



# **Institutional audit**

**Norwich University College of the Arts**

**November 2010**

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## Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Institutional audit: report

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Norwich University College of the Arts (the University College) from 22 to 26 November 2010 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University College offers.

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

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

### Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit found that the University College had a strategic approach both to the enhancement of learning opportunities and to the identification and dissemination of good practice, which was not only systematic, active and embedded, but also inclusive in that it involved staff at all levels and in all areas.

### Postgraduate research students

Since 2008, the University College's research degrees have been conferred by the University of the Arts London. The audit found that the arrangements for postgraduate research students, including those for support, supervision and assessment, with the exception of the lack of information to students on appeals, complaints and research misconduct, were effective and met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

## **Published information**

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

## **Features of good practice**

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the simplicity, clarity and flexibility of the frameworks for the design of the undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum
- the active engagement of staff with management information across the University College and the way in which this is used to inform planning and decision-making
- the integrated approach, involving both academic and support staff, to the identification and support of students with additional needs from their point of application to the University College through to the completion of their studies
- the strategic approach both to the enhancement of learning opportunities and to the identification and dissemination of good practice, which is not only systematic, active and embedded, but also inclusive in that it involves staff at all levels and in all areas
- the comprehensive support provided to postgraduate research students throughout their programme.

## **Recommendations for action**

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

The team advises the University College to:

- make information on research misconduct and student appeals and complaints procedures readily accessible to postgraduate research students by including these procedures in, for example, the Research Student Handbook.

It would be desirable for the University College to:

- consider ways in which it can ensure that minutes across all school and course committees are a meaningful record of the committees' deliberations
- ensure that full external examiner reports are shared with student representatives
- produce guidance on the different forms of work-related learning it offers and the institutional procedures relating to these, including when learning agreements are required
- clarify who is responsible for providing personal/pastoral support to individual students, and to make this explicit to students in the documentation they receive.

## Reference points

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

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

The audit found that the University College took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

## Report

1 An Institutional audit of Norwich University College of the Arts (the University College) was undertaken during the week commencing 22 November 2010. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University College's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised the following auditors: Dr Dawn Edwards; Dr Richard Latto; Professor Debbie Lockton; Professor Neil Taylor; and Mrs Cathryn Thompson (audit secretary). The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr David Gale, Assistant Director, Development and Enhancement Group.

### Section 1: Introduction and background

3 Norwich University College of the Arts is a specialist higher education institution offering undergraduate and postgraduate awards. The origins of the University College can be traced back to 1845 when the Norwich School of Art and Design was established to provide designers for local industries. Degree-level provision has been offered since 1965. In 1989, the School merged with Great Yarmouth College of Art to form the Norfolk Institute of Art and Design, with its degrees validated by Anglia Polytechnic (now Anglia Ruskin University). In 1994, the Institute was incorporated as a higher education institution and renamed the Norwich School of Art and Design. The institution was granted its University College title by the Privy Council in 2008, after obtaining taught degree awarding powers in 2007. Research degrees are conferred by the University of the Arts London.

4 The campus is divided between seven buildings in the centre of Norwich. While offering a full range of courses from Foundation Degrees to PhDs, the University College is comparatively small with 1,520 full-time equivalent (FTEs) students in September 2010, although student numbers have grown significantly since the last audit in 2003. At the time of this audit there were 15 postgraduate research students.

5 The University College reviewed its mission and developed a new strategic plan for 2009-14. The University College's vision is to 'become the best specialist Higher Education Institution of art, design and media in the UK, with a contemporary industry focus and an international reputation for excellence'. The Strategic Plan identifies five strategic priorities as key commitments to the delivery of the mission and core values.

- The Student Experience focuses on the high quality that is expected of a specialist University College.
- Our Academic Portfolio foregrounds the need for provision that has contemporary industry relevance and reflects demand for new areas of knowledge and skill as well as more traditional practices.
- Professional Practice and External Engagement sets out the approach to high quality research, consultancy and professional practice.
- Expertise and Resources highlights commitments to developing the quality of staff, the estate and physical resources.
- Financial Sustainability and the Management of Risk.

6 At the time of the audit, the University College was structured into two schools; the School of Art and Media, and the School of Design. The University College has, since 2007, embarked on a major refurbishment of its estates and specialist resources to create a discipline focus for its buildings and a greater sense of identity for the two schools.



7 The previous Institutional audit of the University College took place in May 2003. It concluded that broad confidence could be placed in the University College's management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of the awards it offered on behalf of Anglia Polytechnic University. The report made a total of five recommendations for action. The present audit team found that the University College had addressed the recommendations made in the previous audit.

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

8 Formal responsibility for standards and quality rests ultimately with the Academic Board. The key subcommittees of the Academic Board are the Quality and Standards Committee, the Learning and Teaching Committee, and the Research and Consultancy Committee. The Quality and Standards Committee is the parent committee of the schools board of study, to which course committees are answerable, along with the Research Degrees Committee, undergraduate and postgraduate Awards and Resubmission Boards, and the Appeals Committee.

9 The key officers responsible for standards and quality are the Principal, the Deputy Principal (Academic Affairs and Research), the Academic Registrar, the Director of Studies, the two heads of school, and the course leaders. All but the course leaders are members of the Senior Management Team and it is the responsibility of the individual members of the Senior Management Team to ensure that quality procedures are followed in their areas of responsibility. The Senior Management Team reports to the Strategic Management Group, which has overall responsibility for the strategic and operational management of the University College. The Course Leaders Group, which considers matters relating to the management and development of academic provision and resources, reports to the Senior Management Team through the Director of Studies, who chairs the Group.

10 The University College is responsible for postgraduate research students' learning provision through its Research Degrees Committee, but these students are registered for awards of the University of the Arts London and, therefore, subject to the University's academic regulations.

11 The University College's framework for assuring academic standards and quality is set out in a number of key documents: the Staff Handbook on Quality Management and Enhancement that details the institution's systems and procedures for quality management and enhancement, and the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Frameworks that form the basis for the design, operation and structure of awards. These frameworks are complemented by the Student Regulations and Procedures.

12 The University College introduced revisions to both the undergraduate and postgraduate frameworks in September 2010. The frameworks operate within common unit structures, incorporating progression opportunities which, at postgraduate level, extend to both part-time and full-time students. Revisions to the Postgraduate Framework aimed to simplify the structure and number of awards on offer and to improve progression of undergraduate students to postgraduate study. Both frameworks are comprised of generic unit outlines. In the Undergraduate Framework, studio practice, business and professional studies, contextual studies, and personal planning and development are integrated within the generic units with the aim of preparing students for employment, professional practice and further study. While undergraduate unit outlines are generic, programme-specific project briefs help guide students through specific areas of study and their assessment. At undergraduate level, the assessment structure has been simplified to reduce the assessment load and produce a more coordinated approach to submission and assessment deadlines. Staff the audit team met had been involved in the development of the new

Undergraduate Framework and were very supportive of it. The team was also told, however, that a more limited number of staff had been consulted on the Postgraduate Framework. Nevertheless, the team considered that the simplicity, clarity and flexibility of the frameworks for the design of the undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum to be a feature of good practice.

13 The procedure for both approval and periodic review of academic programmes comprises three stages: document verification by a panel that normally comprises the Deputy Principal (Academic Affairs and Research), Academic Registrar, and Director of Studies; an internal approval or review event conducted by a panel of staff and a student representative (which can set conditions and recommendations); and finally, an external event with external membership that can lay down conditions and recommendations. The Staff Handbook on Quality Management and Enhancement lays down detailed criteria for the appointment and approval of external panel members as well as detailing documentation requirements and providing standardised agendas for meetings. Students participate in both course approval and periodic review panels (see paragraph 32).

14 Courses are approved indefinitely but are subject to periodic review, normally every five years. Similar processes apply to the periodic review of programmes, with the additional requirements for the team to produce a critical review and for the panel to look at student work. Programme specifications are prepared according to a template after the approval event by the Director of Studies.

15 After meeting with the University College and studying the documentation provided, the audit team reached the conclusion that the process for programme approval and periodic review was very rigorous.

16 Annual monitoring is overseen by the Quality and Standards Committee on behalf of Academic Board. It includes both assurance and enhancement. Each course undertakes an Annual Course Evaluation that includes consideration of external examiners' reports, unit evaluations, annual student questionnaires, including the National Student Survey, and student data. Annual Course Evaluations feed into School Annual Monitoring Reports. The Quality and Standards Committee has an Annual Monitoring meeting that discusses the School Annual Monitoring Reports, Support Area Annual Monitoring Report, and Postgraduate Research Degrees Annual Monitoring Report in some depth. The Quality and Standards Committee also approves an Institutional Overview Report and Enhancement Plan that goes forward to the Academic Board. An annual report on the effectiveness of annual monitoring and evaluation is prepared for the Quality and Standards Committee by the Academic Registrar.

17 The Staff Handbook on Quality Management and Enhancement states that enhancement plans from Annual Course Evaluations should be considered throughout the year and that the enhancement plan should be a standard agenda item on course committee agendas. The audit team found, however, that this was not the case in all of the course committee minutes. The team also considered that the minutes of course committees that they saw were lacking in detail of discussions that had taken place. The team, therefore, considers it desirable that the institution should consider ways in which it can ensure that minutes across all schools and course committees are a meaningful record of the committees' deliberations.

18 While the audit team noted the rigour of both the Annual Course Evaluations and the School Annual Monitoring Reports, they both contained a great deal of information. The team was told that the University College was moving towards a more risk-based reporting system for annual monitoring and there was a move towards reporting by

exception. The team would encourage the University College in this streamlining of the annual monitoring processes.

19 Regulations and procedures for the operation of external examining are clearly specified in the Staff Handbook on Quality Management and Enhancement. Each award has an external examiner, appointed by Academic Board, with nominations coming through heads of schools and course leaders for consideration by the Quality and Standards Committee. Lead external examiners are appointed for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes and they attend the final award boards. External examiners previously attended mid-session course assessment boards, but these have been replaced in 2009-10 by progress review panels that externals do not attend. The success of this change is being monitored.

20 External examining issues are covered in the school annual monitoring reports, which are considered by the Quality and Standards Committee, and an institutional summary is considered by Academic Board and governors. The audit team was told that external examiner reports were discussed at course committees and thus would be shared with student representatives on those committees. However, in the course committee minutes made available to the team none showed a discussion of external examiner reports.

21 Overall, the team concluded that the University College had an effective system for the appointment, induction and reporting of external examiners. Appropriate use was made of their reports, although the team found that course committee minutes lacked discussion on external examiner reports. There was clear evidence of feedback from the University College to external examiners on actions taken and issues considered, and an overview of issues raised by external examiners was considered and appropriate action taken at institutional level.

22 The University College considers that the Academic Infrastructure is firmly embedded in the institutional framework for the management of standards, and reflected in the Staff Handbook on Quality Management and Enhancement, the curriculum frameworks and the Student Regulations and Procedures. Responsibility for monitoring and responding to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* lies with the Academic Registrar, who produces the Norwich University College of the Arts QAA Code of Practice Guidance that is updated every two years. In addition, external developments on the Academic Infrastructure are monitored by the Deputy Principal and discussed and implemented at the Quality and Standards Committee. In the documentation seen by the audit team, the team was able to conclude that the University College makes appropriate use of the FHEQ, *Code of practice*, and appropriate subject benchmark statements in designing, approving and reviewing the academic standards of its programmes.

23 All undergraduate and postgraduate courses work within Assessment Procedures and Regulations. There is a Staff Handbook on Assessment and Feedback that complements the Student Regulations and Procedures and is supplemented by a University College Policy on Feedback to Students, which was developed with student input. The common Undergraduate and Postgraduate Frameworks with their generic unit outlines, common aims and learning outcomes, together with standardised pro formas for project briefs and assessment records, are all designed to strengthen parity between awards. From September 2010, grading matrices were introduced for each level of undergraduate provision. Some students that the team met felt that the new grading matrices had helped their awareness of what they needed to achieve for particular grades, while other students seemed less clear. The team would encourage the University College to raise the awareness of the grading matrices so that all students are aware of them.

24 The Academic Registry has a well-defined process for generating and distributing appropriate statistical datasets from its own and other comparable institutions. The audit team found that the University College was making good use of this statistical information at unit, course and institutional levels, enabling it to make comparisons across years and with other institutions, and to highlight trends in student performance and progression data as a basis for operational and strategic decision-making.

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

### **Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities**

26 The processes outline above in relation to academic standards for programme approval, monitoring and review simultaneously contribute to the management of learning opportunities. The programme approval process includes explicit consideration of the resourcing needs and integration within the overall planning process. As a result, the audit team was satisfied that the planning and approval processes were managed to take full account of resources for learning.

27 Course monitoring involves an appropriate use of data. Annual course evaluations are discussed in school board of study annual monitoring meetings and feed into the School Annual Monitoring Report that goes forward to the Quality and Standards Committee. All monitoring reports examined by the audit team contained detailed discussions of the data and plans arising from such. Data was also discussed on an ongoing basis throughout the year. The team concluded that the active engagement of staff with management information across the institution and the way in which this is used to inform planning and decision making to be a feature of good practice. The team concluded that annual monitoring is effectively monitored and evaluated by the University College.

28 Support areas also have annual evaluation reports. These are received by a working group of the Quality and Standards Committee together with an overview report prepared by the Academic Registrar on annual monitoring. The support areas judged to have the most significant student interface, for instance, the Library, technical workshops and Student Support, have all undergone a periodic review by the University College since the 2003 Institutional audit.

29 The audit team concluded that the University College's annual monitoring and periodic review processes contributed effectively to the management of learning opportunities.

30 The central mechanism the University College uses for monitoring student views is the National Student Survey, which is given to first and second year students as well as to the third year. Postgraduate research students complete a survey based on the Higher Education Academy's Postgraduate Research Experience Survey. There is good student representation at all levels and there was evidence that their views are responded to and lead to change. Students' views on units are collected using a standard Course Unit Evaluation Form. Student feedback on workshops is also collected. The audit team concluded that there was extensive and effective use made of management information collected from students in maintaining the quality of learning opportunities. The team, however, would encourage the University College to continue to develop ways of enhancing response rates, of feeding back to the general student body changes made in response to their input, particularly at unit level, and of increasing student involvement in the workshop session evaluations.

31 Student representation operates across the University College, which values its close relationship with its student body. Students are involved in policy and decision making through the Students' Union President's membership of the governing body, Academic Board, Quality and Standards Committee and Learning and Teaching Committee. There are also regular meetings between the Students' Union President and the Senior Management Team. Students, through nominated representatives, are members of course committees, school boards of study and the Student Representatives Group.

32 Students confirmed that the student representation system worked effectively, that students understood the representative role, and that training for student representatives was available through the Students' Union. Documentary evidence confirmed to the audit team that student representation operates at all levels within the University College, allowing students to participate in quality management processes. Students also participate in course approval and periodic review panels, and the team saw evidence of this for the events held in 2009-10, for the migration of courses to the new undergraduate framework and the approval of new undergraduate and MA programmes. Students have been involved in the selection process for the appointment of academic staff, and students are members of admissions panels.

33 The audit team explored how the University College shares external examiner reports with student representatives, in line with the expectations set out in the HEFCE review of the Quality Assurance Framework for learning and teaching in higher education (HEFCE 2006/45). The team found that, with the exception of the Students' Union President, students had not seen the reports and that the reports were not considered by course committees at which student representatives are present. As a consequence, the team considers it desirable for the University College to ensure that full external examiner reports are shared with student representatives.

34 The University College provides feedback to students through the formal committee structure, with course leaders and committee chairs being responsible for providing feedback at subsequent meetings, and student representatives being responsible for disseminating this information to the student body. Feedback on progress with the annual Enhancement Plan is provided to the Student Representatives Group. It was apparent to the audit team that the University College is taking a strategic approach to actively addressing the provision of feedback to students.

35 The enhancement of the student learning experience through teaching informed by research and professional practice is a key objective set by the University College's Research and Consultancy Strategy 2009-2014. The University College's research vision is one where staff understand, celebrate and promote research, consultancy and professional practice so that it underpins and enhances the curriculum. The impact of these activities on the student experience is considered as part of annual programme monitoring.

36 The periodic review processes may include consideration of the impact of research, consultancy and professional practice on the curriculum, but this was not evident in the formal reports from periodic review panels. The University College is, therefore, encouraged to consider how it can ensure that the formal reports from periodic review panels fully articulate the debate and discussion that took place.

37 The University College has extensive links with industry that enhance the curriculum at a number of levels. Its students have won a wide range of prizes and awards at a national level for their work in art and design. The audit team formed the opinion that these activities have the potential to contribute significantly to the quality of the student learning experience in the future and help to equip students for their chosen profession.

38 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University College has effective arrangements for maintaining and advancing the link between research and scholarly activity with teaching and with students' learning opportunities.

39 The University College uses a range of work-related learning activities throughout the curriculum to provide students with insights into professional practice and to give them the opportunity of gaining experience in their chosen profession. The audit team confirmed that the University College's close relationship with the creative industries significantly enhances both the student experience and their employability.

40 The audit team found that the use of Learning Agreements for work-related learning activities and work placements was inconsistent and, when used, focused on the responsibilities of the student. Where a student was in a work setting, the team found that, in practice, guidance provided to employers, with the exception of health and safety requirements, was variable. The team considered the lack of a consistent approach to and guidance on the use of Learning Agreements could result in students not fulfilling the requirements of the unit, and students and employers, where relevant, being unclear as to their respective responsibilities. The team, therefore, considered it desirable for the University College to produce guidance on the different forms of work-related learning it offers and the institutional procedures relating to these, including when Learning Agreements are required.

41 Over the last few years, the University College has invested considerable resources into improving both the physical structure and the use of its buildings in order to give them a clearer discipline focus. Research students benefit from the University College's links with the University of the Arts London, which, among other things, gives them access to the University library's online resources. The University College's view is that its learning resources compare well with other specialist institutions, with the possible exception of its use of the intranet. The evidence gathered by the audit team and the National Student Survey confirm this view. The strategic planning of the development and use of the estate to meet the changing needs of the programmes has been particularly successful.

42 The University College has a wide range of outreach and AimHigher activities with schools in low participation neighbourhoods and has established progression agreements with several schools and further education colleges. Applications for the 2010 entry rose by 30 per cent, well above the sector average for art and design. Applicants are normally invited for interview and assessed on their academic qualifications and/or their portfolio of work. Admissions panels include more than one member of staff with relevant expertise. This, together with a centrally produced checklist of questions to be asked, ensures consistency. The panels also include a student to act as a critical friend. Applicants are given the opportunity to discuss any specific support needs and, if necessary, the Student Support Office and the course leader will meet them prior to enrolment. There is a well formulated policy for admission on the basis of accreditation of prior learning. The audit team concluded that the University College has in place appropriate and well-documented procedures for ensuring the effective implementation of an appropriate admissions policy, with a particular strength in identifying and responding to students' learning needs at an early stage.

43 There is a well-structured support system divided into student support and academic support, with each area being the responsibility of an appropriately staffed section of the Academic Registry. Some support services are successfully contracted out to local organisations. The University College has a relatively high proportion of students with additional needs. The audit team found strong evidence that the University College has very effective procedures for identifying and supporting these students. The team considered that the integrated approach, involving both academic and support staff, to the identification and

support of students with additional needs from their point of application to the University College through to the completion of their studies, to be a feature of good practice.

44 Students have clearly identified academic tutors, linked to units, with whom they work closely. Students do not have individual personal tutors, although course administrators and year tutors, which larger courses have, can also fulfil a pastoral role. While the students the audit team met felt well supported by this system, it was also apparent that there was some confusion among both students and staff about who was responsible for providing pastoral support. The team concluded that it would be desirable for the University College to clarify who is responsible for providing personal/pastoral support to individual students, and to make this explicit to students in the documentation they receive.

45 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University College's student support arrangements were comprehensive and very well integrated and, with the exception of a lack of clarity about responsibility for pastoral support by academic staff, fully met the students' needs.

46 The University College's Human Resources Strategy is currently under review to incorporate a number of recent significant changes. New lecturer and professorial levels have been introduced to enhance career opportunities for academic staff. There is a strong emphasis on the need for all staff to have a teaching qualification and, where appropriate, a discipline-based postgraduate qualification. Teaching quality is recognised through annual teaching awards for academic staff and separate awards for support staff.

47 Staff development is the responsibility of the Director of Human Resources. There is an annual training programme, three staff development days, a Learning and Teaching Day and a Managers' Awayday. Staff have a well-structured and effective Annual Development Review in which training needs are identified and fed into subsequent professional development opportunities. Academic staff receive an allocation of time for research and scholarly activity. A Research Coordinator was appointed in 2005 to facilitate staff activities in these areas.

48 New staff have a rigorous induction process and are allocated a mentor. Their formally structured probation period is six months. The University College is committed to using peer observation of teaching as a way of helping staff develop their teaching skills. However, the current procedure has lapsed while its value is being reviewed. The audit team would encourage the University College to develop a process that is accepted by the academic staff as a helpful way of developing their teaching skills.

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

49 The University College aims to manage proactively the quality of the student experience and includes in its Student Agreement the statement that a principle underpinning the partnership between the University College and Students' Union is 'Enhancing the student experience'. It has a Quality Enhancement Policy that involves the use of Annual Enhancement Plans, through which the University College sets out to implement 'clear and measurable enhancements to the quality of the student experience'. Enhancement Planning involves a set of quality management procedures, such as annual monitoring, through which staff are required to reflect on performance and feedback and then plan future enhancements accordingly. An annual Institutional Overview Report, which the Quality and Standards Committee submits to Academic Board, provides an overview of performance during the reporting period and sets the enhancement agenda for the coming year.

50 There is considerable evidence of an effective structure of mechanisms for the identification of enhancement opportunities and plans. The audit team identified the implementation in September 2010 of the new undergraduate and postgraduate frameworks as a significant example of a deliberate institutional step designed to improve the student experience. Other examples of deliberate enhancement steps at institutional level were provided to the team in meetings with University College staff.

51 One element in the University College's regular and ongoing commitment to enhancement is its structure of procedures for identifying and disseminating items of good practice. Staff whom the audit team met provided many examples of internal good or innovative practice in particular areas, which had been identified either by annual monitoring and review or by the use of external examiner reports, and which had then led on to affect improvements of the student experience in other areas. The means of dissemination was not restricted to the formal, committee-based procedures generated by annual monitoring, but included Learning and Teaching Days, discussion at the regular Course Leaders Group meetings, and the publication of Continuing Professional Development events via the news feed on the intranet.

52 At the time of the audit, the University College had established a robust framework and set of mechanisms for identifying and disseminating good practice but, as yet, no institution-wide follow-up procedures for logging their take-up and evaluating their impact. However, the University College routinely reviews progress with the delivery of enhancement plans and the annual monitoring procedures require reports on implementation. Opportunities for enhancement are also identified in-year. For example, the Academic Board identified Organisation and Management as a theme for enhancement during 2009-10 on the basis of an analysis of the National Student Survey, and this was to be followed up by a progress report in spring 2011.

53 The audit team concluded that it had found sufficient evidence to substantiate the University College's claim that its approach to enhancement was an integrated one. Furthermore, it involved a pervasive and inclusive culture of self-reflection in the interests of enhancement, and an institutional system of deliberate planning and implementation of actions designed to improve the student experience. Indeed, the team considered the strategic approach both to the enhancement of learning opportunities and to the identification and dissemination of good practice, which is not only systematic, active and embedded, but also inclusive in that it involves staff at all levels and in all areas, to be a feature of good practice.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

54 At the time of the audit visit, the University College did not have, and had no plans to have, any collaborative partnerships leading to awards; it had nevertheless approved a Collaborative Provision Policy and Procedures in 2008. The audit team was confident that this document was sufficiently comprehensive to establish appropriate procedures if the University College decides to enter into any collaborative provision agreements in the near future.

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

55 The University of the Arts London confers the University College's research degrees. The University College has 15 postgraduate research students in 2010-2011. One of the objectives of the University College's Research and Consultancy Strategy is to increase the University College's research supervisory capacity and concomitant with this,



the number of research students. The University College also acknowledges the need to enhance the research culture to support research students as a result of the outcomes of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise.

56 The University College's Research Degrees Committee oversees the management of research degrees and ensures that its policies and procedures are aligned with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), *Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. The Research Degrees Committee reports to the Quality and Standards Committee, and to the Research Degrees Sub-Committee at the University of the Arts London. Research students are represented on the Research Degrees Committee through a nominated student representative.

57 Students apply to and are interviewed by the University College. When students register for a research degree, they complete a comprehensive training needs analysis that is considered by the University College's Research Degrees Committee. Students are appointed at least two supervisors, one of whom acts as Director of Studies. Initial registration is for an unspecified research degree, with the intention to complete an MPhil or PhD. At the end of the probation period, the degree for which the student is ultimately registered, an MPhil or PhD, is confirmed through the confirmation meeting.

58 The University College has a comprehensive system of support for its research students, details of which are contained in the Research Student Handbook, the University College's Research Training Guide, and the research training guide of the University of the Arts London. Research students undergo induction by the University College and are also expected to attend three one-week training events in their first year at the University of the Arts London. The University College holds a range of research activities, workshops and training to support its research students. Postgraduate research students expressed their satisfaction to the audit team with the support they receive in the early stages of and throughout their research degree programme. The team considered the comprehensive support provided to by the University College to postgraduate research students throughout their programme to be a feature of good practice.

59 Key features of arrangements to obtain and act on postgraduate research student feedback include the University College's Postgraduate Research Survey, the postgraduate research forum and the formal annual report, which not only looks at progress and training throughout the year but also agrees objectives for the forthcoming year. Students can also discuss areas of concern with their supervisor and/or the University College's Research Coordinator as they arise.

60 Support and training for supervisors of research students is provided by the University College and University of the Arts London. Directors of studies are all members of the University College's Research Degrees Committee.

61 The University College follows the regulations of the University of the Arts London for its research degrees, including those for appeals. Complaints are considered under the University College's complaints procedures. The audit team noted the comprehensive nature of the University College's Research Student Handbook, although the team found that information for students on the process they should follow for complaints and appeals, and information on research misconduct, including plagiarism, was not readily accessible. To ensure alignment with the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, the team considered it advisable for the University College to make information on research misconduct and student appeals and complaints procedures readily accessible to postgraduate research students by including these procedures in, for example, the Research Student Handbook.

62 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University College's arrangements for postgraduate students, with the exception of the lack of information to students on appeals, complaints and research misconduct, met the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

## **Section 7: Published information**

63 The University College has in place an authorisation framework to ensure, as far as is possible, that the information it communicates to all stakeholders is accurate and up to date. The University College prospectus, external website and marketing literature are the responsibility of the Director of Marketing, while the accuracy of information published internally on the intranet or in the form of school or course guides is the responsibility of the relevant head of school and overseen by the Director of Studies. Information about support areas is maintained by the relevant support area manager, and management information is the responsibility of the Academic Registrar.

64 The Student Agreement assures students that the University College will provide 'accurate information before and during your course, with clear signposting to sources of additional information about the University College and its courses, services and procedures'. To this end, the University College regularly monitors students' views on the accuracy, accessibility and usefulness of the information it publishes. A survey of first-year students in 2008-09 found that while 93 per cent of BA respondents rated the prospectus as good or excellent, only 74 per cent rated the website at this high level. As a consequence, both the website and intranet were redesigned.

65 Students told the audit team that the information they received when visiting and then applying to the University College had been accurate and that they had no criticisms of the ways in which it had described their courses. Some students in recent years had been critical of the information received after registration, but the University College had responded to student feedback by revising the Course Guide and reorganising its content.

66 The audit team consulted staff, students, and the student written submission, as well as sampling a range of published information. The team found that the University College had a comprehensive procedure for validating its externally and internally published information. The team concluded that overall reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information published by the University College about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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

### **Features of good practice**

67 The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the simplicity, clarity and flexibility of the frameworks for the design of the undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum (paragraph 12)
- the active engagement of staff with management information across the University College and the way in which this is used to inform planning and decision-making (paragraph 27)
- the integrated approach, involving both academic and support staff, to the identification and support of students with additional needs from their point of application to the University College through to the completion of their studies (paragraphs 42 and 43)

- the strategic approach both to the enhancement of learning opportunities and to the identification and dissemination of good practice, which is not only systematic, active and embedded, but also inclusive in that it involves staff at all levels and in all areas (paragraph 53)
- the comprehensive support provided to postgraduate research students throughout their programme (paragraph 58).

### **Recommendations for action**

68 A recommendation for action that is advisable:

- make information on research misconduct and student appeals and complaints procedures readily accessible to postgraduate research students by including these procedures in, for example, the Research Student Handbook (paragraph 61).

69 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- consider ways in which it can ensure that minutes across all school and course committees are a meaningful record of the committees' deliberations (paragraphs 17 and 20)
- ensure that full external examiner reports are shared with student representatives (paragraph 33)
- produce guidance on the different forms of work-related learning it offers and the institutional procedures relating to these, including when learning agreements are required (paragraph 40)
- clarify who is responsible for providing personal/pastoral support to individual students, and to make this explicit to students in the documentation they receive (paragraph 44).

## **Appendix**

### **Norwich University College of the Arts' response to the Institutional audit report**

The University College welcomes the audit report and its confirmation of the soundness of the management of the academic standards of our awards and the quality of the learning opportunities which we offer to our students.

The University College particularly welcomes the identification of a number of features of good practice which reflect its strong commitment to the continuing enhancement of the student experience. Considerable energy has been devoted to the development of our undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum frameworks, and the audit team's recognition of the simplicity, clarity and flexibility of these was appreciated. Student support is a key priority for the University College, and we were encouraged by the audit team's identification of our integrated approach to support for students with additional needs together with the comprehensive support which we provide to postgraduate research students. The University College has actively engaged staff with management information across the institution, and recognition of this, together with the way in which management information is used to inform planning and decision-making, was also welcomed.

The University College's approach to quality enhancement, which the audit team identified as strategic, systematic and involving staff at all levels and in all areas, was also separately identified as an area of good practice.

The recommendations concerning information for postgraduate research students, the minuting of school and course committees, and the sharing of external examiners' reports, have now been addressed. The remaining recommendations will be addressed by the University College, with appropriate consultation with its Students' Union, before the commencement of the 2011-12 academic year. Progress with actions arising from each of the recommendations will be monitored by the Quality and Standards Committee, with reports to Academic Board.

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