



# **Integrated quality and enhancement review**

**Summative review**

**South Staffordshire College**

**April 2011**

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## **Preface**

The mission of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continual improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. As part of this mission, QAA undertakes reviews of higher education provision delivered in further education colleges. This process is known as Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER).

## **Purpose of IQER**

Higher education programmes delivered by further education colleges (colleges) lead to awards made by higher education institutions or Edexcel. The awarding bodies retain ultimate responsibility for maintaining the academic standards of their awards and assuring the quality of the students' learning opportunities. The purpose of IQER is, therefore, to safeguard the public interest in the academic standards and quality of higher education delivered in colleges. It achieves this by providing objective and independent information about the way in which colleges discharge their responsibilities within the context of their partnership agreements with awarding bodies. IQER focuses on three core themes: academic standards, quality of learning opportunities and public information.

## **The IQER process**

IQER is a peer review process. It is divided into two complementary stages: Developmental engagement and Summative review. In accordance with the published method, colleges with less than 100 full-time equivalent students funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) may elect not to take part in Developmental engagements, but all HEFCE-funded colleges will take part in Summative review.

## **Developmental engagement**

Developmental engagements explore in an open and collegial way the challenges colleges face in specific areas of higher education provision. Each college's first, and often their only, Developmental engagement focuses on student assessment.

The main elements of a Developmental engagement are:

- a self-evaluation by the college
- an optional written submission by the student body
- a preparatory meeting between the college and the IQER coordinator several weeks before the Developmental engagement visit
- the Developmental engagement visit, which normally lasts two days
- the evaluation of the extent to which the college manages effectively its responsibilities for the delivery of academic standards and the quality of its higher education provision, plus the arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of public information it is responsible for publishing about its higher education
- the production of a written report of the team's findings.

To promote a collegial approach, Developmental engagement teams include up to two members of staff from the further education college under review. They are known as nominees for this process.

## Summative review

Summative review addresses all aspects of a college's HEFCE-funded higher education provision and provides judgements on the management and delivery of this provision against core themes one and two, and a conclusion against core theme three.

Summative review shares the main elements of Developmental engagement described above. Summative review teams however, are composed of the IQER coordinator and QAA reviewers. They do not include nominees.

## Evidence

In order to obtain evidence for the review, IQER teams carry out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the college's self-evaluation and its internal procedures and documents
- reviewing the optional written submission from students
- asking questions of relevant staff
- talking to students about their experiences.

IQER teams' expectations of colleges are guided by a nationally agreed set of reference points, known as the Academic Infrastructure. These are published by QAA and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, which includes descriptions of different higher education qualifications
- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study
- award benchmark statements which describe the generic characteristics of an award, for example Foundation Degrees.

In addition, Developmental engagement teams gather evidence by focusing on particular aspects of the theme under review. These are known as 'lines of enquiry'.

## Outcomes of IQER

Each Developmental engagement and Summative review results in a written report:

- Developmental engagement reports set out good practice and recommendations and implications for the college and its awarding bodies, but do not contain judgements. Recommendations will be at one of three levels - **essential**, **advisable** and **desirable**. To promote an open and collegial approach to Developmental engagements, the reports are not published.
- Summative review reports identify good practice and contain judgements about whether the college is discharging its responsibilities effectively against core themes one and two above. The judgements are **confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence**. There is no judgement for the third core theme, instead the report will provide evaluation and a conclusion. Summative review reports are published. Differentiated judgements can be made where a team judges a college's

management of the standards and/or quality of the awards made by one awarding body to be different from those made by another.

Colleges are required to develop an action plan to address any recommendations arising from IQER. Progress against these action plans is monitored by QAA in conjunction with HEFCE and/or the college's awarding body(ies) as appropriate. The college's action plan in response to the conclusions of the Summative review will be published as part of the report.

## Executive summary

### **The Summative review of South Staffordshire College carried out in April 2011**

As a result of its investigations, the Summative review team (the team) considers that there can be **confidence** in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreements, for the standards of the award it offers on behalf of its awarding bodies. The team also considers that there can be **confidence** in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreements, for the quality of learning opportunities it offers. The team considers that reliance **can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

### **Good practice**

The team has identified the following **good practice** for dissemination:

- the active role played by governors in the assurance of the quality of academic standards through their allocation to particular curriculum areas
- the payment of fees for membership of professional and scholarly societies by the College.

### **Recommendations**

The team has also identified a number of recommendations for the enhancement of the higher education provision.

The team considers that it would be **advisable** for the College to:

- seek written clarification of the formal roles and responsibilities of College and university staff for all Staffordshire University validated programmes to remove any confusion, in particular with regard to assessment
- institute an effective procedure for gathering feedback regularly from higher students and encourage the active involvement of students in this process to enhance the student experience
- develop a clear strategy for the use of, and access to, the virtual learning environments so that all higher education students are aware of where relevant information can be found.

The team considers that it would be **desirable** for the College to:

- further strengthen its ownership of the higher education provision, and use the role of the Higher Education Manager to ensure strong management of its delegated responsibilities
- review the sources of information, purpose, dissemination and effectiveness of its communication with higher education students to fully address all issues that are raised.

## A Introduction and context

1 This report presents the findings of the Summative review of higher education funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) conducted at South Staffordshire College. The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the College discharges its responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes which the College delivers on behalf of Staffordshire University Regional Federation. The review was carried out by Mr John Hawthorn, Dr Hayley Randle and Ms Ruth Stoker (reviewers) and Mr Martin Hill (coordinator).

2 The Summative review team (the team) conducted the review in agreement with the College and in accordance with *The handbook for Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review* (the handbook), published by QAA. Evidence in support of the Summative review included documentation supplied by the College and awarding bodies, meetings with staff, students, employers and partner institutions, reports of reviews by QAA and from inspections by Ofsted. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagement in assessment. A summary of findings from this Developmental engagement is provided in Section C of this report. The review also considered the College's use of the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers, with reference to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, subject and award benchmark statements, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and programme specifications.

3 In order to assist HEFCE to gain information to assist with the assessment of the impact of Foundation Degree awards, Section D of this report summarises details of the Foundation Degree (FD) programmes delivered at the College.

4 South Staffordshire College was established in January 2009, through the merger of the Tamworth and Lichfield College, Cannock Chase Technical College and Rodbaston College. It is a large general further education college with four main campuses located across the south of Staffordshire. The College offers a range of provision from entry level to higher education programmes across 14 curriculum subject areas. The College mission statement is 'To work together to raise aspirations and success through excellence in all that we do whilst striving to achieve the best sustainable practices'. In 2010-11 the College had 12,782 enrolments; 72 per cent of the full-time equivalent (FTE) students were 16-18 years old and 28 per cent were adults. The College employs 1,137 full and part-time staff, and of these 534 are engaged in teaching. There are currently 490 students (254.17 FTEs) studying higher education programmes, taught by 40 staff. The College's higher education provision in April 2011 consists of the following:

### Staffordshire University

- BA (Hons) Business and Management (part-time) (11 students) (7.84 FTEs)
- FD Adult Social Care (part-time) (21 students) (13.97 FTEs)
- FD Complementary Therapies (part-time) (14 students) (6.07 FTEs)
- FD Contemporary Art Practice (full-time) (7 students)
- FD Early Childhood Studies (part-time) (176 students) (55.67 FTEs)
- FD Education (Teaching assistants) (21 students) (5.6 FTEs)
- FD Film and Television Production and Management (full-time) (20 students)
- FD Leadership and Management (part-time) (14 students) (6.97 FTEs)
- FD Small Business (Salon) Management (part-time) (6 students) (3.36 FTEs)

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- FD Sustainability and Environmental Management (part-time) (13 students) (9.76 FTEs)
- HND Business (full-time) (22 students)
- HNC Business (part-time) (10 students) (2.99 FTEs)
- Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (part-time) (89 students) (26.94 FTEs)
- Foundation year Health Studies (full-time) (10 students)

## University of Wolverhampton

- BSc Animal Management (full-time) (23 students)
- BSc Equine Sports Science (full-time) (8 students)
- BSc Zoo Animal Management (full-time) (15 students)
- HND Animal Management (full-time) (10 students)

5 When the College submitted the self-evaluation of its provision, it included the HNC and HND in Applied Information Technology with 64 enrolled students. College staff and Staffordshire University staff each teach half of these programmes. Students on these programmes use some of the facilities in the jointly operated campus at Lichfield. During the visit, the team was informed that Staffordshire University is wholly responsible for the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities on these programmes. Consequently the team was unable to include any review of documentation, nor the views of the students on these programmes in this report.

## Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

6 The College has partnership agreements with Staffordshire University and the University of Wolverhampton. The Staffordshire University Regional Federation began in 2000 as a funding consortium for the delivery of higher education programmes delivered by further education colleges in the region under the auspices of Staffordshire University. The University of Wolverhampton Collaborative Achievement Network is a robust partnership that facilitates curriculum planning and staff development between the University and its partner colleges. The University of Wolverhampton decided to withdraw from its partnership agreement with the College in 2010-2011. No new students were recruited to these programmes in September 2010 and the validated provision will conclude with the completion of the current cohorts of students.

## Recent developments in higher education at the College

7 The College undertook a management restructuring at the end of July 2010. A new Higher Education Manager was appointed in December 2010. During 2009-10 the Foundation Degree in Film & TV Production Technology and Management was revalidated. During this process two pathways were created: one relates to Production and one relates to Management. In collaboration with Staffordshire University Regional Federation, the College renamed the Foundation Degree in Creative Arts for Employment as the Foundation Degree Contemporary Art Practice to reflect market demand. The College has recently validated two new Foundation Degrees, namely the Foundation Degree in Sustainability and Environmental Management which is currently operating and the Foundation Degree in Public Services which will be available in September 2011.



## **Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission**

8 Students from the higher education provision at the College were invited to present a submission to the team. The College employed an external consultant to put together the student submission in collaboration with students. The views of students from five higher education programmes were collected through two focus group meetings held at the Lichfield and Cannock campuses. Additionally, the external consultant took note of six questionnaires from other students. The consultant wrote up the findings as the student written submission. The team found the document of limited help since it did not attribute comments to programmes and gave no indication of the importance of the comments. The team was able to pursue issues included in the submission in two meetings with students from several programmes.

## **B Evaluation of the management of HEFCE-funded higher education**

### **Core theme 1: Academic standards**

#### **How are responsibilities for managing and delivering higher education standards delegated within the management structure and what reporting arrangements are in place?**

9 There is a clear structure in place for the management of the quality of the higher education provision at the College. The Deputy Principal for Curriculum and Quality manages the Quality team and the Director of Curriculum, who manages heads of faculty. Curriculum area managers within each faculty are responsible for award tutors and module leaders. The effectiveness of the management system is demonstrated with the involvement of the College Quality Team at all levels, from award tutors to the Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality.

10 The College stated in its self-evaluation that the awarding bodies are responsible for the academic standards of all awards and for ensuring that the College adheres to the monitoring and review procedures. The partnership agreements with Staffordshire University and the University of Wolverhampton Collaborative Handbook detail the requirements the College must fulfil to maintain the academic standards of its provision. The quality assurance process for Staffordshire University programmes concludes with the ratification of College documentation at the annual Staffordshire University Regional Federation Curriculum Quality Board. The College informed the team that the processes at Wolverhampton are similar.

11 The post of Higher Education Liaison Manager was created in November 2009 and retitled as Higher Education Manager in October 2010. The Higher Education Manager plays a pivotal role in quality management and reports directly to the Director of Curriculum, being responsible for the implementation of strategies, monitoring of procedures and dissemination of information from the awarding bodies. The Higher Education Development Group adopted revised terms of reference for 2009 and has recently begun to function at two levels, both of which are chaired by the Higher Education Manager. The Higher Education Development Group addresses strategic issues including policies and procedures and considers new programme proposals and is attended by awarding body staff, College directors, heads of faculty, and marketing personnel. The Higher Education Development Award Tutors subgroup deals with operational issues and is attended by award tutors and curriculum

area managers. The Higher Education Manager also works directly with heads of faculty, curriculum area managers, award tutors and delivery teams. Through the work of the Higher Education Development Group, the College is beginning to formally recognise the importance of its relationship with its awarding bodies. The team recommends that it is desirable that the College further strengthens its ownership of the higher education provision, and uses the role of the Higher Education Manager to ensure strong management of its delegated responsibilities.

12       Governors are encouraged to be actively involved with the higher education provision at the College. Staff confirmed that governors play an important role in the assurance of quality and the maintenance of academic standards. They are allocated to curriculum areas and meet regularly with heads of faculty, curriculum area managers and teaching staff in order to contribute to the ongoing development of programmes. Governors also participate in curriculum level meetings and take part in the self-evaluation discussions. They also receive and approve the final annual monitoring reports at the governing body meetings. The active role played by governors in the assurance of the quality of academic standards through their allocation to particular curriculum areas is good practice.

### **What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?**

13       Following the recommendation in the Developmental engagement to improve staff understanding and use of the Academic Infrastructure, the College has begun to revise its policies and procedures. College quality management staff organised training on the use of the Academic Infrastructure that was delivered by a colleague from Staffordshire University. Elements of the Academic Infrastructure are discussed regularly at the Higher Education Development Group and the Award Tutors subgroup meetings. Award tutors reported that an improved understanding of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure has enabled the provision of more specific feedback to students.

14       Despite clear guidance notes on the Academic Infrastructure provided by Staffordshire University Regional Federation, some of the College's policies and procedures lack appropriate reference to it. For example, the College's Academic Appeals Procedure makes no reference to the *Code of practice, Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters*. Similarly, none of the policy documentation refers to the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. Where the provision has been mapped against the Academic Infrastructure, a good level of engagement is demonstrated. For example, the Foundation Degree in Adult Social Care team mapped their programme against the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* and relevant subject benchmark statements. The College recognises that further development is needed to ensure that elements of the Academic Infrastructure are fully embedded.

### **How does the College assure itself that it is fulfilling its obligations to ensure that the standards of higher education provision meet the requirements of validating partners and awarding bodies?**

15       The College communicates with its awarding bodies through partnership network meetings, and College staff meet regularly with cognate university faculty staff at both Staffordshire University and the University of Wolverhampton. Both awarding bodies support the College, and confirm that the College's policies and procedures accord with those of the universities in maintaining academic standards. Constructive working relationships with link tutors from the universities assist in the oversight of higher education and the maintenance of academic standards. The link tutors provide a conduit for the sharing of information between College award tutors and University programme managers. Support is also provided to the College Quality Manager by the partnership managers from the awarding

bodies. The College states that quality assurance is embedded in all College employees' job descriptions and is therefore a college-wide responsibility. The team found that College staff comprehend the operation and function of these processes.

16 The design, validation, monitoring and review of programmes at the College are closely controlled by the awarding bodies. In some instances the College has produced its own policies and procedures which effectively complement those of the awarding body, for example in a higher education validation process document. As part of its joint responsibilities, the College could further enhance its ownership of quality assurance processes in order to complement those of the awarding bodies.

17 The College engages fully with the quality assurance systems operated by the validating universities. It also operates its own quality assurance system covering its higher education and further education provision. Each award tutor produces an annual monitoring report which includes an action plan identifying recommended actions for both the College and the awarding body. These are combined into a single Annual Monitoring Report for higher education that is submitted to the Staffordshire University Regional Federation Quality and Curriculum meeting for approval. A similar process is followed for the University of Wolverhampton provision. Each award annual monitoring report also contributes to the College's award-based self-evaluation system. Curriculum area managers produce a curriculum level self-evaluation document which feeds into the College's self-evaluation document for higher education. Actions identified during this thorough scrutiny inform the Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan, written by the College Quality Team. This is the summative document received by the College's Senior Leadership meeting. The dual process of quality assurance ensures that the quality of higher education provision is clearly managed and documented.

18 External examiners' reports are received by the awarding bodies who conduct an initial screening of their content, highlighting actions requiring immediate attention by the College. These are then forwarded to the College Quality team for distribution to curriculum area managers and award tutors. The Head of the College Quality Team also summarises the external examiners' reports and identifies necessary actions. External examiners' comments are used in the College's annual monitoring process, particularly when constructing the Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan. The College does not make any formal response to the external examiners; this is provided by the awarding bodies. External examiners also provide verbal feedback at the annual award boards chaired by the awarding bodies where grades, progression and the awarding of qualifications are ratified.

### **What are the College's arrangements for staff development to support the achievement of appropriate academic standards?**

19 Staffordshire University designates all College staff teaching on the validated programmes as associate lecturers. College staff can take part in staff development programmes and enrol on higher degrees at both universities. Local staff development opportunities are also available at the College including bespoke higher education training, organised by the Higher Education Advanced Teaching and Learning Coach. Staff development focuses on academic standards, pedagogy, local needs or professional topics.

20 Staff development needs may be identified at award tutors meetings, through the self-evaluation process and the review of the quality improvement plans. Initial training needs are identified at staff induction by the completion of the mentor checklist and through the lesson observation and appraisal systems. The Higher Education Manager monitors participation in staff development. The College recognises the value of professional updating

and scholarly currency and pays for membership of appropriate scholarly and professional societies for staff teaching on the higher education programmes. This was demonstrated to the team for staff teaching on the Foundation Degree Sustainability and Environmental Management and the HND Business provision. The payment of fees for membership of professional and scholarly societies by the College is good practice.

**The team concludes that it has confidence in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreements, for the management and delivery of the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding bodies.**

## **Core theme 2: Quality of learning opportunities**

### **How are responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities for higher education programmes delegated within the management structure and what reporting arrangements are in place?**

21 The College has a clear structure for the delivery of higher education, which is described in paragraphs 9 to 12. Award tutors coordinate programmes, and are given 72 hours' remittance from teaching each year to enable them to carry out their responsibilities. The Higher Education Development Award Tutors subgroup focuses on issues relating to programme delivery. Minutes from curriculum team meetings are reported to the Group. Strategic matters and quality improvement issues are relayed back to curriculum team meetings. This system is effective and staff understand the remit of each of the groups in enhancing teaching and learning.

### **How does the College assure itself that it is fulfilling its obligations to its awarding bodies to ensure that students receive appropriate learning opportunities?**

22 Each award at the College undergoes an annual self-evaluation to assess strengths and areas for development. This process is described in paragraph 17. The Higher Education Manager attends meetings of the Staffordshire University Regional Federation Quality and Curriculum Group and the University of Wolverhampton Strategic Partnership Meeting and reports back on these meetings to the Higher Education Development Group. The Higher Education Development Group reviews student achievement data from both awarding bodies. Additionally, University link tutors and librarians liaise directly with award tutors at the College. Staff on all Staffordshire University programmes attend regular events with other consortia partners to ensure that the standards of student work are comparable and at the appropriate level. Staff said they felt well supported in their relationship with their awarding bodies.

23 The College assessment strategy documents reflect university policies and cover internal verification of assignment briefs through to the moderation of marked work. For programmes validated by Staffordshire University, assessment tasks are verified by university staff. College staff conduct the first marking of student work. On some programmes second-marking is undertaken by university staff; on others the College is responsible for second-marking. Assessments are verified by the appropriate University, and the universities organise the external examiner arrangements. The assessment grades are included at the award boards held at the University. Additionally, the College evaluates assessment outcomes, progression and achievement through its awards teams and internal

self-evaluation process. Similar processes operate for the programmes validated by the University of Wolverhampton. The procedures for verifying assessment tasks by the College and the universities are well established and staff are clear about them. The Schedule to the Memorandum of Cooperation for the Foundation Degree in Contemporary Art Practice, however, sets out a different set of responsibilities for the partners in the assessment process to those being currently adopted. Thus established processes do not always align with written agreements. The team concludes that it is advisable for the College to seek written clarification of the formal roles and responsibilities of College and university staff for all Staffordshire University validated programmes to remove any confusion, in particular with regard to assessment.

### **What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?**

24 The precepts of the Academic Infrastructure are considered through programme validation with the awarding bodies. The College provides all students with a programme specification containing details of expected academic standards related to the intended learning outcomes of their programmes. Students on the Foundation Degree in Film and Television Production Technology and Management particularly appreciated the explanation of academic standards that they were given by staff. Students met by the team understood the function of the subject benchmark statements for their programmes.

25 Staff at the College have taken part in a higher education conference to further develop their understanding of the Academic Infrastructure. Good practice relating to aspects of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* is discussed through the Award Tutors' Group.

### **How does the College assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?**

26 The student written submission indicated that the quality of teaching was generally good and students met by the team confirmed this. The student written submission also indicated that there were occasions where feedback was received late or was unhelpful. The submission does not relate the comments to particular programme areas, and there is no quantitative information associated with the comments. It is unclear whether the negative comments indicate a college-wide problem or relate to one programme. The College has responded positively to the recommendation in the Developmental engagement on the timeliness of feedback, by implementing a new feedback timetable. Assessed work has to be returned to students within 20 working days. At the visit, students who met the team said that the timeliness of feedback had improved and that generally feedback was good.

27 Staff teaching on higher education programmes undergo teaching observations and are graded using the same criteria that are used for observations of further education teaching. The College has a number of advanced learning and teaching coaches who aim to support all staff with their teaching. There is one higher education advanced learning and teaching coach. Good practice and issues for dissemination are discussed by the advanced learning and teaching coaches at curriculum level and through targeted training events. The staff said that they valued this system and felt it enhanced teaching and learning. There is a formal staff induction process, and staff new to teaching higher education are assigned a learning mentor from their curriculum area who supports them in higher education practice and procedures.

28 External examiners' reports on the Staffordshire University programmes have indicated that poor standardisation of assessment is of concern. However, the reports refer to all colleges in the consortium with no differentiation between colleges. The College tracks all external examiner comments but acknowledges that lack of detail in the reports has not

been helpful in identifying issues specific to the College. This concern was raised at meetings of the Staffordshire University Regional Federation. From the current year, external examiners' reports will indicate whether issues relate to specific colleges in the consortia or to all colleges.

### **How does the College assure itself that students are supported effectively?**

29 At the beginning of their programmes all students take part in induction. Students report that this is useful, relaxed and informal, and puts them at ease. At induction, students are signposted to study skills support. While there was a high level of satisfaction about the guidance that they received, some students felt that they could have been given more information on access to grants and other financial matters. Some reported that they find the dual enrolment system with the College and appropriate awarding body confusing.

30 Higher education study skills are offered on all programmes. A specific first year study skills module, covering academic writing and plagiarism, is included in all newly validated programmes. Students said that they are well supported in developing their study skills, and staff are approachable and helpful in discussing academic writing. Students are also told at induction about access to the study skills support at the awarding bodies. The College has a well developed individual learning support system. If a student declares they require additional support when they apply to the College, the learning support team begin a formal assessment prior to enrolment. Students can also be referred to the College's learning support team by their tutors.

31 The College maintains that there are various opportunities for students to provide feedback on the quality of their programmes. Staff reported that students are invited to curriculum team meetings at the College and annual team meetings at the Universities. Although students are familiar with the student representative role, few were aware of the opportunities to contribute to the management of their programmes. Students on the Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Studies and Complementary Therapies, however, are actively encouraged to take part in the meetings, and have found them useful. Students stated that they complete module evaluation forms and a number of college-wide feedback surveys.

32 A new annual Higher Education Forum has been set up to facilitate and improve communication between students and staff. Students have also been invited to attend cross-college student forums, although they are not well attended by higher education students, some of whom said that they felt out of place as it was predominantly attended by further education students. Students said that they would welcome a more effective higher education student forum which meets regularly. It is recommended as advisable that the College institutes an effective procedure for gathering feedback regularly from higher education students and encourages the active involvement of students in this process to enhance the student experience.

### **What are the College's arrangements for staff development to maintain and/or enhance the quality of learning opportunities?**

33 The College expects staff to be qualified to a level above that at which they teach. College staff are able to undertake further qualifications and the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector. Staff are encouraged to enrol on the Masters in Leadership and Management which is delivered at the Lichfield Campus by Staffordshire University. Fees may be remitted and many College staff have taken the programmes and commented favourably on their usefulness. Staff may also be supported to undertake higher level qualifications at Staffordshire University and elsewhere, providing alignment with the curriculum can be demonstrated.

34 The College hosts an annual higher education conference which enables the sharing of good practice. For example, the Developmental engagement identified the good practice in the work-based learning mentor handbooks available on the BSc Animal Management. The conference facilitated the production of new work-based learning documents across other programmes.

**How does the College ensure the sufficiency and accessibility of the learning resources the students need to achieve the intended learning outcomes for their programmes?**

35 In their written submission, students expressed satisfaction with library facilities at the Tamworth site. At the meetings held with students they reported that they also find the Cannock site library, and the library staff, very helpful. The Lichfield site does not have its own library, but shares space in the Staffordshire County Council library. The College buys relevant higher education texts for deposit in this library. However, the texts are not exclusively reserved for student use, and some students said they found it difficult to access books when they needed them. Staff also reported that students could access all university library facilities. Library staff from the universities visit the College during induction to explain their library systems.

36 The College aims to provide all students with access to a virtual learning environment. The College is developing its e-learning strategy and has appointed an e-learning manager to facilitate this. Higher education students on Staffordshire University programmes are given access to both a College and a University-hosted virtual learning environment. Students reported in their written submission that there were problems with the virtual learning environments, particularly with access at the beginning of their programmes. This was confirmed at the student meetings when students noted that there was considerable confusion over which learning environment to use. Students on University of Wolverhampton validated programmes use only the university virtual learning environment. It is recommended as advisable that the College develops a clear strategy over the use of, and access to, the virtual learning environments so that all higher education students are aware of where relevant information can be found.

**The team concludes that it has confidence in the College's management of its responsibilities for the quality of the learning opportunities as required by the awarding bodies to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.**

**Core theme 3: Public information**

**What information is the College responsible for publishing about its HEFCE-funded higher education?**

37 Most public information available to College students comes from the two awarding bodies. The universities are responsible for programme handbooks, programme specifications, module handbooks, assignment briefs, quality and policy documents, and the content of their own virtual learning environment. The College is responsible for the content of their own website, the higher education newsletter, the College prospectus, programme guides, feedback sheets if not provided by the awarding bodies and material on the College's virtual learning environment.

38 Where there is opportunity for the College to customise the standard templates of relevant university documents, any amendments must be approved by the quality departments at the awarding bodies. Course leaflets and other marketing materials require internal College approval and awarding body endorsement prior to publication. Programme handbooks are published online, and hard copies are available. The documents are reviewed for compliance with the Disability Discrimination legislation. Potential students can access the College prospectus, mini guides and programme leaflets through the College website. Current students find the handbooks helpful.

39 Students on Staffordshire University's programmes should have access to information on the Staffordshire University virtual learning environment. This includes programme specifications and module handbooks. Some reported that they are not always able to access the University's written materials. Classroom resources and assignment support materials are intended to be available on the College's virtual learning environment. College staff often upload material to the College's virtual learning environment if students are unable to locate it on the university's virtual learning environment. Many students were confused on where material was available. Students on the University of Wolverhampton's programmes did not experience this confusion, as all their material is published on the University of Wolverhampton's virtual learning environment. It is recommended as advisable that the College develops a clear strategy over the use of, and access to, the virtual learning environments so that all higher education students are aware of where relevant information can be found.

**What arrangements does the College have in place to assure the accuracy and completeness of information the College has responsibility for publishing?  
How does the College know that these arrangements are effective?**

40 Following the recommendation in the Developmental engagement to identify sources of public information and to document procedures for ensuring accuracy and completeness, the College has produced a robust strategy to ensure that public information is accurate and complete. The ultimate responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of published information lies with the Higher Education Manager and the Marketing Manager. The Quality Department approves materials published internally through the staff intranet and virtual learning environment. The Marketing Department approves material published on the College website. The College ensures that all published documents comply with the equality and diversity legal requirements.

41 Marketing material produced by the College is passed to the agreed link person at the University for approval. The link person may be the Partnership Manager, a subject link tutor or another named person. The link person checks that the award title and the information provided are accurate and complete. To ensure the suitability of marketing materials, the Marketing Manager organises focus groups of students to provide feedback on these materials. The Marketing Manager also speaks with potential students at exhibitions and recruitment fairs to gain feedback on information published by the College.

42 Programme information is appropriately maintained throughout the year. The marketing team requests information in line with an annual marketing calendar. A member of the marketing team assigned to each curriculum area will circulate the relevant programme information to the curriculum managers, the learner services team and the programme managers for review in one-to-one meetings. The curriculum managers check the accuracy of this information and notify the marketing team of any changes and any content such as student success stories. The Higher Education Manager also checks the accuracy of



the higher education information and liaises with award tutors to highlight any additional programmes, changes to award titles and advise the Marketing Team of any changes.

43 The College has recently published a higher education newsletter identifying how it is dealing with issues raised in the Higher Education Forum and reported in the student written submission. However, the newsletter does not address all of the issues identified. While this is an attempt to communicate the College's response to student issues, students told the team that they did not find it helpful. It is recommended as desirable that the College reviews the sources of information, purpose, dissemination and effectiveness of its communication with higher education students to fully address all issues that are raised.

**The team considers that reliance can be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.**

## **C Summary of findings from the Developmental engagement in assessment**

44 The Developmental engagement in assessment took place in May 2010. The lines of enquiry for the Developmental engagement agreed with the College in advance of the team's visit are set out below. The lines of enquiry reflect a broad range of assessment issues. The Developmental engagement reported on all higher education programmes delivered by the College, from partnerships with four awarding bodies.

- **Line of enquiry 1:** How effectively does the College manage the communication of information to students that helps to prepare them for assessment, and ensure its accuracy and completeness?
- **Line of enquiry 2:** To what extent and how do employers contribute to the quality of the assessment of work-based learning?
- **Line of enquiry 3:** How does the College ensure that the quality and timeliness of written feedback to students on summative assessment enable students to see what standards they have achieved and how they can improve their future performance?

45 In the course of the Developmental engagement, the team identified one area of good practice. On the HND Animal Management programme, the learning agreement and negotiated work-based learning outcomes improve significantly the learning experience of students.

46 The Developmental engagement team considered it advisable for the College to develop a robust system to ensure the accuracy of published information, improve staff understanding and use of the Academic Infrastructure, and to produce a programme specification for the HND Electrical and Electronic Engineering programme. The College should also set and monitor a maximum time for the return of feedback to students, in consultation with the awarding bodies. The team considered that it would be desirable for the College to produce a programme handbook for HND Electrical and Electronic Engineering students, improve the communication of work-based learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria to students, devise minimum standards for the quality of the written feedback provided to students on their work, and monitor its implementation. To improve fairness of the assessment process, it was also considered desirable for the College to improve the consistency of the written assessment information given to its students, in

consultation with its awarding bodies and develop a strategy to increase the use of the virtual learning environments by both staff and students.

47 Good progress has been made with most of the recommendations identified in the Developmental engagement. The e-Learning and IT Strategy is now in place. For work-based learning, there are mentor handbooks for those programmes with a work-based element. The production of the programme specification and handbook for the HND Electrical and Electronic Engineering programme has been deferred as the programme has not recruited any students. The standard of feedback has improved, and students praised the changes in timelines of the return of their assessed work.

## **D Foundation Degrees**

48 Nine of the 18 higher education programmes offered by the College are Foundation Degrees. The College has 292 students (128.40 FTEs) studying on Foundation Degrees. They are all validated by Staffordshire University within the Staffordshire University Regional Federation:

- FD Adult Social Care (part-time) (21 students) (13.97 FTEs)
- FD Complementary Therapies (part-time) (14 students) (6.07 FTEs)
- FD Contemporary Art Practice (full-time) (7 students)
- FD Early Childhood studies (part-time) (176 students) (55.67 FTEs)
- FD Education (Teaching assistants) (part-time) (21 students) (5.6 FTEs)
- FD Film and Television Production Technology and Management (full-time) (20 students)
- FD Leadership and Management (part-time) (14 students) (6.97 FTEs)
- FD Small Business Management (Salon) (part-time) (6 students) (3.36 FTEs)
- FD Sustainability and Environmental Management (part-time) (13 students) (9.76 FTEs)

49 In its Higher Education Strategy, 2009-11, the College stated that it will continue to reflect market demand and skills shortages in identified local growth sectors by working with Staffordshire University to design and to offer new Foundation Degrees. The recent validation of the Foundation Degree Sustainability and Environmental Management was an example of this. The College also designed and validated a Foundation Degree in Logistics Management to reflect local demand, but this did not recruit in 2010. The College has validated a Foundation Degree in Public Services with Staffordshire University and this will be available in September 2011.

50 The team's findings and conclusions in Section E relate to all the College's higher education provision, including the Foundation Degrees that it offers on behalf of its awarding bodies.

## **E Conclusions and summary of judgements**

51 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in South Staffordshire College's management of its responsibilities for academic standards and for the quality of learning opportunities of the awards the College offers on behalf of its awarding bodies. This was based upon discussion with staff and students and scrutiny of evidence provided by the College and its awarding bodies Staffordshire University and the University of Wolverhampton.

52 In the course of the review, the team identified the following areas of **good practice**:

- the active role played by governors in the assurance of the quality of academic standards through their allocation to particular curriculum areas (paragraph 12)
- the payment of fees for membership of professional and scholarly societies by the College (paragraph 20).

53 The team also makes some recommendations for consideration by the College and its awarding bodies.

54 The team considers that it is **advisable** for the College to:

- seek written clarification of the formal roles and responsibilities of College and university staff for all Staffordshire University validated programmes to remove any confusion, in particular with regard to assessment (paragraph 23)
- institute an effective procedure for gathering feedback regularly from higher students and encourage the active involvement of students in this process to enhance the student experience (paragraph 32)
- develop a clear strategy over the use of, and access to, the virtual learning environments so that all higher education students are aware of where relevant information can be found (paragraphs 36 and 39).

55 The team considers that it is **desirable** for the College to:

- further strengthen its ownership of the higher education provision, and use the role of the Higher Education Manager to ensure strong management of its delegated responsibilities (paragraph 11)
- review the sources of information, purpose, dissemination and effectiveness of its communication with higher education students to fully address all issues that are raised (paragraph 43).

56 Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, and other documentary evidence and from its meetings with staff and students, the team concludes that it has **confidence** that, in the context of this Summative review, the College discharges its responsibilities effectively, as set out in the relevant partnership agreement for the management of the standards of the awards of its awarding bodies.

57 Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, and other documentary evidence and from its meetings with staff and students, the team concludes that it has **confidence** that, in the context of this Summative review, the College discharges its responsibilities effectively, as set out in the relevant partnership agreement for the management of the quality of learning opportunities to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

58 Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, and other documentary evidence and from its meetings with staff and students, the team concludes that, in the context of this Summative review, reliance **can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

South Staffordshire College action plan relating to the Summative review: April 2011						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
In the course of the Summative review the team identified the following areas of <b>good practice</b> that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the active role played by governors in the assurance of the quality of academic standards through their allocation to particular curriculum areas (paragraph 12)</li> </ul>	<p>Clerk to Governors to keep record of contacts. Summarise findings and feedback to the Board as part of HE board paper</p> <p>Identify a HE Governor lead to chair HE self-evaluation validation and Quality Improvement Plan monitoring</p>	September 2011	<p>Clerk to Governors: Governing body</p> <p>Director of Quality and Learning</p>	All self-evaluation panels attended by a Governor	Board of Governors	<p>Scrutiny of minutes of meetings and board papers</p> <p>Scrutiny of attendance at Self-Assessment Reporting Validation Panels</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the payment of fees for membership of professional and scholarly societies by the College (paragraph 20).</li> </ul>	<p>(This is to be reviewed in the light of cost savings required)</p> <p>Professional fees paid in priority areas only (that is, those where the fee is a pre-requisite to running the programme)</p>	To review September 2011	<p>Director of Finance</p> <p>Director of Curriculum</p>	Fees paid in priority areas	Finance Committee	Scrutiny of Financial accounts

Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is <b>advisable</b> for the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>seek written clarification of the formal roles and responsibilities of College and university staff for all Staffordshire University validated programmes to remove any confusion, in particular with regard to assessment (paragraph 23)</li> </ul>	<p>Liaise with Staffordshire University staff to create a clear schedule of responsibility by reviewing written documents relating to assessment processes, with particular reference to verification procedures and the schedules for Staffordshire University awards that describe where responsibilities lie</p> <p>Distribute assessment and feedback protocols to teams</p>	4 May 2011	Head of Quality Improvement Quality Managers at HEIs	<p>Materials uploaded from BlackBoard</p> <p>Award leaders fully conversant with responsibilities for delivery and assessment of Staffordshire University programmes</p>	Higher Education Development Group	<p>Materials downloaded for virtual learning environment and distributed to teams</p> <p>Audit of Course Management files</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>institute an effective procedure for gathering feedback regularly from higher students and encourages the active involvement of students in this process to</li> </ul>	<p>Devise and implement a plan to systematically review groups of learners in focus groups</p> <p>At least one bespoke focus group per curriculum area per year in second semester</p> <p>HE Focus Group in first semester</p>	<p>September 2011</p> <p>June 2012</p> <p>December 2011</p>	<p>HE Manager</p> <p>HE Manager</p> <p>HE Manager</p>	<p>Reps from all higher education learner groups attend at least one focus group</p> <p>Increased learner satisfaction (Learner Survey outcomes)</p>	Higher Education Development Group	<p>Learner Satisfaction Report to the College Leadership Team</p> <p>Scrutiny of use of feedback systems</p> <p>Minutes of meetings</p>

<p>enhance the student experience (paragraph 32)</p>	<p>Report findings at Higher Education Development Group and College Leadership Team</p> <p>Analyse and report on the percentage of learners attending forums</p> <p>Raise awareness of HE@southstaffs link, Facebook page and Talkback campaign</p> <p>Implement higher education specific training for HE course reps</p> <p>Implement a 'job description' and induction programme for HE course reps</p> <p>Create a Student/Staff Liaison Committee - Terms of Reference and inaugural meeting</p>	<p>January 2012 and June 2012</p> <p>October 2011</p> <p>September 2011</p> <p>September 2011 May 2012</p>	<p>HE Manager</p> <p>Award tutors</p> <p>HE Manager</p> <p>HE Manager</p> <p>HE Manager</p>	<p>Reps and teachers meet annually to discuss issues relating to higher education</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop a clear strategy over the use of, and access to, the</li> </ul>	<p>Deliver bespoke staff Continuing Professional Development implemented on virtual</p>	<p>July 2011</p>	<p>Head of Learner Services</p>	<p>Learner feedback reports clarity of responsibilities</p>	<p>Higher Education Development Group</p>	<p>Report to E-learning Manager</p> <p>Training Records</p>

virtual learning environments so that all higher education students are aware of where relevant information can be found (paragraphs 36 and 39).	learning environment usage, including e-enrolment and implications of incomplete University enrolment					Continuing Professional Development attendance records
	<p>Create agreement of virtual learning environment usage at local course level</p> <p>Share agreement at Student Induction</p> <p>Clarify guidance to staff on what to use each virtual learning environment for</p> <p>Signpost resources for students to locate easily</p> <p>Include questioning on effectiveness and usefulness of the virtual learning environment in focus groups</p>	September 2011	Award tutors and teaching team	All learners successfully enrolled and able to access virtual learning environments		Audit of STEPS student intranet use
		July 2012	HE Manager			

Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is <b>desirable</b> for the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>further strengthen its ownership of the higher education provision, and use the role of the Higher Education Manager to ensure strong management of its delegated responsibilities (paragraph 11)</li> </ul>	Create standard agenda for Higher Education Development Group and sub Award Tutor group	May 2011	HE Manager	Improved communication between higher education and other business areas	Director of Curriculum	Scrutiny of meeting minutes
	Attend and contribute at SURF and WOLV meetings including quality meetings to promote effective working relationship with partnership managers	From September 2011 to July 2012	HE Manager	Effective management of higher education provision		Scrutiny of meeting minutes
	HE Manager to attend WOLV/SURF meetings and feedback to Higher Education Development Group team	From September 2011 to July 2012	HE Manager	Increase sharing of good practice		Effectiveness of role confirmed though feedback
	Prepare higher education specific reports to identify good practice and areas for development			Timely intervention of non-compliance		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>review the sources of information,</li> </ul>	Report findings of Learner Voice meetings at Higher Education	Twice-yearly	HE Manager	Increased learner satisfaction	Higher Education Development Group	Analysis of survey reports



purpose, dissemination and effectiveness of its communication with higher education students to fully address all issues that are raised (paragraph 43).	Development Group and College Leadership Team					
	Ensure YSWD (You said, We did) is distributed through higher education distribution list	Twice-yearly	HE Manager	Increased learner involvement		Scrutiny of meeting minutes
	Raise awareness of HE@southstaffs link, Facebook page and Talkback campaign	October 2011	HE Manager	Increased staff awareness		
	Implement higher education specific training for HE course reps	October 2011	HE Manager			

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