University of Chester

MAY 2005

Preface

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

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

The purpose of institutional audit

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

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

Judgements

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

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

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

Nationally agreed standards

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

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

The audit process

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

The main elements of institutional audit are:

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

The evidence for the audit

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

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

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

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

Contents

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University College Chester (UCC or the College) from 16 to 20 May 2005 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of awards that the College makes.

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

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

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

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

Outcome of the audit

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

- broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the College's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

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

- the enhancement undertaken of the institution's revalidation and quality and standards review processes by the involvement of recent graduates in the former, and existing students in the latter

- staff development activities available in-house and the opportunities provided for personal development

- the seamless way in which the College's intranet system provides a virtual learning environment and information about all aspects of the College's management and governance arrangements.

Recommendations for action

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

- keep under review its school level committee structures and, in particular, monitor the volume of work undertaken by school boards of studies so as to enable them to properly discharge their quality assurance responsibilities and functions

- continue to keep its system of annual monitoring under review so that the College can be assured that it is receiving relevant and appropriate information to enable it to discharge its responsibility for the quality of the student learning experience and the standards of its awards

- continue to develop its management information system, and associated staff development activity, to enable staff to make optimum use of relevant data for comprehensive and well-informed evaluation, at both module and programme levels.

The team also recommends that it would be desirable for UCC to:

- establish a core minimum content requirement for the evaluation of modules to provide the College with data which will enable it to ensure comparability of the student experience.

Biological sciences, computer science and information systems, performing arts, and theology and religious studies

To arrive at these conclusions the audit team spoke to staff and students, and was given information about the College as a whole. The team also looked in detail at programmes in the discipline audit trails listed above to find out how well the College's systems and procedures were working at that level. The team came to the view that the standard of student achievement in the programmes was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), published by QAA. In each case, the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for a programme of study leading to the relevant awards.

National reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings the audit team also investigated the use made by the College of the Academic Infrastructure which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the audit suggest that UCC has responded appropriately to the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements, programme specifications and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, published by QAA.

From 2005, the institutional audit process includes a check on the reliability of the information set published by institutions in the format recommended in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*. The audit found that UCC was alert to the requirements set out in HEFCE 03/51 and was moving in an appropriate manner to fulfil its responsibilities in this respect.

Main report

Main report

1   An institutional audit of the University College Chester (UCC or the College) was undertaken during the period 16 to 20 May 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the College's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility for its awards.

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

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

Section 1: Introduction: University College Chester

The institution and its mission

4   University College Chester was founded by the Church of England in 1839 as a teacher training college to prepare students, within an institution guided by Christian values, for careers of service. The College's original buildings opened in 1842 and teacher training remained the College's principal activity for more than a century. In August 2002 the College incorporated the higher education provision of Warrington Collegiate Institute (WCI), a mixed further/higher education provider. The management of the incorporation process was featured in *Investment decision making: A guide to good practice*, April 2003 (HEFCE's document 03/17) as a model of good practice. With the incorporation of WCI's higher education provision centred at a separate site in Warrington, the Padgate Campus, the College assumed responsibility for over 900 students registered for degrees of the University of Manchester. The final intake of students permitted to register for University of Manchester awards was in September 2003.

5   UCC now operates on two main sites at Chester and Warrington. Both campuses have a full range of physical facilities, including residential accommodation. Students are not required to travel between the two campuses as each campus offers free-standing tuition. In addition to the two main sites, the College has educational facilities at four hospital sites across Cheshire, Wirral and Warrington.

6   UCC has had a long academic association with the University of Liverpool and was granted accredited status by the University for taught programmes from September 1994. Its accreditation agreement with the University was reviewed and extended in 1998 and renewed in 2004. In 2002, a codicil was added to the Instrument of Accreditation to take account of the extension of awards to the Warrington Campus. Although the Privy Council granted taught degree-awarding powers to the College in August 2003, UCC decided not to implement its powers until September 2005 to ensure that commitments made in its prospectuses to award degrees of the University of Liverpool would be honoured. Thus, most students enrolling at Chester and Warrington in September 2004 were registered with the University of Liverpool. UCC also offers postgraduate research study opportunities

leading to the University of Liverpool awards of Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy.

7   The College applied to the Privy Council for the right to use the title of university in 2004 and, at the time of the audit, a formal announcement on the outcome of that application was awaited.

8   In 2004-05 UCC had approximately 8,000 full-time and 3,000 part-time students, of whom just over 7,000 full-time and 2,700 part-time students studied on the Chester Campus or at the four hospital sites. There were approximately 1,000 full-time and 250 part-time students on the Warrington Campus.166 full-time and 842 part-time students were studying on taught postgraduate programmes of study, with 34 full-time and 52 part-time students registered for research degrees.

9   The College increased the number of schools from four to seven from August 2004. The current schools are: Applied and Health Sciences; Arts and Media; Business Management and Law; Education; Health and Social Care; Humanities; and Social Sciences. At the same time, it restructured its committee, board and subcommittee framework, giving additional responsibilities and delegated authority for quality assurance to school boards of studies (hereafter school boards).

10   A special feature of the academic provision is the Church Colleges' Certificate provision, designed for lay and ministerial education and offered by the Centre for Christian Ministry within the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, located within the School of Humanities (see paragraph 12 below).

11   The College's institutional mission states that 'as a learning community, it seeks to:

- encourage and nurture, through partnership and enterprise, excellence in learning and teaching, scholarship and research, for the lifelong benefit of all students and employees and members of the wider community

- facilitate a widening of access to higher education through the development of its programmes and flexibility in admissions

policies, recruitment strategies, learning and teaching styles, modes of delivery and the range of locations at which its courses are offered

- offer undergraduate and postgraduate courses that promote academic, vocational and personal development and professional training, preparing students for a wide range of careers within a community offering students a sense of corporate membership

- provide ready access to student support services of a high standard

- collaborate with employers of diplomates and graduates in the public, private and voluntary sectors, locally, regionally, and nationally, within the European Union and elsewhere, in preparing all students to make a positive contribution in the social and economic context in which they are employed, hope to work, or seek to serve

- offer, in an open and inclusive manner, all students and staff, through the work of its ecumenical chaplaincy, and where appropriate its programmes of study, opportunities to consider the personal and social challenge of moral and spiritual values especially those that motivated the College's foundation'.

Collaborative provision

12   UCC has collaborative programmes with six further education colleges broadly within the region: the Isle of Man College; Mid-Cheshire College; Reaseheath College; Warrington Collegiate Institute; West Cheshire College; and Wirral Metropolitan College. Institutional agreements have also been signed with Macclesfield College and South Cheshire College but no collaborative programme is being delivered currently. In addition, the College has collaborative agreements with the Dioceses of Chester, Manchester and Shrewsbury and with the Education for Ministry for the delivery of Church Colleges' Certificates and a Certificate in Higher Education in Theology and Ministry. A partnership with the Northern Ordination Course in Manchester has been terminated, although

some students are still currently registered on the programme. While UCC delivers the University of Liverpool's awards, it remains accountable to the University for collaborative provision leading to awards of the University. UCC has no overseas partner institutions.

Background information

13   The published information available for this audit included:

- information made available through the Higher Education and Research Opportunities (HERO) portal and UCC's own website

- reports of QAA reviews of provision at subject level, and

- the report of QAA's previous audit of the institution (published in January 1997).

14   The College initially provided QAA with:

- an institutional self-evaluation document (SED) and accompanying appendices

- supporting documents including the Corporate Plan 2003-07, Principles and Regulations, The Student Experience Handbook - A Companion to the Quality and Standards Manual, Student Experience CD-ROM, undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses for 2005 entry, and the International Student Guide 2005

- electronic copies of other supporting documentation on CD-ROM

- discipline self-evaluation documents (DSEDs) for the four areas selected for DATs.

15   During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team had on and off-site access to a range of internal documents on UCC's intranet (IBIS). It was also given on-site access to internal documents in hard copy, and to a range of documentation relevant to the selected DATs, including samples of student work.

The audit process

16   Following a preliminary meeting at UCC in March 2005, QAA confirmed that four DATs would be conducted during the audit visit. QAA received the institutional SED and supporting documentation in January 2005. On the basis of the SED and other published information, the audit team confirmed that the DATs would focus on biological sciences; computer science and information systems; performing arts; and theology and religious studies. QAA received the DSEDs, accompanied by programme specifications, in February 2005.

17   In the case of computer science and performing arts, the DSEDs comprised self-evaluation documentation produced for internal (quality and standards) review purposes, together with reports on the review events, responses and action plans arising from the reports, the relevant minutes of the committees which handled the process, and short evaluative updates on progress since the reviews took place (in June 2004). The review of theology and religious studies was held in March 2005 and the DSED provided was that submitted for internal quality and standards review (QSR) purposes. The DSED submitted for biological sciences was specially written for the audit in the absence of a recent QSR.

18   A briefing visit took place from 15 to 17 March 2005 with the purpose of allowing the audit team to explore with the Principal, senior members of staff and student representatives, matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the SED, the students' written submission (SWS) and other documentation provided to the team in advance. At the close of the briefing visit, the main themes to be pursued in the audit visit were signalled to the College, and a programme of meetings for the visit was agreed. The team decided that it did not wish to pursue any thematic enquiries during the audit visit.

19   At the preliminary meeting for the audit, discussions were also held with representatives of the Students' Union (SU) to confirm the contribution of the SU, and the College's students more generally, to the audit process. The student representatives were invited to submit a separate document expressing views on the student experience at UCC, and identifying any matters students would wish to highlight with respect to the quality of

programmes and the standard of awards. QAA received the SWS in January 2005. The submission was informed by questionnaire responses, email forums, student focus groups and feedback from student academic representatives and student/staff liaison committees. The audit team is grateful to the students for preparing the helpful submission to support the audit.

20   The audit visit took place from 16 to 20 May 2005, and included further meetings with staff and students of the College, both at institutional level and in relation to the DATs. The audit team consisted of Professor M Everist, Mr P Hodges, Professor D Lockton, Professor R Slater and Professor C Strange. The audit secretary was Ms M McLaughlin. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr I Ainsworth, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

21   The previous quality audit report (the 1997 report) commended the College on a range of matters, including the loyalty and commitment demonstrated by staff and students; the development of the Quality Assurance and Student Handbooks; the concern to maintain its award standards and those of the University of Liverpool; the encouragement to programme planning teams to give greater attention to curriculum design, the student experience and the academic quality of proposals; the use made of external representatives on steering groups and validation panels, consideration of targeted staff development relating to programme and module approval, and the proposals for more active student involvement in such activities; peer mentoring; the personal academic tutor (PAT) system; the contribution of Student Guidance and Support Services, the Careers Service and the SU to the College community; the contributions of the Postgraduate Tutor and Research Development Officer; the demonstrable departmental commitment to eradicating inconsistencies in assessment practice and encouragement given by the

College to undertake a self-critical review of its assessment practices; staff appointment and induction procedures; clear and well presented promotional materials; and the College's commitment to work with its student community to produce a students' charter.

22   The audit also identified a number of points for further consideration. These included considering the necessity of making formal responsibility and authority for quality assurance and enhancement more focused and providing a clearer view of the role of the Academic Board and its subcommittees in relation to such matters; ensuring careful exploration of the cumulative effects of resourcing new and existing programmes and modules, and continuing to review carefully the pressures on staff arising from the expansion of the College's academic portfolio; ensuring that programme and module approval and review activities operate in accordance with stated policies and procedures; and clarifying the arrangements and responsibilities for academic appeals in collaborative partnerships.

23   Other recommendations of an advisable nature included encouraging closer dialogue between the Academic Review and the Academic Resources Committees and exploring the minutes of these committees to afford interested parties a fuller understanding of their deliberations and actions; reviewing whether boards of study should have sight of all external examiners' reports; providing more specific guidance on module evaluation design and implementation; taking a more active approach to identifying and promoting good practice in teaching and learning; formulating and implementing a clear policy on anonymous marking; continued monitoring of the assessment of external placements; providing appropriate student and staff accommodation; clarifying probationary requirements for new staff and considering whether the Staff Handbook should provide further information on staff promotion; ensuring that apparent discrepancies in its publicity material are avoided and continuing its careful monitoring of advertising by overseas agencies; ensuring

careful attention to the development and operational implications of overseas ventures; and reviewing whether its arrangements for tracking and developing collaborative programmes, and for identifying and sharing good practice across the College and its partners, might be further strengthened. The audit report also invited the College to consider the desirability of considering student membership on boards of study; further developing the roles of particular staff forums in relation to quality enhancement and academic development; and obtaining more structured feedback from the University of Liverpool.

24   The SED indicated how the College had responded to the 1997 report. Improvements in procedures relating to two of the points identified as matters of necessity (programme approval and review, and student academic appeals in collaborative provision) were made and reported to the QAA in the 'one year on' report in February 1998. The remaining matters of necessity concerning the role of the Academic Board and its subordinate committees in relation to quality assurance and enhancement, and resource-related issues, led to the merger of the Academic Review and Academic Resources Committees to form the Academic Committee (AC), advising the Academic Board on the validity and strategic implications of new proposals; and the creation of Teaching and Learning and Academic Audit Sub-Committees, reporting to AC. The Teaching and Learning Sub-Committee (TLSC) was established to advise on developments and to promote the dissemination of good practice in teaching and learning. The remit of the Academic Audit Sub-Committee (AASC) was to audit and advise on all aspects of academic provision and academic-related services. The Quality Assurance Handbook was also revised and the Academic Registry was reconfigured into Registry Services and Academic Quality Support Services. In making these responses, the College wished to affirm its 'commitment to strengthening its capacity to exercise independent oversight, from the centre, of all matters of quality'.

25   UCC has had ten subject reviews since 1996, all of which resulted in the provision being approved. There have also been two developmental engagements (DEs) (in archaeology/history and in geography). Four subject reviews and one DE recommended improvements to physical resources; in two reviews, however, this aspect was commended. Following each review or DE, the AASC (now the Organisational Audit Sub-Committee (OASC)) undertook internal audits of the relevant department or subject area to check the implementation of actions arising from external reviews.

26   The audit team observed a 'risk averse' culture with regard to quality and standards within UCC. It considered that the College's incorporation of WCI's higher education provision, and the reconfiguration of the school structure from four to seven, demonstrated a very careful and measured approach to the management of change. It noted that the Academic Board would review, through a general, annual report on quality assurance, the effectiveness of associated changes to its committee structure, focusing on the school boards in particular.

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

27   The SED stated that the College placed 'the interests of students and the maintenance of the standards to which they are entitled' at the heart of its quality assurance processes. It also indicated the careful thought given to ensuring 'the right balance in matters of quality assurance between direct central oversight and local accountability', reflected in the recent changes in its committee structure which took effect in August 2004. Growth, diversification 'and the need to give added prominence to the College's strategic approach to the enhancement of learning and teaching' were

identified as key contributory factors in effecting the changes made.

28   The College has established a Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) with a clearly defined remit and introduced a number of other measures (see paragraph 33 below) to ensure consistency in the management of quality and standards. In addition, it has developed a new academic quality and standards strategy to be applied within the changed context of UCC receiving taught degree-awarding powers.

The institution's framework for managing quality and standards

29   Academic Board has ultimate responsibility for quality and standards but, since August 2004, its subcommittee structure has been rationalised into five key committees, each with a number of subcommittees reporting to the Board through the major committees. The major subcommittees are the Research Committee; Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC); QSC; Student Services Committee (SSC); and the Equal Opportunities Committee. QSC subcommittees each have a specific focus and comprise the Partnerships Sub-Committee (PSC); OASC (which includes an external member); Academic Review Sub-Committee (ARSC); Academic Quality and Standards Sub-Committee (Manchester programmes); and the Undergraduate Programmes Sub-Committee (UPSC).

30   ARSC currently recommends new programmes for approval, following successful validation; oversees the approval, monitoring and review procedures for all taught programmes; oversees the submission and approval of programme specifications; advises the College Executive Group on significant resource issues; and acts as a review group on behalf of QSC. However, the SED foreshadowed the likely disbandment of ARSC following a review of the performance of school boards in 2004-05. From August 2004, the seven school boards assumed additional responsibilities in relation to quality assurance particularly in respect of the 'steering' stage of programme development prior to validation and new

module approval. They now have a direct reporting line to Academic Board, thus enabling the Board to exercise appropriate central oversight. QSC has recently recommended the transfer to school boards of ARSC's functions relating to validation; revalidation; and approval relating to site authorisations, programme modifications and programme specifications. Given the existing workload on school boards and the College's stated aim to increase student numbers in the period 2003 to 2007, the audit team questioned whether QSC's recommendations went far enough to ensure that the boards would have sufficient space in their already full agendas to adequately discharge their quality assurance functions.

31   The audit team saw the unconfirmed minutes of an extraordinary meeting of QSC which discussed the review and noted that the meeting had concluded that, while the revised College committee structure was 'generally felt to be working well', there was some concern about the possible duplication of business within the committee structure. QSC had consequently recommended to the Academic Board that the terms of reference of three key committees: LTC, SSC and the UPSC, should be reviewed to prevent an overlap in discussion of aspects of the student experience. Furthermore, QSC recommended that the Academic Board should review the working practices of committees and, in particular, the volume of material being drawn upon, and the transmission of items from committee to committee, giving particular attention to the distinction between items for approval, recommendations for approval and items for report.

32   The audit team formed the view that the restructuring and, in particular, the streamlining of committees had worked well on the whole, affording UCC appropriate oversight while focusing the agendas more appropriately within the subcommittees. Furthermore, it noted that the College is intending to review the terms of reference of some of its committees to ensure there is no duplication of business and has recommended steps to ensure more focused discussion at school boards. The team welcomed

the review of the terms of reference of the LTC, SSC and the UPSC to prevent duplication. It was less convinced, however, that the proposals to focus discussion in school boards would be effective. In the course of the audit, staff told the team that they welcomed the increased transfer of responsibilities to school boards, citing cognate specificity and the closer engagement this afforded boards in programme development as particular benefits. From documentation seen by the team, it appeared that school boards had a large amount of business to consider, most of which needed detailed discussion, including annual monitoring reports, partner college reports and external examiners' reports. The team considered that the amount of business was likely to increase in the future, given the intended increase in student numbers and resultant expansion of curriculum provision. Consequently, UCC is advised to keep the school committee structure under review and, in particular, the volume of work of the school boards to enable them to properly discharge their quality assurance functions.

33   In addition to the enhanced quality assurance responsibilities given to school boards, the SED listed other key measures put into place from 2004 to ensure the consistency of the management of quality and standards. These included:

- the appointment of the Dean of Academic Quality and Standards (DAQS), who sits on the College Executive Group and directs the work of Academic Quality Support Services (AQSS)

- the appointment of an administrator within each school with responsibilities for the organisational aspects of quality assurance

- the appointment to each school of an AQSS senior assistant registrar who is a member of the relevant school board as a nominee of the DAQS

- the designation of a senior member of each school to hold a quality and standards remit and represent the school on QSC

- the introduction of the Principles and Regulations, and the accompanying Quality and Standards Manual (QSM)

which has replaced the old Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH).

34   Furthermore, the Academic Board receives an annual report on quality assurance from the Assistant Principal with responsibility for that area. Before August 2004, assistant principals were also school deans. Recognising this could create a potential conflict of interest, assistant principals were relieved of direct responsibility for academic areas in the restructuring.

35   The SED stated that the College insisted 'upon the equitable treatment of all students in matters of assessment'. To that end, it sought to ensure clarity through its Principles and Regulations; new Handbook of Requirements Governing the Assessment of Students at Levels C, I, H and M; and Registry Guides to Assessment. The SED stated that the College was currently evaluating its assessment procedures against the relevant section of *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA. An OASC meeting, held after the SED was written, confirmed that the College considers itself adherent to all the precepts in the *Code*.

36   The College's framework for managing collaborative provision is set out in its Principles and Regulations and the Handbook for Collaborative Provision. Both documents provide detailed guidance on the establishment of partnerships, the validation and approval of programmes, the management of such programmes and annual and periodic monitoring and review. The SED stated that the framework was devised at the time the College embarked on its application for taught degree-awarding powers and the key initial reference points were the relevant section of the *Code of practice* and the systems and structures of the University of Liverpool. The SED further indicated that the procedures had been recently reviewed against the revised section of the *Code*.

37   PSC (reporting now to QSC) was established in 2001-02 with a 'gatekeeping' function in relation to institutional approvals for proposed collaborative arrangements. An appointment to the post of Senior Assistant Registrar-Collaborative Provision was also made

at that time. Support for collaborative provision was supplemented in 2003-04 by the appointment of a Director of Foundation Degrees and a Policy Implementation Officer in AQSS and by the establishment of a Foundation Degrees Advisory Group.

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

38   UCC views the delegation of additional responsibilities to schools as an act of enhancement. In addition, it wishes to establish a clear and strong link between the monitoring of standards and the dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching. LTC is now a full committee of the Academic Board, thus strengthening the emphasis on learning and teaching. The College has also appointed a Dean of Learning and Teaching, assigned six staff to supporting enhancement in this area and created a Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching. The College's current learning and teaching strategy, available in summary form on IBIS, is subject to revision at present. With the emphasis on learning and teaching, the College is planning to further improve IBIS, linking it with e-learning. This plan will further enhance IBIS by creating a seamless link between the College, its schools and departments in providing students with learning materials and other necessary information. Complementing the focus on learning and teaching, UCC is encouraging ownership of its Principles and Regulations, vesting greater responsibility for quality assurance in school boards and disseminating good practice through overview summaries of external examiners' reports.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Validation and approval of new provision

39   UCC's Principles and Regulations and the Handbook for Validation, Revalidation and Modification of Academic Provision provide information on the College's approach to validation. UCC has adopted a process model of validation whereby proposals are considered on a staged basis at a series of meetings, culminating in a validation event. Through the SED, the College indicated that this ensures that a proposal 'is relevant to its mission, that resources will be available and that, at the point where the programme is approved, it is appropriate in terms of academic quality and standards'. Programmes are required to conform to a generic set of regulations. Validation panels comprise external and internal members, including representation from the College's Learning Resources academic service department. They are required to ensure that programmes comply with the requirements of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), the *Code of practice,* published by QAA, and relevant subject benchmark statements, in addition to any professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements.

40   At the time of the audit, school boards were responsible for the approval of new modules while ARSC had programme level responsibilities, receiving validation reports and confirming that conditions had been appropriately signed off. A reader confirmed for ARSC the acceptability of the documentation for approval purposes and recommended minor amendments, if appropriate. ARSC then recommended approval to QSC and, through that committee, to the Academic Board, which has ultimate authority for programme approval. Following a review of school boards and ARSC, reported to QSC in April 2005, these functions will pass to school boards from 2005-06 with the proviso that post-validation documentation will be subject to checking by a reader from outside the parent board. The minutes of the April 2005 meeting of QSC recommended that past members of ARSC should perform this function. The audit team queried whether, in the absence of the ARSC, the College would have sufficient oversight to monitor curriculum drift or any other potential conflict of interest situation arising in the context of the anticipated enhanced role of school boards. Staff sought to assure the team that the rigour of the College's procedures, and the reporting lines of the school boards to central UCC committees, would enable the College to exercise sufficient

oversight. The team considered, nevertheless, that this may be an area that the College would wish to keep under review.

Annual monitoring

41   The College Handbook on Monitoring and Review covers QSR and annual monitoring and the QSR processes, giving detailed guidance to staff on the application of those processes. In 2003 the College introduced revised arrangements for the annual monitoring of programmes and review of subject departments, reflecting a pro forma based approach piloted in the School of Education and School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Care. In addition, the College has adopted a system of departmental and school annual reviews, undertaken by departmental heads and school deans respectively. Deans are required to bring together the key points raised in departmental and programme reviews in their school annual reviews which are discussed at the relevant school board and submitted to QSC.

42   Annual monitoring occurs in the autumn and consists of a review of the previous academic year and future plans. School boards consider annual monitoring reports (AMRs) together with external examiners' reports and departmental annual reviews. Summaries of matters identified, and associated action plans, are included in the minutes of school boards which are forwarded to the Academic Board. School boards also forward to QSC items for consideration arising from AMRs and generic issues from school annual reports. In addition, AMRs are peer reviewed by staff from outside the subject area but within the school, and reports are presented to the school boards with samples reviewed on a school-wide basis.

43   The SED stated that UCC was conscious of the need to review the AMR template for 2005-06 given that the requirement for programme leaders to supply affirmative or negative responses to certain questions may limit the level of detail provided. The review of the template had been conducted by the time of the audit and the audit team noted that QSC was aware of the schools' concerns about the annual monitoring process and the AMR pro

forma. The SED also indicated that the College was considering the feasibility of greater student involvement in annual monitoring. The team saw that OASC had recommended that AMRs should be considered at staff-student liaison committee (SSLC) meetings or at an equivalent minuted meeting involving programme teams and student representatives. This recommendation was yet to be endorsed by QSC at the time of the audit.

44   From documentation seen by the audit team, and from discussions with staff, it was clear that the AMR for 2003-04 had proved problematic for staff and had not been wholly effective in providing the College with information it should have at a central level of operation. However, it was clear that the College had reacted promptly to concerns raised. The team noted that QSC had discussed issues relating to the template in May 2005 and had recommended the adoption of a new template and the abolition of departmental annual reviews, in the light of an expectation that school annual reviews would contain departmental information. The recommendations were awaiting ratification by QSC and the Academic Board at the time of the audit.

45   The audit team had sight of the proposed revised AMR template. While endorsing the College's view that it is likely to elicit more relevant information, the team considered that some of the wording of the areas to be considered by programme teams could still mean that the College would be lacking information. Consequently, it formed the view that it would be advisable for UCC to keep the system of annual monitoring under review so that the College can be assured that it is receiving relevant and appropriate information to enable it to discharge its responsibility for the quality of the student learning experience and the standards of its awards.

Periodic review

46   The framework for revalidation is contained in the College's Principles and Regulations and relevant Handbook (see paragraph 39 above). Provision is subject to review and revalidation, undertaken on a

departmental basis, every six years. Panels comprise internal and external members and include an existing student and a recent graduate from the programme subject to review and revalidation. In addition to a critical appraisal, panels receive progression and completion statistics, external examiners' reports, the results of any student evaluation and also meet students.

47   ARSC receives programme review and revalidation reports and recommends approval to QSC. The Academic Board, which has the ultimate authority for programme re-approval, receives QSC minutes. School boards consider modifications to modules. At the time of the audit, such modifications were approved by ARSC but, from 2005-06, responsibility for recommending approval will rest solely with school boards reporting to QSC and the Academic Board.

48   In addition to validation and revalidation, in 2003-04 the College introduced triennial QSR of quality and standards at programme and subject level. QSRs involve both external members and a student member and have a specific focus on the use made at programme/subject level of the FHEQ, subject benchmark statement and the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. The QSR process places emphasis upon 'quality enhancement and the highlighting of good practice'. Built around an action orientated SED, it focuses on strengths and areas for improvement. The SED stated that the College recognised the need to keep the QSR process under review and cited action taken in response to comments made in the course of one DE that clearer connections in the QSR report could have been drawn between the conclusions and the evidence supporting them. This was made specific in the next QSR. OASC receives QSR reports and monitors action plans arising from the reports which departments are required to produce.

49   QSR reports seen by the audit team showed detailed discussion, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement. Staff who met the team showed a clear understanding of the difference between the revalidation and

QSR processes and endorsed the value of the latter. The team was able to confirm the quality enhancement value of the process and noted as a feature of good practice the enhancement of the revalidation and QSR processes through the involvement of recent graduates in the former, and existing students in the latter.

External participation in internal review processes

50   Advice is sought from an external adviser at the developmental, steering stage of the validation process. While this is normally given in written template form, the SED stated that the appropriate school dean may invite an adviser to the steering event. The College also requires two external advisers on validation and revalidation panels. In addition, two external advisers (one subject specialist and one with experience of institutional audit and review) serve on QSR panels. From documentation seen by the audit team, it is clear that such external participation adds value to the process and is in line with the *Code of practice* published by QAA.

External examiners and their reports

51   The SED, Principles and Regulations, and the Quality and Standards Manual provided the audit team with a detailed understanding of external examiner arrangements at UCC, including appointment procedures and criteria, induction and mentoring, provision of documentation, rights and responsibilities, and the annual reporting process. The College has two categories of assessment board for undergraduate students: the Programme/Subject Assessment Board, focusing on modular assessment and student marks; and the Awards Assessment Board, focusing on the confirmation of awards and progression. Subject specialist examiners serve on the former while school-nominated chief examiners serve on the latter. In the case of postgraduate students, specialist examiners serve on both types of assessment board.

52   External examiners are appointed to verify the appropriateness of standards; assist in reaching judgements about comparability of

standards with other institutions; and to monitor the fairness of the assessment regime and its application. They are asked to report on 'the use made of and compliance with the requirements of the national academic infrastructure - namely, published national benchmarks, the FHEQ and Programme Specifications'. External examiners also contribute to the wider academic life of departments. They approve the validation of new modules or major changes to existing modules, and may be asked to comment on the aims, learning outcomes and content of the curriculum; learning and teaching methods and supporting resources; evaluation and review processes; the level and effectiveness of administrative support; and collaborative provision (where appropriate). An external examiner's annual report template includes prompts relating to these areas.

53   Using the report template, external examiners report annually to the Principal, as Chair of the Academic Board. In practice, reports go to the Dean of Academic Quality and Standards. There are clear procedures for scrutinising reports, responding to external examiners, and for identifying and disseminating good practice. These involve action by, inter alia, programme leaders, subject heads, school deans and the Dean of Academic Quality and Standards. The audit team also heard that school administrators have a significant role in supporting the College's external examining arrangements. The College's external examining system is closely aligned to the relevant section of the *Code of practice*. A task force, set up by OASC in the autumn of 2004, reviewed institutional practice, confirmed continuing adherence to the precepts, and made several procedural recommendations for action and improvement. The closeness of the alignment is an important indicator of the College's commitment to the maintenance of the academic standards of its awards.

54   Committee minutes enabled the audit team to confirm the operation of designated procedures for the appointment, induction and mentoring of external examiners. They also confirmed the operation of the system for scrutinising the individual reports of both external and chief external examiners, and the annual composite report of the Dean of Academic Quality and Standards, at school and College levels. It was evident to the team that there was a willingness to keep processes under review and to make changes where appropriate. Through the DATs, the team explored the role of external examiners in assessment processes at programme level. It found that external examiners' reports were treated seriously, noting examples of issues being appropriately addressed by programme teams. In discussions with staff, the team explored the possibility that the scrutiny system may lead to some unnecessary duplication of effort, and at least one opportunity for streamlining the process was identified. The team concluded that the external examiner system at UCC is sufficiently robust to support a judgement of broad confidence in academic standards.

External reference points

55   According to the SED, the College has responded appropriately to the Academic Infrastructure and has established effective monitoring arrangements at institutional and local levels for detecting and addressing any slippage. The College took an early opportunity to benchmark existing policies and practice against the *Code of practice* through a centrally-directed process and, in 2003-04, undertook a further operational review, this time through internal audit, in the light of developing College procedures. Conformity with the FHEQ, systematic engagement with subject benchmark statements (where available), and the use of programme specifications based on a standard template are non-negotiable elements of the College's quality assurance policy. The SED stated that adherence is verified through institutional validation and revalidation procedures.

56   The audit team noted that College handbooks contain references to elements of the Academic Infrastructure. UCC's Handbook of Requirements Governing Collaborative Provision refers to the relevant section of the *Code of*

practice and includes the precepts verbatim as an appendix. The Handbook of Requirements Governing the Admission of Students 2004-05 refers to the *Code of practice, Section 10: Recruitment and admissions*, and a separate summary of the precepts appears in UCC's Principles and Regulations. UCC's Requirements Governing the Design of Approved Academic Provision 2004-05 opens with discussion of the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements and programme specifications, and its appendices include the level descriptors from the FHEQ document, and templates for undergraduate and postgraduate programme specifications. These references support the College's claim that key elements of the Academic Infrastructure are now an instinctive component of institutional thinking at a senior level.

57   The audit team explored the process of the 2003-04 internal review (see paragraph 55 above) through the records of the OASC. Each section of the *Code of practice* had been assigned to a separate working party for consideration and, in each case, the group had undertaken a gap analysis using the precept grid to determine whether amendments and policy adjustments were desirable. The team noted that specific action plans had resulted from the review exercise, and also a 'cascading' effect, as OASC's work generated discussion of the *Code* elsewhere within the committee structure: for example, in the PSC and in the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG), where relevant sections of the *Code* were considered and addressed.

58   The audit team noted a QSM requirement that external examiners should use their annual reports to indicate the extent to which subject/programme teams engage with three elements of the Academic Infrastructure: the FHEQ, programme specifications and subject benchmark statements. The team was able to confirm, through the DATs, that such monitoring occurs, and that the resulting judgements are often positive for all three elements, confirming an appropriate level of engagement and genuine conceptual understanding. In other sources, however, the team encountered less reassuring evidence. For example, the February 2005 internal audit of

programme specifications found that very few programme leaders were aware of the requirements for publication of programme specifications; there was very little consistency in the level of detail and appropriateness of presentation for external audiences in existing programme specifications; and the relationship between programme specifications, definitive programme documents and programme handbooks needed clarification. In addition, the report of a collaborative partnership arrangement, though broadly positive, referred to the lack of a clear understanding of the detail of programme specifications by the programme team and the need for programmes specifications to be shared with teaching staff of the partner.

59   The audit team noted the omission of the *Code of practice* from the list of elements on which external examiners are required to report, and a similar omission in the College Handbook on Validation, Revalidation and Modification of Academic Provision 2004-05. Validation panels are advised, however, to check that programme specifications have been satisfactorily completed; appropriate account has been taken of the FHEQ and the relevant subject benchmark statement has been addressed. In addition, programme teams are advised to give due weight to subject benchmark statements and programme specifications in preparing their documentation. The *Code*, in contrast, receives no such emphasis. However, the team was able to set against this the fact that the *Code* has a central place in the College's quality assurance framework as a whole, and that other mechanisms exist for checking alignment at a local level. For example, during the revalidation of theology and religious studies provision in March 2005, FLAG was asked to confirm that any flexible and distributed learning modules or programmes within the submission were consistent with Section 2 of the *Code*. Accordingly, the team had no major concerns relating to UCC's engagement with the *Code*. Overall, the team was confident that the College has a well-developed awareness of the Academic Infrastructure, and that it is making

appropriate and consistent critical use of each of the four major components in developing its academic provision.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

60   PSRB review, and QAA subject review and DE, reports are considered by school boards as appropriate and the boards oversee responses and monitor action plans. OASC (previously known as the Academic Audit Sub-Committee) considers such reviews and action plans and the minutes of OASC are considered by QSC and the Academic Board. The audit team found evidence to indicate that reports of external agencies are thoroughly discussed with action plans arising from such reports being monitored at the highest level. The team also noted the thoroughness of the internal audit process which resulted in further recommendations being made to the relevant subject area on occasion.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

61   The SED claimed that UCC has appropriate levels of student representation on its boards and committees and that student opinion is taken into account in its deliberative processes. Each module group elects a student academic representative (SAR) who represents the group at SSLC meetings, and SAR training is provided by the SU and Student Guidance and Support Services (SGSS). The SED noted that the SU contribution to SAR training has been variable but the current SU Executive was reported to be making good progress towards consistency of SAR training. SSLCs meet once a semester to discuss immediate operational matters and module/programme development, and their minutes are fed back to students. The SED recognised that principles of good practice in feedback to students needed further work to ensure universal application, especially in partner institutions.

62   The SED stated that the SU President is an ex officio member of the Governing Body. It also indicated that there is frequent consultation between the Principal and the SU; there are monthly meetings between senior members of the SU executive and the Senior Assistant Principal; and the Bursar meets financial officers from the SU. There is student representation on the SSC, both from the SU and from SSLCs. There are two student members on each school board, but the SED acknowledged that election to these bodies can be problematic and the College is consulting with the SU on this matter. Students are also represented on the OASC. While QSR panels include student members, and students also participate in revalidation events, the SED recognised the need for progress in the involvement of students in validation and external monitoring and in the training of student representatives on institutional level committees.

63   The SWS spoke positively of the student view of departmental and institutional representation, recording a 79 per cent level of awareness of the SAR system, and 59 per cent awareness of the SSLC system (only 27 per cent had seen SSLC minutes, however). The audit team witnessed great enthusiasm for both the SAR and SSLC systems in its meetings with students. Individual students spoke additionally of ad hoc arrangements at departmental and institutional levels, demonstrating a high degree of responsiveness. In discussions with students and staff, the team probed the relationship between SARs and SSLCs, and found that while this provided comprehensive module-level feedback, the system was less successful in generating feedback at programme level.

64   The College's concern with the recruitment of student members to school boards, as expressed in the SED, was echoed in meetings with students, and in the scrutiny of school board minutes. Given the length of school board meetings (a consequence of the amount of work they undertake), the audit team considered that the time commitment alone for an undergraduate student is considerable and a further deterrent to participation. UCC may wish to consider further how it balances the competing needs of student representation and student commitment to quality management within the College.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

65   A system of student evaluation of modules is in place. Results are considered in AMRs and SSLC meetings, but the SED noted a variability within departments in terms of student take-up of this opportunity for feedback. The audit team observed that the SWS was reticent concerning formal feedback on modules, and considered that this was perhaps because the SAR system contributes so obviously to the process of module evaluation. The team found widespread use of the system of student evaluation, and of some use being made of it in departments (although it was not clear how this fitted in to AMRs, and SSLC use was complicated by the parallel reporting track of the SARs). Feedback from recent graduates is not directly sought but, as previously noted (see paragraph 49 above), graduates are members of revalidation panels.

66   Student evaluation of modules is undertaken. The format of the questionnaire used, however, varies considerably between departments and usually does not contain numerically based evaluation, making comparison across the College more difficult to achieve. The audit team considered that it would be desirable for UCC to establish a core minimum content requirement for the evaluation of modules to provide it with data which will enable the College to ensure comparability of the student experience.

67   A review of the PAT system was carried out during 2003-04, resulting in a number of changes for the following academic year. A college-wide satisfaction survey was conducted in May 2004, and was reported to the Academic Board in December of that year. There is a biennial survey of student resources which reports to the Learning Resources Users' Forum and then to the SSC.

68   The SED listed a number of organisations in the North West with which the College has established links. Employer feedback comes from the College's work-based learning scheme and from professional, practice based learning

in schools, hospitals, television production companies and other organisations. New Foundation Degrees for the Civil Service, the Prison Service and the NHS may provide another route for employer feedback. The audit team found evidence of employers' feedback in two of the DATs.

Progression and completion statistics

69   Progression and completion data are produced annually by the Management Information Section of Registry Services for two main purposes: to inform the annual monitoring process at subject and programme levels, and to provide a basis for institutional scrutiny by LTC and QSC. Annual monitoring data are organised under five key headings: intake profile, qualifications, progression, classification and modular performance. All have clear potential significance for evaluating quality and measuring standards. Institutional data sets are aggregations of the programme data.

70   The audit team was told that UCC had made conscious and systematic efforts to enhance the quality of its student data in recent years. For example, data for the 2003-04 annual monitoring exercise had been 'modified substantially…to show more detail about progression and also to present data at the level of the programme', and the new annual monitoring report template included a section requiring comment on statistical data for individual programmes. At the same time, the SED acknowledged that there is further scope at school, departmental and programme levels for 'increased use of MIS in order to follow through issues that arise from the annual monitoring and other review processes'. In discussion with the team, senior staff emphasised the importance of making greater use of data between monitoring points at departmental level. A key challenge here is to encourage staff to be proactive in requesting specific data sets from Registry Services to meet their needs.

71   The audit team found that reports containing data and data analysis, some quite elaborate in form, are now routinely presented to committees within the College, for example,

the Academic Board, LTC, QSC and school boards. However, the team noted the variable quality of analysis generated by reports and saw evidence of annual monitoring reports that sometimes reflected disappointing levels of engagement with statistics, with brief comments and a lack of evaluation. In other examples considered, although generally longer, responses tended to concentrate on static features of the data, rather than on emerging trends over time. Significant programme changes resulting from statistical analysis are not yet common.

72   In dialogue with staff, the audit team explored a range of possible strategies for encouraging more productive engagement with the data. The need to change the annual monitoring report form to promote improved analysis was recognised. So, too, was the need for stability in the data presentation format to facilitate comparison over time. At a more strategic level, the importance of encouraging confident and critical engagement with data through further staff development was acknowledged, as was the need for the presentation of data in more user-friendly ways. The need for the College to consider and compare its performance against that of other higher education institutions, promoting a vigorous external benchmarking culture was also noted. While recognising the recent progress made by UCC in its production and use of statistical material, particularly at institutional level, the team formed the view that it would be advisable for the College to continue to develop its management information system, and associated staff development activity, to enable staff to make optimum use of relevant data for comprehensive and well-informed evaluation at both module and programme levels.

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

73   The College requires new staff to have a minimum of a master's degree or equivalent professional experience and be either a

member of the Higher Education Academy or eligible to become a member by means of the College's mandatory Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in the Context of Higher Education (PGCLTCHE). The College has an induction programme and a system of informal mentoring in addition to a probationary period (12 and six months for academic and other staff respectively). Staff have an annual staff development interview (SDI) linking development and performance review.

74   The audit team was told that levels of qualification in terms of staff holding doctorates were above the average for institutions of its type, and it met staff involved in the PGCLTCHE, both as learners and as mentors; responses were universally positive. Procedures for the selection of new staff are exhaustive and in line with national practices. Staff who discussed selection procedures with the team mentioned that their research, even in the context of a teaching-led institution, was central to the presentations made at interview. SDIs were discussed at length and the team heard that these are supportive and productive meetings that informed staff development. The team was shown a draft section of the staff handbook dealing with staff promotions, Staff Handbook - Section 6e: Promotions Procedure - Lecturing Staff. It noted that the criteria for promotion from lecturer to senior lecturer were limited and the document was largely concerned with automatic transfer between grades. The team found a level of commitment to the recruitment and retention of academic staff entirely commensurate with the teaching-led ambitions informed by research that characterised the institution's approach to staffing.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

75   An assistant principal is assigned responsibility for staff support, which is set out in the College's Staff Development and Training Handbook. AMRs provide a means to identify staff development needs and opportunities. Staff development ranges from the acquisition of

specific skills relating to learning and teaching to the contribution to the fees of staff registered for higher degrees, and to the costs of conference attendance. The SED noted that 93 per cent of staff have participated in some sort of external staff training. In-house training centres on Learning and Teaching in the Context of Higher Education qualifications, mandatory for new staff (see paragraph 73 above) and available at master's level to existing staff for continuing professional development purposes. The College also offers biannual staff development weeks and an annual staff development conference. The audit team spoke to postgraduate research students responsible for teaching about the training they had received. Some students spoke supportively of the training provided but, in some cases, students indicated that training had not been timely.

76   SDI is the central tool for individual staff development for target setting as part of institutional priorities. Reviewers are trained by Human Resource Management Services, and the process is confidential to the reviewer, staff member and the relevant head of department, who reports to the Staff Development Officer on the progress of the exercise. One teaching session is peer-reviewed each year, and this process is currently under review. Members of the Senior Management Team and other managers benefit from a HEFCE (Rewarding and Developing Staff in Higher Education) grant for a management development programme.

77   The audit team gained a detailed oversight of staff development at UCC from the Staff Development and Training Handbook and the Staff Development Report 2003-04 presented to the Academic Board, in which the team found a close match between ambition and delivery. The team also learnt about the 'Show and Say Café' and the Shared Practice Database. In meetings with staff, the team heard enthusiastic support for the annual staff development days and the 'Show and Say Café'. It noted, however, that some of the content on the Shared Practice Database was at odds with documentation provided elsewhere in the College and, consequently, probed the level of editorial grasp maintained by the

College on what could be a valuable tool in the enhancement of quality.

78   The system of peer observation of teaching was evaluated in 2004-05, with consistent, institution-wide, reporting forms now produced for the activity. In meetings with staff, the audit team found that the system was already working well. The team also met institutional teaching fellows, and heard about the wide-ranging role that the fellows had within the College. It was told that although fellows receive no teaching remission or funds to support their research projects, they received additional increments. In general, the team found an approach to staff development that was not only consistent with the objectives of the institution, but that went well beyond what might normally be expected. In terms of the breadth and depth of the staff development provision, and the opportunities for personal development, the team considered this aspect of the institution's activities represented a feature of good practice.

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

79   The College currently has only limited distance-learning provision. The principal provision offered by distance learning is the MSc Exercise and Nutrition programme (in Dublin, Hong Kong and Singapore); the Postgraduate Certificate: Teaching and Learning in Clinical Practice; and a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered by the Theology and Religious Studies Department. The SED stated that the framework for the approval and monitoring of distance learning has been informed by QAA's *Guidelines on the quality assurance of distance learning* issued in 1999 and was about to be reviewed in the light of the revised *Code of practice*, *Section 2.* An OASC working group reported an action plan to be adopted to assure full adherence, involving action by AQSS, and discussion of relevant points relating to collaborative provision, by PSC.

80   UCC's approach to distance learning is outlined in part two of its Collaborative Provision Handbook. All the College's approval and

monitoring processes apply to provision delivered through distributed and distance methods but the SED stated that there is an additional requirement for programme teams to consult, where appropriate, the College's Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG). FLAG is under the direction of the Dean of Learning and Teaching and, in addition to providing central advice and support for teams developing distance-learning proposals, it acts as a first stage check on proposed distance-learning materials. The audit team found evidence that, while some programme teams were making use of FLAG, this was not universal. The team also noted a paper written jointly by the Deans of Learning and Teaching and of Academic Quality and Standards making recommendations on current operation and future developments in this area. The team noted that one of the recommendations was that there should be no requirement to consult FLAG, although the amendment of outline proposal forms and module authorisation forms was recommended to include a tick box for self-declaration, indicating whether a proposal falls within the definition of flexible and distance learning, that is, 'provision where a substantial element or the majority of the structured learning activities are designed to be undertaken by the student flexibly or at a distance using electronic or other resources'.

81   The audit team noted that LTC had endorsed the recommendation and was to seek action from the Academic Board on a set of practices to be written into the QSM, but the team queried why the decision to consult FLAG had not been made mandatory. It was told that FLAG's role is advisory and that it has an enhancement function. As such, it is not part of the formal committee structure and it was thought inappropriate to require programme teams to consult, particularly where there was a great deal of experience within them. Given the enhancement role of FLAG and the expertise within the College, the team considered that this was an appropriate position. In addition to consulting FLAG as needed, the Handbook requires teams to consult relevant support services to ensure that the specific needs of distance learners are appropriately addressed.

82   Each school has an IBIS and flexible learning coordinator (FLC). IBIS provides a home grown virtual learning environment (VLE) which has evolved to meet identified need. Originally, each school had an IBIS coordinator who was a member of the IBIS User Group. However, this role has developed over time and each FLC is a member of the College's E-Learning Forum. The Forum's terms of reference are, inter alia, to share best practice and to guide Computing and Information Technology Services (CITS) in developing the VLE to meet the needs of UCC's academic and administrative schools and departments. The audit team was told that the aim of the forum (which reports to the Information Strategy Committee but provides information to both LTC and the Computing and Information Users' Forum) is to use technology to enhance the student experience. FLCs support dissemination of good practice and work with programme leaders to develop blended or e-learning. In addition, FLCs contribute to staff conference and staff development days. Staff and students spoke of the usefulness and ease of use of IBIS, properties endorsed by the team itself. The team considered that the seamless way that the College's intranet (IBIS) provides a VLE and information about all aspects of the College's management and governance through a common portal constituted a feature of good practice.

Learning support resources

83   According to the SED, the 'development and delivery of learning resources is set within the overall context of the Corporate Plan, the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Information Strategy'. An assistant principal has responsibility for the overall management of academic service departments providing learning resources to students and holds fortnightly meetings with service directors to ensure cross-service coordination. The College claimed to operate a 'high quality service across its sites'. There is Learning Resources representation on the SSC and on school boards. SSLC minutes are received by Learning Resources and students are represented on the Learning Resources Users' Forum. There are annual user evaluation surveys,

and results are fed back through departments, newsletters and IBIS. Information technology (IT) resources, including the network that brings IBIS and other on-line resources into student residences (RESNET), are managed by CITS.

84   The College's student satisfaction survey (December 2004) revealed a high level of satisfaction with learning support resources. Although based on a small sample of the student body, the SWS provided an index of the level of student satisfaction with learning resources. Students expressed great satisfaction with IBIS and the audit team found evidence of a high level of sophisticated use of the system on both the Chester and Warrington campuses. Paper-based learning resources were the subject of greater criticism in the SWS although the team found, in student meetings and in the examination of submitted work, that access to such material was adequate at worst and the object of praise by students at best. Students expressed high levels of satisfaction with programme handbooks in the SWS, and although the satisfaction with teaching spaces appeared low from the SWS, this was viewed as largely a consequence of current difficulties in performing arts spaces, a position that is being remedied by the, admittedly delayed, new build on the Chester Campus.

85   In discussions with staff, learning resources were found to be the subject of strategic planning. In general, the audit team found that the institution was responding well to student feedback on all matters relating to learning and teaching. The audit team considered that IBIS represented an example of good practice in terms of resources for student learning as well as the delivery of management and administrative information. The team was particularly impressed by the way in which the system offered a seamless interface between email delivery, a college intranet and a VLE. Impressions of the system based on first-hand usage were confirmed in discussions with staff, in which future developments of the VLE, while currently perhaps a little behind those of proprietary systems, were secure and likely to deliver the results the College requires.

Academic guidance, support and provision

86   The SED set out the operational principles for academic support in the College. The PAT system is central to student academic support. PATs are responsible for providing academic advice and for directing students to SGSS or the SU, when problems go beyond expertise. Programme leaders for postgraduate taught programmes are PATs for those students and responsibility for postgraduate research students lies with the Graduate School. Undergraduate students are assigned a PAT on enrolment, usually a tutor with whom they will normally have a significant amount of contact. In 2003-04, the College conducted a review of the PAT system which resulted in the assignment of responsibility for PATs to the Director of Undergraduate Programmes and SGSS; new guidelines on the PAT system for students and staff; and the inclusion of PAT activity as a subject in staff and student induction. Learning Support Services (LSS), which report to the Dean of Teaching and Learning, has recently been reviewed and enhanced to reflect the diverse learning needs of the student population. Academic skills support has been strengthened in, for example, the areas of writing and presentation skills, and examination preparation.

87   The SWS was reticent about the PAT system and academic support in general, with only oblique reference being made in the context of mitigating circumstances. In meetings with students, however, the audit team found a very high level of satisfaction with the system, and the extent to which the system is embedded and functioning effectively may explain its absence from the SWS. Students spoke positively about the availability of tutors who were not their PATs, and this was echoed in the SWS, with 86 per cent of the student population either satisfied, or very satisfied, with the availability of staff in general. The audit team was able to speak to only a small number of postgraduate research students as a consequence of their small numbers within the institution. However, those students who

expressed a view on the quality of their supervision spoke of its effectiveness.

Personal support and guidance

88   Responsibility for personal support and guidance lies jointly with academic departments and central services whose roles are currently under review in the light of the various sections of the *Code of practice*. Student guidance and support, which received a matrix accreditation in December 2003, have always been praised in subject reviews. SGSS is now housed in new accommodation and is managed by the Dean of Students; its activities are outlined on a CD-ROM (Student Experience). It encompasses counselling, careers, the chaplaincy, disability support, welfare services, and support for international and part-time students. It also coordinates the student mentoring scheme and provides training, as well as the UCC student volunteer scheme (involving 200 students). The College sees the need to ensure the comparability of provision at Chester and Warrington as a priority and has worked hard to that end. It supports, and encourages PATs to support, the use of progress files. The SU provides a range of activities appropriate to the size of the College.

89   The audit team found that the account of personal support and guidance in the SED was accurate and that arrangements were generally working well. Staff spoke enthusiastically of the new building for SGSS which, for the first time, enabled them to refer students from one section to another 'across the corridor' rather than across the campus, as had previously been the case. SU members who met the team spoke enthusiastically of the mentoring system which built on induction processes and provided continuity across years of study. In student meetings in the course of the audit, however, the team found that although the mentoring system worked well at induction and was praised by students, it found little evidence to suggest that students stayed in touch with their mentor beyond the beginning of the first year. Students highlighted induction for direct entry second and third-year students on the Chester

Campus as a weakness, observing that Warrington ran separate induction programmes for second and third-years. However, in general, students viewed positively the personal support and guidance provided by the College.

Collaborative provision

90   As previously indicated (see paragraph 10 above), lay and ministerial education provision in theology and religious studies constitutes a special feature of the College's academic portfolio and the College has collaborative partnerships involving mainly certificate level provision with the Dioceses of Chester, Manchester and Shrewsbury, and the Education for Ministry. A collaborative partnership with the Northern Ordination Course to provide applied theology programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels has now been terminated although some students are still registered on these programmes. In addition, the College had a number of other collaborative partners (see paragraph 12 above) involving undergraduate programmes of study in animal behaviour and related studies; elective modules for biological sciences programmes; health-related studies; history and heritage management; and nursing studies. It is also involved in collaborative partnerships relating to Foundation Degrees in the areas of business and management; information and communications technology; public services management; and in social and health care.

91   At institutional level, support for collaborative arrangements is provided by the Senior Assistant Registrar: Collaborative Provision and Partnerships, who is an ex officio member of PSC; additional support is provided in the form of a policy implementation officer within AQSS. All collaborative partnerships must have been approved by the Academic Board. In addition, the Academic Board has drafted criteria and procedures (yet to be adopted) for the granting of associate college status. Detailed procedures and processes are set out in the Handbook for Collaborative Provision which is designed to be read alongside the College's Principles and Regulations. The processes include initial

approval to proceed by means of the relevant school board to the PSC; detailed due diligence and financial checks on the proposed partner; institutional visit; signing of institutional and programme agreements; and job descriptions for moderators of collaborative programmes and link tutors. PSC also regularly confirms link tutors and moderators for all collaborative provision. A College moderator, appointed to each collaborative programme, acts 'as the final, internal monitor of the collaborating institution's quality assurance procedures'. Moderators are continuously involved with partners throughout the year and produce end of semester reports on the operation of the programme which form part of the annual monitoring process and which are submitted to school boards and PSC.

92   Partner institutions are subject to five-year review and renewal of the institutional agreement. PSC receives such review reports, including any action plans. Partners are also required to produce institutional and programme monitoring reports on an annual basis. PSC receives institutional annual reports, action plans arising from the reports and moderators' reports. School boards receive AMRs for each relevant programme delivered in collaboration, along with individual reviewer's and moderator's reports, and recommend action as a result. In addition, they approve the curriculum vitae of staff teaching Chester provision in partner institutions. Collaborative programmes are administered by programme committees involving staff from the partner institution and UCC. Partner institutions appoint an individual to liaise regularly with the relevant UCC programme leader on programme operation and delivery. UCC appoints link tutors 'to provide general advice and guidance…as well as appropriate subject specific and pedagogic advice'. Specific tasks involve, inter alia, ensuring quality assurance mechanisms are implemented, including an assessment board before the College's subject assessment board; ensuring moderation of a sample of student work; ensuring liaison between the partner college and external examiners; and liaison with partners in the preparation of AMRs.

93   From its reading of documentation and its meetings with staff, the audit team came to the view that the processes for the approval, monitoring and review of partners, and the provision they deliver, were generally sound. It appeared to the team that there was sufficient oversight at both school and institutional levels across all aspects of delivery. The team learnt that all publicity issued by partners, was checked centrally. It also heard that link tutors often check other documentation 'because they considered it part of the role', although the team noted that such checks were not part of the job description for link tutors. The College may wish to consider whether this should be made explicit, to ensure that all information issued to existing and prospective students, in its name, is accurate and reliable.

Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline audit trails

Discipline audit trails

94   For each of the selected DATs, two members of the audit team met staff and students to discuss the provision, studied a sample of assessed work, saw examples of learning resource materials, and studied internal review and other documentation. The team's findings are as follows.

Biological sciences

95   The scope of the DAT covered the following programmes:

- BSc (Hons) Animal Behaviour
- BSc (Hons) Animal Behaviour and Welfare (collaborative provision with Reaseheath College)
- BSc (Hons) Biology
- BSc (Hons) Biomedical Sciences
- BSc (Hons) Forensic Biology
- BSc (Hons) Human Nutrition
- BSc (Combined Hons) Animal Behaviour
- BSc (Combined Hons) Biology

- BSc (Combined Hons) Forensic Biology
- BSc (Combined Hons) Health Sciences (collaborative provision with Isle of Man College)
- HND Animal Behaviour and Welfare (collaborative provision with Reaseheath College)
- BSc (Hons) Nutrition and Dietetics
- MSc Nutrition and Dietetics
- MSc Public Health and Nutrition.

96   The programmes are delivered through modules totalling 120 credits per level by 24 full-time (plus some fractional) staff. The DSED, which included programme specifications, was written specifically for the audit. While detailed progression and completion data were not provided in the DSED, it did include a commentary based on data contained in departmental annual reports.

97   The programme specifications were all approved at validation and were based on a formal definitive document with broader scope. Programme specifications included the educational aims; programme structure; named core and optional modules; the intended learning outcomes with associated teaching learning and assessment strategies; and general information. Where relevant, they made specific reference to the appropriate subject benchmark statement. Reference to the FHEQ was made by means of IBIS. The audit team found the nature of the programmes to be consistent with the educational aims of the Department and the College's wider aims and mission.

98   The DAT confirmed that UCC's procedures for internal monitoring and review were being applied. There was positive evidence of employer involvement and recent graduates are members of revalidation panels. External examiners' reports, and comments sheets on those reports, are considered through the AMRs at school board level. The audit team saw evidence of clear and constructive dialogue with external examiners on issues such as teaching and learning strategies, appropriateness of module content and

examples of issues raised being discussed at LTC. However, it was not clear, in all cases, how actions were followed through since the AMR action plan does not state which actions arise from external input. At the time of the audit there was some variation in the presentation of summary reports published on HERO. All include confirmation of the key elements concerning standards, performance, assessment and awards but others also include comments on good practice from the external examiner.

99   The audit team found the learning, teaching and assessment strategies to be appropriate to the aims of programmes and in alignment with the *Code of practice* and the FHEQ. IBIS provides direct links to QAA documents and thereby facilitates their use by staff and understanding by students. The team saw good examples of grading and assessment criteria, including their use in student feedback, and students confirmed that they understood the criteria on which they were being assessed.

100   Examples of student work, providing evidence of appropriate standards, were available from modules at all levels across a range of programmes. The audit team found that the quality of feedback on the assessed coursework was good although it believed that more opportunity might be made to encourage students to report on their ethics approval process in dissertations. The team formed the view that the standards of student achievement are suitably located within the FHEQ and are appropriate to the titles and levels of the programmes considered.

101   Programme handbooks provide a useful and informative reference source for students. They are supplemented by module guides, containing information about the rationale, aims, intended learning outcomes, methods of learning and assessment. A particularly good feature is the relationship between programme handbooks and the generic student handbook on IBIS. This discourages duplication of information and reduces the likelihood of transcription errors concerning key College regulations. In some cases, programme handbooks did not accurately reflect the aims as

stated in the programme specification and staff planned to correct this for the 2005-06 session. The audit team found several examples of modules in biosciences where not all the intended learning outcomes were assessed and it was not obvious how these mapped across the programme as a whole. The team saw some very good examples of module guides in biosciences, with clear instructions for students and thorough assessment criteria. The team formed the view that appropriate and understandable information is available for students about expectations and assessment criteria.

102 The availability and adequacy of learning resources is considered in the AMR and QSR processes. Some programmes are heavily reliant on external expertise (for example, forensic biology), but this is constantly kept under review. Students confirmed the adequacy of learning resources but reported that access to University of Liverpool on-line resources was not available to them.

103 Module questionnaires and the SSLC provide the main vehicle for students to express their views. Students who met the audit team cited examples of issues raised and handled and were also very positive about the opportunities to provide informal feedback to staff. The team noted that the SSLC is structured on a module and year basis and considered that student liaison might benefit from more interaction between students on different years of the programme. Students are represented on the school board, which is a considerable commitment on their part given the number of meetings and the extent of the agenda.

104 The audit team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities was suitable for the programmes of study being considered.

Computer science and information systems

105 The DAT covered the teaching and research provision made by the Department of Computer Science and Information Systems, with a focus on the following awards:

- Foundation Degree (FD) in Information and Communications Technology

- BSc (Hons) Computer Science
- BSc (Hons) Multimedia Technologies
- BSc (Hons) Network and Communication Systems
- MSc Information Systems
- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)/Master of Philosophy (MPhil).

106 The DSED was based on the new QSR process undertaken in June 2004. Information provided included the response to a self-evaluation questionnaire, the report by the Chair of the panel on the review, the subsequent response and action plan from the Department and a further departmental evaluative update (February 2005). Programme specifications for undergraduate programmes were included in the DSED; those for postgraduate programmes were provided within the annual review of postgraduate programmes, dated March 2005.

107 The audit team found that programme specifications related to the FHEQ and reflected the *Subject benchmark statement* for computing. Additionally, Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment (QCA) Authority level-related key skills descriptors are incorporated into the programmes following the guidelines and key skills descriptors specified by the UCC Key Skills Advisory Group. In designing the programmes, module level design and programme structures were cross-referenced to ensure that the content and level reflected the subject benchmark statements, FHEQ and QCA key skills. The FD benchmark statements are also reflected in the programme specification for the FD in Health Informatics. The College aligns the Quality and Standards Manual with the *Code of practice,* published by QAA, on a continuing basis; programmes in computing are delivered and monitored in accordance with UCC's Regulations. The DSED referred to the *Code* in relation to a QSR panel recommendation on assessment.

108 The most recent annual reviews for the undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision contained comprehensive admissions data and data relating to student achievement

and, for each programme, the awards obtained. The undergraduate review also contained information relating to the outcomes from the delivery of each module and detailed progression data for the year 2003-04 only. Within the overview of the undergraduate annual review, there was some limited analysis of student recruitment, achievement and progression data. In contrast, the overview for the postgraduate taught provision was able to provide some analysis and evaluation of student data over several years.

109 The programme annual monitoring reports appended to the undergraduate and postgraduate annual reviews, were found to contain very little analysis or monitoring of student data in relation to the quality and standards of the programme. While acknowledging that several undergraduate programmes had commenced in 2003-04, and thus had limited progression and achievement data, the format of the programme annual monitoring report did not encourage a detailed evaluation of student data. Staff commented that student destination data are provided and analysed by SGSS, and the data are not considered within annual monitoring reports or by the School Board. There was also a lack of quantitative evaluation of student progression data within the QSR; more detailed discussion, however, was provided on student admission. Despite this, the Chair's event report of the QSR commented that the 'SED contained an effective evaluation of this section of the review', for example, student admission and progression.

110 The QSR was undertaken with due regard to the required process. The Department provided detailed factual responses to a comprehensive range of questions in the DSED. Additional documentation provided for the QSR included external examiners' reports, annual reviews, student data, sample module assessment board minutes and examples of module evaluation. The audit team considered that the membership of the review panel, which included two external members and a student member, was appropriate. The panel had noted that the Department had acted

upon all recommendations arising from validation (May 2002) and revalidation (April 2002) reports. The Department response to the QSR panel's 'desirable recommendations' (June 2004) in February 2005, was noted with some further discussion, at OASC and a supplementary update was provided by the Department later that month.

111 The undergraduate annual review is compiled in October, while the postgraduate review is submitted in March. The undergraduate annual review for 2003-04 was a very lengthy document (261 pages). In addition to the initial overview of the provision, the report contained annual monitoring reports for each single and combined honours programme, twelve reports in total. Given the overlap between these modular programmes, there was considerable repetition of the information provided. Additionally, the template format of the report did not always result in an evaluative discussion of the provision. The annual review for the two postgraduate programmes (29 pages) provided an evaluative overview of the provision; however, the annual monitoring report provided for each programme did not contribute much further information to the report. Staff commented that the format for the annual monitoring review is currently under review.

112 Any concerns arising from student performance on a particular module are dealt with at module assessment boards (MABs) and at subject (for undergraduates) or programme (for postgraduates) assessment boards, if necessary. All staff delivering a module attend the MAB; this minuted meeting focuses on the assessment process and student results and includes comments from the second marker. The MAB is also used to help ensure consistency of delivery of modules and to inform module development.

113 External examiners' reports are appended to annual reviews, together with the responses from the relevant head of department. The audit team found that points raised by external examiners are considered carefully, not only by the appropriate department but also through the review of the AMRs by the Applied and

Health Sciences (AHS) school board. For example, in 2004 an external examiner had again raised the issue of some undergraduate examinations at levels 2 and 3 being only one hour long. This had been a recurring theme for external examiners across a number of subjects for several years. The College's policy regarding the word limit/examination length for a 15-credit module had been raised through the AHS school board at the AC in June 2004. Following ratification by the Academic Board of the current policy, staff have made changes to reduce the number of one hour examinations.

114 The Department's learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) strategy reflects the College's learning and teaching strategy and supports the educational aims of the programmes. Staff explained that the 2004-05 LTA action plan is being used as a reference when undertaking peer observation of teaching. The range of actions on the LTA is comprehensive and reflects issues arising from, for example, programme development; modification; student retention; and the implementation of new assessment policies and regulations. Departmental assessment strategies reflect the requirements of UCC as set out in the Quality and Standards Manual; for example, there is second-marking of 25 per cent of scripts including all those under 40 per cent and over 69 per cent and double-marking of all dissertations, where all assignments are fully marked twice.

115 The audit team reviewed a range of examples of assessed work from undergraduate and postgraduate programmes within the DAT. Student work was considered to be of an appropriate standard and suitably located within the FHEQ. Students commented that assessment criteria were provided for honours degree programmes but had not always been explicit for FD-level modules. An external examiner commented that undergraduate 'assignment briefs adopt a variety of formats with grading criteria being rather brief and not always very helpful to the students' and that examination papers do not always show how a 'pass' mark is achieved for questions. The Department responded by requiring greater

scrutiny of all assignments, exam papers and marking schemes/criteria by the second marker and the Department Assessment Officer before material is sent to the external examiner for comment. External examiners stated that, in general, the Department has good assessment processes that are well linked to module learning outcomes. There was evidence of double-marking of master's dissertations with both markers providing feedback to students.

116 In providing information to students, the Department makes comprehensive use of IBIS. Students commented that they use IBIS extensively to access programme and module information; IBIS was also said to be very helpful for students with any visual impairment. Staff explained that, by using IBIS as the principal information source and providing links to other documents, students are able to access regulations from the original source; this eliminates the possibility of errors when paraphrasing information for a handbook. There are generic student handbooks for FD, honours and master's level programmes on IBIS with further information provided at programme level. Additionally, information is provided at the level of the module; the range of information varies but can include guides to learning on a weekly basis, suggested reading and sources of information and the assessment. Students submit their assignments using IBIS for some modules.

117 Students commented on the friendly atmosphere at the College and the support and guidance provided by the Department. On commencing their studies, undergraduates and postgraduates met by the audit team said that they had appreciated their helpful induction programmes; the induction for research students, for example, had included an evening when they met second and third-year PhD students. Students also commented on the Department's good software resources. Within the Department's mid-semester evaluation of each module, undergraduates are asked if they 'know where to find additional resources and material'. From the sample of response summaries, from semester one 2004-05, provided to the audit team, the majority of

students knew where to find 'some' or 'plenty' of additional resources. Results from mid-semester module evaluations are summarised by tutors, discussed at department meetings and actions are addressed immediately by module tutors. The access and adequacy of resources is also included in the end of semester evaluation for undergraduates and postgraduates. These evaluations have been paper-based; however, an on-line version has recently been introduced for undergraduates.

118 Due to lack of attendance of undergraduate student representatives at SSLC meetings, the Department had trialled an on-line system for student representatives. Although the system appeared to satisfy students' needs, the QSR panel recommended, in June 2004, that the Department should 'formalise the SSLC' Committee meetings as the on-line version did not conform to the College's SSLC requirements. Students confirmed that, at undergraduate level, face-to-face SSLC meetings do now take place and that there is, additionally, an on-line feedback system available for all students. There is no formal SSLC at master's level; students contact staff directly with any concerns. Students confirmed that issues raised were considered and acted upon.

119 Overall, the audit team was satisfied that the standard of student achievement in the programmes covered by the DAT is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ and that the quality of learning opportunities is suitable for these awards.

Performing arts

120 The scope of the DAT included a range of programmes at undergraduate and master's level taught at both the Chester and Warrington Campuses, as well as PhD programmes, and covered the following taught programmes:

- BA Drama and Theatre Studies
- BA (Combined Hons) Drama and Theatre Studies with another discipline
- Combined Honours Dance with another discipline
- BA (Combined Hons) Performance and New Media with another discipline
- BA (Combined Hons) Arts and Cultural Management with another discipline (has ceased recruiting)
- BA (Combined Hons) Popular Music with another discipline
- BA Performing Arts Management (has ceased recruiting)
- BA Performing Arts with Media Studies and other disciplines (has ceased recruiting)
- BA Performing Arts minor (has ceased recruiting)
- MA Performance Practice.

121 The DSED consisted of documents related to an internal QSR that took place in June 2004: an SED, the QSR template, the chair's event report, departmental response with timed actions and the minute of the OASC recording the outcomes of the visit, and an evaluative update to the SED prepared in February 2005 to coincide with the QAA institutional audit. A full set of programme specifications was included in the DAT.

122 The programme specifications made clear links to the FHEQ at all levels with consistent reference to Certificate of Higher Education, Diploma of Higher Education and BA honours levels. Reference to subject benchmark statements were found in all programme specifications, with threshold statements used for level 1 and focal statements for levels 2 and 3. The use of the *Code of practice* is embedded in UCC practices and is not required in programme specifications.

123 The QSR that formed the basis of the DSED was an exhaustive undertaking, covering the period 2001 to 2004 and following on from a QAA subject review in 1998 and UCC's response to that review in 1999. The audit team's analysis of the documentation revealed a well-focused process with careful follow-up by both the College and the Department. For example, the quality of the programme specifications in the DSED was a direct consequence of actions endorsed in the QSR,

especially with regard to the reference made to subject benchmark statements.

124 The audit team examined annual monitoring reports for performing arts from 2001 to 2004. These grew over the period to a point where the most recent document ran to 197 pages with a high level of duplication, and a significantly lower level of evaluative engagement. The team considered that the preparation and management of a document of this size was disproportionate to the size of the Department and believed that a smaller, better-focused document would have resulted in a more evaluative exercise. The team found in meetings with staff a genuinely self-critical stance in all areas of their work that did not translate into the voluminous AMR seen by the team. Progression and completion data were available as part of the AMR. The team found that, despite the dimensions and complexity of the AMR, there was little evidence to suggest that the statistics were used to monitor quality and standards.

125 The audit team saw evidence of external examiners' reports being followed up as part of the AMR, and responses were appropriate and timely. Multiple external examiners were at work in the various programmes within the Department, and the formal response was a single document to the group as a whole.

126 Assessment strategies were found to be working well. Prior to the institutional development of generic criteria, the Department had used subject-specific criteria based on those promulgated by the national subject centre for dance, drama and music (PALATINE), but the audit team learnt from staff that these had been temporarily abandoned to take account of the institutional generic criteria, onto the back of which they were proposing to redevelop subject-specific criteria. The staff spoke eloquently of this ongoing negotiation between subject-specific and institutional-generic criteria, and the team found the dialogue stimulating and productive.

127 The audit team examined written work from all three undergraduate levels of achievement in the Department. For each module, it was provided with a programme outline that included a rationale, aims, learning outcomes, content, methods of teaching and learning, methods of assessment, employer collaboration and bibliography. The written work showed evidence of careful feedback based, in some cases, on the learning outcomes for the module, in others rather more ad hoc feedback was given. In all cases the assessment was accurately calibrated and the standard of student achievement appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

128 The audit team saw student handbooks on IBIS, one for all the BA programmes in performing arts and one for master's level work. These were largely concerned with practical matters and did not, for example, include programme specifications which are found elsewhere on IBIS, a practice that protects against any risk of textual variance in versions of the programme specification itself. In its meeting with students, the team found enthusiastic support for the content and accuracy of the student handbook.

129 The audit team conducted lengthy discussions with staff and students over learning resources. Information and communication technology (ICT) and library facilities were praised in general, although some drift in resources from Warrington to Chester was identified as programmes were phased out, and students also pointed to a higher degree of downtime on the Warrington server, although all students were enthusiastic about IBIS. Both staff and students noted the difficulties with studio space for practice-based activities, but looked forward (albeit with some frustration at building delays) to the new performing arts build on the Chester Campus.

130 The audit team saw examples of student evaluation via a form that was largely generated without institutional oversight within the Department. Responses to evaluation exercises were posted on IBIS at Chester and on notice boards at Warrington. The team saw minutes of SSLC meetings on IBIS. Each module is in principle represented by a selected student, and is given space at the meeting. Issues raised were wide-ranging and there was evidence of students contributing to ongoing discussions relating to

module quality and standards in terms of the balance between practical and theoretical work and the variety of styles of delivery.

131 Overall, the audit team found that the quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the awards covered by the DAT.

Theology and religious studies

132 Theology and Religious Studies is one of four departments in the School of Humanities. Its portfolio of programmes includes:

- Master of Arts/Graduate Diploma (MA/GD) in Applied Theology

- MA/GD in Contemporary Spirituality

- MA in Science and Religion

- BTh (Hons) Theology

- BA (Hons) Religious Studies

- BA (Combined Hons) Theology and Religious Studies

- BA (Combined Hons) Religion and Culture.

The Department also offers awards in partnership with the Centre for Christian Ministry as follows:

- MA in Science and Religion

- MA/GD in Adult Education with Theological Reflection

- BA in Youth Work with Applied Theology

- Certificate of Higher Education, Diploma of Higher Education and Church Colleges' Certificate provision.

133 The DSED was originally written for an internal QSR (and revalidation of academic provision) in March 2005. It contained two similar (but not identical) sets of programme specifications, one for programmes delivered in 2004-05, the other for programmes seeking revalidation. Both sets linked aims, learning outcomes, learning and teaching methods and assessment modes in the manner recommended by the QAA *Code of practice*; and both listed component modules, and provided helpful cross-references to information on the IBIS websites. Only the second, however, referred explicitly to

the FHEQ, and also to the subject benchmark statement, deploying a standard statement for this purpose. The Head of School confirmed that the FHEQ is a 'controlling influence' and that new modular materials are routinely mapped against this and subject benchmark statements. The audit team noted external examiners' comments on good articulation between the portfolio of modules and subject benchmark statements.

134 The audit team had access to centrally-generated entry and progression data for theology and religious studies undergraduates in 2003-04, but not to equivalent data for postgraduate students. It found that commentaries identified relevant 'messages' in the data, and follow-up action sometimes ensued, but also that engagement with emerging trends was variable, and writing sometimes lacked analytical depth. The team noted that one internal peer audit report had criticised the absence of numeric data and had expressed concern about the quality of the evidential base for conclusions.

135 The audit team examined the local operation of institutional periodic review processes though the DSED, the final report of the QSR panel, and reports for five programmes validated in the previous 18 months. The material revealed that due attention had been paid to institutional guidelines for preparing documents, constituting panels and conducting processes. It also showed the Department reflecting critically on its programmes and engaging constructively with processes. A clear external presence was evident on both the QSR and the MA Science and Religion panels (three and two external members respectively).

136 The local operation of institutional monitoring processes was examined through annual reviews for the last three years. The application of the prescribed institutional processes and the appropriate reporting cycle was noted. The audit team noted that further changes were being considered to enhance its usefulness as a quality enhancement tool.

137 In recognition of the importance of collaborative partnerships in the Department's

academic portfolio, particularly the Church Colleges' Certificates, the audit team sought reassurance that periodic review processes operated effectively in this area. The team examined a September 2004 review report on collaboration between UCC and Chester Diocese, and found that the partnership had successfully come through a wide-ranging and robust investigation of its recent history. The team noted that PSC receives annual institutional reports for partnership arrangements.

138   External examiners' reports enabled the audit team to confirm three key claims in the DSED: namely, that examiners are impressed by the Department's programmes, they judge the standards set for awards to be appropriate for their levels, and consider that standards are comparable with those of similar programmes in other institutions. Records of the annual monitoring process indicated that reports are carefully considered by the Department according to institutional procedures, particularly in relation to any issues and concerns that had been raised. All departmental staff are able to see all reports in order to foster quality enhancement through the sharing of good practice. The outcome of the audit team's review of the Department's teaching quality information website entries was satisfactory in terms of both institutional requirements and national expectations. The responsibilities of departmental examiners sometimes cover several programmes at different levels, and in these circumstances the submission of a composite report is permitted. The team sympathised with the scrutiny reviewer for the MTh Applied Theology in 2002-03 who commented that this arrangement 'made it difficult to extract the relevant postgraduate comments'.

139   The audit team based its understanding of the Department's approach to assessment on the DSED and the Department's learning, teaching and assessment strategy (March 2005). Harmonisation between departmental and institutional strategies was noted, as was a declared commitment to the FHEQ and to its associated level descriptors. The *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* has been an

implicit influence to the extent that institutional assessment policy was carefully benchmarked against its precepts in 2004. Programme specifications showed clear links between these wider frameworks of reference and the design of modular assessment, particularly its use of an overarching scheme in which different modes of assessment are matched to different levels of study, including M level.

140   The audit team looked at a selection of assessed student work from a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. It confirmed that the assessment modes were those specified in the modular handbooks, and that institutional marking procedures had been followed. Initial concern about parallel teaching (a practice which allows HE3 and M-level students to be taught together), was allayed through the study of modular literature and examples of student work, both of which confirmed that the Department was managing the arrangement carefully in accordance with institutional guidelines. Another concern, the absence of written examinations at level HE3, and its significance in terms of tackling plagiarism, was answered by the Head of Subject.

141   Student modular handbooks are available on the IBIS network. They were found to be generally well written in a clear and accessible style, and provided appropriate information, including details of assessment requirements. Modular handbooks are supplemented with programme handbooks giving general overviews. Students expressed full satisfaction with their handbooks, both in terms of content and accessibility. This judgement was endorsed by some external examiners.

142   The DSED asserted that the departmental methodology for distributing the annual library budget ensures 'that all modules are adequately resourced' and students supported this view. The fact that library resources, although occasionally raised, have not been a dominant concern in module evaluations, or in SSLC business, may be read as implicit support from the wider student constituency. Students have access to several external libraries, including St Deniols Library at Hawarden and Liverpool

University library. In addition to module and programme handbooks, students have access to other learning support arrangements which include local induction, skills delivery within modules, and IBIS-based study materials. Students commended the quality of departmental induction, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and for college-based and partnership programmes. One student particularly mentioned the willingness of staff to make ad hoc bespoke provision if scheduled arrangements were impractical. IBIS was warmly praised both for its materials and accessibility.

143 The Department operates a system of student evaluation of academic provision in accordance with institutional requirements. The audit team had access to a selection of undergraduate student evaluation forms for individual modules and programmes, the latter investigating student experience at two points, the end of year one and the end of year three. In addition to evaluation forms, students' views have sometimes been obtained through exit focus groups. On one occasion, the Department consulted a group of students on the audit of programme specifications undertaken in 2004. Students showed that they were aware of procedures for making complaints, and in this context, felt that informal approaches through personal academic tutors and other staff would often be productive.

144 The minutes of the undergraduate SSLC showed a systematic approach to addressing issues, reasonable attendance by student module representatives, and serious staff responses, even when proposals could not be accommodated. Students confirmed that training for module representatives was provided, and feedback on issues raised was both informal and formal. The list of issues raised included changes to the room timetable, accommodation, the timing of lectures, library matters and aspects of course content and structure. No particular concerns dominated. Improvements resulting from student input included the enhancement of student skills provision and the development of e-books.

145 The audit team was satisfied that the standard of student achievement in the portfolio of programmes within the DAT was appropriate to the titles of the awards concerned and their location within the FHEQ, and that the quality of learning opportunities was suitable for these awards.

Section 4: The audit investigations: published information

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

146 The SED stated that UCC undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses are the 'chief vehicles for disseminating information, advice and guidance to prospective students'. Additional material includes an international guide, course booklets and admissions advice, all supported by the website. Registered students receive a Student Experience CD-ROM and access to IBIS during induction week. A generic UCC student handbook provides core information not duplicated by programme handbooks, thereby ensuring consistency and currency.

147 The audit team found some variability in the information provided in module and/or programme handbooks. Some departments provide paper-based programme handbooks that provided the aims and intended learning outcomes and a brief outline of the programme, others provided a departmental handbook and others made the information available only through IBIS. However, the team found all these methods to be satisfactory and fit for purpose. This is largely due to the pervasiveness of IBIS as a communication tool.

148 The SED indicated that published information is subject to annual review by the Marketing and Recruitment Unit. Production documents attached to leaflets and information booklets help to ensure compliance with the UCC's regulations. Material is checked by the Director or Assistant Director of the Marketing, Recruitment and Admissions Service (MRAS). Web

content is the responsibility of a web and design manager, the College web editor and MRAS director and assistant director. They check for compliance with appropriate national guidelines and the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act*. The audit team noted that students were positive concerning the accuracy of information provided prior to enrolment.

149 The audit team was informed that MRAS checked information published by collaborative partners. Although the job description for link tutors makes no reference to checking for accuracy of published information, the team was told that link tutors fulfilled a useful role in checking subject-specific information. The SED indicated that responsibility for the publication on IBIS of programme handbooks on IBIS resided with departments and programme teams.

150 The SWS was supported by a questionnaire completed by about 5 per cent of students. Over 90 per cent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the information provided. The SWS stated that 'issues concerning facilities at the Warrington campus', 'isolated incidents where the course is not the same as had been described to them on an open day' or aspects of 'transport between campuses' may have contributed to the small number of replies expressing dissatisfaction. Students were very clear about how to access information such as assessment requirements, and appeals procedures. The audit team was able to confirm that such information was available and easy to access. According to the SWS, 87 per cent of students were either satisfied or very satisfied with IBIS.

151 Information about programmes and departments is readily available in the prospectuses, on the website and IBIS. The exception is the Graduate School, which is more difficult to locate from the postgraduate prospectus or main website. The audit team was informed that the Graduate School was specifically for research, not taught postgraduate, students. The team considered that this is not immediately obvious from either the title of the Graduate School or its home page on IBIS. Programme specifications are

readily available through IBIS. There were isolated examples where programme aims were not reflected accurately in the appropriate programme handbook and these were to be addressed for the 2005 entry of students.

152 On the basis of the documentation seen, and meetings with staff and students, the audit team concluded that there was appropriate support to students via the information provided to them. The team considered that UCC's intranet IBIS made a significant contribution to the students' experience of information available to them, particularly in the way that it provides a seamless interface between institutional level information, programme content and module details through a common portal.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

153 The audit team found that the following were available on HERO: the teaching and learning strategy, the use of external examiners, and employers' needs and trends. The HERO site devoted to UCC's commentary on the Higher Education Statistics Agency data (which is optional) had not been completed. The team noted that not all QSR reports, relating to events which had happened by the time of the audit, had been formally approved by the relevant committee and were consequently not present on HERO. It further noted variations in the external examiners' reports submitted: all included confirmation of the key elements concerning standards, performance, assessment and awards but others also included comments from the external examiner relating to good practice. The team concluded that the University was making steady progress towards meeting the requirements of HEFCE's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance.*

Findings

Findings

154 An institutional audit of the University College Chester (UCC or the College) was undertaken during the period 16 to 20 May 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the College's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility for its awards. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals and Universities UK, four discipline audit trails (DATs) were selected for scrutiny. This section of the report of the audit summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and recommendations to the College for enhancing current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

155 In August 2004 the College restructured its major committees, rationalising the Academic Board subcommittee structure into five key committees: Research Committee; Learning and Teaching Committee; Quality and Standards Committee (QSC); Student Services Committee; and the Equal Opportunities Committee. Each of these committees has a number of subcommittees reporting to it. At the same time, school boards were given additional responsibilities in relation to quality assurance, particularly in respect of the developmental, 'steering' stage of programme development prior to validation and new module approval.

156 Within the revised structure, school boards have a direct reporting line to the Academic Board. The College maintained the Academic Review Sub-Committee (ARSC), a subcommittee of QSC, for 2004-05. ARSC recommends new programmes for approval following successful validation; oversees the approval, monitoring and review procedures; oversees the submission and approval of programme specifications; advises the College Executive Group on

significant resource issues; and acts as a review group on behalf of QSC. The College had reviewed the performance of the school boards and the operation of the new committee structure shortly before the audit. The review had concluded that the new structure was working well although there was a need to revisit the terms of reference of some of the key committees to avoid duplication of business. The review had further concluded that ARSC should be disbanded from 2005-06 and its functions transferred to school boards.

157 The audit team considered that the restructuring and the streamlining of committees had worked well, on the whole, affording the College appropriate oversight while focusing agendas more appropriately within the Academic Board's subcommittee structure. The team further considered that the College had conducted the restructuring in a measured way and that the review undertaken during the first year of operation had been thorough. The team believed, however, that the already large amount of business conducted by the school boards was likely to increase, given UCC's stated intention to increase student numbers and expand curriculum provision. Consequently, the College is advised to keep its school level committee structure under review and, in particular, the volume of work undertaken by school boards.

158 The College has a process model of validation whereby proposals are considered and developed at a series of meetings, culminating in a validation event. External consultation takes place at the steering stage and validation panels include external members. Provision is subject to review and revalidation every six years and this is undertaken on a departmental basis. Revalidation panels include external members and a recent graduate. In addition, in 2003-04, the College introduced a triennial quality and standards review (QSR) of quality and standards at programme and subject level. QSR panels include both external and student membership, and the emphasis of the QSR process is on quality enhancement and the highlighting of

good practice. Staff clearly understood the purpose of each of the processes adopted and the audit team was able to endorse the quality enhancement value of the QSR process.

159 In 2003 the College introduced revised procedures for the annual monitoring of programmes and review of academic departments. This is now undertaken by the completion of a pro forma which the College had initially piloted in two schools. The College was conscious of the need to review the pro forma as, in some cases, the questions posed allowed simple yes or no answers. The audit team saw the revised pro forma during the audit. While endorsing the College's view that it is likely to elicit more relevant information, the College is advised to keep the wording of some of the questions posed under review to enable it to be sufficiently informed of local level developments and trends.

160 The College had a number of collaborative partners at the time of the audit. It has detailed procedures for the initial approval of prospective partners and the validation, revalidation and monitoring of provision delivered elsewhere. Each collaborative programme has a moderator and a link tutor, with clearly defined roles, from within the College. The Partnerships Sub-Committee (PSC), a subcommittee of QSC, oversees collaborative partnerships which are supported administratively by a designated member of staff within Academic Quality Support Services. Partner institutions produce institutional annual reports in addition to undertaking annual monitoring of programmes. PSC receives institutional reports and moderators' reports. Partner institutions are subject to review and renewal of the institutional agreement every five years. From its reading of supporting documentation and its meetings with staff, the audit team formed the view that the processes for approval, monitoring and review of both partners and the provision they were delivering, were sound.

161 The audit team considered that the College took a measured approach to the management of quality and standards, consulting before implementing change and then reviewing the consequences of such change, making adjustments where necessary.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

162 UCC has direct responsibility for the standards of the awards made in its own name. For awards conferred in the names of the Universities of Liverpool and Manchester, and any other institutions, responsibility rests with the awarding bodies. In practice, the College exercises considerable autonomy in respect of all awards.

163 The maintenance of standards lies at the heart of the College's quality assurance processes. UCC's Principles and Regulations and Quality and Standards Manual are the main documents setting out the College's framework for securing standards on a day-to-day basis. The framework is informed by three key principles: the location of awards and assessment processes at all levels within the national academic framework; the presence of a strong measure of externality in validation and student assessment; and the maintenance of a regulatory framework for assessment which is robust and objective. These principles are underpinned by effective operational systems and processes. The College recognises the value and importance of using statistical data to interrogate the standards of awards, on a UCC-wide and national higher education sector-wide basis.

164 Externality is secured in two main ways: through external advisers at internal validation and periodic review events, and through external examiners. External participation in internal validation and review is regarded as an essential safeguard of the academic integrity of programmes and, therefore, of the academic standards of the awards to which they lead. From its reading of institutional guidelines for programme validation, revalidation and QSR processes, and documentation relating to their operation, it was clear to the audit team that the College is using external experts in appropriate and effective ways to help to secure the standards of awards.

165 UCC appoints external examiners to all programmes according to detailed procedures informed by the principles of objectivity and impartiality. Other procedures ensure that external examiners are involved actively and independently in all key stages of the assessment process, and so acquire the knowledge and understanding required to monitor effectively the standards achieved by UCC students. Appointments reflect a broad range of experience from across the higher education sector, so that judgements about the comparability of local standards with those elsewhere in the United Kingdom invite confidence. External examiners' reports are taken seriously, considered systematically and, where appropriate, acted upon.

166 The self-evaluation document (SED) stated that UCC is committed to the equitable treatment of all students in matters of assessment. To this end, it has developed a regulatory framework for the management of student assessment whose details appear in the Handbook of Requirements Governing the Assessment of Students at Levels C, I, H and M. The framework is thorough and coherent. It prescribes robust arrangements for setting, organising and marking assessed work; includes procedures for dealing with academic misconduct and mitigating circumstances; sets out requirements for the conduct of programme and assessment boards; provides guidance on appeals; and contains generic marking criteria for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

167 The College produces progression and completion data to inform the annual monitoring process at subject and programme levels, and to provide a basis for institutional scrutiny. In recognition of the importance of using statistical information to interrogate standards, it has made, with some success, conscious and systematic efforts to enhance the quality of its student data in recent years.

168 On the basis of the evidence available to it, the audit team concluded that the College's arrangements for securing standards were effective.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

169 UCC has two teaching campuses, at Warrington and Chester. The SED is careful to consider both campuses in all its statements on learning support. The audit team found that in general, while provision on both campuses was never identical, learning support was appropriate and complementary across the College. It also found evidence of substantial effort to ensure that even when programmes were in the process of migrating from one campus to another, learning support was central to the logistic moves required.

170 Library facilities at UCC make use of both paper-based and electronic resources, and the SED considered multi-site usage of the library to be sound. The audit team was able to confirm strong student support for the library facilities in all their forms. Information and communication technology (ICT) provision across the College is entirely fit for purpose, although some students recognised slightly less immediacy to the network on the Warrington Campus. Management, administration and virtual learning environment are all integrated within the campus on-line information service (IBIS). The team found that staff and students considered IBIS a powerful tool, and it was able to confirm its power by using it before, during and after the audit.

171 The SED described the ways in which learning resources are managed in the context of annual monitoring statements, the Corporate Plan, the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Information Strategy. The audit team found that allocation of resource for learning resources in general was working well, with requests from departments for space, increased or changed ICT provision being dealt with in an effective and purposeful way. Student support is based on the Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) system. In meetings with students and staff, the team found both that the PAT system was working well on a college-wide basis and that the size and ethos of UCC meant that it was easy for students to approach staff who were not their tutor. Personal support for students is provided

jointly by departments via the PAT system and central college services. The Student Guidance and Support Services Department is now housed in new accommodation, and staff and students who had used its facilities spoke warmly of the work it does and the supportive environment that it creates for students.

172 Student representation works well at UCC. Student Academic Representatives represent each module on a Staff-Student Liaison Committee, and a large proportion of students were aware of this system and could speak with some authority about actions that had arisen as a result of their comments. At central College level, student representation was equally strong, and the audit team saw evidence attesting to the fact that the student voice was strong and audible.

The outcomes of the discipline audit trails

Biological sciences

173 From its discussions with staff and students and its review of assessed work the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the BSc (Hons) Animal Behaviour; BSc (Hons) Animal Behaviour and Welfare; BSc (Hons) Biology; BSc (Hons) Biomedical Sciences; BSc (Hons) Forensic Biology; BSc (Hons) Human Nutrition; BSc (Combined Hons) Animal Behaviour; BSc (Hons) Biology; BSc (Combined Hons) Forensic Biology; BSc (Combined Hons) Health Sciences; HND Animal Behaviour and Welfare; BSc (Hons) Nutrition and Dietetics; MSc Public Health and Nutrition; and MSc Nutrition and Dietetics was appropriate to their location in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), was suitably referenced to subject benchmark statements and that the titles were appropriate to the awards.

174 Students from a variety of biosciences programmes confirmed that they were satisfied with their programmes and the information given to them. They also confirmed that information provided to them was accurate, that the IBIS system worked well in the context of biosciences provision, and that resources to

support the programmes were adequate. The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities offered to students was suitable to the programmes of study.

Computer science and information systems

175 The scope of the DAT comprised taught and research provision within the Department of Computer Science and Information Systems, with a focus on the Foundation Degree in Information and Communications Technology; BSc (Hons) programmes in Computer Science, Multimedia Technologies and Network and Communication Systems; and the MSc in Information Systems. Programme specifications seen by the audit team reflect the Subject benchmark statements for computing. From its study of students' assessed work, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

176 The audit team found that student evaluation of the provision was positive and students were very satisfied with the extent and nature of the support they received from staff. Students particularly commented on the friendly atmosphere within the College. Undergraduate and postgraduate students make extensive use of the College's intranet (IBIS) for programme-related information and some communication, including the submission of assignments. The Department has recently introduced an on-line feedback system for all undergraduate students in addition to other formal and informal systems for student feedback. The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

Performing arts

177 The performing arts DAT covered a range of programmes at undergraduate and master's level taught both at the Chester and Warrington Campuses, as well as PhD programmes. The audit team were shown how the programmes at the Warrington Campus and validated by the University of Manchester were in the process of being phased out and

replaced by programmes based on the Chester Campus. The DAT SED consisted of documents relating to an internal QSR that took place in June 2004. The programme specifications make clear links to the FHEQ at all levels and with consistent reference to Certificate of Higher Education, Diploma of Higher Education and BA honours levels. On the basis of the examination of student written work and discussions with staff and students, the team found that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

178 Students were satisfied with the learning environment created on both the Chester and Warrington Campuses, and the audit team considered that the ways in which the teaching-out of programmes on the Warrington Campus was being conducted were being done well with due concern for the students. Library and ICT facilities were entirely in keeping with departmental ambitions. The student voice was listened to attentively by staff in the context of an extremely friendly atmosphere that governs relations between staff and students. The team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

Theology and religious studies

179 The scope of the DAT comprised provision at levels HE1 to 3, and level M, within the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, covering a range of undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes and various certificate programmes. Programme specifications seen by the audit team reflect the *Subject benchmark statement* for theology and religious studies. From its study of students' assessed work, and from discussions with students and staff, the team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the theology and religious studies programmes was appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

180 Student evaluation was very positive, with the approachability and accessibility of the teaching staff, and their willingness to give support, receiving particular mention. The students were satisfied with the information they had received relating to their programmes, identifying modular handbooks as particularly full and useful. The importance of IBIS was emphasised, both in terms of its content and accessibility. There was a clear sense of an academic community within which the student voice could be heard, and would be listened to. The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes leading to the range of awards offered by the Department of Theology and Religious Studies.

The institution's use of the Academic Infrastructure

181 UCC has welcomed the development of the national Academic Infrastructure (AI) and has made conscious and systematic attempts to embed the AI elements firmly within its quality assurance systems. By locating the College's portfolio of academic programmes and their associated assessment processes within the AI, UCC believes that it has strengthened the integrity and standards of its academic awards.

182 The audit team found that the College expects a high level of staff engagement with the AI in the context of programme development. All programmes of study are obliged to conform to the requirements of the FHEQ, both in terms of award titles and the relationships between awards and levels of study. Programme specifications are used for all institutional programmes. A common template, introduced in 1999, and revised in 2004-05 to make more explicit reference to the AI, has fostered a common approach to content and presentation. Staff are expected to use subject benchmark statements as external reference points in both programme design and in subsequent programme monitoring and development. All programme planning is required to take account of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA.

183 The audit team was able to confirm that UCC has established robust mechanisms for

monitoring and promoting engagement with the AI. Validation, revalidation and QSR processes ensure that programme proposals are interrogated from the perspective of AI. In their annual reports, external examiners are required to comment on the way in which programme teams have used the FHEQ, programme specifications and subject benchmark statements. These routine processes have been supplemented from time to time with bespoke, College-wide audits.

184 The audit team is confident that UCC is reflecting appropriately on its current practices in relation to each of the main constituent elements of the AI. It believes that the College has taken, or is taking, steps to bring about changes where this is perceived to be desirable. The team read documents showing some uncertainty among staff about particular aspects of programme specifications, and noted that the *Code of practice* did not always seem to have the same high profile as other elements of the AI at programme and departmental levels. Overall, however, the team concluded that the AI is securely embedded within the academic processes of the College, and that it is being used in ways which support the maintenance of UCC's academic standards.

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

185 The SED provided a comprehensive and detailed account of the processes for the assurance of quality and standards. A clear rationale was evident in the College's progress towards achieving taught degree-awarding powers and its application for university title. There have been a considerable number of changes since the previous audit in 1996; succinct outlines of strategies and discussions supporting decisions taken by the College provided a helpful insight into the management of these changes. Some of the changes documented have still to take effect and others, such as the change from four to seven schools, had only recently occurred at the time of the

submission of the SED and, therefore, evaluation of these changes was not possible within the SED. In some areas, as in the case of annual monitoring, for example, evaluation of recent changes is occurring and adjustments are being made. In other areas, the audit team considered that the SED would have benefited from a more critical analysis of the provision; for example, the use of statistical information to inform trends with respect to student progression.

186 Although there was comprehensive coverage of the taught provision, the SED provided very little information relating to research students. For example, recently a Graduate School has been established and although the functions of this School were set out, it was not possible to ascertain from the SED how, or whether, the Graduate School related to other schools or how outcomes from that School informed appropriate committees within the College. Overall, however, the SED provided a very helpful basis for the audit and a reliable source of information.

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

187 Throughout the many changes that the College has undergone since the previous audit, the College has responded with a carefully considered approach to assure the quality of the student experience. The restructuring and streamlining of the committee structure to reflect the 'College's commitment to strengthening its capacity to exercise independent oversight, from the centre, of all matters of quality', has generally been effective. Furthermore, the College intends to review the terms of reference of some committees to ensure that there is no duplication of business. The audit team had some concern about the excessive workload of school boards which was expected to increase with the demise of ARSC. The team considers that the effectiveness of school boards, in being able to discharge their responsibilities with respect to the assurance and enhancement of quality, may diminish with increasing workload.

188 In the enhancement of its quality and standards, the College takes care to ensure that outcomes from events focusing on the quality of provision are responded to and that checks are made to ensure action has been taken. The audit team confirmed that the triennial QSR places emphasis upon 'quality enhancement and the highlighting of good practice' as intended. The involvement of recent graduates in revalidation and current students in the QSR process also enhances these quality assurance processes.

189 The comprehensive processes for monitoring and reviewing provision include module evaluation, annual monitoring, annual review, validation and revalidation and quality subject review processes. Recent examples of annual departmental reviews seen by the audit team are very lengthy and include the annual monitoring report for each programme within the department. The team noted that there was sometimes unnecessary repetition of material and incisive evaluation did not always follow.

190 The template introduced for the 2003-04 annual monitoring reports is already being revised and the audit team considered that the revised template should be kept under review to ensure that the College receives relevant and appropriate information to assure and enhance the quality of the student experience. The annual monitoring template appropriately contains sections on the monitoring of student admissions, progress and achievement. In order for staff to make optimum use of the student data, the management information system needs to provide data in formats that ensure ease of access and use, for example, student progression is currently provided on an annual basis rather than by student group over the length of a programme. At the level of the module evaluation, each department has its own evaluation format and thus there may not be a common core minimum content. This does not necessarily enable the College to ensure comparability of student experience across its taught undergraduate and postgraduate provision.

191 The enhancement of quality and standards is assisted by the College's intranet system, IBIS, providing a seamless link, via a common portal, between the learning environment and information about the College's management and governance. Students are able to access the original source of documents, thus removing the possibility of errors arising from copying important information into other electronic or paper forms. This access to information, both from within and external to the College, is valued by students. IBIS is also an effective system for providing information to staff, for example, details of a good range of staff development opportunities may be easily accessed. The Shared Practice Database on IBIS provides a mechanism for staff to share information on good practice in learning and teaching, although currently this would benefit from more rigorous monitoring of its content.

The reliability of information

192 The audit included a review of progress made by UCC towards publication of teaching quality information (TQI) as required by HEFCE's document 03/51 *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance.* The range of documents required by HEFCE is published on the UCC section of the Higher Education Research Opportunities website. Currently there is no commentary on the quantitative data set but this is not a compulsory requirement. On the basis of meetings held during the audit and documents seen, the audit team concluded that UCC has made satisfactory progress in fulfilling its responsibilities for TQI publication.

193 Information on UCC regulations, systems and procedures is found on the College's comprehensive intranet, IBIS. There was some variability in the detail of information provided at programme level. The audit team found that published information matches the reality of what was seen of the student experience. Students confirmed that their experience matched their expectations prior to enrolment and they clearly understood how to access information pertinent to them.

Features of good practice

194 Of the features of good practice noted in the course of the audit, the audit team identified the following in particular:

i   the enhancement undertaken of the institution's revalidation and quality and standards review processes by the involvement of recent graduates in the former and existing students in the latter (paragraph 49)

ii   staff development activities available in-house and the opportunities provided for personal development (paragraph 78)

iii the seamless way in which the College's intranet system provides a virtual learning environment and information about all aspects of the College's management and governance arrangements (paragraph 82).

Recommendations for action

195 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

i   keep under review its school level committee structures and, in particular, monitor the volume of work undertaken by school boards of studies so as to enable them to properly discharge their quality assurance responsibilities and functions (paragraph 32)

ii   continue to keep its system of annual monitoring under review so that the College can be assured that it is receiving relevant and appropriate information to enable it to discharge its responsibility for the quality of the student learning experience and the standards of its awards (paragraph 45)

iii continue to develop its management information system, and associated staff development activity, to enable staff to make optimum use of relevant data for comprehensive and well-informed evaluation, at both module and programme levels (paragraph 72).

196 Recommendation for action that is desirable:

i   establish a core minimum content requirement for the evaluation of modules to provide the College with data which will enable it to ensure comparability of the student experience (paragraph 66).

Appendix

University of Chester's response to the audit report

The University of Chester welcomes the report of the institutional audit held in May 2005 and is gratified by the judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of its management of the quality of provision and the academic standards of its awards.

We note with satisfaction the audit team's commendation of features of good practice in a number of areas and reaffirm the University's commitment to enhancement in all aspects of our work.

The University notes the recommendations for action that are advisable and desirable and acknowledges the recognition on the part of the audit team that work was in hand on the matters in question prior to, and at the time, of the team's visit. The University is committed to continuing development of the systems, structures and processes identified in the recommendations, in the light of the detailed comments made by the audit team.

In conclusion, the University thanks the QAA and its audit team for the courteous conduct of the audit and for the constructive spirit in which it was carried out.