



# Institutional audit

**Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln**

NOVEMBER 2009



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## Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

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

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

### **Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex**

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

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

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website.

## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln (the University College) from 16 to 20 November 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University College offers.

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

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

### Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit team found that the University College was committed to enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities, and was taking a systematic approach at institutional level to such enhancement. The team also concluded that there was effective identification and dissemination of good practice across the University College.

### Postgraduate research students

The University College is at an early stage in the introduction of research degrees having recently concluded validation agreements with an awarding partner. The audit team considered the arrangements in place to meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. The team concluded that there were thorough and well-conceived plans for securing the research degree experience of the initial students.

### Published information

The audit found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University College publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

### Features of good practice

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

- the comprehensive arrangements for student feedback and its use in quality assurance and enhancement

- the enhancement of the student experience through the provision of opportunities for self-development
- the contribution of the Centre for Learning and Teaching in support of staff development and the furtherance of the University College's quality enhancement agenda
- the thorough and well-conceived plans for securing the research degree experience of the initial intake of students.

### **Recommendations for action**

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

The team advises the University College to:

- review its Codes of Practice and associated documentation to ensure appropriate recognition of the specific quality assurance needs of collaborative provision
- review the operation of its quality management processes for collaborative provision to ensure they are fully implemented.

It would be desirable for the University College to:

- formalise the role of Chief External Examiner in the institution's Codes of Practice for external examining and conduct of boards of examiners
- effect regular review of aggregated statistical data to facilitate consideration of academic performance at the institutional level
- make systematic and timely consideration of revisions of the Code of practice, published by QAA and other elements of the Academic Infrastructure as they are published
- make explicit expectations for the quality assurance of programme placement arrangements in order to strengthen institutional oversight.

### **Reference points**

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

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

The audit found that the University College took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students, although the institution could respond in a more systematic and timely manner to revisions.

## Report

1 An Institutional audit of the Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln (the University College) was undertaken during the week commencing 16 November 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University College's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised of the following auditors: Ms Barbara Howell; Professor Ian Robinson; Dr Marie Stowell; Dr Mike Wing; and Mr David Batty (audit secretary). The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr David Gale, Assistant Director, Development and Enhancement Group.

### Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University College, founded in 1862 to train teachers in primary education, is a church college within the Anglican tradition. As well as offering teaching qualifications and programmes for continuing professional development, since the 1990s the University College has diversified its provision with three awards in the arts and humanities. The University College was granted taught degree awarding powers and a new institutional title in 2006. The University College awards both undergraduate and taught postgraduate degrees and has recently entered an arrangement with the University of Leicester for the award of research degrees.

4 The University College's strategy is for growth in undergraduate student numbers and for more significant growth in taught postgraduate numbers, international work, research and third stream activity. Its vision statement is to be 'committed to being a leader in learning, to inspiring excellence, and to enriching the lives of its students and staff and the communities it serves'.

5 In 2008-09, the University College had a total student population of 1,965 students. There were 1,461 full-time students and 504 part-time students, the majority of which were registered on postgraduate education programmes for professional development. At the time of the audit, the University College was structured into two academic schools: the School of Culture, Education and Innovation and the School of Teacher Development.

6 Since being granted degree awarding powers, the University College has developed collaborative arrangements with two further education colleges and validates diplomas and Foundation Degrees that are aimed at students working as teaching assistants or in related support roles. At the time of the audit, there were 50 students registered for University College awards at collaborative partners.

7 A report in lieu of Institutional audit was produced in 2006 on the basis of QAA's scrutiny of the institution in connection with its application for taught degree awarding powers. As a result of this process, it was concluded that broad confidence could be placed in the University College's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The present team found that the institution had taken appropriate steps to address the matters raised by the previous scrutiny activity.

8 Since the scrutiny in relation to the application for taught degree awarding powers and institutional audit, the University College has reorganised its academic structure into schools and departments and completely overhauled its deliberative committee structure and introduced committees at school level. Another significant development since the previous scrutiny has been the intention to grow research which has seen validation arrangements recently agreed with the University of Leicester. At the time of the audit, three PhD studentship places had been awarded and one student had started; plans were in place to introduce an EdD programme.

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

9 Formal responsibility for determining and assuring academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience of taught provision resides with the Academic Board, which is responsible for all matters regarding academic policy, strategy and planning. It engages formally in the approval and closure of all taught programmes, in the approval of academic regulations and Codes of Practice, and in the appointment of external examiners to programmes. By working through its subordinate committees, Academic Board has oversight of the more detailed work of the institution in relation to academic standards and quality.

10 The key subcommittees of the Academic Board for the management of academic quality and standards are the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, the Learning and Teaching Committee, the Research Committee, and the two school boards. Each school board has established a further level of departmental Committees. The handbooks and procedures demonstrated to the audit team that the committees have clearly defined terms of reference and inclusive constitutions, and operate according to well-defined institutional procedures.

11 The institution has designed and approved a detailed set of academic regulations that define the academic decision-making processes for the assessment of students. A suite of Codes of practice, procedures and guidelines constitute a comprehensive academic quality manual that describes the various processes to assure the academic standards and quality of its awards. Both the regulations and codes are readily accessible on the institution's website.

12 The approval of new programmes takes place in two stages: first, a developmental stage is conducted at school level, and then an institutional-level formal review event. This latter stage involves at least one external specialist and a member of academic staff from another school on the validation panel. The report of the event is received by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee which recommends approval to Academic Board. The audit team was able to confirm that the processes are well-defined and explained in the institutional Codes of Practice and that the procedure took due account of the learning and teaching strategy, resources to support student learning, and assessment and admissions policies.

13 All taught programmes are subject to annual monitoring. It involves consideration of a range of information relevant to academic standards, including student feedback and evaluation, external examiners' reports, the views of external bodies, and statistical measures of retention, progression and achievement. Heads of department prepare a departmental executive summary which, together with the reports, are considered at school Board. A school report on the outcomes of annual monitoring is then presented to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee. School level reports also inform the Annual Report of Quality and Standards prepared by the Vice Principal (Academic Affairs) for consideration at Academic Board.

14 The team found that the annual monitoring reports were thorough and evaluative, that discussions at departmental meetings and school board added value, and that the resulting school report on annual monitoring both reviewed the success of previous action plans, and contained new detailed action plans. Reports addressed potential standards issues in detail and identified matters for further consideration at institutional level.

15 The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee audits one programme annual monitoring report in detail each year, to provide reassurance that processes had been conducted appropriately. While the audit team appreciates fully the intent of the audit, the team was less clear about how the audit of one report each year gave assurance to the University College about the integrity of the process as operated across the institution, particularly as the team noted that there was already thorough scrutiny of reports at school level.



16 The University College has revised its process for periodic review of programmes following the end of the validation arrangement with the University of Leicester. The new process is designed to bring particular focus on the learning experience of students as well as upon academic standards. At the time of the audit, only one such review had been completed under the revised procedures.

17 Periodic review scrutinises all programmes (around three to four) in one department at the same time, in a five-yearly cycle. Review panel members are independent of the department and include at least one external subject specialist. It has been agreed in principle that the Students' Union will be invited to nominate a student panel member. Review reports are considered by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, and the outcome reported to Academic Board. A detailed response to the report is required one month after the event, and a year later the head of department is asked to provide a commentary on the outcome of actions taken.

18 The audit team was able to confirm that the process of the first review had been conducted thoroughly and had included a detailed consideration of academic standards against external reference points. The team considered the review process to provide appropriate assurance regarding the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities at programme level.

19 The process for the nomination and appointment of external examiners is set out in a Code of Practice for external examining. The audit team was able to follow the appointment process through departmental and school committees; however, they were unable to identify records of the final decisions made by the subcommittee of the Academic Board. Although decisions were effectively communicated to the school, the team believed that the University College may wish to reconsider whether records should be kept of these formal Academic Board decisions.

20 Every programme has at least one external examiner, and in the case of larger programmes, additional externals may also be appointed. In such cases, one is identified as the Chief External Examiner, although no terms of reference or specific duties are identified. The audit team considered that it is desirable to formalise the role of Chief External Examiner in the institution's Codes of Practice for external examining and conduct of boards of examiners in order to minimise the potential for misunderstandings concerning the role.

21 The external examiner is required to confirm the award of degrees and grades. The audit team noted one occasion when the external felt unable to do so, highlighting a number of irregularities in the assessment process. Robust action was taken by the examination board to reassure the external examiner and demonstrated, in the view of the team, that the University College made appropriate use of the expertise of its externals and processes to assure academic standards.

22 The audit team noted that the institution makes use of a comprehensive external examiners' annual report form which is considered at both departmental and school levels. The Vice Principal (Academic Affairs) uses external examiner reports to produce his annual report on external examining to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee and to inform his annual report on the annual monitoring process to Academic Board. Student representatives contribute to discussions on external examiner reports through their representation on departmental committees and school boards.

23 Overall, the audit team considered the external examiner process to be detailed and well-managed, enabling the University College to confirm the academic standards of its awards.

24 The University College's framework for supporting academic standards is enshrined within its own Codes of Practice, which themselves draw heavily upon the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. The institution has adopted the generic level descriptors from the South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer, which are consistent with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The institution's Codes of Practice contain generic guidelines about expectations for programmes and modules at all levels which broadly reflect the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. The audit team noted that panel members for approval, monitoring and review of academic programmes made use of subject benchmark statements, and the University College had fully adopted the principles embodied within the Foundation Degree benchmark statement. The team also noted that the University College's substantial involvement with regulatory body scrutiny brings an additional, standards-based perspective to the development of the curriculum.

25 While a number of sections of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, are reflected and explicitly referenced in the University College's own Codes of Practice, the audit team learnt that there was no automatic mechanism for considering systematically revised sections of the *Code of practice*, or subject benchmark statements, as they are updated. For example, *Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* had not been considered at institutional level. Consequently, the team considered it desirable for the University College to make systematic and timely consideration of revisions of the *Code of practice* and other elements of the Academic Infrastructure as they are published. Notwithstanding this matter, the team is satisfied that the University College makes generally appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in the management of academic standards and learning opportunities of its programmes.

26 Academic Board has recently approved revised regulations following the granting of degree awarding powers. In the view of the audit team these assessment regulations are comprehensive and properly documented. The institution has also published a suite of guidance notes for staff regarding the specification of modules, assignment briefs and assessment moderation. Detailed regulations for specific programmes are widely available, and students informed the team that they are aware of the criteria relevant to their programmes of study. Students expressed general satisfaction with arrangements for assessment. The team, having reviewed both the regulations and their implementation, concluded that assessment policies and regulations were making an effective contribution towards assuring the maintenance of academic standards.

27 The Academic Registry provides wide-ranging statistical and analytical information at the programme level to support programme management. The data is provided in a timely manner for the production of annual monitoring reports, and are routinely copied to heads of department and deans of school. The student record system is also used to generate data for examination boards. The audit team heard that prior to the new student record system, institutional level data was produced manually. However, currently, the data provided was not aggregated for consideration either at school or institutional level. While there were plans to reintroduce the consideration of aggregated data in the future, in the view of the team, the current position limits the institution's ability to exercise an overview of academic achievement and performance. The team, therefore, considers it desirable for the University College to effect regular review of aggregated statistical data to facilitate consideration of academic performance at the institutional level.

28 Overall, the audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

### Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

29 The availability of appropriate learning opportunities for students is considered in the approval, monitoring and review of programmes. The audit team noted that where minor modifications to programmes impact on resources, changes are presented to school boards for approval with representatives of support departments before final approval at Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee. The team found the processes for programme approval, monitoring and review to be operating in accordance with the University College's stated procedures and were making an effective contribution to the management of the quality of learning opportunities.

30 The University College makes use of a number of mechanisms for obtaining feedback from students, and students confirmed that they felt there are 'ample opportunities' for them to express their views and provide feedback. The audit team found that the results of the institutional and the national student surveys were given careful and comprehensive consideration within the University College and informed quality monitoring and quality enhancement action plans. The team considered the comprehensive arrangements for student feedback and its use in quality assurance and enhancement to be a feature of good practice.

31 The audit team confirmed that students are represented on all major committees. Reports by student representatives are a standing item on committee agendas and they are able to contribute to discussions on a wide range of standards and quality issues. Training for student representatives is provided by the Students' Union and supported by the University College. The course representation system is supplemented by informal meetings between course leaders and student representatives so that immediate issues can be addressed. Students understood the systems and indicated a number of ways in which they received feedback from representatives. The audit team concluded that students are widely represented across the University College's committee system, and that the mechanisms for engaging students in quality assurance enabled them to contribute significantly to assuring and enhancing learning opportunities.

32 The University College believes that excellence in teaching requires the development of the research base, and it has a number of schemes to incentivise research activity, including a fund to meet the costs of conference attendance to present papers; a scheme to support sabbatical leave; and a scheme for the appointment of readers and professors. The Centre for Learning and Teaching also carries out projects to strengthen links between research and teaching. A Centre for Higher Education Research has been established to provide an interest group of practitioner researchers. The audit team confirmed that the University College has a clear and targeted strategy for fostering links between research, scholarly activity and learning and teaching, such that professional practice is underpinned by relevant research and student learning is research informed.

33 The University College has no distance or online programmes, although many of its postgraduate programmes are delivered through weekend and block teaching supported by use of the virtual learning environment or 'blended learning'. Students generally expressed satisfaction with the support provided through the virtual learning environment, and the Centre for Learning and Teaching has a Learning Technologist and Lecturer in e-Learning to provide staff development opportunities and individual support for colleagues in making use of learning technologies.

34 Placements and work-based learning are particular features of many of the University College's programmes, and there are a variety of arrangements across the range of programmes provided by the University College. The audit team saw documentation associated with programmes that included work-based learning and placements and this was generally clear and appropriate. The team noted, however, that Section 9 of the *Code of practice* had not been

explicitly reviewed by the University College when the revised version was published in 2007, and noted that there was no institutional Code of Practice or set of principles to inform the quality assurance of work-based learning and placement opportunities. The team considered it desirable for the University College to make explicit expectations for the quality assurance of programme placement arrangements in order to strengthen institutional oversight.

35 The two academic schools match financial resources to programmes through the application of a Resource Allocation Model, and budget requirements for corporate service departments rest with the Directorate and the Governing Body. Learning resources are considered as part of programme approval, the periodic review process, and through the annual monitoring reports of academic programmes.

36 It is recognised and appreciated by both staff and students that there has been pressure on library resources and physical teaching accommodation. However, the audit team concluded that the institution had effective systems in place to try to optimise the use of its learning resources in supporting the student experience. On the effectiveness of information and communications technology and e-learning resources, the team concluded they made a positive contribution to the learning opportunity available to students.

37 The institution's Corporate Plan 2007-10 sets out a commitment 'to being an inclusive community which welcomes and hosts a diverse population of students'. The policy for admissions is set out in a Code of Practice. Strategies to support this commitment include the involvement of student ambassadors in the recruitment process and the development of the 'Next Steps 4 Study' programme to assist students in making the transition between school and university.

38 Admissions and recruitment statistics are compiled at programme level as part of the annual monitoring of programme reports. Although the audit team noted discussion of admissions statistics takes place at institutional level, limited evidence could be found of aggregated data to support an institutional overview. The team took the view that although the admissions process was robust the institution would benefit from a more coherent representation and discussion of admissions data (see paragraph 27).

39 New students receive an information booklet, called 'What Next?' which provides details of the week-long induction programme. The audit team confirmed that students are also provided with module and course handbooks, plus support materials on the institution's virtual learning environment. Although experiences varied between the students studying at the institution and those studying at partner institutions, students generally viewed these materials as supportive. Students can also gain advice from the Learning Advice section of the Centre for Learning and Teaching, which offers dyslexia support, one-to-one surgeries, and group sessions on a variety of topics, for example academic writing, referencing and revision. Students are further supported through the Student Support department which offers accessibility support for students with disabilities or specific learning difficulties, careers advice and guidance, funding and financial support, and counselling.

40 The audit team also learnt of support provided to students through the personal development planning process administered by personal tutors (which includes at least one meeting per year) designed to monitor student progress throughout a programme of study and to support career planning. Career guidance is further provided through activities undertaken by the Careers Service. The staff and students acknowledged that personal development planning experiences vary across the programmes, reflecting the individual needs of the programmes, and recognise the need to continue to monitor the effectiveness of this system.

41 The institution offers a range of corporate opportunities for student self-development, for example volunteering, student ambassador programme, business development and Students' Union activities. Students are also encouraged to engage with enterprise activities supported by the Business Development Unit and events organised by the Students' Union.

42 The audit team viewed the support provided to students through induction, handbooks, the virtual learning environment, Centre for Learning and Teaching, Student Support Department, personal development planning and Careers Service was making an effective contribution towards managing the quality of the student learning opportunity. The team further viewed the enhancement of the student experience through the provision of opportunities for self-development as a feature of good practice.

43 The audit team learnt that the main resource and development base for all academic and academic-related staff support and development rests with the Centre for Learning and Teaching. The Centre plays a key role in supporting new staff through its oversight of the induction and mentor scheme for both full and part-time staff. The Centre provides a postgraduate certificate programme for those new to lecturing. The Centre also arranges staff development conferences as well as a range of shorter sessions for department and course teams, and support for staff attendance at external conferences and sabbatical leave. The team noted a high level of engagement by staff with the activities of the Centre (see paragraph 48).

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

44 The University College regards quality assurance as playing a key role in the enhancement of student learning opportunities, by identifying areas that would benefit from enhancement, and by the dissemination of good practice. Responsibility for quality enhancement is described by the University College as being distributed at appropriate levels across the University College's management and deliberative structures. Alignment of enhancement activities to institutional enhancement objectives are realised through the reporting line of the committee structure to Academic Board, and through the reporting line of the management structure to the Directorate. There is no separate committee with sole responsibility for enhancement, or separate enhancement policy.

45 Academic Board and a number of its subcommittees play a key role in the deliberative consideration of the enhancement of academic quality, with these committees receiving a number of annual overview reports. A coherent view is taken of enhancement issues and opportunities in the Vice Principal's (Academic Affairs) Annual Report on Academic Quality and Standards, which is submitted to Academic Board. This report is based upon an examination of external examiners' reports and school board reports on annual monitoring.

46 The audit team considered that the overview reports, and the discussions of these by Academic Board and its key subcommittees, made an effective contribution to the enhancement of quality at an institutional level and saw examples of such enhancement. The team can confirm that annual monitoring is effective in identifying good practice. The team noted, however, that the recommendations for enhancement arising out of periodic review were relatively small in number and scope and would encourage the University College to keep under consideration the impact of periodic review in terms of quality enhancement.

47 Enhancement of learning opportunities is also advanced by initiatives embedded in University College strategic plans, with the Learning and Teaching Strategy being seen as a key driver for enhancing the student experience. The fulfilment of actions in the strategies is overseen via the University College committee structure, and the team saw a number of examples of the way in which the strategies were contributing to the enhancement of the student experience.

48 The University College's Head of Learning and Teaching is responsible for developing the University College's learning and teaching policy, promoting innovation, sharing good practice and making available appropriate development opportunities for staff. The Head of Learning and Teaching leads the Centre for Learning and Teaching, which supports the use of learning technology and provides the staff development related to the enhancement of pedagogic practice and also provides funding for a number of projects related to enhancing teaching and learning. The audit team considered that the Head of Learning and Teaching, and the Centre for

Learning and Teaching, play an effective role in enhancing the student experience and in disseminating good practice across the institution. It was clear to the team that the contribution of the Centre for Learning and Teaching in support of staff development and the furtherance of the University College's quality enhancement agenda is a feature of good practice.

49 The University College has also appointed a Quality Enhancement Academic to undertake projects which are intended to improve the student experience. Additionally, the University College has awarded a number of Teaching Fellowships to colleagues who have been recognised for the excellence of their teaching practice. The audit team formed the view that these appointments have also been effective in furthering the enhancement agenda.

50 The audit team concluded that there was ample evidence of the University actively promoting enhancement activity, and that the University College was taking a systematic approach at institutional level to enhancement. The team also saw evidence of the identification of good practice through the academic quality processes, and of its dissemination across the University College.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

51 The University College currently approves programmes to be delivered by two partner further education colleges. As part of its corporate strategy, the University College intends a modest expansion in its partnership arrangements with further education colleges so as to provide the local community with enhanced opportunities for study at higher education level.

52 The University College intends that its collaborative students 'receive an experience comparable with that of their counterparts studying at the University College'. The University College's collaborative quality management processes are largely built upon the quality assurance procedures adopted for programmes offered directly by the University College, and its Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision identifies those matters that need to be considered with respect to collaborative provision, and the additional processes that need to be applied.

53 The University College has a two-stage approval process for higher education provision delivered through partnership. In the first stage, institutional approval, all proposals for new partners are initially considered by the Bishop Grosseteste Directorate. Where there is Directorate approval to proceed, and Academic Board endorsement of this decision, an institutional approval event is held at the partner institution. The approval panel forms a judgement as to whether partner approval may be given, with the final decision being subject to Academic Board and the Directorate agreement. Once a partner is approved, a memorandum of cooperation is agreed which lays out the framework within which programmes may be approved to run at the partner institution. The agreements are valid for a maximum period of six years. The audit team concluded that the University College's process for establishing formal relationships with partners was sound. Although conditions relating to termination are laid out in the memorandum of cooperation, the team noted that the process is not described in the Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision. The team therefore suggests that the University College may wish to make more explicit its processes for termination of agreements in the Code of Practice.

54 Collaborative programme validation, the second stage of the approval process for higher education provision delivered through partnership, is largely based on the procedures for the validation of in-house provision (as described in the University College's Code of Practice for the Validation of Programmes). This Code itself does not specifically consider any additional requirements related to the validation of collaborative programmes, although supporting materials do note additional matters that should be considered, and additional arrangements that should be put in place. The audit team concluded that validation events are appropriately conducted and programme panels and teams are appropriately constituted. While there was due consideration of issues related to collaborative provision, the team considered it advisable that as

the University College extends its collaborative activity, it should ensure that the relevant codes of practice and associated documentation fully reflect the specific arrangements that relate to the approval of collaborative programmes.

55 At institution level, a board of studies is established for each partner. The board acts as the principal body for maintaining oversight of the University College's programmes delivered by the partner, and reports to the University College's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC). In addition, the University College and partner each nominate a senior member of their staff to have senior responsibility for the link.

56 Each partner appoints a course leader who acts as the principal point of contact for matters related to the management and delivery of the programme. The University College appoints a link tutor who is responsible for monitoring the delivery of the programme on behalf of the University College, and providing the programme team with support and advice. Although there is no specific role description for link tutors, the key elements of the link tutor role are described within the Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision. Currently, there is no University College training specifically designed for link tutors. The audit team formed the view that as the University College extends its collaborative provision activity, it would be helpful to clearly define details of link tutor responsibilities, and to provide for the training of link tutors new to the role, so as to make clear the expectations placed on link tutors and to promote consistency of practice.

57 Programme committees are responsible for the effective operation of a programme, or groups of related programmes, at a partner. Programme committee minutes are reviewed by the appropriate board of studies, and by QAEC. The audit team noted that although, in general, programme committees dealt effectively with quality issues as they arose, in one case the programme committee did not meet as frequently as intended by the Code and consequently it was not in a position to completely fulfil its role in ensuring the effective operation of the programme.

58 Annual monitoring of collaborative programmes is broadly similar to that adopted for programmes delivered directly by the University College. The partner programme annual monitoring reports are initially considered and agreed by the programme committee, received by the Board of Studies, and then submitted to QAEC.

59 Collaborative programmes are described in the University College's Code of Practice on Collaborative Provision as being subject to the same programme review and revalidation arrangements as for those adopted for programmes delivered directly by the University College. As in the case of the Code relating to programme validation, the Codes of Practice of the University College that relate to the review and revalidation of collaborative programmes do not specifically consider any additional requirements. Although it was evident to the audit team that where collaborative programmes were included in a review, then there was appropriate consideration of matters relating to the collaborative nature of the provision, the University College should amend the programme review and revalidation documentation so as to fully reflect additional requirements associated with collaborative programmes in order to assure that future events will be similarly comprehensive in their scope.

60 The University College appoints an external examiner to each programme, or group of related programmes. The University College affirms comparability of standards and learning opportunities by appointing the same external examiner to a programme wherever it is run. In other respects, arrangements are the same as for the external examination and conduct of assessment boards for programmes delivered directly by the University College. The relevant Codes do not specifically mention arrangements particular to collaborative programmes. The audit team formed the view that arrangements for external examining and conduct of assessment boards are effective in practice, but that it would nonetheless be prudent to update the relevant Code of Practice so as to reflect the specific requirements of collaborative provision.

61 The content and format of collaborative programme handbooks is similar to those produced for in-house programmes. The audit team formed the view that given the partner-specific approach of partners to regulatory matters such as student complaints, and to student services, that the University College should enhance its guidance for producing collaborative programme handbooks, so as to assure that handbooks include, or direct students to, partner-specific regulations, procedures or services.

62 In conclusion, the audit team considered that, generally, the academic standards and quality of collaborative provision are securely managed and reflected the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. The team found that the University College's procedures and associated documentation do not always reflect the particular requirements of collaborative provision. The team therefore considers it advisable that the University College should review its Codes of Practice and associated documentation to ensure appropriate recognition of the specific quality assurance needs of collaborative provision. The team also found that programme committees did not always meet as frequently as intended by the institution's Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision. The team, therefore, also considered it advisable for the University College to review the operation of its quality management processes for collaborative provision to ensure that they are fully implemented.

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

63 At the time of the audit, the University College had recently concluded validation arrangements with the University of Leicester for the award of research degrees, and the validation of an EdD programme is nearing conclusion. Three PhD studentships have been awarded for 2009-10 and one student has commenced studies. The introduction of research degree studentships is the outcome of an institutional commitment to increase research activity and build sufficient capacity to provide high quality authoritative supervision. Ten staff have been approved as eligible to provide supervision, and training has been provided through an external consultant. The strategy is to slowly build capacity in a focused way and carefully select and match research students to supervisors in the University College's subject area of greatest strength.

64 A Research Centre has been established by the University College, providing a physical base for students, and dealing with all administrative matters relating to registered research degree students, and research more generally. The Centre is managed by the Head of Research who has responsibility for coordinating research student support, including induction and training, and for monitoring student progress.

65 Formally approved Regulations Governing Research Degrees and a Code of Practice for Research Degrees, which take careful account of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, are in place. Responsibility for oversight of research degree matters lies with the University College's Research Committee, and a subcommittee, the Research Students Committee, considers recommendations from the Head of Research regarding student admission, registration and progression. The audit team found the processes, as set out in the University College's Code of Practice and Regulations, and the terms of reference for the Research Committee, provide a sound basis for the management of research degrees.

66 Given the very early stage in the introduction of research degrees, it is only those parts of Section 1 of the *Code of practice* relating to selection and admission, induction and the start of research training that have been implemented.



67 Applicants for research studentships are interviewed by the Head of Research and potential first supervisor following a two-day process involving the completion of tasks designed to test readiness to undertake research at doctoral level. Students are allocated two supervisors, with the first supervisor taking primary responsibility and having extensive knowledge of the proposed field of study and successful experience of supervising research degrees. Students are also allocated a mentor, who is not a member of the supervisory team. A comprehensive Student Handbook with information about the research degree student experience, including a Progress File for planning and recording training and development activities, is provided. The University College has an arrangement with the University of Leicester for students to participate in the research training programme, aspects of which are compulsory.

68 The audit team heard from both the Head of Research and the research student that both formal and informal processes for induction and training were working effectively to provide a positive, supportive and welcoming experience. The team formed the view that carefully planned induction and support arrangements were in place to ensure that the current very small number of research students will be part of a research community at the University College.

69 Overall, the audit team considers the arrangements in place and planned for the current and future development of research degrees to be appropriate, consistent with the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and the thorough and well-conceived plans for securing the research degree experience of the initial intake of students to be a feature of good practice.

## Section 7: Published information

70 The University College provides a wide range of information for prospective and current students on its website and in printed form, including prospectuses, programme specifications, policy documents and guidance. The primary responsibility for checking the accuracy of published information rests with the head of section in which the information is generated and in many cases further independent scrutiny takes place.

71 The audit team reviewed the prospectus and the institution's website as well as the entries on the Unistats and UCAS websites. The team found clear evidence that the institution was making publicly available the documentation suggested in Annex F of HEFCE circular 2006/45. The team learnt from various sources that most students found the information about the institution to be accurate.

72 Students receive programme specifications, various handbooks and study guides, which most found useful, accessible and easy to follow. The audit team was confident that changes to programmes would be incorporated in student handbooks, unit study guides or other information to students as appropriate, and changes will be incorporated in the programme specification at the next cycle of revision. The team was made aware of some concerns raised by the institution itself over the consistency of the student handbooks, which had been addressed by a checklist of expected contents to achieve greater standardisation. Through an examination of booklets and handbooks, the team generally found them to meet the expectations of the checklist, although it was noted that several had not yet fully applied the newer requirement to include student comments.

73 As a result of sampling the published information, and from what the audit team heard from students and staff, the team formed the view that overall reliance can be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

## **Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations**

### **Features of good practice**

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

- the comprehensive arrangements for student feedback and its use in quality assurance and enhancement (paragraph 30)
- the enhancement of the student experience through the provision of opportunities for self-development (paragraph 42)
- the contribution of the Centre for Learning and Teaching in support of staff development and the furtherance of the University College's quality enhancement agenda (paragraphs 43 and 48)
- the thorough and well-conceived plans for securing the research degree experience of the initial intake of students (paragraph 69).

### **Recommendations for action**

75 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- review its Codes of Practice and associated documentation to ensure appropriate recognition of the specific quality assurance needs of collaborative provision (paragraphs 53, 54, 56, and 59 to 62)
- review the operation of its quality management processes for collaborative provision to ensure they are fully implemented (paragraphs 57 and 62).

76 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- formalise the role of Chief External Examiner in the institution's Codes of Practice for external examining and conduct of boards of examiners (paragraph 20)
- effect regular review of aggregated statistical data to facilitate consideration of academic performance at the institutional level (paragraphs 27 and 38)
- make systematic and timely consideration of revisions of the *Code of practice* and other elements of the Academic Infrastructure as they are published (paragraph 25)
- make explicit expectations for the quality assurance of programme placement arrangements in order to strengthen institutional oversight (paragraph 34).

## Appendix

### **The Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln's response to the Institutional audit report**

The University College welcomes the auditors' judgement that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of its present and likely future management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

The University College seeks to ensure that its quality assurance processes are directed towards safeguarding and improving the student experience. It is therefore particularly pleasing that the auditors found evidence of a systematic approach to enhancement at institutional level and considered the way in which student feedback is used in quality assurance and enhancement to represent an aspect of good practice. For the same reason, we are gratified that the audit team found instances of good practice in the provision of opportunities for students' self-development and the plans for securing the experience of the first intake of postgraduate research students. We are also pleased to note the team's recognition of the important role played by the Centre for Learning and Teaching in contributing to the institution's approach to quality enhancement.

The University College is grateful to the audit team for its constructive advice on the ways in which the institution could strengthen its procedures further. Actions have been planned, and in some cases implemented, in response to each of the team's recommendations.

In particular, we note that, although the team considered the academic standards and quality of collaborative provision to be securely managed, there are a number of respects in which the associated processes could be more fully reflected in institutional codes of practice and related documents. Prompt action will be taken to make the recommended additions. The auditors also noted that, while the documentation associated with work-based and placement learning was generally clear and appropriate, there was no overarching statement of principles at institutional level to ensure consistency of practice. Procedures reflecting the relevant section of the Code of practice have now been approved and steps will also be taken to ensure that future revisions to the Academic Infrastructure receive formal consideration through the deliberative committees as they are published. We are taking steps to provide appropriately aggregated data for Academic Board and its subordinate committees to assist them in monitoring student achievement at institutional level. Revisions are also planned to the Code of Practice on External Examining to define the remit of the Chief External Examiner to achieve greater clarity with regard to responsibilities in those larger programmes where a team of examiners operates.

In conclusion, we would wish to acknowledge the courteous and professional way in which the audit team conducted its interactions with staff and students during its visits to the University College.

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