



Application for taught degree awarding powers: Leeds College of Art

Scrutiny team report

May 2016

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About this report

This report reflects the findings of a team appointed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to conduct a detailed scrutiny of an application from Leeds College of Art (the College) for the power to award taught degrees.

The application was considered under criteria approved by Government in 2004. In advising on applications, QAA is guided by the relevant criteria and the associated evidence requirements. QAA's work in this area is overseen by its Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP), a subcommittee of the QAA Board.

ACDAP's initial consideration of applications establishes whether an applicant has made a case to proceed to detailed scrutiny of the application and the evidence on which it is based. If satisfied on this matter, ACDAP agrees that a team may be appointed to conduct the scrutiny and prepare a report, enabling ACDAP to determine the nature of the recommendation it will make to the QAA Board.

Scrutiny teams produce reports following each of the engagements undertaken. The final report reflects the team's findings and is structured around the four main criteria contained in the 2004 TDAP criteria,¹ namely:

- governance and academic management
- academic standards and quality assurance
- scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff
- the environment supporting the delivery of taught higher education programmes.

Subject to the approval of the Board, QAA's advice is communicated to the appropriate minister. This advice is provided in confidence. The minister determines whether it should be disclosed to the applicant. A final decision on an application, and the notification of that decision, is a matter for the Privy Council.

¹ The TDAP criteria are available in Appendix 1 of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' Applications for the grant of taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers and university title: Guidance for applicant organisations in England and Wales (August 2004), available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32388/11-781-applications-for-degree-awarding-powers-guidance.pdf (PDF, 304KB).

Executive summary

Governance and academic management

The Board of Governors consists of 16 members, including the Principal, the Students' Union President and a staff governor, and meets at least six times a year. There are three subcommittees that have an advisory role. Governors are carefully chosen in light of the skillset required overall by the Board, and provided with induction, training and ongoing updating.

The governance model operating since 2011-12 retains the governors' responsibility for the monitoring of financial and academic matters at the level of the main Board. This shortens the decision-making chain and ensures that all governors participate in debating the key business of the Board. The effectiveness of this model was reviewed in 2013 and found to be working well.

Governors rigorously challenge, query and seek clarification from the Senior Management Team (SMT) on matters discussed. The development of formal key performance indicators (KPIs) has helped the oversight and monitoring of key aspects of the College's business, and works on a traffic light system.

The Principal heads the SMT in a flat management structure appropriate to the size of the institution. The SMT listens carefully to the advice of the governors. The Academic Board is the senior deliberative forum and discharges its responsibilities for the safeguarding of academic standards according to the requirements of its awarding body through the deliberative committee structure.

The scrutiny team concluded that there was potential for greater development of the student voice in the context of programme boards, where the lengthy and very formal agenda did not encourage or facilitate full student involvement.

Financial management is rigorous and carefully monitored by the SMT and the governors, with appropriate procedures for risk management. The institution is in a healthy financial position, classified by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) as 'not at higher risk', and is planning an extension of its higher education campus, which it will fund itself.

Resource allocation is the result of a carefully built up set of information. The physical and human resource requirements of each course are set at validation and may later be modified by course evaluations. The budget arising from these models is considered by the Audit Committee, which scrutinises it on behalf of the Board of Governors, to which it then reports. There is rigorous challenge and debate on these matters.

Academic standards and quality assurance

The current regulations comply with the requirements of the awarding body, the Open University (OU), and are efficiently operated. The devolved nature of the OU partnership allows the College to enhance certain policies and procedures such as the introduction of the Chief External Examiner (CEE), an innovation praised by the OU. In this way the College has prepared other changes it would make were it to be granted TDAP.

All processes for quality assurance are aligned with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and fulfil the requirements of the OU, which finds the College an effective and at times innovative Associate College. Policies are well thought through, carefully managed, and well publicised to staff and students.

There is a set of procedures for the design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes, which is operated rigorously and thoroughly to ensure that the provision of the College is of an appropriate standard, is industry current and offers students a rewarding and challenging learning experience. Extensive use is made of externals from other institutions, national arts organisation and employers. There are external members on the major deliberative committees to add a level of objectivity.

In the light of what is overall a self-critical community, there has been some slowness to take action in the light of variability in the level of evaluation in some Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs). National Student Survey (NSS) results in 2012-13 showed significant reductions in scores particularly in feedback and assessment questions, but it was not until 2014-15, despite the concern of the OU about one programme, that effective action showed results.

In other respects the College is self-critical. It actively seeks ways to improve how it carries out procedures, and makes use of staff expertise and new technical developments to enhance its offer. Care is taken to ensure that staff are kept informed of relevant changes in policies and procedures.

The College is effective at working through its various strategies and in encouraging and developing new ideas. One of its new programmes was suggested by a fractional member of staff. Opportunities are widely sought to bring in guest speakers, identify placements and hold live briefs, which all enhance the employment readiness of students.

Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff

The College has effective recruitment, staff development and monitoring processes, which ensure that there is an appropriately qualified and resourced staffing base, and that programmes have the correct balance of academic and relevant industry experience in the teams.

Staff are well qualified and show a developing profile of qualifications such as doctorates, study for which is supported by the College. Two-thirds of higher education staff are fractional appointments allowing the input of professional expertise, which is highly valued by students. Many staff belong to peer and professional networks and national sector bodies. Membership of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) is strongly encouraged.

During the course of the scrutiny the profile of research has increased considerably. The College has been proactive in developing this through initiatives including the appointment of two post-doctoral Junior Research Fellows and in the funds made available to support staff in developing their research profile. The formation of research clusters, by topic, has accelerated the rate of research activity among most of the staff. Recognised outcomes are clearly evident.

A comprehensive programme of continuing professional development is offered to all staff. The appraisal process leads to opportunities to undertake further research and/or development, and to the sharing of good practice through events such as staff conferences. Staff are experienced in curriculum development and validation; much experience was gained when the College changed awarding bodies in 2006. A growing number are external examiners elsewhere and take part in validations as external panel members.

The environment supporting the delivery of taught higher education programmes

The College is proactive in monitoring and developing its activities in the learning environment. Evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching and learning derives from the annual programme evaluations (APEs), to which external examiners and students contribute

and which are reported to the OU. Feedback from these and other sources drive changes that assist students in achieving their learning outcomes.

Students normally receive summative feedback on their work within three weeks, although there is no specific time for this set out in College policy. Although the results and the quality of feedback are carefully monitored, the College does not yet have a mechanism for knowing when students have received their results and feedback. Complaints and appeals are well advertised and well managed. Students know how to use these mechanisms, although the ready access to staff often resolves problems at an early stage.

Thorough and effective inductions are offered to all staff and students. Students appreciate the excellent learning support materials available to them and rate the College highly in this area. The resource planning process and effective use of feedback ensures that all courses are annually monitored for their requirements and any changes which occur.

Staff appraisals are carried out annually for staff in all areas and used to develop further the opportunities offered to them. Staff feel well supported by the range of opportunities possible and the College makes a significant investment in this area. The College is of a size where staff all know each other and the supportive environment enriches collegial interaction, which promotes effective working practices.

The College has shown its commitment to a high quality learning environment through, for example, significant investment in recent years with the creation of new senior posts and structures, such as the Academic Registry and management information systems. The focus of quality with the Registry promotes the efficient functioning of procedures and their communication to all staff.

Information is rigorously monitored and checked before being published. The highly rated website attracts many students from the UK, EU and further afield. The removal of specific information about courses from the hard copy prospectus and the direction of potential students to the Finance Office ensure they can always receive current information about fees from the website. Administrative staff are meticulous about the cross-checking of key data such as assessment results.

The College is committed to a broad interpretation of equality, diversity and fairness. It maintains both Investors in People and Investors in Diversity and scrupulously monitors qualitative and quantitative data to take forward its policies in this area.

Privy Council's decision

The Privy Council's decision is to grant Leeds College of Art indefinite taught degree awarding powers from 13 September 2016.

Introduction

This report provides a summary of the work and findings of the scrutiny team (the team) appointed by QAA to review in detail the evidence submitted in support of an application for taught degree awarding powers (TDAP) by Leeds College of Art (the College).

The application was considered by QAA's Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP) in May 2014 when the Committee agreed to proceed to the detailed scrutiny of the application. The team appointed to conduct the detailed scrutiny comprised Mr Graham Brotherton, Mrs Patricia Millner and Professor Katherine Leni Oglesby, and the secretary was Dr Jacqueline Gresham. The detailed scrutiny was managed on behalf of QAA by Dr Penny McCracken, Assistant Director.

The detailed scrutiny began in October 2014, culminating in a report to ACDAP in May 2016. In the course of the scrutiny, the team read a wide range of documents presented as part of the evidence in support of the application. The team also spoke to a range of the College's stakeholders, and observed meetings and events pertinent to the application.

Key information about Leeds College of Art

Leeds School of Art was founded in 1846, on the merger of the Literary Institute with the Leeds Mechanics Institute, which had offered classes in perspective, figure and landscape drawing since its formation in 1824. In 1903 Leeds School of Art moved into a purpose-built building in Vernon Street, now the main centre for further education. It counts many famous alumni among its former students: for example, Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth enrolled in 1919 and 1920 respectively. The School changed its name to the Jacob Kramer College in the late 1960s after the local eminent artist. This remained its name until it became an independent corporation in 1993, when it took the name Leeds College of Art and Design, which became Leeds College of Art in 2009. It operates from two campuses within the city centre – one for further education and the other for higher education.

There are no departments or schools. The three directors in the SMT chair many of the major committees and manage the programme leaders, some of whom may be responsible for a cluster of programmes in a cognate area.

In 1994 the College became an affiliated college of the University of Leeds, which enabled it to offer degree courses. When the University withdrew from validation activity in 2005, the College chose the Open University as its validating partner.

The College had 1,878 students registered overall in 2015-16, of whom 1,293 were studying for a higher education award. The large majority were from the UK, with 26 from the EU and 50 from further afield.

There are 55 full-time permanent academic staff, and 35 fractional permanent academic staff; there are no hourly paid staff. In addition, there are 19 full-time and 12 fractional workshop staff who contribute to the learning and teaching experience and environment.

The College's mission is 'We are an influential, world-facing, creatively driven institution where professional educators, practitioners and researchers work together to develop and enable excellence. We aim to promote distinctive, critically informed and relevant practice in order to support economic growth and cultural advancement'.

Detailed scrutiny against taught degree awarding powers criteria

A Governance and academic management

Criterion A1

An organisation granted taught degree awarding powers is governed, managed and administered effectively, with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities. Its financial management is sound and a clear relationship exists between its financial policy and the safeguarding of the quality and standards of its higher education provision. In the case of an organisation that is not primarily a higher education institution, its principal activities are compatible with the provision of higher education programmes and awards.

1 The respective roles and responsibilities of the Board of Governors (the Board), the Principal and Academic Board are defined in the College's Articles of Government approved by the Privy Council in 2011, when the College became a Higher Education Corporation. The College's decision to apply for TDAP forms part of its current strategic plan (2012-17) and it has approached seeking degree awarding powers in a structured and systematic way. The process has been led by the Board and the SMT.

2 There are currently 16 governors, including the Principal, one staff governor and two student governors, one for higher education and one for further education. The Board meets at least six times a year and has three subcommittees: Audit, Remuneration and Search, and Nominations. The Audit Committee meets four times per year. The Board adopted the 'policy governance' model, which focuses particularly on the College's strategic aims, monitoring of KPIs, the monitoring by the Board of its own role and responsibilities, regularly reviewing its effectiveness, and the accountability of the Principal as CEO for the achievement of the strategic aims.

3 Observation of the Audit Committee meetings confirmed that there was proper scrutiny of both proposals and reports by those governors present and that they demonstrated appropriate contextual understanding of the higher education environment. The Principal, who is also the Chief Executive of the College, determines the College's academic activities after consultation with the Academic Board. There was clear evidence that the Principal, with the support of the SMT, undertakes her role as claimed in the application, and that the SMT discharges its role effectively. Indeed, the size of the SMT and the flat structure in the institution allow the SMT to have a detailed knowledge and oversight of the College's activities.

4 In accordance with the model set out above, the Board undertook a governance review during the transition to a Higher Education Corporation with a view to enhancing the Board's effectiveness in discharging its responsibility for the overall management of higher education activities. The Board has actively sought to ensure there is expertise on the governing body for a number of key issues, including recruiting people with experience at a senior level of other higher education institutions, those with financial and strategic management expertise, and those with an understanding of equality and diversity issues. The membership has been carefully managed through an active recruitment process to ensure there is an appropriate mix of skills, including experience of TDAP elsewhere and expertise in the creative sector. Two of the current governing body work in other higher education institutions and two others have previously done so. At least two of the governors

have also been governors of other higher education institutions. The expertise is appropriately distributed across the Board's subcommittees, and discussion at these meetings reflected an appropriate level of current knowledge in terms of both the Quality Code and the wider legal and policy context. There is a training programme for governors to support them in undertaking their scrutiny role effectively. The Board and the Audit Committee members: challenge, with rigour and hard questioning, claims made to them by the SMT; probe the reality behind committee reports; and request clarification, especially in respect of data, in order to assess where the College stands within the national context. It is also clear that the SMT listens carefully to the advice of the governors, as in the recommendation for earlier scanning of the higher education horizon, and took action to create the new post of Strategic Planning Analyst to assist the College. Nonetheless, these debates always take place in a collegial and supportive manner.

5 The independent Clerk to the Board of Governors plays a central role in coordinating the training of governors, and in ensuring they receive appropriate training and updating to discharge their responsibilities effectively in relation to the Quality Code and other guidance, and to enable the Board to benefit from a wide range of specialist skills. The role has no other remit within the College.

6 The College has a direct funding arrangement with HEFCE in respect of its higher education provision and receives grant funding from the Skills Funding Agency. For the financial year 2014-15 the College had a total income of £14.3 million, of which approximately £10 million came directly from its higher education activities and around £3.6 million from its further education activities. This compared to £9.3 million and £3.8 million respectively, with a total income of just over £13.3 million in 2013-14 confirming the College's increasing emphasis on the steady growth of higher education activity. Financial modelling is robust and the College's financial position is healthy, with net assets of £21.3 million at the end of the 2014-15 financial year. Accounts are monitored by the SMT on a monthly basis and formal reports are provided to the Board of Governors. The Audit Committee takes into account HEFCE's annual assessment of institutional risk, normally produced in March. The Audit Committee and the Board discuss this letter in June and are advised by the Director of Finance on any decision that should be taken. It is currently in the HEFCE 'not at higher risk' category. On the basis of HEFCE's information on its indicators, the College appears to be on a sound financial basis.

7 The Audit Committee also produces an annual report for the year ending in July for the governors and the Principal, as the accountable officer, and, on the basis of this report, approves the College's annual assurance return and its financial forecast to HEFCE. The governors agreed that the College should also submit an optional Value for Money report and adopt in 2014 the Transparent Approach to Costing system. Governors on the Audit Committee and the Board have the appropriate expertise to evaluate the College's financial matters. Observations of both the Audit Committee and the full Board confirmed that the claim in the application that governors ensure robust formal public accountability is met.

8 The College's subject area requires considerable specialist equipment and use of space. The resource allocation process begins with an annual budget drawn up by the Director of Finance, the Principal and the Head of Human Resources. The original budget is set at validation and any subsequent enhancements are identified through the APEs, which provide the opportunity for staff and students to influence the process (see paragraphs 56-58). This culminates in a budget, which is scrutinised by the SMT, and by the Board at its July meeting. The process is clearly understood and supported by governors, senior managers, staff and students, and both staff and students felt that resources and equipment were a key strength of the College.

9 The management of the College lies with the SMT, which consists of five people: the Principal, the Director of Finance and three directors of studies, comprising the Director of Studies, Professional and External Development (DOSPED); the Director of Studies, Progression and Student Support (DOSPSS); and the Director of Studies, Higher Education Enhancement and Research (DOSHEER). This is a relatively streamlined structure, appropriate to the size of the College, and the specific roles of each director are clearly defined within job descriptions. Evidence shows that it functions effectively, with each member of the team demonstrating an understanding of their role, and with issues being debated in a frank and open way with a critical but collegial approach. Each of the members of the SMT has clearly defined areas of responsibility, which are understood by governors, staff and students.

10 Quality assurance is overseen and managed by the Academic Registry, established in 2012, and in particular by the Deputy Academic Registrar (Quality and Standards) and the Quality and Standards Office, in conjunction with the directors of studies and programme leaders, who all have their defined responsibilities. The HE Committee is the highest quality assurance committee and receives items from the programmes, and other relevant committees and working groups, and reports to Academic Board. At the start of the process of applying for TDAP, a TDAP Transition Group was set up to coordinate the transition process and it has met on a regular basis through the scrutiny period.

11 The College is currently planning a significant expansion of its estate through building an extension of its higher education campus, which it plans to fund out of its capital reserves. The development has been approached in a cautious and strategic way, which reinforces the sense that financial planning up to this point has been both prudent and effective.

12 The Academic Board is the College's senior deliberative committee and is responsible for the oversight of academic standards, research, scholarship, learning and teaching (including the quality of the student learning experience), and programmes at the College subject to the overall responsibility of the Board of Governors and the Principal. The HE Committee; Research Committee; Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee (LTE Committee); and the Further Education Committee all report to the Academic Board, and together these form the main part of the deliberative structure.

13 Prior to its application the College undertook a mapping of its provision against the Quality Code, particularly *Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval* through to *Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints*, covering the key approaches to the quality of student learning opportunities, and Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision. This mapping identifies where the College demonstrates alignment and who has responsibility for oversight of the different areas. The mapping is detailed and appropriate, and the application states that this is repeated whenever a chapter of the Quality Code is revised. The resulting document has been seen and approved by the Academic Board and the HE Committee. Observations and scrutiny of the minutes of both of these committees confirm that reviewing the impact of external guidance from both external agencies and the OU formed a substantial part of their deliberations. Understanding of the Quality Code is clearly demonstrated within the College's Quality Handbook, which sets out all the quality assurance policies and procedures, and was evident in the validation process observed during the scrutiny period.

14 Of particular and specific relevance to the College, given its range of provision, is health and safety legislation; there are clear systems for managing staff and student safety, with detailed induction processes and a system of review through the Health and Safety Committee, as well as an annual Health and Safety Report, which goes to the Board of Governors.

15 The College has UK Border Agency Highly Trusted Sponsor status as a result of an audit in 2012. It has sought to increase the number of international students and there was a modest increase during the scrutiny period.

16 There is strong evidence that full account is taken of higher education legislative requirements and developments. The SMT is alert to the external educational environment and communicates effectively across the College, ensuring awareness and understanding of sector-wide higher education matters and their impact on the provision. The Principal's briefings provide an effective method for ensuring that this is disseminated widely and this is reinforced by staff development where appropriate.

17 The College's development is framed around the current Strategic Plan 2012-17. The College is about to begin developing its new plan. Governors and staff are evidently familiar with the plan and understand how to work within it, and there is a systematic process for informing students through student representatives' meetings and programme boards. The Strategic Plan was drawn up through a process of consultation and shows that governors, managers and staff have given considerable thought to the College's mission and values through a proper process of deliberation and consultation. Updates against the KPIs derived from the Strategic Plan are presented to the governors on an annual basis in a detailed way, and there was evidence that the governors tested in debate any assumptions or assertions made in the report.

18 The College reviews its performance through a system of KPIs, which are monitored using a 'traffic light' approach. These are reviewed on a regular basis by both the SMT and governors, where there is evidence of full discussion of KPIs that fall into the red or orange categories. KPIs are set through a benchmarking approach, which draws on a range of sources including evaluation of internal data, benchmarking against other higher education institutions and specialist institutions, together with external expertise such as that provided by the College's auditors. The deliberative committees also play a central and effective role in terms of the development and monitoring of policy and processes.

19 The SMT meetings provide a mechanism for deliberation and dissemination of policy and practice around key issues, and observations of the SMT confirmed that full and detailed evaluative discussion takes place. The SMT is complemented by the informal Leadership Group consisting of some programme leaders and heads of services. It is primarily operational and is not minuted. The Principal's regular briefings, together with the programme boards, also provided a useful forum for ensuring knowledge and understanding of the College's mission and policies, although in both of these contexts there appears in practice to be a somewhat limited amount of active student engagement. On a more formal level, however, the College has acted to ensure student presence on all deliberative committees and to support the development of the Students' Union through the creation of a sabbatical Students' Union President in 2014. The SMT also meets four times a year with the Students' Union Executive, and the Students' Union President has additional meetings with the DOSPSS.

20 College policies and associated guidance are easily available to both staff and students through the Quality Handbook on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE), including links to the regulations of the OU. The scrutiny team saw that they are also updated on a regular basis. The regular meetings of the Staff Consultative Committee are the fora at which information is disseminated directly by members of the SMT, who can receive feedback and questions. Regular but informal meetings are held with the higher education student representatives by the Principal and directors of studies. There is a clarity of function and responsibility at all levels in the organisation in relation to its governance structures and systems for managing its higher education provision.

21 In 2012 the College created a single Academic Registry with overall responsibility for quality assurance, admissions and the administration of the assessment and progression processes. It is led by the Academic Registrar, alongside a Deputy Academic Registrar with a specific remit for quality and standards. The Registry is responsible for publishing the Quality Handbook and undertaking any updating to policies required. The OU devolves to its partner institutions a considerable level of responsibility for assessment (see paragraph 38). The examination board process is managed by the College, with the OU representative present on an audio link at the final board. The Registry manages the assessment board and admissions processes, both of which were observed to be well managed and efficient. Students in particular praised the way in which the application process worked.

22 The current Principal took up her post in 2009, having been Vice-Principal since 2004. She oversaw the transition of the College to the higher education sector in 2011. The current Strategic Plan, including the application for TDAP, was therefore developed under her leadership. Currently, management at programme level is undertaken by programme leaders and overseen by one of the directors of studies, although the College is in the process of moving to a system of subject-based leadership, with responsibilities for single programmes being taken on by principal lecturers. As is normal in creative arts institutions, the College also makes substantial use of technical staff through a system of workshop managers, and instructor technicians. These are people with significant technical expertise, some with master's level qualifications, who support students in the practical aspects of their studies. Both staff and students testified to an effective working relationship between academic and technical staff. The teaching staff overall are well qualified, experienced in higher education and also active as practitioners. They bring external contacts and experience, which adds greatly to the experience of students (see also Criterion C).

23 The deliberative structure operates through the system of committees. The Academic Board is the senior academic committee and deals with all matters relating to the teaching, scholarship, research and academic portfolio of the College. The HE Committee; the LTE Committee, more recently set up; the Research Committee; and the Further Education Committee all report to the Academic Board, as does the Final Examination and Progression Committee. Programme boards report directly to the HE Committee. Programme leaders provide academic leadership to the respective programmes and inform the HE Committee on issues that have College-level implications or significance. Given the size of the College, the flat committee structure allows for the involvement of a significant proportion of staff in the committees. This contributes to the sense of ownership of the matters discussed. There is also an external academic member.

24 Observations of all these committees confirmed that they discharge their functions effectively, although it was the view of the scrutiny team that there was potential for greater development of the student voice in the context of programme boards where the lengthy and very formal agenda did not encourage or facilitate full student involvement.

25 Throughout the quality assurance processes observed the scrutiny team saw that staff were appropriately qualified for the roles they undertook throughout, and that the College has an effective staff development policy that supports staff when there are changes in regulations or procedures. Staff have a considerable combined experience of validation and monitoring under the regimes of their previous two successive awarding bodies.

26 There was clear evidence both from observations and minutes of previous meetings that the Academic Board and the HE Committee play key roles in the development and review of policy and regulations. Changes are reported to the Board of Governors and students are informed through programme committees.

27 The College has a clear schedule for the updating of both academic and other policies, and up-to-date versions are available on the VLE. The College's current version of the Quality Handbook, in which all the quality assurance policies and procedures are collated, is accessible through the VLE. The College has an induction process and organises updating events for staff on changes in policies and procedures; the Principal also holds briefings for staff three times a year. Programme leaders are expected to ensure that staff in their area are kept up to date.

28 The TDAP Transition Group has approached the process of policy review and development in a structured and systematic way, and observations of this group confirmed that a diligent and detailed approach to creating a set of structures and processes suitable for TDAP is in place. The OU confirms the College's ability to manage existing quality systems and has made it an official partner institution, fully supporting the College's application for TDAP.

29 The nature of the academic portfolio means that links with employers within the creative sector are regarded as highly important; the College has addressed this strategically through the appointment of governors from the sector. It has also been effective in engaging employers as active partners within the curriculum through the provision of live briefs, for example, and in a more general way through its creative networks initiative, which brings in external speakers to offer expertise, experience and constructive criticism in various formats. Employers reported that the College was proactive in its engagement with them and also comment favourably on the quality of the College's graduates.

30 As outlined above, the College has a process for the review of its policies and processes in accordance with the power currently delegated to it. This is coordinated by the Academic Registry and overseen by the HE Committee and Academic Board, with final approval being sought from the OU. At present, much of this work has been organised through the TDAP Transition Group, but there is no reason to suggest that the deliberative structures are not sufficiently robust to manage the processes should TDAP be granted. The College has also used its internal auditors to carry out a process audit of its quality processes in 2012; this report was presented to the Audit Committee. The report, after confirming that quality assurance systems were robust, made a number of relatively minor recommendations such as making all policies and processes available in an electronic format, which subsequently have all been addressed. The College states in its application that it has a process for the systematic review of policies, and scrutiny of the policies on the VLE confirmed that regular review and updating indeed take place.

31 The College has a risk register, which is overseen by the governors through the Audit Committee, where any changes in identified risk are evaluated. The SMT also monitors the risk register and discusses relevant issues on a regular basis. Academic risk feeds into this process through the AMR for the College, which is seen by the Board of Governors through receipt of Academic Board minutes before it is sent to the OU. Minutes of Board meetings, and observations of both these and the Academic Board, confirmed that scrutiny took place and that governors asked for updates and proposed actions where appropriate.

32 As highlighted above, the College has approached its development in recent years in a structured and systematic way. The College is willing to review its portfolio in light of the changing external context and has negotiated the transition to becoming a higher education institution. This has been done in a collegial and supportive way, with an open approach to developing new provision, some in response to staff ideas. For example, a recent call to all staff for suggestions for new programmes has led to the validation of a new BA in Fashion Photography for 2016. At the final external validation event for this programme the College was commended by the OU on its strategic response to programme development.

33 The College has taken steps to ensure that each of the deliberative committees that consider quality and academic standards has appropriate external representation on them, and that these external members asked appropriately challenging questions and provided useful advice; observations confirmed that the committees performed their role in a diligent and appropriately detailed way.

34 The College regards the external examiner system as its way of ensuring academic standards are maintained. It manages the external examiner system internally and nominates suitable candidates to the OU. It also appoints the CEE. External examiners are drawn from a range of appropriate institutions. The creation of the Academic Registry and a coordinated quality system, with clear processes set out in the Quality Handbook, have played a role in this. Most external examiners' reports are very positive; on the occasions that they are not, the response letters and associated APEs address issues raised and possible actions to be taken. There is evidence of effective oversight of this process through annual monitoring.

35 The College also has clearly developed staff development and review systems, and a structured system of research and scholarly activity, which has time allocated to it. There is also an internal system of peer review of learning and teaching, which is overseen by the LTE Committee.

36 The College has already demonstrated the capacity to take a strategic approach to managing change in its development up to this point. It has taken a proactive approach to ensuring it has a fit-for-purpose governing body, and has clear executive and deliberative structures. It also operates many of its quality assurance processes itself according to the devolved powers and with monitoring and support from the OU. Governors, the SMT and the broader College academic community have demonstrated a capacity to reflect upon structures, systems and policies and use them as a basis for further development. There is still space for developing further student involvement in the deliberative structures, most notably in programme boards. Given the effective way in which the College has managed its development up to this point the scrutiny team sees no reason why it should not have the capability to manage the extra responsibilities which would be vested in it, should its application be approved.

B Academic standards and quality assurance

Criterion B1

An organisation granted taught degree awarding powers has in place an appropriate regulatory framework to govern the award of its higher education qualifications.

37 The College describes its regulatory framework as having achieved a significant level of maturity, having evolved over many years, first under the guidance of the University of Leeds, and, since 2005, the OU. It considers the framework to provide a comprehensive reference point to inform the quality assurance infrastructure and academic conduct of both its students and staff, and to be sufficiently robust to adopt, with some adaptations, following TDAP.

38 Ultimate responsibility and oversight for academic standards and assurance currently lies with the OU, which is the validating body. The OU conducts an annual review of the performance of the College through institutional review, which comprises an AMR including details of individual programmes, as well as through course validation. The OU has devolved a high level of authority to the College, which has taken increasing responsibility for overseeing its own delivery, and refining and improving its assurance practices; the College now exercises a large degree of autonomy. The OU has expressed confidence in its delegated arrangements and expressed itself as satisfied overall with the College's performance, although there is evidence that there were some concerns at one point in relation to performance and reporting (see paragraph 110).

39 The College Quality Handbook is guided by the OU's Handbook for Validated Awards. The policies which govern the College's practices in relation to the regulatory framework are written by the College and based on the Quality Code. The Handbook is comprehensive and clear, and is widely understood and adhered to by staff. Monitoring of staff compliance with the handbook is undertaken by staff within the Registry.

40 The College has been working for some time on a regulatory framework appropriate for the granting of its own higher education awards, based on its experience of operating under two validating institutions and the specific demands of its subject specialist provision. It is evident that the College has considered adaptations to the OU regulatory framework that it thinks would accord better with the requirements of the curriculum it offers. Any adaptations, revisions and amendments of the framework are thought through and scrutinised carefully by committees in both the deliberative and executive management committee structure, as well as the TDAP Transition Group, before being approved by the Academic Board. Revisions that have already been made include the introduction of a Final Examination and Progression Committee within the deliberative structure for the purpose of confirming all degree and progression decisions recommended by examination and progression boards. In addition, the College has created the CEE role (see paragraph 86).

41 There is no reason to suppose that the College would not continue to be effective in maintaining appropriate standards for its higher education provision without the involvement of the present validating body. The OU has indicated that it has every confidence in the College's standards of provision.

Criterion B2

An organisation granted taught degree awarding powers has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for defining and securing the academic standards of its higher education provision.

42 Evidence that programmes of study for higher education awards are offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of the FHEQ is available from the scrutiny of programme validation documents; peer scrutiny of the APEs; and verification by external examiners that these levels are used in examination board papers and reflected in the assessment criteria and marking of student work. The FHEQ is used when new programmes are approved, and there is explicit reference in prevalidation and validation processes and documentation to the College's higher education awards being in alignment with the framework. Both internal and external peer involvement in programme approval assists in establishing the appropriate levels of programmes for the awards, as does the inclusion of external members on those key committees, which are mostly concerned with the academic standing of the programmes.

43 In seeking to establish and maintain comparability of standards with other providers of higher education awards, advice is explicitly sought from academic peers from other higher education institutions and from those in the appropriate professional employment fields. All degree programmes have external examiners drawn from an appropriate peer institution, and external peers are routinely used in the approval and review of programmes.

44 The process within the College for the development of new programmes and their approval and validation is carefully articulated through a three-stage process: SMT scrutiny, internal validation and external validation. The validation process is clear and comprehensive in its scope, and thorough and systematic in its operation.

45 The College approval process prior to a formal internal validation meeting encompasses an initial discussion of the proposal with the SMT, which includes agreement that the proposal both fits with the College's Strategic Plan and is financially viable. After approval by the Academic Board there is a preliminary validation resource meeting, which addresses and plans the physical and human resources required to support the curriculum delivery.

46 The internal validation panel is chaired by a director of studies and includes, in addition to the programme team responsible for the proposal: two programme leaders from other subject areas, one of whom will have acted as a College internal peer reviewer for the proposal; the Deputy Academic Registrar (Quality and Standards); and a student representative. In addition, there is an external member, described as the process panel member, who is from another HEI and present in the role of a critical friend. The agenda for the internal first stage of validation covers all relevant aspects.

47 The two-day external panel meeting is organised, coordinated and chaired by the OU as validating body. It includes three external subject experts from other higher education institutions, together with two senior members of the OU's validation and partnerships team. There is a formal meeting to discuss the proposal with the College, followed by a private panel deliberation to arrive at its verdict.

48 These procedures are extremely thorough and robust, widely understood, and appear consistently implemented. Considerable care is taken over all stages of the approval process through to validation. The use of external representatives on the panel, as well as the OU representative, enables the College to benchmark its practice against sector norms.

The validation unit at the OU has expressed its trust and respect for the work of the College, and clearly views it as a worthy provider of higher education programmes.

49 The requirement for establishing and maintaining comparability of standards with other higher education providers is repeatedly evidenced at a number of levels: through external members of the LTE Committee and the Academic Board; external examiners' reports; events organised in conjunction with appropriate industry partners; and visits from external reviewers. Membership of the LTE Committee includes a person external to the College with long experience of university teaching, who has also been a QAA reviewer and worked with the HEA. This person also attends the HE Committee meeting at which the APEs are reviewed in detail (see paragraph 93). The Chair of the HE Committee is clear on how the membership of this Committee, and of the LTE Committee, had been augmented positively by an external member, whose role is to bring an external perspective and critical distance to the deliberations of the committees.

50 There is clear evidence that degree programmes are benchmarked against appropriate standards, through external members of committees and validation panels, and to the FHEQ. The levels are scrutinised carefully and expressed in learning outcomes. There is currently only one level 7 award, with a small cohort of students, but great care is taken with this programme to scrutinise its level, resources, achievements and outcomes. The level of involvement by external professionals in supporting the programmes, assisting with development, and providing placement opportunities is high. There is no reason to doubt that this approach would continue without the involvement of the OU.

51 The programme approval procedures, as described above, are carefully documented for staff; the procedures are widely understood, appear consistently implemented and routinely address matters of rationale for the introduction of the programme, its standards, learning resources, including technical and IT requirements, and student support.

52 The monitoring arrangements are conducted largely through the regular programme boards held for each programme, the agenda for which follows a set template, to ensure full consideration of curriculum content, assessment, and learning and teaching strategies. Each board is chaired by the programme leader and membership includes members of the academic, technical and administrative staff, and student representatives from each level of study. A director of studies may also attend the meetings. The topics for consideration and monitoring of the programme cover the programme leader's report, matters of learning, teaching and assessment, quality assurance, equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), health and safety, student feedback, and staff development. Matters for information and discussion include feedback on the business of the major deliberative committees. The deliberations of the programme boards are fed through to the HE Committee, which all programme leaders attend, and at which they are invited to raise any specific issues, comments or observations arising from their board meetings. The length of the agenda and the formality of the meetings can discourage student participation.

53 Each programme is required to complete an annual review of its operations, via a comprehensive APE form, the set template for which details a range of relevant areas. It also requires student feedback on their learning experience, as seen through the NSS results and the College's internal student surveys of levels 4 and 5 students, and also student preparation for employment. These APEs, together with their enhancement action plans, are scrutinised firstly by two peers, who consider whether the available evidence on the programmes supports the evaluations made, identify any deficiencies and suggest appropriate action plans. These evaluations, and the action plans arising from them, are reviewed by the HE Committee at its first meeting of the academic year. During the exercise all examination methods are monitored for their aptness in helping students achieve their

intended learning outcomes, and external examiners comment on the appropriateness and validity of the assessment tasks in relation to module and programme specifications. The value of this exercise lies not only in evaluating the consistency of assessment briefs across the College via the Assessment Review Process (ARP), but in promoting shared learning of good practice across the College programmes. This information provides the basis for a cross-College review of its programmes; forms are forwarded to the HE Committee for scrutiny at a single-item agenda meeting of the committee in early autumn, with their overview and reflection on these then being transmitted to the Academic Board.

54 The degree to which the data is analysed with some rigour varies between programmes, with the large majority being thorough; committee discussion of the templates is constructive and helpful in all cases. Senior staff present in the meeting draw out suggestions for remedial action specific to particular programmes, and also remedial and enhancement action that could be applied across all provision.

55 The College is diligent in assuring the quality of its higher education programmes. Its APE process is detailed and meticulous, and it is notable that the process features many steps before producing a result that the College is then prepared to forward to the OU. The highly detailed and somewhat lengthy process is painstaking but ensures that College staff are aware of the demands of assuring higher education level provision, and that their attention is focused on the relevant performance indicators by which programmes will be judged - in addition to providing confidence in the College's standards.

56 Given the specialist subjects of the College, there is an intensive use of space and high demand for technical assistance and resource. The College manages the effective use of its existing space and resources through an annual review conducted by the Principal, in conjunction with programme leaders, directors of studies and the Head of Estates, to establish the capital investment requirements of the programmes and their space use, and in light of the likely future student recruitment. The SMT similarly reviews staffing resources for the programmes in light of planned or unexpected changes in student numbers. The programme hours allocation model used by the College determines the staffing resource and allocation of teaching hours for each programme. Staff are clearly aware of this model and refer to it in meetings. SMT discussions on resource allocation are part of the agenda for both the Board of Governors and Audit Committee meetings.

57 There is clear evidence of close links between academic planning and resource allocation for new programme proposals. The minutes of the preliminary validation resource meeting for the BA Fashion Photography programme clearly indicates that the discussion had covered all areas, including staffing, rooming and space requirements, learning resources (including any specialist equipment or facilities), and library resources, and had been attended by the heads of those services. Attending the meeting, chaired by the DOSPSS, were not only the programme leader but representatives of the library, estates and finance departments; relevant workshop staff; and the Academic Registrar and Head of Human Resources. The views of the Head of Student Support were also represented. That meeting had concluded that the academic and technical support for the course was available in the department, but noted the additional development requirements for staff and students.

58 Resources for specific programmes are raised by students at the programme boards or at the higher education student representatives' meeting, and concerns are investigated either by the programme leader or a member of the SMT. External examiners comment on resource issues, particularly staffing, where appropriate. Resources for more general cross-College matters are raised at the deliberative committees for referral to the appropriate body.

Criterion B3

The education provision of an organisation granted taught degree awarding powers consistently meets its stated learning objectives and achieves its intended outcomes.

59 The key document for all staff involved in learning and assessment is the College's higher education Learning, Teaching and Enhancement (LTE) Strategy 2013-17, approved by the Academic Board in July 2013. This document sets out the core values that underpin learning and teaching at the College, and the specific learning and teaching themes that inform the strategic and operational development of quality enhancement and assessment activities across all aspects of the learning experience; and outlines the framework for enhancement that underpins the development, delivery and review of strategies, policies, curricula and initiatives.

60 The LTE Strategy is an ambitious one, but the document sets out clearly how the College expects to see the core values, themes and guiding principles realised in practice through its operations, with clear guidance on which staff and committees are responsible for which actions, ensuring quality and academic standards are reached and enhancement practised. The LTE Strategy is clear, carefully thought out, widely disseminated and understood by staff within the College, and informs discussions of learning and teaching that arise in committee meetings, validation events and programme boards. The LTE Committee minutes of March 2014 note that the Strategy, which is linked to the student charter and the Student Engagement Strategy, would be a regular feature of future LTE Committees. It was referred to on a number of occasions during observations, such as the sharing of good practice within the College, and informed discussion of the NSS report.

61 Staff, students and external examiners are informed of the LTE Strategy and its application to the College's processes and procedures. For staff, this is through the programme proposals, validation and review of programmes; for students, through their handbooks and induction sessions explaining the teaching methods and strategies used to meet the learning outcomes of their programmes review; and for external examiners, on their induction into the College.

62 The extent to which the College applies the values, themes and principles of the LTE Strategy is evident from the requirements of its templates and procedures; the testimony of the external examiners' reports; and the scrutiny team's observations of its practices, boards and committees.

63 The processes to ensure consistency of standards and operation across the College are firmly based on principles to which the whole College subscribes and on processes and procedures that are thorough, well thought out and generally complied with. To assist with realising the principles, the Academic Registry produces the Quality Handbook. Any updates are ratified by the HE Committee and Academic Board, and are communicated to staff through the committee procedures, programme boards and staff development events.

64 All programme leaders and the key support managers are members of the HE Committee; its discussions are reported on in detail at programme boards to update academic, technical and support staff, as well as student representatives. New staff are introduced to the Quality Handbook at their induction sessions. Great care is taken to ensure that staff are kept informed of relevant changes in policies and procedures.

65 There is a clear procedure for making minor or major amendments or improvements to module or programme specifications, initially through the appropriate director of studies

and subsequently through the HE Committee, which has delegated authority from the Academic Board to approve these. Those which are approved can be implemented for the following academic year and will be monitored and evaluated in the subsequent programme evaluation. Records are kept of these amendments by the Quality and Standards Office.

66 Major changes to programmes follow an initial similar process but are subject to external review by the OU, involving peer subject specialists, and require formal approval from the Academic Board. Once the changes have been agreed, the Quality and Standards Office informs all relevant academic, technical and support staff, and advises students of the revisions to their programme. From its observations the scrutiny team can confirm that this process is adhered to and complied with. Were TDAP to be granted, the College intends to replace OU peers with subject specialists and appropriate industry representatives.

67 The College has no validated programmes with named pathways, although it is possible for students to specialise in their areas of interest within the main programmes. A common framework was introduced in 2011 across all undergraduate programmes, consisting of a core of generic modules with common learning outcomes, and with the teaching to support the attainment of these outcomes being contextualised to suit the different disciplines. The aim of this framework is to provide students with a professional and practice-based education core that is common and key to all the specialist subject disciplines. The College has two such clusters of modules: the Context of Practice (COP), and the Personal and Professional Practice (PPP) modules. The staff responsible for these attend programme boards, the LTE Committee and examination boards.

68 Students appreciate the value of the COP modules. External examiners for the College have commended the development of COP, citing in one instance its 'positive influence and synthesising approach'. There have been references in committee minutes and agenda papers to teething issues relating to the COP and PPP modules but the College has matters well in hand. Questions have been raised by a number of examiners about the separate structural assessment position of COP, with its own examination board running in parallel to the programme examination boards, and the CEE recommended in 2013-14 that a new structural position be investigated whereby programme external examiners have an overview of all modules within the programmes. The Academic Board concurred with this recommendation; the matter was referred to the HE Committee, the TDAP Transition Group and the LTE Committee, and was introduced for the 2015 examination boards.

69 The CEE also suggested that the College needs to ensure that all students achieve an agreed (and defined) professional and business core of skills and knowledge; and that mechanisms to share and adopt best PPP module practice between the programmes needed to be more effective. The value of the common framework is recognised by both students and staff, and adds a useful professional external dimension to the creative subject curricula.

70 When a new programme is proposed, which is intended to draw upon expertise and subject knowledge from closely related existing programmes, the College is very careful to examine where issues and tensions might arise, both in terms of undue overlap between programmes, with possible confusion for the students, and competition for resources for the related programmes. This was clearly evident in discussions during the validation process for the BA Fashion Photography programme proposal and its overlap with the Fashion degree. This matter was also explored at the internal validation meeting for the proposed new programme, as were the positive aspects of the collaboration between the new and existing programmes.

71 The strong links between the learning support services and the College's programme planning, approval, monitoring and review arrangements were observed on a

number of occasions. The prevalidation and validation stages of programme approval showing consideration of these areas have been set out earlier in criterion B2.

72 Issues arising from the monitoring of student performance or the progress of KPIs are often referred to the support staff for initial investigation. For example, it was felt necessary to look deeper into the causes of students wishing to suspend their studies or withdraw through health related or well-being issues. It was agreed that the Head of Student Support would report to the HE Committee on the increase in such students, particularly relating to well-being issues, and the Chair would discuss, with the Strategic Planning Analyst, the recommendation of separating students who were suspending their studies from those who were withdrawing, in order to gain a clearer picture of the issue.

73 The College ably uses its support services staff to scan the horizon on higher education matters. The Head of Student Support updates the College on trends in the number of students with specific learning difficulties. There is clear evidence from the IT Strategy and Policy meetings of joined-up thinking and future scoping on the part of the IT Service in relation to College governance and management issues, EDI, learning and teaching, and VLE matters - all with the aim of improving the student experience. Extensive knowledge of external national policies and legislation informed the development of the Computer Use Policy. The Chair of the eLearning Group made clear the close partnership of e-developments with the work of the IT Service, and the close working between the policy makers and the service to effect improvements in the learning and teaching environment.

74 There is a well-established annual monitoring system, the whole process of which is viewed as the key mechanism by which the College and the OU assure themselves that the College is meeting its responsibilities for delivering degrees. It also provides the College with an opportunity to reflect on any issues arising from the APEs and to report on quality assurance.

75 The College defines the academic standards for its provision by reference to the level descriptors in the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. The College monitors, assures and maintains its academic standards through the programme boards and APEs. Through an ARP, introduced in 2010 and refined subsequently, staff are asked to complete the APE.

76 The OU requires an AMR from the College consisting of an institutional overview, accompanied by APEs from each programme team, and the external examiner's reports and responses. The report is approved by the Academic Board before going to the OU. The OU provides feedback on the report, specifies whether any further action is to be taken, and then monitors whether this has been carried out in the following year's report. The OU Academic Reviewer visits each year and spot-checks a specific programme. The OU's feedback on the report is discussed by the appropriate committees.

77 The College has thorough, detailed and rigorous planning procedures, and approval, review and assessment practices, as evidenced by validation, peer scrutiny, external members of committees and external examiners' reports. Observations by the scrutiny team of these procedures and practices, and perusal of the documentation, confirm that their systems are complied with. However, although the annual programme review processes are clear, comprehensive and monitored at a high level by the senior committees, on the evidence of the scrutiny team's observations, the review practices can, on occasion, be somewhat uncritical at programme board level, and feedback from the OU is not always acted upon promptly.

78 Should TDAP be granted the College intends to transfer the OU's level of scrutiny to its Academic Board, which would draw upon external membership and the HE Committee to provide the same level of safeguarding of standards.

79 Students are informed of the methods and strategies that will be used to meet the learning outcomes of their programmes in varying forums, including student handbooks, induction for each level of their programme, and through their representatives at programme boards. Student handbooks provide details on assessment methods and criteria, including grading criteria. Observations by the scrutiny team showed that the procedures for mitigating circumstances are applied anonymously and fairly across all programmes by an independent group of staff drawn from the academic staff, Academic Registry and student welfare staff.

80 Assessment briefs for programmes are written using the College's standard template and indicate the intended learning outcomes being assessed, the grading criteria, and opportunities for formative feedback to the students during delivery of the modules, in addition to the requirement to provide further feedback at the summative stage.

81 Students met by the scrutiny team confirmed the quality, clarity and usefulness of the information. Student feedback on their understanding of, and compliance with, assessment requirements is checked in a variety of ways: through regular meetings of student representatives with the SMT; student representatives on programme boards and the major deliberative committees; module reviews; internal College surveys and the NSS (see Criterion D).

82 The ARP requires all assessment methods proposed for programmes to be evidentially capable of demonstrating the learning outcomes of programmes, and to be aligned to the grading criteria to be used. This ensures the appropriateness and validity of the assessment tasks in relation to module and programme specifications and the credit value of the modules. Peer scrutiny of assessment briefs and committee scrutiny of programme approval documentation, which includes module specifications, confirms that learning objectives are aligned with intended learning outcomes, assessment tasks and assessment criteria at the appropriate levels. Module evaluations and reviews are discussed at programme boards, where the student representatives can, and do, raise questions on assessment tasks and requirements. Following completion of the assessments, the Quality and Standards Office reviews whether the assessment, including the second-marking of student work, has been carried out appropriately.

83 The external examiners are appointed by the OU as the validating body, following receipt of nominations from the College to the OU. Initial responsibility for the selection of examiners rests with the programme teams and the HE Committee, based on the criteria for selection set out by the OU. The subject and practice specialist nature of the College's programmes have occasionally made it difficult for the College to follow the selection criteria fully, but in these instances the College has, with the agreement of the OU, put in place a mentoring process for the nominee, with an experienced examiner in support. Academic Board members have noted the commendation of some external examiners on their induction training by the College. This system has apparently worked well.

84 As is typical for practice-based programmes, the external examiners usually visit the College twice a year to view an extensive sample of student work and discuss with the students their experiences of their programmes. They judge whether the assessment standards are consistent with programme specifications and are in line with national standards for the higher education sector. However, they advise assessment teams on whether they judge the marking levels to be appropriate or in need of revision by the internal moderators, and this feature of their role was observed by the scrutiny team at examination boards.

85 The College has also introduced an innovative refinement of its own, outside of the OU's procedures, in the appointment of a CEE whose role is to provide an overview of the reliability of the external examining standards across all its programmes. Following the individual programme examinations and progression boards, the College holds Final Examination and Progression Boards at which all the marks and profiles of the final examination results are reviewed and discussed; the CEE comments on these. There is a clear sense that the appointment of a CEE is valued, particularly by members of the Academic Board, and by the College generally, for the rounded picture provided of the academic standards achieved across the programmes and the judgement/advice as to how these stand up against the sector. The CEE's views are considered carefully. Care is taken to ensure that staff are kept informed of relevant changes in policies and procedures.

86 The College operates a tightly defined examination board procedure at which the results for each level are carefully scrutinised and processed. All the boards observed complied strictly with the OU regulations, were operated in accordance with their terms of reference, and were competently chaired.

87 The Academic Registry has recently introduced a new student record system, which has resulted in an improved assessment recording process, evidenced by the efficient recording and monitoring of results for the examination boards. External examiners are expressly invited to comment at the examination boards on whether or not they are in agreement with the assessment procedures and practices for the programmes which they are viewing, and the reliability and validity of the grading. The College has extended the OU's examination board processes by introducing a further level of scrutiny of student results through the introduction of a Final Examination and Progression Board, which considers the marks and grades of all students before confirming the outcomes. The CEE is in attendance at all three of its meetings and produces a holistic report on the College's assessment procedures, practices and outcomes. The CEE reported in 2013-14 that the level 6 average was in line with the Creative Art and Design sector and slightly higher than the average across all higher education institutions, and that external examiners had expressed unanimous confidence in the examinations processes and the results.

88 Observation of the assessment process at all stages confirmed that it was very well managed and effective, a view confirmed by the CEE in his verbal feedback. The procedures are clearly monitored, and discussions of assessment outcomes feature in the agendas of the main deliberative committees. Evidence that the assessment outcomes inform future programme and student planning can be seen in the agenda discussions of the CEE's report to the Academic Board, the HE Committee, the TDAP Transition Group and the LTE Committee. Evidence is also available in the discussions by the HE Committee of the programmes' incorporation of matters raised in the CEE's report into their APEs and action plans.

89 There is a clear procedure for closing programmes or programme elements, which is meticulously followed. An initial decision by the SMT is followed by discussion with the relevant teaching and support staff on an appropriate strategy for teaching-out the remaining student cohorts, to ensure: that the required programme specifications continue to be met; that workshop resources are maintained; and continuity of teaching. External stakeholders are informed, including the OU and external examiners, who are asked to advise the College on their perceptions of how the process is being managed by the College, particularly with regard to the maintenance of academic standards and the student experience. Students are informed by senior managers, reassured as to the continuation of teaching and support for their cohorts, notified of communication channels for the expression of any concerns, and advised of options for transferring to other programmes if it is feasible and appropriate for them to do so.

90 The Academic Board receives regular monitoring reports on such programmes from the directors of studies; both emphasise their continuing satisfaction with the student experience and the good communication lines with the students on these programmes. The final programme board for one discontinuing programme provided evidence of the continuing care and responsibility that the College gave to the students. The procedure is fit for purpose and safeguards the interests of the continuing students.

Criterion B4

An organisation granted taught degree awarding powers takes effective action to promote strengths and respond to identified limitations.

91 The College's view is that critical self-reflection is embedded in its quality assurance framework and that its deliberative committee structure encourages reflection on performance by management, academic, technical and support staff, and by students. The deliberative committee structure, headed by the Academic Board, is responsible for advising both management and staff, and for informing the Board of Governors, on all matters relating to academic standards, quality, enhancement and the student experience. It manages this through scrutiny of the reports from the committees and boards in the deliberative committee structure and by recommending action to address identified deficiencies or to initiate enhancement. The Academic Board, supported by the Academic Registrar and Deputy Academic Registrar (Quality and Standards), views the recommendations for quality assurance that emanate from the HE Committee, and those for quality enhancement that arise from the LTE Committee, and determines the strategic and operational paths for improvement, as well as the responsibility for monitoring their effectiveness. There is an opportunity for every member of the committee to contribute to the discussions and all are listened to courteously. The student representative input is clearly valued and accorded due weight.

92 The structure is effective in disseminating issues and general matters between the committees for discussion and reflection. The management and the major committees engage in critical reflection processes, as do the programme boards through their own meetings and the APEs. These were introduced in order to provide more consistency in reporting and addressing concerns. There is clear evidence from the HE Committee and the Academic Board of careful scrutiny of the APEs, and a wish by the College to gauge its standards against the higher education sector by the introduction of external peer commentary from the external member of the LTE Committee, who attends the HE Committee meeting at which the APEs are considered. There is additional scrutiny available from the summary report from the CEE reporting on the monitoring of standards by all the external examiners.

93 When considering any proposed changes or recommendations for action, the College consults thoroughly in order that programmes move forward together on a broad front. However, the degree of criticality is variable at programme board level, where scrutiny team observations indicated that critical self-assessment ranged from the thoughtful to one instance of the perfunctory. There was evidence of some slowness in taking action in respect of identified deficiencies in specific programmes, which could impact adversely on the student experience. This became evident in discussion of the College's AMR for 2013-14 before its transmission to the OU.

94 Following discussion of the NSS results for the College, the Academic Board recommended that good practice in reporting should be shared between programmes, and approved the report to the OU with an adjustment of the comment on the College's NSS result from 'still very good' to 'average or satisfactory'. This showed clear judgement on

the part of the Board, as did the comment on enhancement, which indicated that significant steps had been taken to improve the student voice in the programmes. The Board is monitoring issues that arise but appears to be slow in taking action in areas that could be addressed fairly speedily, such as student assessment and feedback (see Criterion D). Overall grading for the assessment and feedback group of questions for one course fell from 66 per cent in 2011-12 to 52 per cent in 2012-13 and 61 per cent in 2013-14. For individual questions within that group, one on 'Criteria used in marking have been clear in advance', the change from 2011-12 was 30 per cent to 48 per cent. Another on assessment arrangements and marking, excluding feedback, also fell on this same course from 54 per cent in 2011-12 to 42 per cent a year later. However, the actions that had been taken over the previous four years appear to have finally borne fruit in the 2015 NSS results, where this programme made a much improved showing.

95 The analysis of the NSS results has passed to the Academic Registry. The Deputy Academic Registrar (Quality and Standards) reports on the NSS results to the LTE Committee; the paper for this agenda item in October 2014 was very clear on the highs and lows of the College's results, and gave a balanced reporting of students' comments under the various question areas. Despite the excellent results from four programmes, the College's overall satisfaction rating had declined in 2014 to 80 per cent from 85 per cent in 2013, against a slight improvement on the 2012-13 response rate of 81 per cent. While assessment and feedback had improved by a small amount, in five of the six themes covering Teaching on my Course, Academic Support, Organisation and Management, Learning Resources, and Personal Development the College's performance had declined. The directors of studies usefully focused the LTE Committee's attention on the longitudinal trend of the results, the comparison of the College's performance with the specialist college sector, and the need to enhance the learning and teaching experience in a holistic fashion.

96 Given the paper trail of earlier committee discussions of student survey responses in previous years, which have shown a similar picture, the discussion of the causes and putative actions would seem to reflect a rather slow and somewhat uncritical earlier response by one or two programmes, which remained unaddressed. However, there was an absence of the blame culture in the committee's discussions and an emphasis on the generic issues to be addressed across the College. This lapse was unusual in a culture of quality assurance at the College where, overall, so much is thoroughly and positively addressed.

97 The mechanisms for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny, monitoring and review of learning objectives and outcomes lie internally at different levels in the deliberative committee structure. At programme level it is the module leader's responsibility for undertaking module reviews to ensure that each module's learning objectives are clearly referenced to specifications, and supported by data on achievement, attendance and student evaluations. An annual summary module review report is then considered by the HE Committee. The HE Committee is key in ensuring that updates and modifications to programme specifications as a result of new regulations introduced by the OU are adopted by the programme teams. Where, as a result of the new regulations, the College had to develop learning outcomes for each level, these were considered and approved by the HE Committee and the Academic Board.

98 The ARP similarly provides scrutiny and monitoring of student results. In addition, the Quality and Standards Office operates a tried and tested validation and revalidation process in conjunction with the OU.

99 The APE template requests details of the intended action plans arising from the programme team's evaluation of their programme. The template is clearly laid out and lists not only actions and tasks, but the criteria for determining future success, the progress to

date on the previous year's plans, and those who will be responsible for the action plans, in addition to requesting the timelines for completion of the action plans.

100 The aim of the College is to provide a creative practice-based curriculum; the input of external professionals from the various creative industries is clearly taken seriously by the College. Abundant evidence of external participation in these areas was seen by the scrutiny team, which includes the industry professionals met by the team; the references to external contacts, visits and events in the APEs; the validation processes; the membership of externals in major deliberative committees; and the events organised for students within the undergraduate programmes, which are highly appreciated by them. A feature of the College's provision is the extent and value of external visitors, lectures and workshops into programmes. The engagement of external professional contacts, and the industrial expertise and familiarity with current professional practices that they bring to the curriculum content, is clearly one of the attractions of the programmes for students, and plays a valuable part in students' higher education learning experience and preparation for the world of work.

101 For existing programmes, identification of examples of good practice and encouragement to share these across the College is highlighted in the HE Committee's consideration of the APEs, and College staff development sessions organised on the 'Sharing and celebrating communities of practice'.

102 Programme board meetings highlight the opportunities available for students, such as a series of presentations/events on the career opportunities for Fine Art students, including an employability event, and a seminar on setting up your own business, together with a summer school on enterprise skills. An Academic Board meeting highlighted the main activities undertaken by the Partnerships and Professional Engagement Unit, and the successes they had achieved in enhancing the professional contacts of students and engaging with the practitioners for the creative industries in the region. The SMT and the Academic Board noted the contribution their work made to the employability agenda for the College and students.

103 The sharing of good practice across the College is strongly encouraged, but is part of an ongoing process rather than a target that has been achieved. Mechanisms are now in place, however, for the College to effect this sharing of ideas and practice; signs are clear that this is increasingly occurring. The formation of the LTE Committee in 2013, and its e-learning subcommittee, is contributing strongly to this strategic aim. The peer review process for staff implemented in 2012, and the peer process used for discussion of APEs is an additional strength, as is the suggestion of the external member of the LTE Committee that the observation/peer review for workshop staff scheme would be useful for those workshop staff working towards a teaching qualification or an HEA fellowship.

104 The formation of the LTE Committee, which reports to Academic Board, has strengthened the College's grasp in promoting and supporting improvement of the quality of its programmes and student achievement. The terms of reference of the Committee are to identify and share good practice, enable innovative practice, and take deliberative steps leading to enhancement of the student experience. The scope of its remit is to consider activity in relation to teaching and learning, extracurricular activity and student support, and to make recommendations to the Academic Board. To assist in this task it includes as part of its membership both an external member and two student representatives, including a Students' Union officer.

105 Quality Enhancement Action Plan updates are provided by the Deputy Academic Registrar (Quality and Standards) at regular intervals to the LTE Committee. These are also a means of tracking the progression of the thematic reviews and focus groups set up by the Committee to discuss quality enhancement issues arising through feedback

from the APEs, the external examiners and/or the student representatives, and have then been pinpointed for action by the SMT, the Academic Board and the HE Committee. Currently, these are monitoring the fitness for purpose of the new generic module framework, exploration of cross-cutting themes of assessment and communication, the effectiveness of enrolment and induction arrangements, and a systematic approach to the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning.

106 The annual monitoring of programmes through programme reports and student evaluation is a requirement of the College and of the OU. The APE system offers an effective means of identifying and sharing good practice between programmes; during the scrutiny period there was evidence of an increasing take-up of such opportunities within the HE Committee and the LTE Committee. Generic matters relating to quality enhancement that arise from the APEs are referred to the LTE Committee for further consideration and action. The Board of Governors is kept informed of these matters through its receipt and discussion of Academic Board minutes, and three of its meetings focus on quality issues within the College.

107 The composite annual review of the actions that the College has taken and the measures it has put in place to improve the quality of the programmes, in addition to an evaluation of how successful these have been, forms part of the annual report to the OU. However, the view of the Academic Registrar and the Deputy Academic Registrar (Quality and Standards) is that the process of compiling the report, compliance with OU timescales and interaction with the OU takes too long. They are looking at how to bring all the required information together at an earlier point in the year, which would enable the College to effect earlier action, and will be actively seeking to do that should TDAP be granted.

108 The OU Quality Partnership Manager monitors the College on an annual basis, and the OU Academic Reviewer visits the College each year to sample-check a programme and meets its students to check on their experience. While much of the College's work is deemed to be highly commendable by the OU, there are general issues to which the OU has drawn the College's attention. The organisation and communication issues continued to be a cause of student dissatisfaction in a number of programmes, and the College was asked to report the following year on the effectiveness of its measures to address an improvement to these areas across the College. It was noted that many programmes had made little or no attempt to compare their statistics with the supplied Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data, and it would be helpful for the OU to have a more consistent approach for the future. The College had already identified this issue and is taking action to strengthen the consistency of the data reported by programmes, and analysis of the statistics.

109 There is evidence that over the years the OU has occasionally been dissatisfied with part of the College's approach to its requirements, and has drawn attention to these in its feedback. These relate mainly to the lack of strategic analysis of performance on the part of some programme boards and the repeated failure of one programme to respond to the OU's concerns (see paragraph 94). The OU AMR 2013-14, states that 'The programme team has given only the briefest account of the implementation of the Enhancement Action Plan 2011-12 even though a more thorough treatment was requested in last year's report'. In the section on 'Issues requiring immediate attention' it states that the same programme team 'has given only the briefest account of the implementation of the 2011-12 Enhancement Action Plan even though a more thorough treatment was requested in last year's report'. However, the report does go on to say that 'The Academic Reviewer visited the programme in June 2014 (sic) and a number of follow up actions have taken place in the light of her comments'. This was reflected in improved NSS results in 2015.

110 The HE Committee discusses in some depth the OU's feedback on the College's annual return and the APEs, and monitors where the OU considers that its comments

have not been fully responded to. The HE Committee clearly takes such matters on board; its minutes note for the action plan for Visual Communication programme that 'the programme team [should] reflect on both the declining recruitment and student satisfaction' and for Fine Art that 'there could be more analysis and critical reflection'.

111 Student feedback on their learning experience and achievements is collected from student representatives at programme boards, from APEs, internal surveys and the NSS. This is referred through the deliberative structure to the SMT and may then be referred back for further specific reflection and action by programmes or general collective action by the College.

112 Judgements and assessments on how the College could improve the quality of its provision and student achievement are also made on the basis of external examiners' and the CEE's reports, in addition to feedback from the OU. Their perspectives, together with those of the external members of the deliberative committees, provide the College with a clear holistic picture of the management and quality of the programmes, and student achievements, and provide assurance that the programme learning objectives, outcomes, and assessment levels are appropriate.

C Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff

Criterion C1

The staff of an organisation granted powers to award taught degrees will be competent to teach, facilitate learning and undertake assessment to the level of the qualifications being awarded.

113 The LTE Strategy 2013-17 sets out the nature of the College's specialist curriculum and its philosophy of learning and teaching. Its approach to teaching and learning is one of staff and student partnerships participating in creative practice. Through active engagement and dialogue the College aims to develop students as autonomous learners. The specialist nature of the provision, and the College's philosophy enables collaborative working to advance integration of theory, practice and professionalism. The College has effective recruitment, staff development and monitoring processes, which ensure that there is an appropriately qualified and resourced staffing base, and that programmes have the correct balance of academic and relevant industry experience in the teams. The skills mix and numbers of staff employed enable the College to fulfil its values and approaches and meet the demands of the student numbers, in addition to the standards and benchmarks, of the degrees it delivers.

114 Staff are required to have qualifications appropriate to the level and context of teaching. Having a research profile is not an essential requirement for engagement as a lecturer but prospective staff need to give an undertaking to fit in with the College's research agenda. The College has set minimum qualification standards for higher education academic staff. For a lecturer post an essential criterion is a relevant BA (Hons) degree, with a master's degree being desirable. For a senior lecturer, principal lecturer and programme leader the essential criteria are a relevant BA (Hons) degree and master's degree, while a PhD is desirable. There is an emphasis on professional experience of staff through their own practice in creative endeavours. At interview, applicants for practice-based modules are expected to demonstrate the relevance to their potential teaching of their own professional creative work. In exceptional circumstances the College may employ staff who do not have the stated requirements, where there is a clear business case and with the express approval of the Principal and the Head of Human Resources. In such cases the member of staff is supported to gain any qualifications deemed to be required for the post. A teaching qualification is no longer an essential or desirable criterion for appointment to an academic post. It is now a condition that lecturing staff hold, on commencement of their employment, membership of the HEA or obtain it within two years of joining the College. The College provides support for staff working towards fellowships. The College attracts highly qualified staff. Two Junior Research Fellows are employed to carry out research and support staff research and the research cluster groups. Their CVs demonstrate that, along with doctorates, they both have experience: of teaching in UK universities and extensive research credentials, such as funding grants they have won; of a number of research outputs and marks of esteem as conference presenters; and as consultants and advisers to other art organisations (see paragraph 116).

115 Staff profiles and CVs provide evidence that staff are highly and suitably qualified. Staff profiles for March 2014 show that, of 55 higher education academic staff, 20 (36 per cent) are full-time, with 35 (64 per cent) on fractional contracts with no staff being employed as hourly paid visiting lecturers. In July 2015 the staff profiles indicate the same balance of staffing. In March 2014 three staff (five per cent) held a doctorate qualification, 34 (62 per cent) had master's degrees, 16 (29 per cent) had a bachelor's degree with honours, and two

(four per cent) held a foundation degree as their highest qualifications. Forty-one (75 per cent) staff held a teaching qualification of which three (five per cent) had teaching qualifications specific to higher education. In July 2015 the staff profile is not dissimilar, and only one person then held a foundation degree as their highest qualification. Analysis of the profiles shows that the large majority of staff are teaching at levels for which they have an equal or higher academic award. There were two staff with foundation degrees who are teaching at level 6 in March 2014 and July 2015. In November 2015 the LTE Committee received the most up-to-date figures for the academic staff profile. It noted that 29 per cent of higher education staff have, or are working towards, doctorates. Of the rest of the staff, 81 per cent were reported to have or be working towards a master's degree. Forty-four per cent of staff had achieved HEA accreditation with another 10 per cent awaiting the outcome of their submissions.

116 The College is well-resourced, with highly skilled workshop staff who play a vital and much appreciated role in supporting students' learning and creative skills development. These staff are employed as instructor technicians or workshop managers whose main focus is on supporting the curriculum. As well as maintaining equipment, they provide formal instruction on techniques and the use of equipment to groups, and provide one-to-one support to all students on a drop-in basis. For workshop staff, a bachelor's degree is desirable but relevant experience is important, and most continue their own practice and exhibit their work. Workshop staff are well qualified. In March 2014, there were 19 full-time posts, of whom two were Senior Workshop Managers, and 12 permanent fractional posts. Four (13 per cent) workshop staff have a master's degree as their highest qualification, while 20 (64 per cent) had a bachelor's degree as their highest award and three (10 per cent) held a foundation degree; there are four (13 per cent) who do not have an academic qualification. Fourteen (45 per cent) had a teaching qualification. The July 2015 census showed 16 full-time (57 per cent) and 12 (43 per cent) fractional workshop staff, of whom six have a master's degree, 18 have a bachelor's degree, five have a foundation degree, and 15 hold a teaching qualification.

117 Internal validation events check academic and professional expertise of staff in terms of their suitability for teaching on the programme being validated. OU representatives are impressed by the level of expertise of staff reflected in their CVs, as it shows that staff are well qualified and professionally active; the quality of staff can be seen in the creativity of the programmes and student work. OU representatives confirmed that the College encourages and supports staff development and is prepared to fund it, with time off for study and opportunities to share with other staff. External examiners' reports comment on the high quality and maturity of student work, which reflects the academic and professional practice experience of the teaching and workshop staff. Also mentioned is the highly individual, insightful creative work they see, some of which is 'pushing the boundaries'. Students benefit from impressive industry links, which have enhanced students' levels of professionalism and enterprise awareness.

118 All students met by the scrutiny team rated their tutors highly in terms of their knowledge and expertise in the creative arts area and the teaching they provide. They appreciate that their tutors are practising artists and know their subject, materials and equipment. Staff discuss their own research and professional practice, which students find inspiring and encouraging. Students on the textiles programme, for example, felt that the tutors provided them with excellent historical knowledge, which helped them contextualise their work. Students are invited to tutors' exhibitions and can discuss how shows are curated. Students especially appreciated the way they are shown a large number of creative practices and are encouraged to experiment. Students on the master's degree felt they benefited particularly from their tutors' research because it has enabled them, for example, to go to events abroad and to curate exhibitions.

119 The collaborative studio-based nature of the teaching and learning environment in a small specialist institution results in positive working relationships in the College. As such, students may become unsettled when there are staff changes or absences, and this has been seen in some student feedback. The College addresses such issues as promptly as possible and has appropriate contingency actions in place and safeguards for niche specialisms. Programme leaders pay constant attention to the staffing situation in their area. Some teaching staff teach across academic programmes so that cover can be found from other teams as well as from within the team. This works well for immediate need, due to the collaborative and collegiate way that students, workshop and academic staff operate together. For longer-term remedies the College has a range of options, including using visiting lecturers or unsuccessful applicants who have the particular skills set needed. The College does not use agency staff.

120 The College is an institutional member of a number of professional organisations, such as the Consortium for Research Excellence, Support and Training (CREST), the HEA, International Association of Universities and Colleges of Art, Design and Media (Cumulus) and the National Association of Fine Art, among a number of others. A number of staff are active within CREST and benefit from attending workshops, contributing to its online publication and the practice-based research within CREST.

121 Examination of staff CVs indicates that they actively participate in peer and professional networks to keep up to date with their subject and pedagogical developments. A majority of staff are members of professional associations and many are also engaged with subject networks; these include the British Educational Research Association, Royal Society of Arts, Textile History Society, The Design Council, the Association of Photographers in Higher Education, the National Association for Fine Art Education, the National Society for Education in Art and Design, and the Society of Dyers and Colourists. These are important links that enable the College to stay abreast of developments in the art world and contribute to the development of art education and research. Students also benefit. For example, membership of the Association of Suppliers to British Clothing Industry enabled students to access competitions and attend conferences.

122 Observations of meetings and discussions with staff demonstrated that issues of pedagogy are taken seriously. This was well illustrated by discussions about how or why students should be encouraged to work collaboratively and the use of eLearning. At an OU validation panel, the programme team was able to clearly demonstrate its pedagogic approach and philosophical underpinning in a way which impressed the final validation panel.

123 The College encourages staff to become HEA fellows. At the March 2014 census there were two teaching staff who were HEA fellows and one academic leader who had senior fellow status. In July 2015 the staff profile shows an increase in teaching staff with HEA recognition; one member of staff has associate fellowship and four were HEA fellows. A paper to the LTE Committee in November 2015 reported that 44 per cent of staff had achieved HEA accreditation, with another 10 per cent awaiting the outcome of their submissions. In order to support further staff HEA fellowships, the College provides workshops, and a member of staff has become an HEA associate, undertaking Accreditation of Frameworks, and will help other College staff to develop their applications.

124 The College has a history of pedagogic research in the art and design context. For example, College staff worked on a project coordinated by the National Arts Learning Networks looking at barriers to entry for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The College continues its interest in this area through the Pedagogy research cluster, which seeks to contribute new ideas to the 'science and art of teaching' in the context of

creative arts programmes. Reports from this cluster to each Research Committee demonstrate an enthusiastic working group with national recognition.

125 A key aim of the College's Strategic Plan 2012-17 is to develop its 'research practice and innovation which enhances teaching and learning'. The accompanying objective is 'to support our staff and help them to develop their research practice; encourage internal collaboration; and through external networks and meetings, enhance subject specialist knowledge (especially as it relates to teaching and learning)'. The associated action and KPI is a qualitative target to 'provide to the Academic Board, including research and grants achieved, postgraduate student enrolments, research projects undertaken, peer-reviewed articles/exhibitions and the number of external engagements and appointments'. The College has supported and resourced higher education academic staff in research and scholarly activity over a number of years. It organised and ran its first significant higher education conference on design pedagogy in 2007. A number of College staff presented papers, and subsequently conference papers were published and widely distributed. At this time the Principal established an academic research budget separate to the continuous professional development (CPD) budget.

126 The gradual development of a research culture has gained momentum in recent years with the appointment of a senior management post, the Director of Studies, Higher Education, Enhancement and Research (DOSHEER); a revised Research Strategy; the formation in 2013 of a Research Committee as a formal deliberative meeting reporting to the Academic Board; and research clusters. In addition, a new Manager for Curation and Exhibiting was appointed in 2015 to support the research culture. Driven by an enthusiastic Head of Research and the DOSHEER, the College is making effective and steady progress towards the achievement of its research agenda and ethos among staff and students. Supported by governors, the College continues to extend its ambitions for research and is preparing to enter the next Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise, aiming at 2* level for international recognition. In working towards this the College appointed two Junior Research Fellows in 2014, employed on fixed-term contracts, who have been judged very successful and made permanent Research Fellows from 2015-16. It was noted that the submission to the REF would be for esteem purposes, in showcasing the College's work externally, rather than for attracting an income stream. A REF Steering Group has been set up, which will report to the Academic Board. It will work with staff to ensure their full understanding of the process and build confidence, manage a 'mock' REF in 2018, and engage an external quality assessor with REF experience to gain a measure of the quality of the work being produced by staff.

127 The College has its own definitions for research and scholarly activity to distinguish them from CPD. Research is defined as innovation and development of new practice-based knowledge, which is peer-reviewed and publicly disseminated. Scholarly activity is about investigating what is happening in the subject area by interaction with external peers, for example through external conference attendance, and produces demonstrable outputs, such as conference presentations and exhibition of creative works. The College considers it can be practice-based and technical as well as academic or theoretical. CPD is not thought necessarily to link to research and is closer to keeping up teaching practice, for example: staff up-skilling in technical ability or use of software.

128 The College clearly supports and encourages research and scholarly activity. At appraisal, the Annual Performance Review (APR), each member of higher education academic staff must put forward their research and scholarship proposals for using their 15 days' (pro rata) allowance. These proposals should include measurable outcomes, a trail of recorded activity, and indication of how it will benefit learning and teaching. This will be agreed with the Head of Research annually, who makes recommendations to the DOSHEER to take to the SMT for approval. The College funds these research

activities from its own finances. In 2014-15 internal funding for research was made available for projects identified through the APRs to a total of approximately £25,000. Staff are clear about how they can also make separate research project bids through the Research Committee; approximately £3,500 is available, with a maximum of £1,000 per member of staff. Staff, including workshop staff, have bid for funding for higher degrees and specific research projects.

129 Staff feel well supported and resourced to achieve their research and scholarship goals. There are four research clusters, which meet at least twice each year. Each member of staff belongs to at least one of the clusters: Pedagogy, Curation, Technology and Crossing Borders. Workshop staff also take part in the clusters. Staff have found the clusters, supported by the Junior Research Fellows and the Head of Research, to be very useful in providing mentorship and assistance in developing their research and scholarship. A dedicated area of the VLE provides links to external research as well as internal activity. Staff provided a number of examples of their research and how in many cases it had been integrated into the curriculum. For example, some archive-based research at the Victoria and Albert Museum was now used directly in the textile programmes, and work using the Feminist Archive of TV and Film for the North is now incorporated into the Visual Communication programme.

130 The College held two staff research dissemination events in 2014-15. At the first event, three members of the research team presented their research projects. The second event was used to introduce staff to the new curatorial and exhibitions manager, who presented her academic paper. All higher education staff are expected to produce a poster for a research dissemination event to share their projects, and the impact on learning and teaching with staff and students, and make presentations. The Junior Research Fellows present their work on these occasions. Staff also report their research at programme boards to give insight to student representatives of the research and scholarly activity being undertaken by staff to report back to their student groups.

131 The Head of Research evaluates research projects and produces an Annual Research Report for the Research Committee, which then goes to the Academic Board, SMT and Board of Governors. The Annual Research Report 2014-15 presents the quality and extent of staff engagements with research and scholarly activity. It is clear that the College is gaining national and international recognition for its work from the range of external activity carried out, and the increased numbers of invitations to speak at conferences and for students to exhibit their work. The College is also proactive in hosting events, such as a national workshop day entitled 'PhD by Design', in collaboration with Goldsmiths College; and an industry event, in partnership with a major game design business for a global software company, to support game and interactive media creators to produce and publish content for well-known computer games. The College is beginning to have success in bids for external funding for research. There are examples of collaborations with international universities in bids for funding for development of academic publications, and a successful application through Erasmus for a grant worth €104,000 over two years for a project with five other international art institutions. The College has successfully developed a formal link with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as a registered organisation that is able to apply for grants. Two members of the research team were successful in their applications to the AHRC Peer Review College as committee members, 2015-18. This will enhance the reputation of the College and give the research team an insight into the bidding process and the criteria for success.

132 The general view of the Research Committee in October 2015 is that significant progress has been made with the research agenda, and that the College has achieved the targets in the research strategy for September 2015. The research clusters had played a significant part in this. There had also been an increase in the number of staff invited as

key speakers or judges of awards and bursaries. However, the committee members were not complacent and acknowledged that the critical review of outcomes needs further development. There was recognition of the need to make more evident the link between exhibitions and research. The OU representatives observed that the research culture had developed rapidly over the past few years, well supported by College organisation, structures and funding. This had been reflected in the recent BA Fashion Photography validation, where staff discussions were at a high level of academic debate.

133 Although the College is young in terms of research activity, its research agenda and ethos is gathering pace, and there are a growing number of instances of peer reviewed work, presentations by staff at national and international conferences and collaborations, and other marks of academic esteem. The College is aware that a more critical and extensive external review of the quality of the research outputs needs further development. The College is taking this forward by the introduction of an external member on the Research Committee and on the REF Steering Group. Future developments will need to address a systematic, more in-depth analysis and collation of the contribution of its research and scholarly activities to the higher education curricula, and to developments in the field generally. The measures being taken by the College are effective in ensuring that staff are encouraged, and adequately supported, to undertake research and develop a creative research community.

134 The College does not offer doctoral programmes and currently does not have any plans to pursue research degree awarding powers.

135 The College has a comprehensive CPD Policy, which sets out the aim to ensure that staff skills, knowledge and behaviours are developed to meet the present and future needs of the College. The Policy supports staff to be proactive in their own development and to consider their needs in order to realise their aspirations and potential. It describes the structures and processes that enable staff dialogue leading to learning and development outcomes. The CPD provision is intended to allow staff to develop skills and expertise, including research and scholarship, which will enhance the learning experience of students.

136 The APR Policy sets out the philosophy and processes for annual appraisal for all members of staff. At their APR meeting staff reflect on their research. The summary of this review, confirmed on the APR form, is intended to be a fair representation of the dialogue and should be used as a working document throughout the following year. Higher education staff are expected to have an outline research project in place, which is agreed with the Head of Research, who should be satisfied with the progress made. If not already accredited, higher education staff are also expected to achieve HEA fellowship (see paragraph 115). Human resources staff monitor the APR process and collate the targets met and not met. This information is provided to the SMT, which agrees any actions to be taken as a result. The overall College staff development priorities for the ensuing year are drawn out; for example, in 2013-14, equality and diversity issues, professional updating workshops and sharing practice events were identified and provided.

137 The Staff Development and Training Officer (SDTO) holds the budget for CPD activities. Staff development and training needs are identified from validation events, strategic and operational plans, and statutory requirements, as well as APRs. Funding can be provided for taking further qualifications, attending external events, projects with other institutions and in-house activities. There is close monitoring of the budget and activities undertaken through the detailed monthly report that the SDTO makes to the Head of Human Resources.

138 The College maintains a full register of all staff development undertaken by all members of staff. The record shows a wide range of activity, including PhD study, higher

education regulations and assessment updates, curriculum planning and current practice, and safeguarding. There is ample evidence from the monthly report, research reports, staff CVs, and Research Committee minutes and observations that higher education academic and workshop staff engage with meaningful CPD, research and scholarship activities. The Research Committee receives updates from each cluster, an institutional review of the College staff's publications and a briefing from the Junior Research Fellows at each meeting. Activities include national and international conference presentations, published papers in peer-reviewed journals, and external and internal exhibitions of creative work. An annual human resources report to the SMT highlighted College support for eight staff undertaking PhDs and 11 staff studying for master's degrees.

139 Programme APEs record the events that the programme team has been involved with and their achievements. As well as higher education specific days, such as the research dissemination events, and learning and teaching conferences each year, the College identifies a week for groups of staff to meet: for example, programme teams, cross-College theme groups, or specific mandatory events for higher education staff, such as on the Quality Code.

140 The College carefully selects staff who have programme leadership or other curriculum management experience to undertake programme leader posts. Essential criteria include knowledge of pedagogic models that integrate theory and practice; relevant teaching experience at higher education level, including curriculum-planning, tracking student progress, pastoral support and assessment; and expertise as a contemporary practitioner. Programme leaders have overall responsibility for curriculum viability, managing a budget, leading the programme team, appraising staff, and quality assurance and enhancement.

141 Module leaders are usually senior lecturers or year tutors and are responsible for curriculum delivery, assessment processes and module review that feeds into the APEs. However, it is the programme leaders who take the overview of assessment and act as assessment review peers to ensure the alignment of the assessment practice with the learning outcomes and programme specification. The March 2014 staffing profile shows 12 out of 14 (88 per cent) academic leaders with curriculum development and assessment design experience. In July 2015 this was nine out of 11 (82 per cent). Programme leaders' CVs evidence a considerable collective experience of curriculum development and curriculum design.

142 The College has successfully developed and delivered higher education programmes for over 20 years. When Leeds University withdrew its validation service, the College partnered with the OU in 2005. College staff at this time went through a process of validation of its higher education provision with the OU, and experienced the academic standards and quality demanded of a different awarding body. There is a very strong, mutually beneficial relationship between the College and the OU. The College's maturity in developing and delivering higher education is recognised in that a considerable degree of autonomy in curriculum design is afforded by the OU. In addition, the College has functioned as an external member of the OU's Validation Committee and has presented its good practice at OU validation conferences. Observation of committees and meetings with staff and the scrutiny team provide evidence that programme leaders have a detailed knowledge of, and a thoughtful approach to, curriculum guidelines and pedagogic issues.

143 Other College staff gain valuable experience of curriculum development when they are invited to contribute to internal preliminary discussions, validation and revalidation processes. They attend to provide independent and impartial advice but also because they have particular pedagogic or subject expertise. At final validation, managed by the awarding body, a member of staff from a different discipline sits on the panel as a College observer and this provides additional experience of the formal process.

144 The College fully supports senior and other staff to engage with peer networks and providers of higher education in other institutions, and acknowledges the mutually beneficial relationships these interactions bring. It recognises the advantage to the College of external contacts in keeping staff up to date in curriculum design and assessment. Authorised leave of absence is signed off by human resources to allow staff to take up these duties. The College monitors staff activity by annual CV updates, and human resources maintains lists of those who have external examining or other external roles.

145 Staff are encouraged to become external examiners. A majority of the programme leaders are either engaged as external examiners or have experience as external validation panels in the UK or overseas. The March 2014 staff profile shows nine out of 14 (64 per cent) academic leaders and three other staff with external examining roles: in the July 2015 profile, there were seven out of 11 (64 per cent) academic leaders and four other staff so engaged. In November 2015 a report listed 16 institutions, including one in Bangkok and one in Singapore, where College staff are external examiners. In terms of external validation experience, in March 2014 there were eight out of 14 (57 per cent) academic leaders involved, and in July 2015 there were five out of 11 (45 per cent). At neither census date was there a member of staff who was a QAA reviewer. The SMT is satisfied with the level of engagement of senior and teaching staff, and academic leaders, with providers of higher education as external examiners and external validation panel members.

D The environment supporting the delivery of taught higher education programmes

Criterion D1

The teaching and learning infrastructure of an organisation granted taught degree awarding powers, including its student support and administrative support arrangements, is effective and monitored.

146 The LTE Strategy 2013-17 sets out the College's approach to the specialist nature of the curriculum, which aspires to excellence (see Criterion B3). The LTE Strategy provides a framework for the organisation of delivery of curricula and to monitor the effectiveness of students' learning experience. The aim is that all contribute to the way that academic theory, professionalism and practice can be integrated and form the basis of the curriculum, which continues to be developed and reviewed.

147 The College monitors the effectiveness of learning and teaching activities through the APE process. It is a thorough and analytical process, which, along with peer review, provides senior management with information to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning across the College.

148 An annual institutional overview, including a summary of the APEs and an action plan, is produced and submitted to the OU. The feedback from the OU for the 2011-12 report commended the thorough College processes in the production of the APEs and the commitment shown by staff in producing the lengthy and detailed reports. The OU commented particularly on the many student successes. It also noted the academic achievement of students, in that the percentage of students awarded first and upper second class degrees compares very favourably with HESA data. In 2015, 21 per cent of final year students achieved first class honours, 52 per cent an upper second, 23 per cent lower second, and three per cent third class. This profile is broadly similar to that in 2012 and 2014. The OU comments are echoed by external examiners' positive comments at board meetings, and in their reports where the high standards achieved by the best students are commended; the creative work was thought to be worthy of professional exhibition. There was also praise for the confidence and maturity shown by students when discussing their work.

149 Student opinions are an important part of the APE process. Feedback from module evaluation contributes to the module reviews, which feed into the APEs. Student feedback shows that students rate their lecturers and workshop staff very highly. They were aware of the research, study for higher qualifications and professional practice of staff, and felt that these had had positive effects on their learning. NSS scores for 'teaching on my course' declined between 2012 (90 per cent) and 2014 (81 per cent) but increased in 2015 (83 per cent) against the higher education sector mean of 87 per cent and a subject area mean of 86 per cent. Further analysis by the College showed that the score had been significantly adversely affected by two programmes, which the College was aware of as having some difficulties during the year. Each programme produces an action plan to address the specific issues identified through the NSS in addition to overall actions taken by the College.

150 The College's peer review process also contributes to the monitoring of the effectiveness of learning and teaching. This is a structured procedure that enables staff to reflect on their teaching practice and that of others through frank dialogue with a peer. The impact of research proposals on teaching is also part of the discussion. The Quality and Standards Office keeps an overview of the process. The collated reports form a peer

review report, which does not identify individual members of staff. It is presented to the HE Committee for quality assurance purposes and to the LTE Committee to inform enhancement and sharing good practice opportunities. Academic staff felt that peer review is a valuable mechanism, which informs them and the College about the quality of learning and teaching and enables staff to observe other delivery styles. An adapted form of peer review is now used with workshop staff and initial reactions have been favourable. This extension of the peer observation scheme to include workshop staff is a useful development given that such staff play a crucial role in supporting students with their technical requirements.

151 The College makes many efforts to identify and share good practice. The studio delivery environment, and the free flow of staff and students around the College, enable many opportunities for informal discussions and sharing among academic and workshop staff. Opportunities are taken to extract common areas for improvement and good practice from matters such as module review, APEs and the peer review report. These are then taken up in development events and in-house conferences, which staff find useful. At the June 2015 LTE conference 'Sharing and celebrating communities of practice' staff discussed ways of developing pedagogy to promote employability skills through collaborative working, including the concept of working with students as partners in learning.

152 The College uses information from a number of quantitative and qualitative sources to produce a coherent picture of learning and teaching. There are discussions at all levels in the institution between different groups of staff about pedagogy, which produce a shared and collegiate approach to learning and teaching. There is effective oversight by the SMT through the Quality and Standards Office to ensure students achieve learning objectives of their programmes.

153 The Quality Handbook states that feedback on assessed work should be given to students in a timely manner. However, it does not specify a time by which feedback should be given. Instead, there is a guideline and expectation that it should be within three weeks of the final assessment submission deadline set out in the Summative Feedback Guidelines for staff. For practical assessments they have ongoing informal discussions and regular structured group critiques, which promote collaborative learning. One-to-one meetings with their tutors are much appreciated by students.

154 Students reported that feedback on assessed work was prompt and usually within three weeks. The NSS question relating to 'feedback on my work has been prompt' has been above the sector mean (70 per cent) since 2012, when the score was 81 per cent; in 2013 it was 72 per cent; in 2014 it was 78 per cent; and in 2015, 75 per cent. In the College's own survey, based on NSS questions and aimed at levels 4 and 5 students, scores were higher. In 2015, for level 4 students, the score for the question on promptness of feedback was 79 per cent; for level 5 students it was 76 per cent. The Academic Registry informs students of the outcomes of the Final Examination and Progression Boards by letter within one week.

155 The College acknowledges that timeliness of feedback is an area for enhancement for the LTE Committee to examine. The complexity and diversity of delivery and assessment arrangements across the programmes may make a common framework difficult to achieve. However, although the College has mechanisms to track dates for student submissions of work, it is not clear that it has ways of monitoring when students get their feedback. Tracking the feedback interval from submission would be a first step to the College knowing what students are experiencing in terms of waiting for assessment feedback so that appropriate actions can be taken to improve survey scores.

156 There are strategies, such as the LTE Strategy, and guidelines in the Quality Handbook to inform staff about the College's approach to the purpose of assessment feedback and the quality it expects. The Quality Handbook defines the aims of assessment

in terms of developing learning, and outlines to staff the requirement for and nature of formative and summative feedback. All modules now have written summative feedback (previously the modules at end of year did not). Staff are directed to frame feedback assessments using the taxonomic language of the assessment criteria.

157 The Summative Feedback Guidelines and module assessment feedback template provide a framework that clearly indicates to students the learning outcomes to be covered by the brief, their weightings and the mark achieved for each. The pro forma provides a table for the content of feedback, which ensures that it refers directly to intended learning outcomes. In many programmes there are innovative ways of providing formative feedback on written work such as blogs, web groups and online. A successful pilot using originality checking software for draft written work to allow students to gain a better understanding of academic conventions has been endorsed for use across all programmes.

158 Students were clear about how the criteria by which their work will be graded linked to learning outcomes in the briefs and the weightings given to each learning outcome or task. They confirmed that they receive detailed written feedback on each learning outcome and that it informs them of how a higher grade could be obtained. They felt that the group critiques in particular were helpful, positive and gave them new ideas. Tutors explained that their approach balances the line between supportive dialogue on the one hand and too much direction on the other.

159 In October 2014, in response to the 2014 NSS results, the LTE Committee set up themed working groups. Assessment and communication was identified as a cross-cutting theme and the working group was tasked with gaining a greater understanding of the issues behind NSS scores for assessment, implementing appropriate actions and evaluating the impact of the interventions. The report to the LTE Committee in October 2015 stated that improvements measured through the NSS were marginal. The score for 'I have received detailed feedback on my work' was 74 per cent in both 2014 and 2015. For the statement 'Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand' in 2014 the score was 69 per cent, but in 2015 it was lower at 66 per cent. These are approximately in line with the national average for the higher education sector but below that for art and design institutions. In the College's own survey in 2015, level 4 students responded with 78 per cent for the 'I have received detailed feedback on my work' question, and level 5 students responded with 73 per cent. For the statement 'Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand' both level 4 and level 5 students responded with 74 per cent. The College is continuing to address assessment.

160 The format of the external examiners' report form is structured to focus comments on the technical areas of assessment, such as: design and structure, comments in relation to the stated learning outcomes, marking, and administration of assessment. There is less opportunity for external examiners to comment on the quality and constructiveness of the feedback given. Along with the LTE Committee improvement plan, the actions of the College have the potential to develop assessment processes to improve student responses in internal and external surveys.

161 The College's Student Engagement Strategy was approved by the Academic Board in July 2013. It was developed largely by the College's Students' Union and commits to involving students in strategic decision-making and operational processes. The opportunities for students to engage with their learning and provide feedback are described in detail. Student representatives play an important and effective role in communications between the student body and senior managers and academic staff. The Students' Union's role is also a key component of the College's structures for ensuring student views are expressed in a number of fora.

162 Student representatives are elected from each programme and receive training from Students' Union officers and the Academic Registry in order to voice the views of their peers. Students felt that programme boards were beneficial for them in receiving feedback quickly about academic issues they had raised, although student attendance is variable. Programme staff also feel that student presence and contributions at boards provides useful feedback to enhance the student experience. The College has put in place actions to improve response rates to module evaluations, as the engagement with them declined when the questionnaire changed from paper-based to online. Students stated that the close proximity to academic and workshop staff, and an open door policy, gave them many informal opportunities to raise issues.

163 The Principal and directors of study meet regularly and informally with higher education student representatives. The attendance by the most senior members of staff signals to students the importance and value of their feedback to the College and the clear wish of the College to enhance the student experience. It effectively deals with student concerns of a non-academic nature. Students felt that responses from College staff were prompt. Where the College is unable to respond to concerns, the reasons are carefully explained. Minutes of both the programme boards and the student representatives' meetings with the Principal and directors of studies are available on the VLE, and student representatives do their best to report back verbally to students. Students can also give feedback via the VLE.

164 The College takes positive actions to engage students with deliberative and decision-making committees. Students' Union officers have membership of and regularly attend College committees, such as the Academic Board, HE Committee, EDI Committee, LTE Committee and the Board of Governors. The College actively supports the Students' Union. Informal meetings take place once each term between the Students' Union Executive, Principal and directors of studies to ensure communications are maintained.

165 The College takes the outcomes of surveys, such as the NSS and its own, seriously and analyses occur at all levels in the College. Overall responsibility for addressing the NSS lies with the SMT collectively, although it is managed by the Quality and Standards Office. Overall, College and individual action plans are formulated to address student feedback in the NSS and the College's own survey. The College takes steps to improve student knowledge of, and participation in, the NSS by placing information on studio noticeboards and the VLE. The College's KPI for overall student satisfaction has been consistently 80 per cent for the last four years, and in 2015 this score was 81 per cent.

166 The OU looks carefully at external examiners' comments on student feedback. It considers that the College shows good practice in listening to students; there is a maturity in the relationships between College staff and students that enables them to speak freely even if being critical.

167 The Staff Consultative Committee is made up of an appropriate representative selection of staff and is chaired by the Principal. It is a forum for communication, consultation and discussion on College matters. At these meetings staff have the opportunity to feed back their views and issues to senior managers. Staff are able to speak freely and senior managers respond promptly or undertake to make further investigations. Staff are able to raise issues at regular team meetings.

168 The College does not operate formal employer fora or carry out formal employer surveys. The extensive professional network links that academic staff have with companies and practising artists are the major sources of contact with employers. The connections made have been productive and beneficial for students in many ways, as well as providing information used in curriculum development.

169 The College provides a high quality, comprehensive service to students in terms of pre-entry advice, induction onto their programmes and individual support for study. Students made very positive comments about their experience of well-organised Open Days, which enabled them to meet staff and current student ambassadors, who discussed the programmes and College in general.

170 All applicants are interviewed if they are likely to meet the entry criteria. Most programmes also undertake a pre-entry task because of the greater number of applicants to places (approximately 6:1 overall). After an offer has been made, the College keeps in contact with the applicants by email to send them useful information about accommodation, finance and end-of-year shows. This is managed by the Academic Registry to avoid duplication from several College sources. International students are interviewed face to face online, and use an electronic 'My Work' submission. Feedback is provided for unsuccessful students. OU representatives felt that the College recruited with integrity, ensuring the right students entered the right course.

171 The College's thorough induction process is spread over the initial weeks of the first year. Students reported that they found induction well run and enjoyable. Of note is the residential visit undertaken as part of induction by the BA (Hons) Photography to help students settle in, get to know their group and gain understanding of the pedagogic approach in the subject. Also at induction Students' Union officers meet new students. In response to a recommendation made from the QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review of 2011, the College now also provides induction refresher sessions for returning students. The College evaluates induction, and a working group, reporting to the LTE Committee, is currently exploring the effectiveness of the arrangements to inform improvements to practice for following years.

172 The College takes seriously its support for individual students with particular needs as evidenced by, for example, the detailed and constructive discussion at a Leadership Group meeting. Students have a number of opportunities to self-identify their learning needs. The VLE (portal) informs students of the range of support services the College offers. Its proactive approach is exemplified by, for example, screening all level 4 students for dyslexia. Guidance about a range of learning difficulties informs academic staff how the support services work and how they should help students in their groups. For older students, there is a mature students' network and a mentoring system. Mentees then become mentors for new adult students.

173 There is a full range of student support for all students who wish to access it. Student welfare and advice staff attend programme team meetings. The services, including those for international students, are evaluated by end-of-year reports, the Student Advice Report (now the Student Welfare Report) and student feedback at programme boards, and a questionnaire (undertaken by the Students' Union). A range of metrics of uptake is used in evaluation but account is also taken of how happy students are with the services. An annual report on academic support is produced. The NSS score for academic support in 2015 was 78 per cent, which is slightly down on previous years and below the sector mean (82 per cent). The Director of Studies, Progression and Student Support (DOSPSS) takes responsibility for this area and works with managers to provide an effective student services facility that meets the needs of students and brings about improvement. To release some capacity for student support staff and provide more targeted focus on international students the College appointed an International Officer in June 2014.

174 The College provides opportunities for prospective students to obtain impartial information and guidance about the higher education programmes. There is also the chance to visit the facilities and gain an understanding of the College approach to learning and teaching and its culture. Induction is thorough, informative and helps students settle in.

The needs of international students are addressed. A number of support services and personnel attend to individual student requirements. There is effective monitoring to check sufficiency and adequacy, and attention is paid to student surveys, which inform enhancement actions.

175 As set out earlier, all resources required to support the achievement of learning outcomes are identified at programme proposal and validation. Subsequently, the quality, adequacy and currency of learning resources are reviewed by student feedback and APEs, and issues arising are addressed during academic planning and the capital bids process. Space allocation is considered annually by the Principal, senior managers and programme leaders.

176 The NSS scores for learning resources overall are good. At 87 per cent in 2015, it is above both the higher education sector mean (86 per cent) and the creative art and design institutions' mean (84 per cent). In the College's internal survey, for level 4 and 5 students the scores are even higher: 86 per cent and 89 per cent respectively. The library consistently achieves good scores, with above 90 per cent in NSS over the past four years and in College surveys. Students met by the scrutiny team confirmed that provision of learning materials is good and the library fulfils their needs. The approachability and helpfulness of library staff is appreciated by students. Library staff are proactive in developing information sources for staff and students.

177 The superiority of the professional facilities in the College was a deciding factor in some applicants choosing to apply. The College's resources are well illustrated on the external website, which also states that in 2014 the College won the What Uni Student Choice Award for the UK university with the best facilities. As a specialist College there is demand for professional and high cost items. Reports from various resource areas indicated a significant investment in new and replacement equipment. The new building, learning areas and facilities are valued by staff and students. They are proactive in identifying cutting edge and new technologies to ensure students are up to date with the latest ideas. In 2015 the NSS scores for students being able to access specialised equipment, facilities and rooms when needed was 80 per cent, which is slightly above that for other specialist art colleges (79 per cent). In the College's survey the scores are 79 and 82 per cent for level 4 and 5 students respectively. Workshop staff are proactive in helping students and are highly praised in student surveys.

178 It is part of the LTE Strategy to create a blended learning environment that encourages flexible approaches to curriculum delivery and assessment by integrating online resources and modes of learning. To this end the College's VLE has been upgraded, and the eLearning subcommittee in 2014-15 deliberated extensively on the best pedagogic approaches the College should adopt in developing its further use. Alongside this, it considered the technical development of the platform. There has been a considerable amount of staff training and VLE guides produced for staff and students. When some students experienced difficulties in navigation, work was done to improve it. An audit of the types of use was undertaken to inform future eLearning policy. Awareness of the emerging culture of use of eLearning and technology has identified a need for a framework and rationale for consistent development in the future, and good progress is being made to this effect.

179 The College has effective measures in place to ensure that students have sufficient, accessible and high quality learning resources.

180 The College has a comprehensive and effective Student Welfare Services section. It provides advisory information on a range of items, including programmes and career advice and guidance, financial, accommodation, health-related issues and counselling.

The student advice service area is visible and accessible. The College is sensitive to the stresses and issues that students might face and provides a thoughtful, confidential and proactive approach to providing support. Students were fully aware of the services available within the College for financial advice, counselling, and sources of information and help. Students appreciate the supportive, caring environment created by the College.

181 Advisory and counselling staff are well qualified and provide a professional service. A member of the counselling team belongs to the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy and as such undertakes the required professional standards to maintain registration. In addition, she was funded by the College to undertake training in mindfulness to support the increasing number of students reporting depression and anxiety. The annual reports provide quantitative and qualitative data to inform senior managers of the usage and effectiveness of the services, and from this make decisions on the appropriate level of resource required.

182 Students learn about future options and career opportunities in a number of ways. The Partnerships and Professional Engagement Unit delivers 'Life After College' sessions to support students' employability and knowledge of future options, and includes Career Track Tuesdays and Start Up Wednesdays. These are increasingly well attended and are appreciated by students. Senior staff are confident that the learning opportunities offered to students are appropriate to work readiness and that students have correct creative skills sets. The outcome of the College survey shows that students feel ready for work because of the live briefs and competitions they have the chance to take part in.

183 The marketing team keeps in contact with alumni and its database has grown considerably in the past year. Students benefit from hearing what previous students have been doing since leaving. Innovative practice in the visual communications area enables students to see the work environments and the work of alumni through live video online connections without the graduates having to travel to the College. The Creatives in Residence initiative is an opportunity for graduates to continue to use College facilities and staff advice when starting on their careers. Particular support is given in developing business and entrepreneurial skills, as many practicing professional artists are self-employed. Creative networks talks from high profile visiting professionals inspire students and are well attended.

184 Staff do not use the College's advisory and counselling services. The human resources department can provide support or signpost staff to external counselling or employee-assistance programmes. Student advisory and counselling services are appreciated by students and monitored effectively by the College through regular qualitative and quantitative reports, which inform the resourcing of the areas through the business planning process.

185 The College has made a considerable investment in staff and technical resources to support the administration of the higher education provision in recent years. New staff appointments in this period include the Head of IT, Academic Registrar and Deputy Academic Registrar (Quality and Standards). The administrative and IT infrastructure has been upgraded and a new student record system introduced. The student record system produces information on student admissions, attendance, withdrawals and achievements. It also generates data on the student profile in terms of the declared protected characteristics and widening participation cohort, which is used extensively by the College, for example for the APEs, but particularly by the EDI Committee (see paragraph 206). Other timely and accurate data is generated to inform committees about the progress being made by the College in terms of its KPIs.

186 The HE Administration Manager manages nine staff who provide programme support. The Academic Registry includes admissions and administration staff who liaise well. This team is responsible for ensuring proper input of student information throughout the duration of their programme. They correspond with students about attendance and assessment. Programme administrators work in pairs and check each other's inputted data to ensure accuracy. The systems for administration are effective, with checks for accuracy in-built, and successful because of good working relationships and communications between the areas. The College Management Information System office works closely with Academic Registry staff to ensure the correctness of statistics in official returns to external agencies, such as HESA data. An internal audit report commission from an external auditing company in February 2013 concluded that the controls the College takes to manage the accuracy of HESA and KIS data are 'suitably designed, consistently applied and effective'.

187 Many of the various College strategic and deliberative committees have a large number of agenda items with associated papers. The documentation for committees is very carefully prepared by the Academic Registry in good time for attendees to read prior to meetings. This was much appreciated by the scrutiny team. The College operates effective examination boards for all its programmes using the student record system for the mark sheets. The boards were seen to run very smoothly in accordance with OU regulations, with all paperwork prepared accurately in advance and with due regard for proper protocols for confidentiality and propriety.

188 The meticulous preparation of committee papers, the organisation of efficient examinations boards, and the timeliness and accuracy of data suggest that the College has very effective administrative personnel and processes. This enables the College to monitor student progression and performance accurately, and provide timely and accurate information to satisfy academic and non-academic management information needs.

189 The College has a set of relevant, comprehensive policies and procedure for complaints (academic and non-academic), admissions and academic appeals. They are well aligned to the Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints* and *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*. The Complaints Policy and a useful flowchart were revised in 2013. It clearly explains the procedure used where a student has a complaint arising from their College experience. Appeals against disciplinary decisions are dealt with by the College's Disciplinary Policy and Procedure for Students. A new Admissions, Appeals and Complaints Policy was introduced in 2012-13.

190 The Academic Registrar manages the complaints and appeals processes, and makes a report to the HE Committee and Academic Board. In 2013-14 there were six complaints and 11 appeals for higher education provision. Of the 11 appeals, 10 related to the Final Examination and Progression Boards and one to the admissions process. In 2014-15 there were nine appeals and four complaints. Seven appeals arose from the June meeting of the Final Examination and Progression Board and two from the September meeting. There were no appeals from the admissions process in this year. The College deals with all the appeals and complaints in line with its policies and procedures. Enhancements arising from the appeals and complaints have been considered through the APE report or the business support review. For example, where an appeal was investigated and resulted in the College acknowledging that it had not provided sufficiently explicit information, the student was offered support and changes were made to the website to ensure additional costs are explicitly stated. The increase in the number of appeals and complaints since 2011-12 was explained by the more formal recording of these, necessitated by the requirement to return an annual report to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator; the improved communication of the appeals and complaints procedures to the students and the rise in the number of complaints was in line with those for other specialist colleges.

None of the complaints had gone forward to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator or OU.

191 All information about complaints and appeals is made known to students through the VLE and reiterated by tutors at induction. Students confirmed they were fully aware of complaints and appeals, and knew where to go for help. The Students' Union President confirmed at the Academic Board that work had been undertaken to inform students of how to raise matters of issue and concern to them.

192 The College has fair and transparent policies and procedures that are known to staff and students. There is close monitoring of complaints and appeals through the Quality and Standards Office, Academic Registrar and Academic Board.

193 It is a strategic aim of the College to attract and retain 'staff who actively engage in self-development'. To realise this aim the College commits to providing support and development for all staff. This includes enabling staff to gain professional qualifications and the College to maintain the Investors in People standard. The CPD Policy states the intention to foster a climate of continuous learning through support of a range of CPD activities both formally and informally. It also commits to offering all staff 'an entitlement to equality of access to high-quality induction and continuing support and development throughout their employment cycle at the College'.

194 There is an induction schedule for new staff. The process is managed by human resources and comprehensively covers all aspects of the post for which the staff member is employed. Staff from all sections of the College confirmed that they have received a thorough induction and then undertook a probationary year of structured support where any training needs were identified and addressed. Subsequently, the APR enables many opportunities for further training. Staff development needs are identified from a variety of sources: programme meetings, the LTE Committee, and other committees and APRs. Common themes are addressed by providing sessions, or individual requests may have bespoke provision, for example in interviewing and recruiting students.

195 Staff acknowledged that the APR process is useful in identifying skills and knowledge needed for their role. Role-specific training is supported. The College is a member of the HE and Technicians Education and Development (HEaTED) organisation, and during staff development weeks speakers from this organisation make presentations to workshop staff. Managers undertake the management development programmes run in the College.

196 There are two periods of staff development for all staff, with one in September for administrative staff. The human resources department sets the programme for these in-house events based on APR information and advice from senior committees. There are also opportunities for skills updating, for example IT and VLE use. The human resources department records all instances of staff development centrally and produces an annual summary report. In 2014-15 a substantial sum was spent on training and other staff development equating to £651 per full-time equivalent. Twenty-six staff were supported in working towards gaining formal qualifications. Also funded were the research dissemination events; staff development weeks; internal updating and on-the-job training; HEA writing retreats; online training; and the management development programme. The College maintained its Investors in People status: a mark of continuing excellence in supporting staff training and development. This report does not, however, indicate how the funded activity is evaluated in terms of enhancements or benefits it brings to the College.

197 The College has an institutional commitment to CPD, which is well embedded. Staff are well supported and the College is able to meet the majority of requests. The APR

process and effective monitoring enable the College to prioritise development to address the strategic imperatives and staff personal aspirations.

198 There is comprehensive and detailed information about the College's Higher and Further Education Provision Policy. The College has aligned this policy with the Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision. It states the College's commitment to providing accessible, trustworthy, complete and timely information for all stakeholders, including prospective and current students and staff. The College further undertakes to ensure information is consistent across all media and with the partnership agreements of its validating body. The Policy covers material that is in the public domain as well as internal documents. It includes a clear table setting out the responsibilities of various staff involved in producing, managing and checking the accuracy and completeness of information.

199 The website is the main locus of information for prospective students and other stakeholders. It is attractive and easy to navigate. It was reported that the website had reached number three in the top five art schools websites across the world, and in 2015 there was a particularly large increase in international applications. Students' opinions on the website and its information have contributed to the new-look website. Students had found the College website information to be accurate.

200 The accuracy of the website is maintained by the fortnightly meetings of the marketing and admissions departments, so that any changes are communicated between the areas and changes can be made promptly to the website by the Digital Communications Officer. The Partnerships, Internationalisation and Marketing Group has representation from all curriculum areas. Part of its role is to coordinate marketing activities; the Head of Marketing has overall responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of published information on the College's website, which is signed off by the Principal and directors of studies. The website is comprehensive, with full information about governance, senior and academic staff, programme specifications and complete key information set data, for which the Academic Registry is responsible.

201 The College hard copy prospectus has evolved into a showcase of artwork to interest new applicants rather than a source of detailed information, for which the website is the point of reference. The website and hard copy do not have information about fees; instead, students are directed to the website where fees are set out. This ensures that the information given to students is always current and accurate. The College has taken note of the Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) guidelines for higher education institutions. A CMA group is reviewing College policies and has put in place a framework for enhanced data checking and updating.

202 The VLE on the College website provides an extensive range of useful information for prospective and current students. It contains information such as academic regulations, assessment criteria, the student handbook and charter, and the Student Engagement Strategy, as well as information on student support and resources available, including library provision. The internal VLE is a further source of essential and helpful information for current students. It provides online communication about the details of programme delivery and assessments, as well as general news, events, student services availability and learning resources. Each head of area, such as student services, learning resources, programmes and advice, has editing rights for the information on its section of the VLE. The Quality and Standards Office takes responsibility for maintaining and managing this area, which also contains the Quality Handbook.

203 Overall, the scrutiny team considers that the College has sufficient and thorough controls to safeguard the accuracy, completeness and accessibility of information produced about its higher education provision.

204 The College has a strategic aim to continue its development of an inclusive community that welcomes staff and students from a wide range of cultures and backgrounds. The KPIs for this aim are about meeting its access agreement targets, monitoring equality and employment statistics, and continuing as an Investors in Diversity institution. The College has set up appropriate management and committee structures, policies and data gathering, and analysis processes to achieve its targets. It has also created an inclusive physical and cultural environment by embedding EDI considerations in all aspects of its work.

205 There is a wide-ranging EDI Policy, which covers the academic and support infrastructure, and external engagement. The College's approach goes beyond equal opportunities to encompass equality, fairness and freedom from discrimination for the protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010 and students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as in the widening participation agenda. As well as physical accessibility the College creates an inclusive environment in all its activities. The EDI Committee is made up of heads of services, the Academic Registrar, academic and support staff, a student representative and the Progression Manager. It is chaired by the DOSPSS. The Committee ensures that EDI practices are implemented and the policy updated. Minutes of EDI Committee meetings and observations indicate a very thorough approach to gathering and analysing statistics concerning applications; enrolments; retention; and achievement in terms of a number of aspects of the student profile, including, age, gender, learning difficulty/disability, postcode and parental education for higher education students. Staff development in this area is reported annually to the committee.

206 This information is used at various levels. The EDI Committee reports to the SMT, with the minutes going to the Academic Board. The statistical information is used at programme boards and reported in APEs. A report back from programme boards to the EDI Committee ensures that EDI considerations are embedded into the quality and standards infrastructure and clearly understood by all staff. The EDI Committee analyses data from a wide range of sources to check for any patterns that may imply bias. Through staff induction and CPD the College widely transmits its values of equality and inclusiveness. The College maintained its Investors in Diversity accreditation in 2015 in recognition of its continued commitment to an inclusive culture.

207 The College's commitment to supporting EDI can be found on the website, although the pages are not prominently positioned. The section explains the College's recognition of the benefits that diversity can bring and its aim to create an environment free from discrimination. It also sets out the aims and objectives of the EDI Policy. At this location the College publishes its annual EDI report in compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and fulfilling the strategic KPI concerning the monitoring of equality group statistics. The report contains an impressive range of detailed, quantitative information and charts, and analysis, which provided a clear picture of staff and student profiles. The report also benchmarks the College's student profile data with that of other similar institutions, with statistical reports provided by the Equality Challenge Unit; this is good practice. College staff keep up to date with legislation and human rights issues by attending external national conferences and reporting back to the EDI Committee.

208 There is ample and strong evidence that the College is proactive and thorough in addressing equality of opportunity across all aspects of its work.

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