



Institutional audit
Newman University College

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Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Institutional audit: report

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

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

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

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

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

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

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Newman University College (the University College) from 7 to 11 March 2011 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that Newman University College offers, including the research degree awards offered on behalf of the University of Leicester.

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

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

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

- **confidence** can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers, including the research degree awards delivered on behalf of the University of Leicester
- **confidence** can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University College has decided not to develop a separate enhancement strategy. Enhancement is embedded through refinement of processes, to ensure fitness for purpose, through the Learning and Teaching Strategy and other routes to improve student learning opportunities. The opportunity to develop a wider understanding of enhancement with staff and students is presented in the report.

Postgraduate research students

The audit team concluded that the University College's management of the research degree programmes awarded through the University of Leicester met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA, and that the procedures for assuring the quality and standards of these programmes are secure.

Published information

The audit team found that, for the most part, reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information the University College publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards. There is a recommendation in Section 7 of this report that the University College ensures a complete, consistent and synchronised publication of programme specifications and handbooks.

Features of good practice

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

- the development opportunities provided by the Critical Commentary journal (paragraphs 44 and 100)
- the wide-ranging work-placement opportunities provided in support of work-based learning (paragraph 46).

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University College to:

- reduce variability in annual monitoring by improving analysis, evaluation and reflection in order to achieve better upward reporting and a more informed institutional overview (paragraphs 18 and 73)
- ensure a complete, consistent and synchronised publication of programme specifications and handbooks (paragraphs 24 and 110)
- ensure both a minimum standard and a consistent approach to the approval of collaborative partners (paragraphs 67 and 91).

It would be desirable for the University College to:

- ensure the publication of all external examiner reports through the existing University College procedures (paragraphs 21 and 80)
- promote awareness and understanding of enhancement across all levels (paragraph 62)
- further enhance the use of management information across the institutional reporting processes (paragraphs 22 and 29)
- ensure that a single institutional policy for the student-staff consultative committees is published and consistently applied (paragraphs 21, 40 and 81)
- promote both comparable student support and consistent application of regulations across all programmes (paragraph 55).

Reference points

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

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

The audit team found that the University College largely took account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students, but there is a recommendation to the University College on the use of programme specifications.

Report

1 An Institutional audit of Newman University College (the University College) was undertaken during the week commencing 7 March 2011. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University College's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers, including the research degree awards delivered on behalf of the University of Leicester and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Professor Geoffrey Elliott, Mr Steve Finch, Dr Wendy Gill, Ms Barbara Howell, and Mr Daryn McCombe, auditors, and Mr Stephen Murphy, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor Peter Hodson, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University College's vision is 'to be a student-centred university rooted in the community providing a formative education informed by the Catholic ethos'. This underpins the mission which is to provide 'high quality, accessible academic and professional education based on respect for others, social justice and equity' with the aim of making 'a positive difference to individuals and communities through the contribution of our staff, students and graduates'.

4 The last Institutional audit undertaken by QAA in 2003 resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The report identified five areas of good practice and made nine recommendations for action by the University College. The recommendations related to ensuring: Academic Governance was consistently located within the Academic Committee structure; feedback to students on assessed work was prompt; rigorous processes for quality and standards were maintained during times of transition; staff development was linked to the Strategic Plan; the University College developed a systematic way to disseminate good practice throughout the institution; and management information was used in a systematic and analytical way throughout the institution.

5 Since the 2003 audit other audits and reviews have taken place including:

- the 2006-07 taught degree awarding powers audit (by QAA)
- the 2008 mid-cycle audit follow-up report (QAA desk review)
- the 2009 QAA review of research degree programmes (desk review).

6 The audit team concluded that the University College had responded effectively to the majority of the recommendations with the opportunity for further enhancing the systematic method of disseminating good practice through the University College still available, and the further enhancement of management information being recommended.

7 The University College manages its academic standards and quality of learning opportunities through two integrated strands of committees or boards: Academic Board and its associated committees and the Newman Management Group. The Board of Governors had recently commissioned an internal report into the governance of the University College which established that 'substantial assurance' could be placed in the controls upon which the organisation relies to manage academic governance, as currently laid down and operated. The Academic Board has primary responsibility for maintaining standards and quality within the institution and operates through three main committees: the Academic Standards

Committee, the Academic Development Committee and the Learning and Teaching Committee.

8 The Academic Standards Committee has operational responsibility for standards and quality assurance and has formal responsibility to manage the annual monitoring process, as well as being responsible for oversight of external inspection and review. The Academic Development Committee provides oversight for curriculum planning for new and revalidating programmes. It is also responsible to Academic Board for actively considering the portfolio provision. The Learning and Teaching Committee advises the Academic Board on all aspects of learning and teaching. The current Learning and Teaching Strategy had expired although the audit team did note that a new strategy is being developed and the team would encourage the University College to ensure this process is completed at the earliest opportunity (see paragraph 41).

9 In addition to Academic Board and its three main committees, there are additional committees such as the Minor Amendments Panel and the Regulations Review Group which assists Academic Board in establishing regulatory frameworks. The audit team found that the terms of reference for each of these committees were appropriate.

10 Directorate is the Senior Management Committee of the University College, and is the executive body which reviews academic matters from a business management perspective and focuses on areas such as business planning and performance.

11 Newman Management Group is a wider management group which includes the Deans, Directors for Quality, Library and Learning Services, Student Support, Research, External Partnerships, Estates, Information Technology, Human Resources, and Marketing. The Newman Management Group makes operational decisions about how to implement the Strategic Plan. The Vice Principal of the University College is responsible for academic developments and is also responsible for the Academic Standards programme and as such chairs Academic Standards Committee, Academic Development Committee, and Learning and Teaching Committee.

12 The University College operates three schools: the School of Human Sciences, the School of Education and the 'Virtual' Graduate School. The schools have an executive role in the management of quality and standards although all formal deliberative work is overseen by the institutional level committees.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

13 Approval of new programmes of study is a formal three-stage process and is articulated in the Academic Handbook. Proposals must also go through a number of pre and interim stages. Programme Approval Panel recommendations go to Academic Board for formal verification and the Academic Standards Committee receives the documentation. There is also a post-validation meeting, up to three months after the Programme Approval Panel, to make sure all conditions and recommendations have been met before delivery begins. Minutes of this meeting go to Academic Board who then formally approve the validation of the programme. Undergraduate programmes are validated for a maximum of six years. Master's programmes are currently reviewed after two years. Periodic review, called review and revalidation by the University College, follows similar procedures to the original validation process, with an additional operational evidence base available to the revalidation panel.

14 The University College recognises that its procedures for validation 'could be considered excessive'. The audit team noted there are multiple pre-stage and interim-stage

activities in addition to the formal three-stage process, and concluded that the institution should consider a streamlining of the process.

15 Any changes to a programme, once validated, must be taken through the Minor Amendments Panel and all minutes of the Minor Amendments Panel are received by the Academic Standards Committee. The Quality Office monitors these amendment proposals and initiates a revalidation event when the proposed changes exceed a third of the programme within a two-year period. The audit team saw evidence of the range and type of changes and formed the view that these are appropriately considered by the panel.

16 Annual monitoring is carried out at individual programme level, at subject level, which may involve several programmes, and at institutional level. The audit team saw 10 annual monitoring reports from six subject areas and noted that there was some variance between content, and that Programme Managers had missed some sections of the template and other sections were completed with minimal content.

17 The terms of reference of the Academic Standards Committee states that it will receive all annual monitoring reports, check for academic rigour and approve the reports as meeting the requirements of the process. The University College has interpreted this to mean that two members of the Academic Standards Committee act as reviewers or monitors for one or more of the reports and give their approval or otherwise to the report(s). The full report is not seen by the complete Academic Standards Committee at any of its meetings, so the terms of reference appear not to be fully addressed. These reports are used by the chair of the Academic Standards Committee to produce an Annual College Quality Monitoring Report. The audit team could find little evidence in the committee minutes that the content and findings of these reports had been discussed by the Academic Standards Committee.

18 The audit team recommends as advisable that the University College should reduce variability in annual monitoring by improving analysis, evaluation and reflection in order to achieve better upward reporting and a more informed institutional overview.

19 The External Examiners Handbook is part of the Academic Handbook, and details the roles and responsibilities of external examiners. The criteria for the appointment of external examiners are also set out in the Academic Handbook. The audit team found that the process of approval is thorough, with three stages of approval. Training and briefing for recently-appointed external examiners is carried out through the Annual External Examiners Conference. Attendance by the external examiners is not compulsory and at the last three conferences nine, six and six external examiners had attended respectively. The team formed the view that the opportunity of developing additional training routes for new external examiners as an alternative option should be considered by the University College.

20 The audit team noted that the external examiners' report format appears sufficiently broad and detailed in its coverage to encourage external examiners to reflect on a wide variety of aspects of their roles, including academic standards. The Academic Handbook sets out the process for considering these reports, which are intended to safeguard standards and to be used by programme teams to inform annual monitoring.

21 The Academic Standards Committee does not see each individual external examiner's report but the chair of the Academic Standards Committee is responsible for producing an overview. The Academic Standards Committee minutes suggest that the committee is concerned with the process of receiving external examiners' reports, and the minutes do not suggest the content of the overview is considered. The University College's policy of requiring all student-staff consultative committees to receive and discuss external examiners' reports does not always happen in practice. The audit team found that a number

of student-staff consultative committees had not seen the external examiner's report, or had not had time to consider it during the meeting. The University College should ensure that a single institutional policy for the student-staff consultative committees is published and consistently applied (see paragraph 80).

22 The treatment of institutional issues raised by external examiners at committee stage, together with the recommendation to further enhance the use of management information, supports the view of the audit team that the University College should improve the institutional reporting processes.

23 The University College makes active use of a range of external reference points, consisting primarily of the Academic Infrastructure and the professional, statutory and regulatory bodies with which the University College engages. The audit team found that the Moodle pages for students on a programme include programme handbooks but that these do not include all the information that the Academic Infrastructure would expect to be in a programme specification.

24 The audit team recommends that it would be advisable for the University College to ensure a complete, consistent and synchronised publication of programme specifications and handbooks is secured.

25 The audit team found that reference to the Academic Infrastructure is present in the validation and approval documents that were made available. The University College's review policy for the *Code of practice* is that all sections will be reviewed every two years. The team concluded that a regular system of review, against sections which had not changed, may not be a productive use of effort.

26 The Academic Handbook deals with assessment guidelines and academic regulations, and the Regulations Review Group meets as required to consider changes. The University College's assessment guidelines and regulations provide a comprehensive structure for the assessment of students.

27 Students at levels 4 and 5 are permitted to resubmit the same piece of work again, having failed it the first time around and students at level 4 are allowed to resit the same examination paper at the next available opportunity, having received feedback on the first attempt. The University College is confident that standards have been maintained and learning outcomes preserved, although discussion of this issue at the external examiners' conference is not well recorded. Subsequently, external examiners were advised in writing of this approach, and invited to comment. The team was persuaded that there were good pedagogic reasons for this policy and that there are sufficient checks and balances in place to ensure that standards are not compromised.

28 There are clear guidelines relating to mitigation and appeals as well as definitions of plagiarism and a comprehensive guide to the conduct of examinations. The University College described an approach to address the problem of student non-completion, including changes to the regulations. The audit team were reassured that any regulatory changes would be fully considered by the Regulations Review Group to ensure standards were protected.

29 The University College indicated that management information system data is used to inform annual module reviews and programme reports. The audit team found variability in the use of this data, with some annual reports including detailed statistics while others used them less effectively. The data is also used for agenda items at Academic Board and Governors meetings, particularly regarding student performance, retention, equality and diversity profiling key performance indicators. The team found that Academic Board had

used the data in meetings but no evidence was minuted to confirm that issues raised had been followed up appropriately. The team recommends that it would be desirable for the University College to enhance the use of management information across the institutional reporting processes.

30 Overall, the audit team concluded that confidence may be placed in the University College's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

31 The University College regards its management of learning opportunities as matching the precepts of the *Code of practice*. It undertakes thematic reviews across the institution on a two-yearly basis. The approval process for new or revalidated courses considers the resources and learning opportunities to assure the quality of the learning experience at a number of points in the process.

32 The audit team saw evidence of externality, and the co-opting of members with specialist interests or knowledge, at the approval stage of programmes. Evidence that panels consider the resource statement and risk assessments, which ensures that the programme is adequately resourced, was also available to the team.

33 The University College states that within the annual monitoring of programmes and subject areas, it considers the management of learning opportunities through external examiners' reports, the monitoring of action plans, student feedback and a specific section on learning resources. The annual monitoring report also considers any staff development requirements. The audit team can confirm the active consideration of staff development at this stage from the evidence seen (see paragraphs 18 and 21).

34 The University College participates in the National Student Survey. In addition there is a well established Student Satisfaction Survey which gathers the views of a sample of undergraduate students during study at level 5. Other methods of feedback include module evaluation, student-staff consultative committees for each subject and programme, the first-year experience survey and programme surveys.

35 There is a page for students on the Moodle virtual learning environment which addresses quality issues which is relatively new, and the audit team would encourage the University College to develop this resource further in line with institutional aspirations. The team found that, essentially, the University College utilises surveys appropriately and is committed to ensuring feedback mechanisms for students are available and comprehensive.

36 The audit team found evidence of student engagement in quality assurance through committee membership and through representation on student-staff consultative committees. Students are also members of school meetings where they have the opportunity to raise any student issues. These committees provide the opportunity for students to feed back on their learning opportunities within programmes; they are then discussed at programme meetings. The team heard that the committees follow a standard agenda, receive annual monitoring and external examiners' reports, and discuss module evaluation and National Student Survey outcomes, with minutes posted on Moodle. However, the evidence provided to the team indicated that this was not being fully achieved.

37 Module evaluations, which provide the opportunity for quantitative and qualitative feedback, take place midway through the module and at the end of each module. This was confirmed during discussions. The audit team learnt that the quality of teaching is monitored through the recently revised Peer-Supported Development Scheme and saw evidence that

the Quality Office monitored module evaluations and incorporated feedback from these into the annual monitoring processes.

38 The audit team confirmed that students are represented on the University College committees mainly by members of the Students' Union, and that the Students' Union has regular meetings with the Principal. From 2010-11 students will be involved as full panel members on approval, re-approval and validation events.

39 Training for Student-Staff Consultative Committee representatives is programme based, with the Quality Office providing training for students to take minutes for these committees. The Quality Office also provides informal training and support for students who volunteer to be involved in approval or other internal quality events. Students are involved in other quality assurance activities, including disciplinary panels.

40 The audit team concluded that there is currently student involvement in quality assurance processes across the University College and feel that the recent changes to policies and processes in relation to this will enable this to continue effectively in the future. However, it was felt that the variabilities found in relation to the policy and practice of student-staff consultative committees affected the students' ability to contribute effectively to the management of their learning opportunities. The team therefore recommends that it would be desirable for a single institutional policy for student-staff consultative committees to be published and consistently applied across the University College, including for collaborative provision.

41 The links between research and scholarly activity and student learning opportunities is established through the appointment of new academic staff, through the appraisal processes and through programme development, validation and review procedures. The effectiveness is monitored through the University College's annual monitoring procedures. The commitment to research and scholarship is articulated in the Research Strategy and the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The audit team noted that the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2005-08 had been extended to 2010 and was currently being revised.

42 Through the documentary evidence available and discussions held with staff, the audit team was assured of the links between research, scholarly activity and the curricula across the University College. The team found evidence to support links between research, scholarly activity and teaching, and students learning opportunities from the appointment of new staff, through programme development and re-design, and annual monitoring procedures. The approach is linked to institutional strategies and policies, some of which are currently undergoing revision.

43 An annual Academic Health Day offers an opportunity for sharing best practice, although the evidence provided indicated that the process of dissemination was localised rather than institutional.

44 The University College publishes an in-house student journal Critical Commentary with postgraduate and final year undergraduate students encouraged to submit articles to it. The journal was well received by staff and students and there are plans to extend the circulation and contributions to this. The audit team considered the journal and the opportunities it provided for students to be a feature of good practice.

45 Academic staff are required to engage in teaching and research and/or scholarship. There are staff development opportunities to support this; and the promotions policy recognises performance in teaching as well as research.

46 The audit team found strong evidence to support work-placement opportunities being provided to all honours degree programmes. This represents a significant proportion of the student population being able to engage in work placement. Work-related learning is supported by handbooks and the information provided to the team confirmed this. The team considered the wide ranging work-placement opportunities provided by the University College to be a feature of good practice.

47 Modules across a range of programmes are delivered online, and there is currently one full programme delivered as an online distance learning programme. The University College considered blending learning opportunities to be important in supporting the planned increase in the number of part-time students, and the audit team saw evidence of this in the development of part-time blended learning provision at master's level. Staff are supported in developing flexible and distributed learning opportunities by online guides, workshops and programme development processes and procedures, with the Head of e-Learning identifying any training needs that teams may have.

48 Information for students on assessment is available in the Student Handbook, and the Academic Handbook provides information for staff. Students confirmed that details on assessment could be found in module handbooks.

49 Three operational units oversee the resources for learning: the Library; IT Services; and e-Learning. The audit team heard that students were appreciative of the library and its extended opening hours, and were praiseworthy of the library staff. The Head of e-Learning ensures that e-learning is planned for and adequately resourced and the team heard that specialist software was provided when required. The Student Services Committee, a sub-committee of Academic Board, was introduced to more fully integrate these three different units and the services they provide. The remit, membership and reporting lines of the Student Services Committee were revised in 2010 to make it more effective.

50 The audit team found evidence to support the University College statement that there has been considerable investment made to improve learning resources. Students were satisfied with the resources available to them and they commented positively on the change to their experiences over the past four years, with more e-resources becoming available.

51 Centralised responsibility for the admission of students lies with the Admissions Office, with the International Office supported by the Admissions staff dealing with all international students. The audit team heard that a new policy for admissions had been developed, although this was still awaiting approval. The Admissions Policy meets the requirements of the Frank Buttle Award, which is in recognition of institutions that provide additional support to students who have been in public care prior to entering higher education. All applicants are either interviewed or offered the opportunity to meet staff by attending a visit day. The University College also provides a HeadStart programme which offers transitional support to non-traditional applicants and other students who would benefit from this.

52 Academic Board has oversight of the Admissions Policy and the admissions procedures are regularly reviewed against the *Code of practice*. An Entry Requirements Group oversees and reviews admission and recruitment and sets tariffs on an annual basis. From 2011-12 admissions will be producing an annual monitoring report.

53 From the evidence presented, the audit team formed the view that the policies and practices for admissions were fair, clear and explicit. However, they note that the University College is currently operating under its old Admissions Policy, while the revised policy awaits formal approval.

54 Academic staff operate an 'open door' policy for students providing academic and pastoral support which was confirmed, and appreciated, by students during the audit. The Student Support Centre provides specialist support on careers and also disability and health. The audit team found evidence to confirm the wide range of support available, and in different locations including the Student Support Centre in the library and in the Hub which is the location of the IT Helpdesk, the Chaplaincy, Admissions, Student Records, and the Examinations and Assessment Centre. However, students experienced different types of support and there was a lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities of individuals who provide support to students. This was compounded by inconsistencies in the information provided.

55 The audit team concluded that while there was a wide range of support available to students, there was variability in practice. Informal support from their tutors or other staff works well for students at present, but there were inconsistencies in the information provided to students, including procedural and regulatory advice. Therefore the audit team recommends that it would be desirable for the University College to promote comparability of both student support and the consistency in the application of regulations across all programmes.

56 The National Student Survey and internal survey results reinforce the view that students are effectively supported through personal development planning opportunities, with information made available to them through the e-learning zone. Students confirmed that they felt well prepared 'for their working life'.

57 It was confirmed that staff support is provided by Human Resources and the Learning and Development Unit and that all academic staff have an induction and a mentoring programme. The Corporate Staff Induction Handbook provides an overview of information, relevant policies and procedures, and staff support. There are also staff resources available on the intranet, via 'mynewman' and the staff Moodle pages.

58 The audit team heard that peer observation of teaching was replaced by a peer-supported development scheme in 2010. It extends beyond teaching observation and is now available to all staff involved in learning and teaching activities. Fellowships in academic practice have been created to support the implementation of this new scheme and the results from this year will be evaluated by the Learning Development Unit. It was confirmed that these processes were in place, but it was too early to evaluate the success of this revised scheme. The University College Postgraduate Certificate in Education (accredited by the Higher Education Academy) has not yet run, instead staff are encouraged to attend the programme provided by Birmingham City University.

59 The audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

60 The audit team explored the principles, processes and definition of enhancement within the University College. It stated that its definition of enhancement was in alignment with the QAA definition of enhancement; as deliberate action taken at institutional level which results in an improvement in quality. The University College also stated that enhancement was embedded within the institution and that it believed itself to be a reflective learning community, committed to continuous enhancement. It views itself as value driven and concerned with providing students with a distinctive and formative education. Examples provided by staff in the University College of enhancement practices included the processes

and practices to support external examiners and the formative student experience embedded within the University College's Strategic Plan.

61 The University College explained that the widespread ownership of quality and standards in the institution, through internal panel membership and participation in Minor Amendments Panels, was a deliberate institutional strategy to disseminate awareness of good practice. The Learning and Teaching Committee was offered as the most obvious forum focused on enhancement. The University College's interpretation of enhancement included the Estate's Masterplan, offered as an example of the way in which the institution was taking a deliberate, considered, and joined-up approach to planning and enhancement.

62 A further list of operational and management improvements in academic processes and practices was offered, including the Higher Degrees Group and Foundation Degrees Group to provide forums for sharing good practice; these may be interpreted as routine systems and practices to support the institution's academic infrastructure, rather than unique and deliberative enhancement within the QAA definition. It was clear that the University College had carefully reflected on the notion of enhancement; and was clearly and evidentially committed to the principle of enhancement, with a number of enhancement initiatives in an early stage of proposal or implementation. However, the audit team formed the view that the definition, principles, and examples, of enhancement were not fully understood across the institution. For enhancement to be institutionally driven it would need to be fully understood at delivery and operational levels of the institution as well as the managerial levels of the University College. It is a desirable recommendation to promote awareness and understanding of enhancement across all levels of the institution.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

63 Since the granting of taught degree awarding powers, the University College has widened its collaborative arrangements to include three undergraduate and two taught postgraduate programmes delivered by four UK partner institutions, with the first of those programmes validated in April 2009. The University College's collaborative provision also includes the validation, called accreditation by the University College, of a level 4, 20 credit Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector short course. Institutional partnerships are also being developed with a number of faith institutions with a view to franchised or accredited programmes, chiefly in Christian Ministry, while discussions over joint master's programmes are continuing with a current overseas partner.

64 The University College's approach to collaborative arrangements largely builds upon the quality assurance mechanisms for programmes offered on campus at the University College, with slight variations at the planning and first validation stages. Those variations include an initial informal strategic assessment of potential partnerships by the Collaborative Provision Strategy Group and a site visit.

65 A due diligence investigation is conducted for all collaborative programmes, covering academic standards and the administrative structure supporting them, legal status, and financial security. If the development of the programme is given provisional approval by the Collaborative Provision Strategy Group, a course development form is completed and resource and market demand considered by the Academic Development Committee, who arrange the site visit.

66 The agenda for the site visit is set out in the Academic Handbook and the University College has a standard template for the site visit report. The site visit report will then form part of the documentation supplied to the approval panel, organised by the Quality Office, for consideration alongside the minutes of the Academic Development Committee.

67 The audit team noted that although site visits had taken place, the requirements of the agenda and report had not been consistently applied, the majority had several omissions, and in some cases it was not clear who had attended the site visit. Although the team was advised that variations could take place, the team took the view that as the site visit formed a vital part of the partnership selection and accreditation process, it would advise the University College to have a more consistent approach.

68 The audit team confirmed that programme partnership agreements are then drawn up with an annex including fee structures, delivery responsibilities, marketing arrangements, recruitment, enrolment, quality assurance monitoring arrangements, and cancellation. The team learnt that if an institutional partnership has already been agreed, any new partnership protocols could be appended to the standard document.

69 A programme approval event will then take place, taking account of the partner's resources or resource commitment, staff expertise, and evidence from the institutional event if undertaken previously. The audit team confirmed these events through a review of the external validation of the Foundation Degree in Mission and Ministry by the University College.

70 The audit team further learnt that the 20 credit short course, following consideration by the Collaborative Provision Strategy Group and the Academic Development Committee was approved by the Minor Amendments Panel. It was confirmed that, as part of the approval process, the course was required to undergo the University College's standard quality assurance procedures. The team heard that 13 students were enrolled on the six-week programme which started in October 2010. The team also found that although an external examiner had been appointed and was currently assessing the students' work, approval of their appointment had taken place some time after the programme was expected to conclude.

71 As part of the University College's requirements for collaborative provision, an academic member of the University College staff is nominated as a link or liaison tutor to oversee and monitor the good health of the collaborative provision programmes. The audit team was able to confirm that link tutors were in place for all collaborative programmes, and the role was undertaken in accord with the guidelines as set out in the Academic Handbook.

72 It is expected that collaborative partners will carry out an annual monitoring review of each programme in line with the University College's internal quality assurance procedures and template as set out in the Academic Handbook. These reports allow consideration of a range of performance indicators, including statistical data, external examiner reports and comments received through student feedback mechanisms.

73 The audit team confirmed annual monitoring had taken place for the collaborative programmes, although noted some differences in the use made of the annual monitoring template and a significant degree of variability in the commentary of the required performance indicators. The team therefore recommends that it would be advisable for the University College to reduce variability in annual monitoring by improving analysis, evaluation and reflection in order to achieve better upward reporting and a more informed institutional overview.

74 The audit team confirmed that collaborative programmes had been considered as part of the annual University College quality reporting system. The team, however, would consider it more useful if the University College could make more explicit use of the annual monitoring reviews, with comparisons made to other programmes within the schools.

75 Representatives from partner institutions are also invited to attend the University College's Annual Monitoring Day and Academic Health Day. The audit team found few had attended.

76 Any changes to collaborative programmes relating to the structure, aims, intended learning outcomes, assessment method, levelness or delivery of a module must be formally considered by a Minor Amendments Panel. Any major changes considered beyond the remit of the Panel will be automatically entered into the validation schedule and any changes affecting delivery, such as changes to staffing or premises, are reported through Programme Committee to Academic Standards Committee, as set out in the Academic Handbook.

77 The partnership will be reviewed prior to the renewal of an agreement and in any event fully after five years, or earlier with a new partner, in accordance with the Academic Handbook, or if notice is given by the University College. The audit team took the view that mechanisms were in place to monitor and review collaborative provision; however, a consistent approach was not applied to all forms of partnership.

78 As set out in the Academic Handbook it is expected that collaborative programmes follow a similar structure to the University College's Student-Staff Consultative Committee, to allow the opportunity to discuss any academic, resources and support matters. However, the team considered that the majority of meetings had not covered several of the standing items as set out in the committee's guidelines.

79 Collaborative programmes are further monitored through the University College's module evaluation processes and standard Module Evaluation Form. The audit team confirmed that an evaluation of the responses had taken place and formed part of the annual monitoring process, although the responses were extremely variable. The team found little evidence to suggest that the responses had been used as part of the Student-Staff Consultative Committee meetings.

80 External examiner appointments follow the same process as the University College's internal process. The audit team confirmed external examiner reports are considered as part of the annual monitoring process, although the team noted a significant variability in the level of commentary. The external examiner comments are seen by the Academic Standards Committee as part of a summary report. External examiner reports are also expected to be received and considered at the relevant Staff Student Consultative Committee meeting and to support this process the reports are posted on Moodle. The team found limited evidence to suggest they had been consistently considered by the Committee or posted on Moodle. Therefore the audit team recommends that the University College ensures the publication of all external examiner reports through the existing procedures (see paragraph 21).

81 The audit team formed the view that the arrangements for the appointment and role of external examining are generally effective. However, the team was less confident that external examiner reports were systematically made available to students through the Student-Staff Consultative Committee, and therefore recommend that it would be desirable for the University College to promote a single institutional policy for student-staff consultative committees that is consistently applied.

82 The University College, as appropriate, issues all certificates and transcripts.

83 Arrangements for the involvement of students in quality assurance and the obtaining of student feedback are broadly similar to those that pertain to programmes delivered at the University College. The audit team further learnt that University College

is considering increasing the involvement of students in validations and this would extend to collaborative partners.

84 The evaluation of the statistical data forms part of the annual programme review process. Within that context, specific consideration is given, although descriptive, to admissions data, student progression and achievement, the National Student Survey and retention rates, in accordance with the procedures set out in the Academic Handbook.

85 Access to resources for students on collaborative programmes is negotiable as part of the partnership agreement; however, it would normally be expected that they would access materials through the partner institution, including the virtual learning environment and library provision. Provision for learning resources is further considered as part of the validation process, and reviewed as part of the annual monitoring process.

86 The University College provides staff development opportunities to partner staff and the opportunity to attend work-related practice groups. The audit team confirmed these arrangements through a review of the staff development section of the Annual Monitoring Report and meetings with staff.

87 Responsibility for student support and arrangements for complaints, appeals and plagiarism procedures are clearly articulated in the Institutional Partnership Agreement.

88 Students on collaborative programmes normally access publicity materials through the partner institution and these details form part of the partnership agreement. The audit team heard that all information relating to collaborative provision is approved by Marketing and the Quality Office as appropriate. Through a review of the partner websites, the team considered the information relating to the programmes on the partner website to be accurate and the handbooks to be clear in the programme expectations. However, the team found the programme handbooks to be less clear about mechanisms for student feedback (see paragraph 107).

89 A QAA Integrated quality and enhancement review of one of the University College's partners (February 2010) considered it advisable that all course handbooks provide full and complete information about articulation routes for Foundation Degrees. The audit team reviewed the Foundation Degree Business and Media Production Handbook years 1 and 2 and could not find the required progression information. However, the team was advised by staff during the audit visit that the students had been fully briefed about progression opportunities by the link tutor.

90 The audit team was made aware of a separate collaborative handbook currently under development. The team notes that this document makes explicit the processes for the selection, approval, monitoring and review of the various forms of partnerships to more fully support the proposed extensions of the current collaborative provision

91 Based on a review of the documentation and discussions with staff and students, the audit team formed the view that overall, confidence could reasonably be placed on the University College's management of its collaborative provision. However, the team recommends as advisable that the institution should ensure a minimum standard and consistent approach to collaborative partner approval processes.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

92 The audit team tested the effectiveness of the institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students, taking evidence from the documentation supplied and requested from the University College, and from meetings with staff and students. The University College does not currently offer its own research degree programmes. Since 2003-04 the University College has been in a strategic alliance with the University of Leicester who award the research degrees of MPhil and PhD. It is a stated strategic objective of the University College to be in a position to award its own research degrees by 2015. The University College has a small provision of seven full-time postgraduate research students registered on doctoral programmes in 2010-11.

93 A desk review of research degree programmes was carried out by QAA in 2009 to evaluate the University College's arrangements for postgraduate research degree students, and the institution's alignment with the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. The review came to the judgement that the University College's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programmes is appropriate and satisfactory. The audit team, in meetings with staff, and through scrutiny of documentation, tested the findings of the review and the institution's response to suggestions and recommendations. The University College has clearly evolved and developed its approach to the support of postgraduate research students since the review. There is evidence of enhancements in: postgraduate research student training and development; and broader engagement with the research community beyond the University College through membership of the Consortium for Research Excellence Support and Training, the hosting of Postgraduate Conferences to support postgraduate research student training and development, and the dissemination of research through an in-house journal.

94 The University College's arrangements for postgraduate research students are set out in the institution's published Research Strategy 2008-12. The University College's Strategic Plan 2010-13 and a document outlining the role and functions of the 'Virtual' Graduate School further articulates the institution's strategic view and direction for postgraduate research. The Strategic Plan includes research, scholarship and enterprise as one of its five key strategic themes, and states that the University College aspires to be recognised locally, nationally and internationally for the quality of its research and scholarship through focused investment and capacity building.

95 The University of Leicester's research degrees provision is governed by its own regulations, and the University College's postgraduate research students are subject to, and follow, these regulations, as well as being subject to the University College's own regulations and practices with regard to research degrees. The University College Research Student Handbook was in draft form as at March 2011. It is yet to be formally approved by the Research Committee for 2011-12.

96 The audit team tested the effectiveness of the University College's arrangements for the selection, admission and management of postgraduate research students. The admissions policy of the institution mirrored that of the University of Leicester, including the use of the University of Leicester Postgraduate Application Form. The University College states that it followed the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*, and has implemented recommendations made by the QAA desk review of postgraduate student provision. This was evidenced in meetings with staff and students. All applications are scrutinised by at least two appropriately qualified members of staff

at the University College and potential candidates are interviewed, thus addressing a recommendation of the QAA desk review in 2009. Both the University College and the University of Leicester have to be satisfied before admission can be agreed. Students are registered jointly at the University of Leicester and the University College.

97 The induction process for new postgraduate research students at the University College includes introductory meetings with the supervisor, the Director of Research, and the postgraduate Research Coordinator. Students are informed of their rights through the University of Leicester Research Student Handbook and the University of Leicester Regulations for Research Students. A further induction programme for postgraduate research students is followed at the University of Leicester. The University of Leicester provides a Research Student Progress File, which includes a guide to research training and personal development planning.

98 Only academic staff who are approved by the University of Leicester are eligible to be doctoral supervisors. New supervisors are required to attend training sessions run by the Graduate School. The appointment of supervisors follows the criteria provided by the University of Leicester. Joint agreement is required for approval of research degree supervisors. A research student supervisor cannot be appointed until they have been formally approved by both the University College and the University of Leicester. The University College holds workshops for new supervisors led by the Director of Research.

99 The Board of Graduate Studies at the University of Leicester is responsible for oversight, review and monitoring of postgraduate research students. Research student progress is appropriately and satisfactorily monitored and reviewed by the University College in accordance with the regulations of the University of Leicester.

100 Postgraduate research students receive regular supervisory meetings, and further progress and review meetings are arranged with the Postgraduate Research Coordinator or the Director of Research as necessary. Supervisory meetings are formally noted by the students and supervisors. All records of meetings, including agreed targets, are kept by the Research Office. The audit team tested through discussion with staff and students the availability and quality of training provided to postgraduate research students. Formal training is provided by both the University College and the University of Leicester. These research training activities included internal workshops and short courses. Resources for postgraduate research students are initially determined by the PhD supervisor on admission. Students are then further required to complete a skills audit as part of the advanced postgraduate transfer review stage of progression. Research students are expected to keep a Research Student Progress File outlining skills requirements and personal development planning, which normally results in an agreed training plan. Postgraduate research students are encouraged to write and publish in journals and to attend academic conferences. The in-house student and staff journal and its use in the development and training opportunities of research students, and the encouragement of a reflective research community, is considered by the team to be a feature of good practice.

101 The audit team tested the feedback arrangements available to postgraduate research students through scrutiny of documents and meetings with staff and postgraduate research students. Feedback on academic development and progress is provided by research degree supervisors on a regular basis through research student meetings. This is supplemented by feedback in meetings with the Director of Studies or the Research Degrees Coordinator. Some postgraduate research students are involved in teaching or classroom demonstration. Students are supported and mentored in this activity by the module leader, who may or may not be a doctoral supervisor. The postgraduate research students may attend learning and teaching support courses offered in the institution, but this is not a requirement. The teaching support provided by module leaders is clearly beneficial to the

development and integration of postgraduate research students. The team was assured that these learning and teaching support and development course opportunities are to become compulsory for postgraduate research students engaged with teaching from 2011.

102 The assessment of postgraduate research students is in accordance with the Regulations for Research Degrees at the University of Leicester. The assessment criteria is outlined by the University of Leicester, and this guidance is issued and disseminated to the University College as a constituted postgraduate research student 'department' of the University of Leicester.

103 Student representation is evident on both the Research Ethics Committee and the Research Committee. A recent innovation at the time of the audit was the introduction of a Student-Staff Consultative Committee for research students. Postgraduate research students are required on annual re-registration to complete a report covering supervision and training that is submitted to the Board of Graduate studies at the University of Leicester. All reports are reviewed by the Graduate Office of the University of Leicester and the relevant Postgraduate Research Student Coordinator for Graduate Studies at the University College.

104 The audit team tested the effectiveness of the institutional arrangements for dealing with complaints and appeals by postgraduate research students, taking evidence from documentation and meetings with staff. The University College operates its own complaints procedure and policy. This procedure is directed by the policies and practices for postgraduate research students at the University of Leicester. The University of Leicester's regulations for postgraduate student appeals applies to all postgraduate research students at the University College. The team found that the University College's overall arrangements for admission, support, supervision, and assessment of postgraduate research students to be appropriate and satisfactory.

Section 7: Published information

105 The student written submission complimented the University College's website, noting it was easy to use and navigate, with all the necessary key information, making students feel confident and comfortable about coming to the University College.

106 Responsibility for the accuracy of information contained in the three prospectuses (undergraduate, postgraduate and professional development) rests with the Newman Management Group and is reviewed annually by Marketing in conjunction with the subject leaders, programme leaders or heads of subject and all service department directors and service coordinators. Changes made by an individual are checked by the Information Officer, Human Resources or Marketing as appropriate, before publication. The audit team learnt that the role of the Information Officer included conducting three audits a year and ad hoc checks of the University College website. The Deputy Registrar has overall responsibility for assuring the accuracy of the UCAS entry profiles.

107 Students are provided with a comprehensive Student Handbook and similarly a comprehensive Guide is produced for the Erasmus and other international students. In addition, the students receive module, subject and programme handbooks, which are regularly audited by the Quality Office to highlight examples of good practice. However, the audit team heard that the programme handbooks were not always updated and noted that subject and programme handbooks, including those provided to students on collaborative programmes, did not always adhere fully to the University College template. The team also noted that a change to re-submission requirements as set out in the Academic Handbook, had not consistently been incorporated into the current module specifications.

108 The audit team also identified that programme specifications for the University College's higher education programmes are not made available to students and found the content of the Programme Specifications varied from the requirements of the University College Programme Specification Guidance Note.

109 Overall, the audit team viewed, with the exception of programme specifications, that the externally available information required by the Higher Education Funding Council for England guidelines is published on the University College's website, and that the teaching quality information on the Unistats website appears accurate and complete.

110 As a result of sampling published information, and from what the audit team heard from staff and students, the team formed the view that for the most part, reliance can reasonably be placed in the accuracy, integrity, reliability and completeness of the information published in the various formats by the University College. However, the audit team recommends it advisable for the institution to ensure a complete, consistent and synchronised publication of programme specifications and handbooks.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the development opportunities provided by the Critical Commentary journal published by the institution (paragraphs 44 and 100)
- the wide-ranging work-placement opportunities provided in support of work-based learning (paragraph 46).

Recommendations for action

112 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- the institution should reduce variability in annual monitoring by improving analysis, evaluation and reflection in order to achieve better upward reporting and a more informed institutional overview (paragraphs 18 and 73)
- the institution should ensure a complete, consistent and synchronised publication of programme specifications and handbooks (paragraphs 24 and 110)
- the institution should ensure both a minimum standard and a consistent approach to collaborative partner approval processes (paragraphs 67 and 91).

113 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- ensure the publication of all external examiner reports through the existing University College procedures (paragraphs 21 and 80)
- the institution should promote awareness and understanding of enhancement across all levels (paragraph 62)
- the institution should enhance the use of management information across the institutional reporting processes (paragraphs 22 and 29)
- the institution should ensure that a single institutional policy for the student-staff consultative committees is published and consistently applied (paragraphs 21, 40 and 81)

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- the institution should promote both comparable student support and consistent application of regulations across all programmes (paragraph 55).

Appendix

Newman University College's response to the Institutional audit report

Newman University College welcomes QAA's confidence in the soundness of its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities for students.

We note that the audit team have commended the development opportunities provided by our student journal and the wide-ranging work placements. We are pleased with the recognition of our work in relating research and teaching and the distinctive contribution made by work experience to students' personal and career development. The University College is also gratified by the recognition that it is 'clearly and essentially committed to the principle of enhancement'. However, we are disappointed that the team did not find more evidence of improvements effected by our enactment of the principle, and did not recognise more good practice in our robust approach to standards, our support for learning and the strength of our student engagement.

We appreciate the fresh perspective brought by the audit team on our processes. In response we will review, or continue to develop, our procedures:

- to improve analysis in annual monitoring
- to work with students on making handbooks more consistent and user-friendly
- to clarify the purpose of initial site visits to potential partner institutions.

We intend to further refine our approach to enhancement through working with our students on developing a Student Charter against which to monitor our mutual aims and commitments.

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