College indicated that it had fully engaged in complying with HEFCE's requirements. In so doing, it had developed, with the University of Birmingham, a system that enabled the HEFCE requirements with respect to summaries of external examiner reports to be met. The audit team reviewed the information contained on the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website. The information complied with HEFCE's requirements in all respects and was found to be accurate, complete and reliable.

226 Students who met the audit team were positive about the usefulness of the information available to them and indicated that they found it accurate and reliable. The team's examination of available documents confirmed this view. The College's website, which contains information on the College's services and facilities, programmes, the alumni society

and the College's policies and strategies, appeared to be regularly reviewed and updated, and was found by students to be attractive and easy to use.

227 The audit team concluded that the College was taking a rigorous approach to the production of information and that there could be confidence in the College's procedures to ensure the accuracy, completeness and reliability of the information it produces.

228 The College had experienced some difficulty with the TQI website in that some information posted by the College had not appeared, for reasons beyond its control. The audit team was nonetheless able to confirm that the College meets the HEFCE information set requirements. In addition to various statistical information, information on employers' needs and trends, and links to programme specifications, the TQI website contained summaries of external examiners reports, the report of the subject review in 2001 of Hospitality, Leisure, Recreation, Sport and Tourism, summary statements of internal reviews, and a summary statement of the College's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

Features of good practice

229 The following features of good practice were noted:

- i the well-integrated support systems, including the Study Support Centre, which give all students the opportunity to realise their full potential (paragraphs 136, 174, 210)
- ii the organisation of placement activity, and the support for students prior to, during and subsequent to their placements (paragraphs 137,138)
- iii the embedding of staff development in the institution, as evidenced by the wide range of opportunities and the high level of participation by all categories of staff (paragraphs 117,121)

- iv the high level of collaborative commitment of academic and support staff to the achievement of the College's aims, leading to the enhancement of the student experience (paragraph 121)
- v the strong engagement of the College with industry, as evidenced through the involvement of employers in curriculum design, delivery and review (paragraphs 70, 71, 101, 102).

Recommendations for action

230 Recommendations for action that is advisable

- i revising the roles and responsibilities of external examiners with regard to the establishment and verification of the standards of individual modules shared between programmes which lead to different awards (paragraphs 75, 148, 166).

Recommendations for action which is desirable:

- ii reviewing the regulations for the awards of the Foundation Degree and honours degrees in the same subject area to ensure that the degrees are suitably differentiated, and that students may receive only the award (or its fall-back award) for which they are registered (paragraphs 54, 167)
- iii continuing the College's development of systematic and comprehensive recording of action taken in response to issues in order to ensure that appropriate progress continues to be made (paragraphs 41, 87)
- iv continuing the development of systems and policies to facilitate staff engagement in scholarly activity and research (paragraphs 122, 154, 175).

Appendix

Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies' response to the audit report

The College welcomes QAA's finding that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the current and future management of the quality of the institution's programmes and academic standards.

The College is also delighted with the very large number of positive comments in the report, highlighting the culture of enhancement which is found throughout the institution, and identifying good practice in our systems for student support; the organisation and support for students' placement activity; the extensive support for professional development; the close working relationships between academic and support staff, and the College's strong engagement with industry.

The audit team's recognition of the effectiveness of the processes used to maintain a high quality of learning, and for the broad range of ways in which external agents, particularly employers, contribute to the effectiveness of the College's programmes, is also gratefully noted.

The audit team highlight four areas for possible improvement, some of which the report acknowledges are already being addressed. Although these are not major issues, the College will nonetheless consider them carefully and take appropriate action following further discussion within the institution, in line with the identified culture of enhancement.

Finally, thanks are due to the audit team for their professionalism in carrying out the audit, for the constructive atmosphere which was maintained in all contact between the team and the College, and also for the positive way in which they dealt with all communication.

