

# **Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh**

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MAY 2004

## Enhancement-led institutional review

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## Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) 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, the Agency carries out reviews of individual higher education institutions (HEIs) (universities and colleges of HE). In Scotland this process is known as Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR). The Agency operates equivalent but separate processes in Wales, England and Northern Ireland.

## Enhancement-led approach

Over the period 2001-2003, the Agency, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, Universities Scotland and representatives of the student body have worked closely together on the development of the enhancement-led approach to quality in Scottish HE. This approach, which was implemented in academic year 2003-04, has five main elements:

- a comprehensive programme of review at the subject level, managed by the institutions;
- improved forms of public information about quality, based on addressing the different needs of the users of that information including students and employers;
- a greater voice for student representatives in institutional quality systems, supported by a national development service (known as the student participation in quality Scotland - sparqs - service);
- a national programme of enhancement themes, aimed at developing and sharing good practice in learning and teaching in HE.
- Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) involving all of the Scottish HEIs over a four-year period, from 2003-04 to 2006-07. The ELIR method embraces a focus on: the strategic management of enhancement; the effectiveness of student learning; and student, employer and international perspectives.

The Agency believes that this approach is distinctive in a number of respects: its balance between quality assurance and enhancement; the emphasis it places on the student experience; its focus on learning and not solely teaching; and the spirit of cooperation and partnership which has underpinned all these developments.

## Nationally agreed reference points

ELIR includes a focus on institutions' use of a range of reference points, including those published by the Agency:

- the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF);
- 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 what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. Programme specifications 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 SCQF.

## Conclusions and judgement within ELIR

ELIR results in a set of commentaries about the institutions being reviewed. These commentaries relate to:

- the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards at the level of the programme or award. This commentary leads to a judgement on the level of confidence which can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The expression of this judgement provides a point of tangency between the ELIR method and other review methods operating in other parts of the UK. The judgement is expressed as one of: **broad confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence**;
- the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair;
- the effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students;
- the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning;
- the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement.

## The ELIR process

The ELIR process is carried out by teams comprising three academics, one student and one senior administrator drawn from the HE sector.

The main elements of ELIR are:

- a preliminary visit by the Agency to the institution in advance of the review visit
- a Reflective Analysis document submitted by the institution three months in advance of the second part of the review visit;
- a two-part review visit to the institution by the ELIR team; Part 1 taking place five weeks before Part 2, and Part 2 having a variable duration of between three and five days depending on the complexity of matters to be explored;
- the publication of a report, 20 weeks after the Part 2 visit, detailing the commentaries agreed by the ELIR team.

## The evidence for the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review

In order to gather the information on which its commentaries are based, the ELIR team carries out a number of activities including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, as well as the Reflective Analysis institutions prepare especially for ELIR;
- asking questions and engaging in discussions with groups of relevant staff;
- talking to students about their experiences;
- exploring how the institution uses the national reference points.

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## Introduction

1. This is the report of an Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) of Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh (the University College or QMUC) undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency). The Agency is grateful to the University College for the willing cooperation provided to the ELIR team.

2. The review followed a method agreed with Universities Scotland, student bodies and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), and informed by consultation with the Scottish higher education (HE) sector. The ELIR method embraces a focus on the strategic management of enhancement; the effectiveness of student learning; and the use of a range of reference points. These reference points include the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)*, the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by the Agency, subject benchmark statement information, and student, employer and international perspectives. Full details of the method are set out in the *Handbook for enhancement-led institutional review: Scotland*, which is available on the Agency's web site.

## Method of review

3. The University College submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA) which sets out the University College's strategy for quality enhancement, its approach to the management of quality and standards and its view of the effectiveness of its approach. Other documentation available to the ELIR team with the RA included the institutional profile at 25 March 2004; the Strategic Plan 2001 to 2005; the Strategic Plan 2003 to 2007; Governance and Regulations Handbook (the Handbook), 2004; and the Student Handbook, 2003-04. The RA provided the focus for the review and was used to develop a programme of activities by the team to provide a representative illustration of the way the University College approaches the management of the assurance of academic standards and the assurance and enhancement of quality.

4. The University College submitted three case-studies with its RA. The three case-studies were: 'Enhancing learning through the strategic use of learning technologies'; 'Recognising diversity: support for mature learners'; and 'the "Theatre Babel" project'. The RA noted that while the activities in the case-studies predated the University College's enhancement strategy, they addressed the University College's three criteria for defining enhancement used by the institution, namely, that

such activities should be planned, evaluated and that the outcomes should be disseminated.

5. The ELIR team visited the University College on two occasions. The Part 1 visit took place on 31 March and 1 April 2004, and the Part 2 visit took place between 10 and 14 May 2004.

6. During the Part 1 visit, officers of the University College gave a presentation to the ELIR team on a number of strategies and current developments intended to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. These presentations included 'The QMUC vision'; 'QMUC Academic Strategy'; 'New Campus - Re:locate project'; and 'Quality enhancement and the reflective analysis'. Following the presentations, the team met with a group of senior staff with responsibility for managing quality and enhancement activity across the institution and with staff who had been involved in reviews at subject level under the University College's internal review process. This latter group included staff from subjects that had been reviewed recently and staff who had acted as members of validation/review panels. The team met a group of student representatives comprising members of the Students' Union and students who had participated in recent reviews at subject level. These meetings enabled the team to explore with staff and students a range of matters, many of which had been raised by the University College in its RA.

7. In addition to its discussions with these groups of staff and students, during the Part 1 visit the ELIR team was able to consider a focused set of documentation which had been identified in the RA. This enabled the team to develop a programme of meetings and to identify a set of documentation that it wished to study during the Part 2 visit in order to provide a representative view of the institution's approach to assuring and enhancing quality and maintaining the standards of its awards.

8. The ELIR team comprised: Mr A T Davidson; Ms L Foster; Dr D R Lamont; Professor J C P Raban; and Ms D McMillan (review secretary). During the Part 1 visit and on the final day of the Part 2 visit, the team was accompanied by an independent observer, Professor D Swinfen. The review was coordinated on behalf of the Agency by Dr J H Ross, Assistant Director.

## Background information about the University College

9. The University College can trace its origins to 1875 with the foundation of the Edinburgh School of Cookery. Under its previous title of Queen Margaret College, the College operated under the

auspices of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) from 1975 to 1992, raising the majority of its courses to honours degree level and developing its research activities throughout that period. In 1992, the former College was accredited by CNAA and, shortly after, was granted taught degree awarding powers by the Privy Council. Its research degrees continued to be validated by CNAA, and then by the Open University Validation Service. In 1998 the College was granted research degree awarding powers by the Privy Council and, in January 1999, the title 'Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh' was adopted.

10. The academic structure of the University College is organised into two faculties: the Faculty of Business and Arts, and the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences. At the time of the review visit, the University College had 3,678 undergraduate students and 907 postgraduate students (of whom 96 were research students).

11. The University College is currently located on three sites within Edinburgh: Corstorphine Hill, Leith, and at the Gateway Theatre on Leith Walk. It is planned that the University College will relocate in September 2007 to a new, purpose-built site at New Craighall, beyond the Edinburgh City boundary. The University College will retain the Gateway Theatre site.

12. The University College's vision is to 'enhance the quality of life and serve communities through excellence and leadership in vocationally and professionally relevant education, research and consultancy, as a university college which is outward looking and committed to innovation, participation and lifelong learning'. Its vision is of:

- 'a highly focused university college working with, and for, its communities;
- promoting research-led, socially relevant, useful and usable scholarship and education;
- enabling and promoting access through student recruitment and the dissemination of its expertise;
- collaboration with institutions within and beyond the education sectors;
- a distinctive and dynamic university;
- a new campus, the first for a generation in Scotland and the first designed to accommodate the new higher education agenda'.

13. The RA explained that the University College's Governing Body is responsible for setting strategic direction and sound financial management of the institution. The Governing Body delegates the organisation and management of the institution to

the Principal, and responsibility for academic planning to Academic Council which is chaired by the Principal. The core executive of the University College is the Strategic Management Group (SMG), which at the time of the ELIR visit consisted of the following: Principal; Deputy Principal; Vice-Principal; deans of faculty (two); Dean of Educational Policy and Quality Assurance; Director of Human Resources; Director of Registry and Secretariat; and the Director of Strategic Financial Management and Business Services.

14. The University College's academic committee structure comprises Academic Council supported by the Educational Policy Committee (EPC) which itself has two subcommittees: the Quality Audit Committee (QAC) and the Library and Information Services Committee. The Academic Council is also served by committees with responsibility for taught postgraduate provision, research degrees, research ethics and honorary degrees. Faculty Academic Boards (FABs) report directly to Academic Council. Within the faculties, the line of accountability is from Student Staff Consultative Committees (SSCCs) at the level of individual programmes, to programme committees which report to FABs. Each FAB is served by a Faculty Taught Programme Committee (FTPC) to which FABs delegate some routine business. Each FAB is also served by a Research Committee.

15. FABs are described in the RA as 'the guarantors of academic standards and quality' and responsibility for 'the implementation of policies and procedures' is delegated to schools, subject areas and programme teams. The University College's senior academic committees 'maintain an overview of academic quality across the institution and are responsible for the review and enhancement of policies, regulations and procedures, as well as ultimately for safeguarding academic standards'. Within this structure of delegated responsibility, EPC is responsible 'for the development and enhancement of educational policy and practice, the provision of advice on best practice in learning and teaching, the monitoring of academic standards and the provision of appropriate learning resources'. The QAC is responsible for 'the auditing of policy implementation and the effectiveness of procedures for the quality of taught programmes'.

16. In the documentation available to the ELIR team, and in discussion during the review, the University College explained recent developments and its ambitions and plans for the future which included the intention to apply for a full university title. These developments included repositioning as a research-led institution; reorganisation; and the relocation to the new purpose-built campus. These plans are

underpinned by the University College's Modernisation Agenda which links strategic planning at institutional level with activity planning and professional development support at the individual level.

### Statement of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement

17. The RA stated that the University College is fully committed to 'a vision that supports all learners at all stages of their adult life, be they learners entering higher education from a disadvantaged background, school leavers following a conventional pattern of higher education, professionals seeking to further develop themselves, people who wish to prepare themselves for an active role as a member of their community, or staff of the University College. A specific focus of this learning will be the development of multi-disciplinarity and multi-professionalism'.

18. The University College's strategy for the enhancement of the quality of learning, teaching and assessment (QELTA) has three primary goals:

- 'maximising potential through learning: [to] provide learner centred multi-disciplinary programmes which will both prepare students for professional careers and at the same time encourage the development of graduate attributes which engender positive attitudes towards lifelong learning and which will enable graduates to make a long term contribution to their profession and to society;
- QMUC as a community of learners: [to] function as a community of learners who will enhance the learning process of students, building on relevant interdisciplinary research and scholarship, and supported by an active programme of staff development. This community of learners will develop partnerships through close collaboration with professional bodies, employers, social communities and other educational providers in Scotland (both HE/further education), the UK, Europe and internationally;
- quality assurance and audit: [to] be a self-reflective and self-evaluating institution that continuously improves its academic quality, standards and services; [to] invest in the maintenance and enhancement of the quality and standards of...educational provision to ensure that staff of QMUC, prospective students and employers will view [QMUC] as the institution of first choice in [QMUC's] specialised fields'.

### Internal monitoring and review of quality and standards and public information

#### Overview of the University College's internal arrangements for assuring the quality of programmes and maintaining the standards of its academic awards and credit

19. In its engagements with the University College staff and students, together with the RA and other documents, the team sought to establish both the current effectiveness of the institution's structures and procedures, and their 'fitness for purpose' in the context of its ambitious agenda for change and, in particular, the goals of QELTA.

20. The RA stated that the University College has 'established a strong track record of effectiveness in the development and implementation of policy and processes for the assurance of the standard and quality of its programmes'. This view was based, in part, on the findings of the 1996 Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) quality audit in which the institution was commended for its 'well developed and understood mechanisms...for the validation, review and monitoring of its programmes', aspects of the external examiner system, and 'the ethos of shared ownership and responsibility for quality assurance'. The audit report also concluded that 'the College had the capacity to manage, and to benefit from, the very sizeable agenda for change it had set itself'.

21. The University College has recently introduced some significant changes to its management and committee arrangements. The institution was restructured in early 2003-04, following a 'wide-ranging review of the academic, management and ...support structures'. The number of faculties was reduced from four to two, and this was accompanied by a 'streamlining' of the academic committee structure with five major committees reporting to the Academic Council and the faculties holding delegated responsibility for academic standards, quality assurance and quality enhancement. The stated purpose of this restructuring was to facilitate 'cross-institutional working' and 'to provide the organisation necessary to achieve continued growth and development'. This is consistent with the University College's QELTA strategy in which particular emphasis is given to the need to develop its capacity for multidisciplinary and multiprofessional working in response to changing employment needs.

22. The RA stated that although some of the University College's procedures reflect its background as a CNAAC accredited central institution, they have



been gradually developed and refined over time to meet 'the autonomous needs of the institution'. Although the Handbook had been revised in February 2004, this had not entailed a fundamental review of its component quality assurance procedures. The team was informed that the institution had felt that it would be wise to retain the current procedures until the restructuring of the University College had been completed. The RA acknowledged, however, that a 'further review and modification' of the institution's quality assurance procedures may be required to enable it 'to address emerging initiatives, including the increased emphasis on enhancement-led quality management'.

23. The ELIR team was informed that the restructuring of the University College's academic committees had enabled EPC and other senior committees to engage in discussions of a more strategic nature. Greater autonomy had been afforded to the faculties for the purpose of locating responsibility for quality assurance closer to the point of delivery. The view of the team is that this may have resulted in an attenuation of the reporting lines between SSCCs and programme committees on the one hand, and Academic Council on the other, as the relationship between academic programmes and institutional committees is now more distant. The team noted, however, that QAC is charged specifically with the task of auditing the institution's quality assurance procedures and their implementation and, in addition, that the faculty-based administrative staff are accountable to the Registry. The team's view is that these arrangements should assist the University College in ensuring the effective and appropriate discharge by faculties of their devolved responsibilities.

24. The ELIR team learned that the recent changes to the University College's committee arrangements had been designed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the committee structure, and to promote interfaculty working. The effectiveness of the faculty committees in discharging their devolved responsibilities was clear from the evidence provided by committee minutes seen by the ELIR team, and the team's discussions with staff and students. It was also apparent to the team that the University College's senior academic committees operate effectively and in accordance with their new terms of reference. Less clear, however, was whether the accountability of programme leaders to heads of school might frustrate the University College's intention to promote multidisciplinary and interfaculty cooperation. The constitutions of EPC and QAC provide for the 'nomination' rather than election of faculty representatives and, apart from

provision for the co-option of external members, there is no provision for the representation from partner organisations. It was not clear to the review team the extent to which the constitution of EPC and QAC promotes the aspiration to establish an inclusive 'community of learners'.

### **Internal approval, monitoring and review**

25. The University College's arrangements for programme validation, periodic review, annual programme monitoring (APM), and external examination are designed 'to enable subject areas and programme teams to reflect critically on issues such as the continuing validity of programme outcomes, graduate employability, standards of attainment and the student experience'. The ELIR team was informed that it was the intention of the University College that QELTA should be embodied in all of these processes and that validation, in particular, would serve as a useful means of promoting staff engagement with the goals of QELTA.

#### **Validation and periodic review**

26. Responsibility for validation and programme review rests with FTFCs and FABs. At institutional level, the University College oversees the process in a variety of ways. Reviews and validations are administered by the Quality Enhancement Unit. The Unit is responsible for ensuring that panels receive consistent and up-to-date advice, and that events are conducted in an impartial manner. The RA explained that summary reports are considered by the Academic Council, and it is within the remit of the QAC to audit all validation and review reports, once they have been confirmed by the validation or review panel, to ensure that due process has been followed and to monitor responses to conditions of approval. From its study of the minutes of QAC, the ELIR team was able to confirm the efficient discharge by QAC of its responsibilities with respect to validation and review.

27. The RA stated that the University College's arrangements for validation and review are founded on a system of peer review involving representatives from a range of subjects and disciplines, and subject experts external to the University College. The required composition of validation and review panels, and the criteria that have to be met by convenors, and by internal and external panel members, are clearly set out in the University College's Handbook. The RA stated that students and graduates are involved in all review events (see below, paragraph 60). Programme reviews are normally subject to a quinquennial cycle, and the outcome of a successful review is the revalidation of

the programme for a specified number of years, normally, according to the RA, subject to conditions that must be addressed to the satisfaction of the panel prior to the programme commencing. A recent internal audit of validation and review event outcomes resulted in the publication of revised criteria for programme approval, including the stipulation that a significant number of such conditions would prevent a programme from being validated. The University College's procedures also specify a minimum period between a validation or review event and the commencement of a course. From its discussions with staff, the ELIR team formed the view that the University College is alert to the potential risk that the rigour of the validation and review process could be compromised by the pressure to develop and approve programmes at short notice. The reports seen by the team demonstrated that the University College's validation and review procedures are rigorously applied.

28. Many of these review and validation reports recorded discussion that was consistent with the University College's modernisation agenda, although there was only limited evidence to confirm that the processes of validation and review were being consistently employed to promote the goals of QELTA. Nevertheless, the ELIR team was informed that the concept of a 'community of learners' had led the University College to involve a wide range of staff in validation and review panels, and an option for staff to act as observers to gain experience, and that this had been extended to include colleagues in academic related and support roles (see paragraphs 92; 102, below).

#### **Annual programme monitoring**

29. The RA stated that the APM procedure requires programme leaders to produce a report, for review by the FAB, during the first semester following the academic year under review. The programme reports are based on a standard template which requires programme teams to reflect critically on progress during the previous session, and to set out an action plan for the following session. To this end, programme teams are expected to draw on student feedback from module evaluation questionnaires, external examiners' comments and recommendations, as well as statistical performance indicators provided by Registry. In future, APM reports will be considered first by the FTPCs, and overview reports of the monitoring process will be presented to the FAB and to EPC. The RA stated the University College believes that 'the monitoring process has worked well in terms of providing a transparent mechanism by which programme teams are encouraged to reflect on and enhance the quality

of learning and teaching in their particular subject area, and by which good practice is shared with other subject areas'. Staff informed the ELIR team that the aim of the University College was to encourage the production of APM reports that are evaluative and forward looking, and the RA argued that the sharing of good practice 'has been promoted by the move to a Faculty structure, and consideration of a composite report at a Faculty level'. The areas for improvement that were noted by the RA included the closure of 'loops' particularly with respect to reporting back to programme teams on the issues that are identified in faculty-wide action plans.

30. Although the University College does not require its schools to employ a standard approach to module evaluation, the programme-level APM reports seen by the ELIR team were all informed by student feedback and full consideration had been given to the content of external examiners' reports. The reports were informative and included action plans, although the team considered that many were non-evaluative and retrospective in their focus. In the team's view, the composite faculty reports were less informative and they did not offer action plans. The nature of the faculty reports, and the revised APM procedure (see paragraph 29, above), is likely to reduce the visibility to the senior academic committees of the routine operations of programme teams. The team also learned that these committees are not furnished with statistical reports on such matters as student progression, achievement and completion. In reviewing its quality strategy (see paragraph 22, above) the University College may wish to consider whether its procedures for annual monitoring might be augmented to increase the volume and quality of information available to its senior academic committees.

#### **External examining**

31. The University College's external examining procedures have recently been revised. The RA explained that this revision was partly in response to an Agency academic review of the institution's provision in information management, and partly as a result of its reflection on practice as part of the annual monitoring process. These revisions have included amendments to the external examiner's report form, and to the policy on moderation and double-marking. The RA stated that the University College's formal external examiner procedures are closely aligned with the precepts of the relevant section of the *Code of practice*. However, the RA recognises that these procedures have not always been fully implemented by both examiners and

academic staff. This has prompted the University College to introduce revised procedures to improve the quality of the reports it receives from its external examiners, ensure that these reports are given proper consideration by relevant staff, and that there is a verified report back to external examiners on issues that they have raised.

32. The induction of external examiners is undertaken by staff within each subject area, and the Registry is responsible for the production and distribution of an External Examiners' Handbook. Additional support is provided through the Quality at QMUC web site which includes pages that welcome and introduce external examiners to the University College's structures, policies and guidelines; outline the institution's expectations of both its external examiners and staff; provide links to appropriate internal and external documents and forms; and offer examples of good practice in the induction of new external examiners. The ELIR team considered that the University College's web site is an example of good practice in the induction and support of external examiners.

33. In 2002-03, a detailed review conducted by the Convener of the QAC considered the reports that had been produced by external examiners, the response of programme teams to these reports, and the procedure for tracking the reporting process. The ELIR team was informed that the University College intends to build upon this experience to produce an annual summary report on the outcomes of the external examining process to the QAC. The 2002-03 review had identified some shortcomings in the processing of external examiners' reports and this has led the institution to introduce a revised procedure for tracking reports and the responses of departments to the comments made by their external examiners. The team concluded that the University College's new arrangements were effective and efficient, and that they enabled an important oversight by the institution of the devolution to faculties of certain key responsibilities for the quality and standards of its academic provision. The team considered as good practice the manner in which the institution has reviewed its processes for external examining.

### **Collaborative provision**

34. The University College maintains some 19 collaborative partnerships based on validation, franchising and articulation arrangements. Some of these partnerships are with organisations overseas, and the University College's portfolio of collaborative provision also includes joint or dual awards with

other HE institutions in Scotland. The RA stated that the purpose of the University College's work in this area is to provide students with the opportunity to 'move...through all levels of education, enabling and promoting the achievement of excellence'. The University College considered that the development of the portfolio has been cautious, reflecting a concern 'to ensure the proper maintenance of quality and standards'. The ELIR team's visit to the institution coincided with the completion of a review by QAC of all the University College's collaborative arrangements. The conclusions drawn by the University College from this review were that it has clear procedures for evaluating its partners; the procedures are consistently followed for international partnerships but possibly less so for local partners; and that robust systems are in place to manage and monitor the institution's collaborative programmes. The RA states that the University College's guidelines for the approval and review of collaborative provision conform to the precepts outlined in the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision*.

35. The RA stated that collaborative provision is 'subject to the established quality assurance and quality control processes of [the University College]'. Joint boards of studies are established to provide an arrangement for the management and monitoring of collaborative programmes that is 'equivalent' in form and function of FTPCs and programme committees. In some cases joint boards of studies have been assisted in discharging their responsibilities by the use of video conferencing and, on the basis of the evidence provided by APM reports and minutes, the effectiveness of these arrangements was apparent to the ELIR team. The University College identified in its RA the need for further investment in staff development at its partner institutions. In such cases, there is an annual exchange of staff, and the Director of the Centre for Academic Practice (CAP) has established a programme of visits in order to support the staff of partner establishments. The team considered that this support provided by CAP to the University College's partner organisations to be a feature of good practice. However, in discussions with University College staff the team learned that the institution did not regard it as appropriate to encourage or require its partners to engage with the QELTA commitment to student-centred learning, and that the access of partner organisations to QMUC staff development and training was a matter for negotiation rather than entitlement.

36. The RA also emphasised the equivalence of its internal and partnership arrangements for the maintenance of academic standards, stating that

programmes franchised overseas 'are equivalent in aims, structure, assessment and award title' to those delivered at the University College's Edinburgh campuses. The RA went on to explain that standards are secured by the employment for each overseas programme of the external examiner appointed to the home-based programme. The RA included an account of the action that the University College had taken on discovering an incident of systematic plagiarism at one of its overseas partner organisations and the ELIR team would wish to endorse the timeliness and appropriateness of this action. In the RA, the University College employed this example of corrective action as evidence that its 'quality assurance and quality monitoring arrangements are sufficiently robust to identify at an early stage any issues of concern'. However, given the difficulties arising with one validated programme offered by a partner in Greece (see paragraph 37, below), the University College may wish to further develop its quality assurance arrangements in relation to collaborative provision.

37. The University College's overseas partnerships include the establishment of local student support centres for its distance-learning provision, the franchise of year three programmes linked with articulation arrangements, and the validation to a partner in Greece of two degree programmes. The RA describes the University College's 'limited number of overseas partnership models' as having 'designed to limit [its] exposure to risk...in terms of academic standards'. From its discussions with staff, the ELIR team learned that the institution's current portfolio of overseas collaborative provision had been developed in an *ad hoc* manner, and staff who met the team were unable to provide a clear explanation of the reasons for establishing a validation relationship with one of the University College's overseas partners. Although the Handbook sets out clear criteria for the selection of partners, a process which is subject to the ultimate approval of the Academic Council, the primary responsibility for initial negotiations with prospective partners lies with faculties. The possible risks that might be incurred by this devolution were exemplified by the difficulties that had arisen as a result of the refusal of the Pan Hellenic Association of Logopaedics to recognise a University College validated programme that is offered by a private sector organisation. The University College explained to the team that it had been aware of the restrictions applying to speech therapy in Greece at the point of validation, but had received assurances that these restrictions would be relaxed once the programme was established. The expected relaxation of restrictions did not materialise. The team considered that this illustrated the

importance of the University College satisfying itself, at an institutional level, that potential risks have been fully explored and appropriate levels of caution determined, before embarking on a collaboration with an overseas partner.

38. The University College is committed to identifying new partnerships and collaborations in accordance with its QELTA strategy. Staff who met the ELIR team expressed some uncertainty about the implications of QELTA for the development of the institution's partnerships. Apart from the procedures set out in the Handbook, the identification and selection of prospective partners is not subject to an institutional policy and strategy for collaborative provision. This, in combination with the revised APM and reporting arrangements (see paragraph 29, above) may limit the visibility of this work to senior academic committees and could increase the institution's exposure to the risk of failure to monitor and maintain quality and standards in relation to collaborative provision.

### Research degree programmes

39. The University College gained research degree awarding powers in 1998 and there were approximately 100 students currently registered for postgraduate research degrees at the time of the review visit. While the development of this aspect of the University College's provision is consistent with the modernisation agenda and the general commitment to becoming a research-led institution, it is not an explicit component of the QELTA strategy. The RA cited the approval by Academic Council of a framework for Master of Research (MRes) awards as an example of continuing further development of the institution's provision for research degrees, and of the influence of the SCQF on academic planning at the University College. It is intended that the MRes framework should 'provide a pathway towards work as a competent researcher under supervision, either as a precursor to subsequent doctoral study or as a means of accreditation of research competence at Masters level', and that it should be used as a foundation for developing a number of linked awards, including professional doctorates.

40. The Research Degrees Committee (RDC) is responsible for establishing and reviewing the University College's frameworks for the academic standards of research degree awards, and faculty research committees (FRCs) have been recently established for the purpose of reviewing student proposals and progress at a level closer to the relevant subject areas. The FRCs will shortly be assigned full responsibility for scrutinising research

proposals and probationary reports, 'with only exceptional matters and matters of policy' being referred to RDC. Staff who met the ELIR team confirmed that probationary reports are currently considered by RDC, and that the University College has recently reviewed its practices against the relevant section of the *Code of practice* and other benchmarks. The RA notes that, 'given the significance of the appointment of examiners and consideration of examiners' reports in maintaining institutional standards for doctoral awards, making recommendations to Academic Council on such matters is to be retained by RDC for the foreseeable future'. The ELIR team would wish to endorse the appropriateness of these arrangements.

41. The University College has responded to the recommendation of the 1996 HEQC audit that the institution should review the mechanisms associated with research ethics so as to eliminate potential conflicts of interest. The RA stated that the University College has maintained a clear policy on research ethics over a number of years, and that its Research Ethics Committee is now to be a standing committee of Academic Council. More specifically, the Research Degree Regulations have been amended to ensure that responsibility for approving a research proposal does not rest solely with the director of studies or supervisor.

42. The report of the 1996 HEQC audit also stated that there was a need for the role of the director of studies and the teaching commitments required of the holders of research studentships to be clarified. The responsibilities of students, supervisors and directors of studies are set out in the University College's Code of Practice for Research Degrees. The RA stated that the RDC had 'made it clear that...research students should not spend more than 6 hours per week teaching, and that this [is subject to] the approval of the director of studies'. It was noted by the ELIR team that this ruling had not been incorporated within the Code of Practice which, in other respects, was considered by the team to be clear and comprehensive. Nevertheless, the students met by the team confirmed that those in receipt of University College studentships were expected to undertake a minimum of three hours teaching each week, and expressed the view that they were well prepared for this role, the support arrangements for research students were effective, and RDC has been responsive to issues they had raised concerning their induction to the University College.

### **The use made of the external reference points for assuring quality and standards**

43. The RA provided little information on the use made by the University College of external reference points, and some of the passages in the RA implied that the institution has been slow to engage with aspects of the Academic Infrastructure. It is stated, for example, that 'increasing' use is made of the SCQF and that the University College is 'currently engaged' in ensuring full alignment with the Framework. Some of the references within the RA to the various sections of the *Code of practice* are also phrased in cautious terms. Nonetheless, the evidence available to the team indicated a full engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and a commitment to employ the QELTA strategy as a means of ensuring the alignment of the University College's practices and procedures with the rest of the HE sector.

44. The Handbook sets out the requirement for course teams to submit programme specifications for validations and review, and for course teams and panels to ensure that programmes are properly aligned with external points of reference, including the SCQF and subject benchmark statements. An explicit attention to the alignment of programmes with the relevant aspect of the Academic Infrastructure was apparent in some, but not all, of the reports seen by the ELIR team. The external examiners' report form contains questions concerning the comparability of student work with that of their peers at other institutions, and whether the intended learning outcomes reflect the applicable subject benchmark statements. It was also noted by the team that validation and review made frequent reference to professional body requirements.

45. Although no specific reference was made by the RA to the University College's position with respect to progress files, the ELIR team was informed by staff that this was at an early stage of development and that an EPC working group was in the process of auditing current practice in QMUC's schools. The issue of student transcripts was, according to the RA, the subject of an internal review in 2002-03. Although this had confirmed that transcript design and content reflected good practice in terms of information it provided on student achievement, the RA explained that the transcript will be modified to reflect the SCQF qualifications descriptors and to meet the requirements of the Bologna Declaration.

46. The recent revision of the Handbook provided the University College with an opportunity to ensure that its procedures for programme approval, periodic review and annual monitoring were

consistent with the precepts of the *Code of practice*. In its discussions with staff, the ELIR team learned that responsibility for advising the appropriate committee of the need for a review of the institution's procedures against the precepts of the *Code* has rested principally with officers. As part of any forthcoming review of the quality strategy, the University College may wish to consider the benefits of increasing the active involvement of a senior academic committee in this process of review.

### **Commentary on the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards**

47. The University College has a range of mechanisms in place for assuring itself of the quality of the provision: programme validation, periodic review, APM and external examination. In relation to these arrangements, the evidence available to the ELIR team indicated that faculties, schools and programme teams are diligent in their handling of the responsibilities devolved to them; the support provided by the University College to its external examiners, and the manner in which it processes their reports are creditable; and the institution has established effective arrangements for the management of its research degree programmes.

48. The RA recognised that further modifications to the University College's procedures will be necessary to address, *inter alia*, 'the increased emphasis on enhancement-led quality management'. The possible need for a further review of the University College's arrangements for the assurance of quality and standards was confirmed by staff. The ELIR team concluded that an update of these arrangements would be advisable and that the University College's quality strategy should address the particular challenges presented by the restructuring of the institution and its QELTA strategy. As part of doing so, the University College may wish to reflect further on the constitution of its academic committees in order to promote its commitment to establish an inclusive community of learners.

49. The University College is committed to identifying new partnerships and collaborations in accordance with its QELTA strategy. The ELIR team learned that the University College does not have an institutional policy and strategy for collaborative provision, and formed the view that this could potentially increase the institution's exposure to risk. The team would encourage the University College to reflect on how it might both develop an institution-wide policy for collaborative provision, and revise this aspect of its quality strategy to ensure that its

practices are consistent with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision* and with its own commitment to limit the University College's exposure to risk.

50. Overall, the ELIR team's study of the implementation and effectiveness of the University College's internal review systems confirms that broad confidence can be placed in the University College's current, and likely future, management of the quality of its provision and of the academic standards of its awards.

### **The institution's approach to ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of provision is complete, accurate and fair**

51. In its RA, the University College expressed its view that it has well-developed systems in place for ensuring that the information that it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair.

52. The principal sources of information for prospective students and other stakeholders are currently the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses and the internet web site, as well as definitive course documents.

53. Responsibility for the production and editorial control of the prospectus and the web site lies with the Marketing and Communications Office, supported by Registry staff who confirm the validation status of the programmes to be listed in the prospectus. The routine maintenance of the web site is undertaken by a web management group which includes representatives from academic and support areas, and guidance is provided for web authors by the University College's Internet Working Group. The RA stated that these arrangements address the recommendation of the 1996 HEQC audit that the institution should review 'the effectiveness of the mechanism for monitoring the publicity given to programmes in advance of formal approval'.

54. Staff confirmed to the ELIR team that the institution had experienced some difficulty in ensuring the currency of information published on its web site, and that it is intended that the web site should be relaunched in summer 2005, and that the Director of Marketing would have overall responsibility for the management of external information.

55. With regards to definitive course documentation, for the past three years the University College has required the production of programme specifications, based on the University College's programme specification and module description templates, and these are subject to approval through the validation process.

56. The QMUC Student Handbook is a key source of regulatory information for all students, and is given to all students at the time of matriculation. The Student Handbook contains key dates; information concerning student support, policies and regulations, including academic regulations; assessment; academic appeals; code of conduct; discipline; complaints; library regulations; and health and safety information. The preparation of the Student Handbook is overseen by the Academic Registrar. Each programme within the University College also produces a programme handbook that provides summary information on programme specifications, supplementing the University College's Student Handbook.

57. The publication of the SHEFC guidance on 'public information on quality' led the University College to establish an EPC working group to examine the extent of the University College's compliance with these guidelines. In autumn 2003, Academic Council approved the recommendations of the working group which included the need for the further development of the University College's intranet; the document management system; the collection of student satisfaction data; and a process for recording annual and periodic review information.

### **Commentary on the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair**

58. In the RA, the University College described its arrangements for the publication of the principal sources of information for prospective students and other stakeholders. In relation to the SHEFC guidance on public information on quality, the University College recognises the need for further development of its approach to information management. In discussions with staff and students, and through its reading of materials, the ELIR team concluded that the University College is acting appropriately, and has established robust procedures for ensuring that the information it publishes is complete, accurate and fair.

## **The student experience**

### **Overview of the institution's approach to engaging students in the assurance and enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning**

59. The RA identified a number of ways in which the University College seeks to engage students in the assurance and enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning. At institutional level, this

includes student representation by elected officers on University College committees: Academic Council; EPC; and QAC. At programme level, there are SSCCs which report to the relevant programme committee and, in turn, to the FAB. Students also complete module evaluation questionnaires which feed into APM reports. In the case of research students, the RDC receives student concerns. Students complete module evaluation questionnaires that feed into APM reports, and there is also an annual satisfaction survey which seeks student views on institutional facilities and support services.

60. The RA stated that current students and graduates are involved in all review events. The involvement of students was cited by staff as one of several means by which the institution ensures the development of its programmes in accordance with the goals of QELTA. A scrutiny of a sample of reports of the review and validation of new courses confirmed to the ELIR team that it is general practice for the panel to talk to existing students and to seek their views on their experience. It was clear from these review reports seen by the team that the panels pursued matters raised by students as well as by the course team. While currently there is no formal requirement for review panels to consult with students, the ELIR team learned that, in practice, students exert a significant influence on the agendas for validation and review events. Review panels do not have a student member, but one faculty is experimenting with the inclusion of a student representative on a validation panel.

61. Students who met the ELIR team agreed that there were opportunities for them to express their views at course level, although their experience of this was variable as, in some cases, the SSCC did not always meet. Students explained to the team that they were not always sure that their views were taken into account since feedback following SSCC meetings was variable. However, they reported that where feedback reports were placed on departmental notice-boards, this worked well.

62. The University College is committed to seeking student views but it has recognised that it is not always easy to gain these views and acknowledged some reluctance on the part of students to complete questionnaires and to attend committees on which they have a representative role. The Students' Union has suggested one possible way forward in the form of a Student Parliament of which all student representatives would be members. This, it was anticipated, would create a unified system of student representation since it would include course representatives. This proposal was still under

consideration at the time of the review visit but it was hoped that this could be implemented in the academic year 2004-05. The University College recognises that this will not address all of the issues and has also experimented in the use of the University College's virtual learning environment (VLE) in order to better engage with distance-learning students.

63. An annual student satisfaction survey is undertaken by the Quality Enhancement Unit of Registry. Following analysis by Registry, the outcomes of the annual student survey are considered at relevant University College committees. The outcomes of the most recent student survey available to the ELIR team were that most respondents viewed the University College's services as 'satisfactory' or 'good' although there was a significant minority who found the services to be 'unsatisfactory'. All relevant service providers are required to develop plans for enhancing the student experience in the light of the views expressed by the students. Consideration is also being given to the feasibility of an on-line version of the questionnaire as a means of improving the submission rate. As part of the development of its RA, the University College had a student focus group to gain feedback. One outcome of this has been a recognition of varying success in the way the student representation systems operated. This outcome was confirmed to the team during its meetings with students.

### **Overview of the institution's approach to the promotion of effective student learning**

64. In the RA, the University College sets out its strategy for the enhancement of the QELTA which is centred on three components: situating the learner at the centre of the educational process; viewing all staff and students as part of, and contributing to, a community of learners; and the continued enhancement of all aspects of educational provision. This strategy is in the context of the University College's wish to move from being a research-oriented institution to one that is research led. The University College is in the process of setting up a Research Policy for the period 2004 to 2012. This policy envisages that staff-student ratios will increase and contact hours between staff and students will decrease as swiftly as possible. The University College's Research Strategy, therefore, has implications for the students' learning environment, and the ELIR team was interested to explore the implicit relationship between the Research Strategy and the strategy for teaching and learning as set out in QELTA.

65. The ELIR team discussed QELTA with a wide range of staff and students and read a number of

relevant documents. The view was expressed by the University College that QELTA was embedded at subject level and that it identified clearly the role of students in the learning process. The student is viewed as an independent learner and there was widespread agreement by staff that student-centred learning was to be welcomed. Staff recognised that the adaptation of current approaches to teaching and learning would be a challenge. The view of staff was that the reduction of class contact hours was not simply to enable more research to be undertaken, but it reflected a new approach to teaching in HE. Moreover, it was acknowledged by staff and students alike that research was supporting teaching, especially at honours and postgraduate levels. It was clear that, at the time of the review, much productive discussion was taking place at faculty level about the implementation of these developments.

66. There is clearly common agreement that the QELTA goal of maximising student potential through learner centred approaches would lead to a shift away from classroom-based learning to what was variably referred to as a blended learning or flexible learning. It was also clear that much attention is being paid to internet-based learning, especially the University College's VLE, as well as printed study guides. The ELIR team was interested to learn of innovative practice aimed at supporting students in new approaches to learning such as the proposal in drama to introduce a student learning contract.

67. The QELTA strategy indicates that the University College will 'develop and evaluate strategies for assessment', but has little further to say on this matter. However, it was clear to the ELIR team from other related papers that the University College has been considering its approaches to assessment. The University College is aware that feedback to students varies both in quality and timeliness, and that the application of agreed assessment criteria is inconsistent. These shortcomings in feedback on assessment were confirmed by the students who met the team. The team welcomed the establishment of an institutional policy for marking and moderation procedures, and agreed that reliable and consistent assessment and feedback arrangements will underpin the QELTA strategy.

68. The ELIR team saw examples of good practice in supporting students in their learning such as the provision of a handbook for the preparation of academic essays, produced by the media, culture and communication teaching team. The team was also impressed by CAP which encourages innovation and is a particularly important element in the identification and dissemination of good practice.



### **Learning resources**

69. The ELIR team learned that course teams, when developing new programmes of study, are required to consult services such as the library to ensure that adequate resources are available to support the new course, and this is taken into account at validation when it is addressed by the validation panel. The team was able to confirm from its study of the reports of validations that panels establish that there is an appropriate resource base to support the proposed course.

70. In discussion, the staff highlighted the significance of the VLE in the development of alternative learning strategies, the importance of a reliable information technology (IT) infrastructure and access to a range of on-line resources and video conferencing facilities. The University College is currently located on three sites and the ELIR team heard that there are some problems with IT resources at the Leith site. However, the University College is well advanced in its plans to vacate all but its Gateway Campus and move to a new purpose-built campus at Craighall in 2007. This new campus is being carefully designed to take account of the changing approaches to teaching and learning envisaged in QELTA. The campus will be serviced by a managed learning environment, and joint library and IT initiatives, along with multifunctional and flexible spaces. The team learned that these arrangements will facilitate interdisciplinary and mixed-mode teaching.

71. There are in place good electronic resources to support the current population of postgraduate research students in their project work. The ELIR team was interested to hear of a pilot scheme for the MBA programme using Personal Digital Assistants, connected to the University College's network by wireless, to aid communication both with students and between students.

72. The ELIR team formed the view that the University College is effectively managing the learning resources available to its students within the context of QELTA aspirations. The University College is in the process of developing its intranet and the completion of this development will support its strategy for using internet-based learning, including students who are on placement or who are studying off-campus. The development of the new campus at Craighall offers the University College the opportunity to provide a state-of-the-art learning environment which will meet the future needs of staff and students.

### **Student support**

73. The University College has a Student Services Department which is based primarily at the

Corstorphine Campus with a second base at Leith to cater for the needs of students at the other campuses. This has recently been strengthened with additional appointments in process at the time of the review. An International Office provides a range of focused support for overseas students, including pastoral support. From its meeting with staff and students, the ELIR team confirmed that a sound central support system for students was in place with staff who were enthusiastically committed to the care of students and who recognised the varying needs of a diverse student body. Of particular note is the University College's approach to the support of students with disabilities and its implementation of SENDA (Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, 2001). In 2003, the Academic Quality Committee (AQC) considered a detailed report on disability and set up a Disability Advisory Group and made provision for appropriate training. At institutional level there is a specialist Disability Adviser in the Student Services Department and each school has a disability officer, thus providing an integrated approach. The team considered this to be a feature of good practice.

74. In matters of academic support, students' access to tutors is by varying means. Some tutors post times of their office hours showing when they are available while others ask students to email them to make appointments. Staff and students who met the ELIR team expressed the view that email was an effective method of communication, especially for part-time students and those on placements. Administrative staff identified that they will have an important role in providing students with straightforward factual information following the planned reduction of staff-student contact hours.

75. There is a Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) system to provide personal and academic support to students, and the RA explained that the requirement for every undergraduate student to be allocated a PAT is set out in the Handbook. The University College has recognised that there is varied experience of the PAT system in practice, including at postgraduate level, and there needs to be a clearer definition of the role of the PAT. It is currently undertaking a review to see how the system can be made more effective and has noted that the PAT system needs to be reconsidered in the light of the implementation of QELTA. The ELIR team welcomed this reflective approach to examining the current PAT system's effectiveness.

76. The University College's Widening Participation Strategy, written in 2001, is due to be reviewed in the current academic year. It has put into place mechanisms to support students entering through the widening access route. These include a Guidance and

Transition Officer in the Student Services Department and a Student Learning Service. Two support schemes have been established: QM Advance which provides a pre-induction course to assist mature and direct entry students in the transition to HE; and QM Connect which provides new QMUC students with mentors. These new schemes have been welcomed by students. The ELIR team noted that the University College was evaluating these two schemes carefully. Staff who discussed these matters with the ELIR team recognised that there is a general need to provide additional support for non-traditional students in their early years of study, with an expectation that this support would taper off in later years.

### **Overview of the institution's approach to the promotion of employability of its students**

77. The University College expressed the view that its portfolio of programmes is closely related to the needs of the professions, the economy and community, resulting in a high level of student employment. The ELIR team explored this through discussions with staff and students, and consideration of reports of reviews and validations. The team saw evidence to confirm a strong focus on the needs of the professions and employment through collaborative activities, in review and validation processes, and in professional/statutory body accreditation. The team also heard of a number of initiatives involving work with specific groups in the local community.

78. The RA explained that the enhancement of employability has been recognised in the design of the curriculum with the inclusion of transferable skills. The ELIR team studied a number of recent reports of validation and review events and noted that attention was consistently paid to employment matters. For example, the BSc Podiatry validation process involved consultation with employers on the appropriateness of the proposed course. A high proportion of its courses have a specific vocational orientation and many are accredited by relevant professional/statutory bodies, particularly in the field of health care. In many cases, courses have an in-built placement which enables students to acquire practical experience.

79. Discussions with staff and students confirmed to the ELIR team that employability and the needs of the workplace were central to the University College's programmes of study. For example, staff who taught in the field of health care explained how they saw placements as essential in that they enabled students to put theory into practice. The team formed the view that there are good arrangements in place for student placements and

students are expected to reflect carefully on their experience in reports and other appropriate assessment tasks. Curricula are reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain relevant to employment. In drama, for example, the cultural industries are seen as drivers for change and this is reflected in the project work undertaken.

80. A University College-wide approach to personal development planning (PDP) for students is at an early stage of consideration, although a PDP is already in place to support students undertaking clinical placements. A working party has been established in order to develop the University College's approach to PDP. The University College acknowledges that its current provision of one careers adviser is no more than a 'threshold' level of support for its students and has identified this as an area for future investment. It has also established a working group to audit current career guidance. It is clear to the ELIR team that the University College has employability of students at the forefront of its curriculum design and delivery and its educational provision is vocationally oriented. The team noted the consideration given to PDP and would encourage the University College in its endeavours to introduce an institution-wide scheme at the earliest opportunity.

### **Commentary on the effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students**

81. The University College seeks to engage students in the assurance and enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning through student representation at institutional level committees, participation in monitoring and validation and review events, and through membership of SSCCs. The ELIR team came to the view that consultation with students as part of the monitoring, validation and review process is effective practice and leads to a productive dialogue between all parties to the review, supporting the enhancement of the student experience. Overall, the team concluded that the University College is committed to seeking student opinion and engaging with it as part of its enhancement policy.

82. The University College's approach to the promotion of effective student learning is very largely based on its QELTA strategy. The ELIR team recognises that there are reflective discussions taking place within the institution which recognise the possibility that there has been over-teaching and over-assessment in the past. The University College's research ambitions are being balanced with new

approaches to teaching with a learner-centred pedagogy. The team formed the view that such approaches may require more staff input in the early years than has been acknowledged as new systems, such as the VLE, are set up and as the learning needs of non-traditional students are addressed.

83. The ELIR team found that there is good support for both taught students and research students, and saw a number of examples of good practice, such as the integrated approach to the support of students with disabilities and the provision of an excellent handbook for the preparation of academic essays.

84. The ELIR team noted the way that teaching staff have taken on board the implications of the new approaches and have recognised the needs of a diverse student body learning in different ways. It noted in particular the key role placed by CAP in supporting the development of these new approaches. However, in securing the effectiveness of the new pedagogy the team would encourage the University College to establish a clearer definition of the 'community of learners' in the implementation of QELTA (see paragraph 107, below).

### **Effectiveness of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement**

#### **Overview of the institution's approach to managing improvement in the quality of teaching and learning**

85. The RA and supporting documentation outlined the progressive development of the University College's approach to managing improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. This approach combines a number of elements: a clear vision of the University College's future role within the UK HE system, with clear strategies of how to achieve this vision; its portfolio of programmes; its organisation and infrastructure; and QELTA strategy. The ELIR team was able to explore the views expressed in the RA through presentations by senior staff of the University College during the Part 1 visit, discussions in meetings with staff and students, and scrutiny of supporting documentation provided by the University College which highlighted a set of key developments and issues.

86. The University College wishes to reposition itself as a research-led university, with an enhanced volume and quality of research, and related knowledge transfer and commercialisation, with increased emphasis on multidisciplinary. The relocation to a new, purpose-built campus is strategically linked to

the vision and to the learner-centred pedagogy emphasised in the QELTA strategy. This will include specialist training facilities to support the development of its portfolio of programmes, and to enhance the student experience, both in learning and in wider aspects of health, social and environmental welfare. The University College has a Modernisation Agenda that is driving and supporting these changes, linking strategic planning at institutional level with activity planning and professional development support at the individual level.

87. In its RA, the University College expressed the view that its QELTA strategy had a key role in managing improvement in teaching and learning, through its linkage to strategic planning and its clear identification of objectives and responsibilities for implementation. The University College recognised that although QELTA built on earlier assurance and enhancement processes, 2003-04 was the first year of its operation, and that the main concern has been to develop awareness and initial implementation. However, it expressed the view in its RA that the targets are realistic, and that the University College as a community wishes to achieve its objectives.

88. The University College had defined and allocated actions for the implementation of QELTA for 2003-04. The two senior staff with institutional-level responsibilities for quality enhancement would be meeting with all planning units to review progress against targets for 2003-04, develop new targets for 2004-05, and revise the overall plan.

89. The University College expressed the view in its RA that its restructured organisation and infrastructure supports its strategies and approaches to improvement. The ELIR team noted the nature, extent and recency of the structuring of academic and support units and the institutional committee structure. Discussions with staff indicated that the new organisational structure had been effectively established, and staff were clear and positive about their roles, responsibilities and reporting relationships.

#### **Overview of the linkage between the institution's arrangements for internal quality assurance and its enhancement activity**

90. In the RA, the University College outlined ways in which quality assurance is linked to quality enhancement, again highlighting the QELTA strategy which encompassed both enhancement and assurance. The RA also referred to research activities, the reorganised academic and committee structure, student representation and creative problem solving as having roles in promoting enhancement.

91. The University College's QELTA strategy covers both quality enhancement and quality assurance. The RA explained that QELTA distinguishes between quality assurance as a means of ensuring threshold standards and quality, as provided by programme monitoring and review processes; and enhancement which is about learning through reflective practice in order to improve the student experience and share good practice. The University College expressed its view that for an activity to be enhancement-led, it must be planned (that is to say, approved at the level of school or above and resources allocated and risks identified), evaluated (with reporting), and the outcomes disseminated. This view carefully differentiated strategic enhancement from activities involving good practice, innovation and experimentation. Referring to its transition to strategic quality enhancement, the University College cited a number of examples of actions that began as innovations, but now included features of its definition of strategic enhancement.

92. The University College has recently revised its quality assurance and enhancement arrangements to emphasise the importance of external benchmarking, and had gathered the policies together in a handbook, available on a new Quality Enhancement web site. The ELIR team considered evidence of implementation of the University College's quality assurance processes of monitoring, review and validation, via scrutiny of a sample of recent reports and by discussion with staff who had participated in reviews, including members of review validation boards. The team was able to confirm the University College's view that these processes did contribute to enhancement in addition to their explicit assurance functions. The team noted also the University College's practice of deliberately involving a wide range of staff as members of internal review and validation boards, with the option for staff to observe in order to gain experience (see paragraph 28, above). The team agreed that this was as an additional and valuable means of promoting enhancement within assurance activities.

93. The University College expressed the view in its RA that its research and knowledge transfer activities, which are closely allied to development of professional practice, could promote enhancement by supporting innovation of undergraduate and postgraduate provision, as evidenced by the Queen's Anniversary Prize for 2002 awarded to Speech and Language Sciences. It also referred to an example that took a creative approach to the problem of plagiarism, seeking to enhance student learning about referencing skills rather than simply trying to 'catch' plagiarism.

94. In the RA, the University College explained that the motivations behind the reorganised academic and committee structure included the promotion of multidisciplinary and multiprofessional agendas and a greater degree of autonomy and effectiveness at the faculty and school levels. The ELIR team met groups of staff who were members of the new committees and from units in the new organisation structure. Staff were clear and positive about their roles and the potential of the new structures to promote enhancement. Academic staff considered the new committees to be effective. This included the new QAC, which has a role in enhancement by undertaking thematic audits and reporting, with recommendations to the institution via the EPC. Academic staff who met the team also welcomed reallocations of administrative work from academic staff to support staff, and introduction of protected time for research. Support staff were also positive, perceiving an increased 'professionalisation' of support roles that enabled them to offer a more effective service.

### **Overview of the institution's approach to recognising, rewarding and implementing good practice in the context of its strategy for quality enhancement**

95. In its RA, the University College explained that excellence in academic staff achievement was recognised and rewarded through the Academic Career Advancement Policy (ACAP) and the Academic Promotions Committee (APC). There are specified criteria which were clarified in 2002-03 to provide a clearer definition of 'scholarship', and to address a perceived imbalance between teaching and research. The University College advised that staff contribution to the QELTA strategy could be recognised through the ACAP and APC.

96. In its RA, the University College advised that a staff activity planning process had been piloted and was undergoing further development, intended to replace the current annual career review. The University College expressed a view that the revised process was more focused than annual career review and encouraged more realistic planning, and that future career review discussions between individuals and heads of school/subject will include consideration of effectiveness of teaching as part of activity planning.

97. The ELIR team explored promotions procedures and activity planning via scrutiny of the procedural documents and discussion with a range of staff. Staff who met the team were very positive about the clarity of the promotions criteria, and the developmental support offered to staff by line and senior managers as a part of the process, including structured feedback

following completion of the process. The procedures identify three sets of criteria: teaching and scholarship; academic leadership, personal qualities and impact; and research and commercialisation. Applications for senior lecturer require a high level of performance in at least two of the criteria; applications for professor require excellence in at least two, and a high level of achievement in the third.

98. The RA explained that implementation of good practice and quality enhancement is supported by CAP which has four broad aims: to enable continuous quality enhancement of learning, teaching and research; to provide professional development to meet the present and future needs of academic and academic-related staff and postgraduate research students; to lead new developments in learning and teaching in alignment with the institution strategic plan; and to engage in and promote educational scholarship and research that is relevant to QMUC's mission strategic plan.

99. The RA went on to explain that the work of CAP may be grouped into four related, often integrated, areas of development: firstly, professional (academic, academic-related and research), with activities including short courses for staff and postgraduate research students; co-delivery of the Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Education; development workshops; and development advice to units and individuals; secondly, educational (quality enhancement), usually involving CAP staff in collaborative endeavours with academic units and individuals. This can include guidance and support for developments related to quality assurance processes, both internal and external (for example, the Agency's); thirdly, organisational (policies, procedures and practices), through input to strategic planning and policy making, collaboration with support units, membership on all relevant committees, and by initiating and managing projects with an institutional focus; and fourthly, external (contributions and collaborations), through which staff of CAP have established external profiles and gained extensive experience.

100. In its RA, the University College expressed a view that the agenda for CAP activities is aligned with the needs of students and staff, institutional strategies and the wider context including external policies and strategies, and that the volume and scope of educational development activities involving CAP staff exemplify the commitment of the Centre to quality enhancement and to organisational development. The ELIR team explored the effectiveness of the work of CAP via discussion with CAP staff, with staff 'clients' from a range of

schools, and scrutiny of documentation describing activities of CAP. The team saw evidence to enable it to confirm the University College's view of CAP as a very effective element of its approach to disseminating and implementing good practice.

101. The ELIR team noted that peer observation of teaching was now the policy of the University College and was in the process of being implemented. It was clear that many staff saw it as an important way of enhancing and developing their academic practice and were taking ownership of the process.

102. In meetings with the ELIR team, a number of staff explained how they found that line managers and quality assurance processes also contributed to dissemination of good practice. Lecturers who had been recently appointed described to the team how senior lecturers were helpful in suggesting ideas and approaches for enhancing the students' learning experience. A number also explained how they found annual course monitoring reports and related staff discussion useful in highlighting effective practice. Some commented that they found review and validation activities helpful in illustrating good practice, including opportunities to act as an observer in these processes (see paragraph 28, above).

### **Commentary on the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning**

103. The ELIR team agreed that the clarity and transparency of the staff promotions procedure was a strength of the University College. In discussion with the team, staff who had responsibilities for career review and promotions indicated that they considered the promotions process was able to recognise an individual's contribution towards the implementation of QELTA.

104. In its RA, the University College highlighted elements of its combined approach: its well-developed policies and strategies, including the recently developed QELTA strategy which complemented its traditional strengths of enthusiastic staff who provided vocationally orientated programmes and a supportive environment for students. It considered that these had been effective in ensuring improvement, but referred also to limitations in its previous organisation structure, and the recent reorganisation designed to address these.

105. The ELIR team met staff from both academic and support departments who demonstrated real enthusiasm and commitment to the enhancement of the learning experience of their students. These staff

also demonstrated commitment to the QELTA strategy and their role in its implementation. Staff were positive about the effectiveness of the recent reorganisations, and considered that they would encourage and promote future improvement. Discussion with staff and scrutiny of sample reports from quality assurance processes confirmed the role of quality assurance processes in promoting improvement, and an effective role of CAP in supporting staff in the development of improvement-oriented activities. The practice of involving a wide range of staff in internal review and validation is important in promoting enhancement within assurance. QELTA was not explicitly referred to as a reference point in reports from recent internal reviews. However, reports did provide evidence that a number of the principles within QELTA had been reflected in the review process, and staff advised that QELTA would be an explicit reference for future reviews, with the CAP providing guidance on implementation.

### **Commentary on the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement**

106. The ELIR team recognised the recency of the introduction of QELTA, and the reality that the University College was at an early stage in its implementation. The team used the documentation describing QELTA and its implementation, to focus discussion with groups of staff regarding their views on the strategy and their plans to engage with it in the future. Without exception, the staff that the team met with were very positive about QELTA, and its role in taking forward the University College's vision. However, this discussion identified a number of areas for reflection in future development and implementation of QELTA in relation to the University College's wider Modernisation Agenda.

107. The ELIR team noted some lack of clarity about interpretations of definitions within the strategy statement, and their implications for staff and for students. The concept of 'community of learners' seemed to mean quite different things to different members of staff. Some saw it as formal collaborations with other organisations in the community; others as social inclusion 'outreach' type activities; with relatively few recognising it, as the University College, as a 'learning organisation' encompassing staff, students and collaborative partners. Staff were very positive about the concept of 'learner-centred' approaches, and the potential benefits to students. However, in discussion of what these approaches might involve, the majority tended to refer primarily to increased use of the VLE. The team would encourage the University College to reflect on the benefits of helping staff

develop a more collective and coherent sense of meanings attached to the terms 'community of learners' and 'learner centred' as they work on implementing these aspects of the QELTA strategy.

108. The ELIR team discussed with staff the planned increase in learner-centred approaches, in the context of the University College's wider Modernisation Agenda, which envisages significant and rapid increases in student-staff ratios, and reductions in staff-student contact hours in order to focus on ambitious research targets. This discussion confirmed staff awareness of potential tensions in the implementation of the University College's various strategies. Some staff cited interesting and very positive examples of ways in which they considered they had been able to combine a more learner-centred approach with a reduction in staff time, for example, in replacement of direct staff observation of students in a practice setting with the use of video recording of the student's work in practice linked to a viva examination. However, the majority recognised challenges and concerns. These included the likely front-end demands, expressed by one member of staff in the form 'we know we will have to invest first to reap the rewards', and the need to train and support students in their roles in the new approaches, including accessing and using the technology effectively. The team heard mixed views about whether increased use of the communications features, such as allowing student discussions within the VLE, would actually save time, or would demand a different type of staff input. Similarly, a number commented on potential risks to student access to staff. There were mixed views about whether team teaching, which was valued by both students and staff, might be in jeopardy due to increased pressure on staff time. The team formed a view that the University College might see advantage in considering how it might be more active in managing the potential risks to the student experience associated with the planned rapid expansion of student-centred learning approaches and the developing use of a VLE. In doing so, it might usefully include consideration of the likely need to invest additional staff time in the development of resources for the VLE, and in the staff time necessary to support and facilitate learner-centred methodologies.

109. The three primary goals of QELTA have been developed into a set of 36 more detailed goals, with further specific targets for the first year (2003-04) and final year (2007-08) of the proposed implementation period. Discussion of monitoring of implementation to date suggested to the ELIR team that the University College might reflect on the benefits of simplifying and clarifying the implementation plan for the future.

110. The QELTA strategy includes a statement that the three primary goals will be facilitated through processes that balance the planned and agreed activities with the allocation of the necessary resources. The University College's presentation emphasised how the design of the proposed new campus would seek to ensure the creation of the necessary learning resources. However, discussion with staff suggested that although staff could make bids within general school and faculty resource planning processes, the University College currently has no explicit means of ensuring that additional resources could be made available to staff planning and implementing changes in pursuit of QELTA goals. Given the declared centrality of QELTA, and the potential resource demands of the transition to more learner-centred approaches, the University College might consider the benefits of some form of targeting resources towards QELTA goals and projects.

## Summary

### Background to the institution and the ELIR method

111. Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh (the University College) can trace its origins to 1875 with the foundation of the Edinburgh School of Cookery. In 1992, the former College was accredited by the Council for National Academic Awards and, shortly after, was granted taught degree awarding powers by the Privy Council. In 1998 the College was granted research degree awarding powers by the Privy Council and, in January 1999, the title 'Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh' was adopted. The University College is organised into two faculties: the Faculty of Business and Arts, and the Faculty of Social Sciences and Health Care.

112. The University College's vision is to 'enhance the quality of life and serve communities through excellence and leadership in vocationally and professionally relevant education, research and consultancy, as a university which is outward looking and committed to innovation, participation and lifelong learning'.

113. The University College's Governing Body is responsible for setting strategic direction and sound financial management of the institution. The Governing Body delegates academic planning to Academic Council which is chaired by the Principal. Academic Council is supported by a number of senior committees, notably the Educational Policy Committee, and the faculty academic boards report directly to Academic Council.

114. In line with the Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) method, the University College submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA) which sets out the University College's strategy for quality enhancement, its approach to the management of quality and standards and its view of the effectiveness of its approach. The RA provided the focus for the review and was used to develop a programme of activities by the ELIR team to provide a representative illustration of the way the University College approaches the management of quality, enhancement and academic standards.

115. The University College submitted three case-studies with its RA. The three case-studies were: 'Enhancing learning through the strategic use of learning technologies'; 'Recognising diversity: support for mature learners'; and 'the "Theatre Babel" project'. The RA noted that, while the activities in the case-studies predated the University College's enhancement strategy, they addressed the University College's three criteria for defining

enhancement used by the institution, namely, that such activities should be planned, evaluated and that the outcomes should be disseminated.

### Overview of the matters raised by the review

116. The University College has a number of arrangements in place to assure quality and maintain standards: programme validation, periodic review, annual programme monitoring and external examination. In 2003-04, the University College implemented its strategy for the enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment (QELTA). The primary goals of QELTA are:

- to maximise potential through learning;
- for the University College to function as a community of learners;
- quality assurance and audit.

117. The review took place at a time of major and ongoing change for the University College, involving reorganisation, repositioning as a research-led institution, and planning for relocation to a new, purpose-built campus. The University College's Modernisation Agenda drives and supports these changes, linking strategic planning at the institutional level with activity planning and professional development support at the individual level.

118. The particular themes pursued in the review included exploring the effectiveness of validation, review and monitoring arrangements; collaborative provision and flexible and distance learning; student-centred learning and student support; and implementing and embedding QELTA, including in relation to development and support strategies for staff.

### Commentary on the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards

119. The University College has a range of mechanisms in place for assuring itself of the quality of the provision: programme validation, periodic review, annual programme monitoring and external examination. In relation to these arrangements, the evidence available to the ELIR team indicated that faculties, schools and programme teams are diligent in their handling of the responsibilities devolved to them; the support provided by the University College to its external examiners, and the manner in which it processes their reports are creditable; and the institution has established effective arrangements for the management of its research degree programmes.



120. The RA recognised that further modifications to the University College's procedures will be necessary to address, *inter alia*, 'the increased emphasis on enhancement-led quality management'. The possible need for a further review of the University College's arrangements for the assurance of quality and standards was confirmed by staff. The ELIR team concluded that an update of these arrangements would be advisable and that the University College's quality strategy should address the particular challenges presented by the restructuring of the institution and its QELTA strategy. As part of doing so, the University College may wish to reflect further on the constitution of its academic committees in order to promote its commitment to establish an inclusive community of learners.

121. The University College is committed to identifying new partnerships and collaborations in accordance with its QELTA strategy. The ELIR team learned that the University College does not have an institutional policy and strategy for collaborative provision, and formed the view that this could potentially increase the institution's exposure to risk. The team would encourage the University College to reflect on how it might both develop an institution-wide policy for collaborative provision, and revise this aspect of its quality strategy to ensure that its practices are consistent with the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 2: Collaborative provision*, published by the Agency, and with its own commitment to limit the University College's exposure to risk.

122. Overall, the ELIR team's study of the implementation and effectiveness of the University College's internal review systems confirms that broad confidence can be placed in the University College's current, and likely, future management of the quality of its provision and of the academic standards of its awards.

### **Commentary on the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair**

123. In the RA, the University College described its arrangements for the publication of the principal sources of information for prospective students and other stakeholders. In relation to the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council guidance on public information on quality, the University College recognises the need for further development of its approach to information management. In discussions with staff and students, and through its reading of materials, the ELIR team concluded that the University

College is acting appropriately, and has established robust procedures for ensuring that the information it publishes is complete, accurate and fair.

### **Commentary on the effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students**

124. The University College seeks to engage students in the assurance and enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning through student representation at institutional level committees, participation in monitoring and validation and review events, and through membership of staff-student consultative committees. The ELIR team came to the view that consultation with students as part of the validation and review is effective practice since it leads to a productive dialogue between all parties to the review, and supports the enhancement of the student experience. Overall, the team concluded that the University College is committed to seeking student opinion and engaging with it as part of its enhancement policy.

125. The University College's approach to the promotion of effective student learning is very largely based on its QELTA strategy. The ELIR team recognises that there are reflective discussions taking place within the institution which recognise the possibility that there has been over-teaching and over-assessment in the past. The University College's research ambitions are being balanced with new approaches to teaching with a learner-centred pedagogy. The team formed the view that such approaches may require more staff input in the early years than has been acknowledged as new systems, such as the virtual learning environment (VLE), are set up and as the learning needs of non-traditional students are addressed.

126. The ELIR team found that there is good support for both taught students and research students, and saw a number of examples of good practice, such as the integrated approach to the support of students with disabilities and the provision of an excellent handbook for the preparation of academic essays.

127. The ELIR team noted the way that teaching staff have taken on board the implications of the new approaches and have recognised the needs of a diverse student body learning in different ways. It noted in particular the key role placed by the Centre for Academic Practice (CAP) in supporting the development of these new approaches. However, in securing the effectiveness of the new pedagogy the team would encourage the University College to

establish a clearer definition of the 'community of learners' in the implementation of QELTA.

### **Commentary on the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning**

128. The ELIR team agreed that the clarity and transparency of the staff promotions procedure was a strength of the University College. In discussion with the team, staff who had responsibilities for career review and promotions indicated that they considered the promotions process was able to recognise an individual's contribution towards the implementation of QELTA.

129. In its RA, the University College highlighted elements of its combined approach: its well-developed policies and strategies, including the recently developed QELTA strategy, which complemented its traditional strengths of enthusiastic staff who provided vocationally orientated programmes and a supportive environment for students. It considered that these had been effective in ensuring improvement, but referred also to limitations in its previous organisation structure, and the recent reorganisation designed to address these.

130. The ELIR team met staff from both academic and support departments who demonstrated real enthusiasm and commitment to the enhancement of the learning experience of their students. These staff also demonstrated commitment to the QELTA strategy and their role in its implementation. Staff were positive about the effectiveness of the recent reorganisations, and considered that they would encourage and promote future improvement. Discussion with staff and scrutiny of sample reports from quality assurance processes confirmed the role of quality assurance processes in promoting improvement, and an effective role of CAP in supporting staff in development of improvement-oriented activities. The practice of involving a wide range of staff in internal review and validation is important in promoting enhancement within assurance. QELTA was not explicitly referred to as a reference point in reports from recent internal reviews. However, reports did provide evidence that a number of the principles within QELTA had been reflected in the review process, and staff advised that QELTA would be an explicit reference for future reviews, with CAP providing guidance on implementation.

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131. The ELIR team recognised the recency of the introduction of QELTA, and the reality that the University College was at an early stage in its implementation. The team used the documentation describing QELTA and its implementation, to focus discussion with groups of staff regarding their views on the strategy and their plans to engage with it in the future. Without exception, the staff that the team met with were very positive about QELTA, and its role in taking forward the University College's vision. However, this discussion identified a number of areas for reflection in future development and implementation of QELTA in relation to the University College's wider Modernisation Agenda.

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learner-centred approaches, the University College might consider the benefits of some form of targeting resources towards QELTA goals and projects.

