



Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

June 2009

South Tyneside College

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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 Tyneside College carried out in June 2009

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 awards 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/or 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 robust and consistent overall management of quality assurance processes, leading to the security of academic standards and programmes that are fit for purpose
- the well-established, close and effective partnership links that the College has formed with its awarding bodies
- the careful and very effective management of the strategic planning process, which ensures that programme development responds to the College's strategic aims in partnership with its awarding bodies
- the way the College has responded to the Developmental engagement, including the formation of the higher education Best Practice Group to oversee the dissemination of good practice across all programmes, and the appointment of quality learning advisers
- the close and very effective links that the College has developed with employers in general and the way it responds to their needs
- the comprehensive and systematic needs-analysis-based nature of the staff development plan and arrangements, to support both teaching and support staff across a wide range of activities
- the extensive range of mechanisms in place to actively seek student views, and the use of student feedback to improve provision
- the range of measures taken to engender a higher education community within small teaching groups and the way in which this impacts positively on the student experience
- the strong approach to, and consistent effectiveness of, the procedures for assuring the accuracy and completeness of public information.

Recommendations

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

The team agreed a number of areas where the College is advised to take action:

- to ensure that policies and procedures for the implementation of work-based learning in all Foundation Degree programmes are consistent with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark (FDQB)*
- to ensure that grading criteria for assessed work are consistently made clear to students and utilised fully by all staff through the student assessment feedback form for all programmes
- to ensure that action steps currently being taken to achieve a more effective and robust allocation of staff and equipment in the marine engineering areas of provision are progressed as soon as possible
- to ensure areas of good practice in franchised programmes in designing and using templates for module guides are consistently applied and monitored in all validated programmes.

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

- ensure that for cohorts with large numbers of students, there is more effective availability of key textbooks at all times through consideration of short-loan periods of issue and scheduling of coursework.

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 Tyneside 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 in partnership with Edexcel, the University of Northumbria, the University of Sunderland and the University of Huddersfield. The review was carried out by Dr Elizabeth Briggs, Dr Elaine Crosthwaite and Mr Peter Cutting (reviewers), and Dr David Ross (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 a self-evaluation document and student written submission supplied in advance by the College, documents supplied electronically in advance of the review and in hard copy at the review visit, meetings with teaching staff, programme leaders, students, employers, senior staff and support staff during the course of the review visit and a short tour of specialist facilities.

3 Additionally, the team had access to a series of external body reviews including QAA, Ofsted and awarding body reports. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagement in assessment and the concomitant action plan developed and progressed by the College. A summary of findings from this Developmental engagement is provided in Section C of this report.

4 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.

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

6 The College is spread over two major sites in South Shields and Hebburn and is the biggest provider of post-16 education in the borough of South Tyneside. South Tyneside College was formed by the merger of South Shields Marine and Technical College and Hebburn Technical College. The South Shields College was founded in 1861. In September 1989, the College was reorganised to become the Tertiary College for the Local Authority. The strong marine association of the College has given the institution a national and international reputation for marine and related studies. The College operates in an area of high deprivation indicators, with low participation in higher education and low rates of retention, as well as higher than average unemployment rates.

7 In 2007-08, the College had over 16,500 students on a wide range of programmes offering a wide and diverse range of full and part-time education across five faculties. Approximately 2,500 students are full-time 16 to 18 year-olds. In 2008-09 the College has 1,432 higher education students who are mainly employed and on part-time programmes. Of these, 953 are home students and 479 are overseas students.

8 The higher education programmes are located within all curricular areas alongside further education provision. Of the total higher education population of 1,432 (1,153 full-time equivalent) students, 1,094 are on the South Shields Campus and 338 on the Hebburn site, with 996 being full-time and 436 part-time.

9 The scope of provision with enrolled numbers of students in 2008-09 includes:

Edexcel

- HNC in Business (6)
- HNC in Manufacturing Engineering (99)
- HNC in Electrical/Electronic Engineering (48)
- HND in Electrical/Electronic Engineering (8)
- HND in Marine Engineering (273)
- HND in Nautical Science (561)

University of Northumbria

- BEng (Hons) in Marine Engineering (17)
- Foundation Degree in Criminal Justice (34)
- Foundation Degree in Marine Engineering (31)

University of Sunderland

- Part-time Certificate / Professional Certificate in Education (Qualified Teacher, Learning and Skills (QTLS)) (43)
- FD in Marine Operations (32)
- FD in Applied Art (20)
- FD in Media Design (Publishing) (12)
- FD in Service Sector Management (4)
- FD in Education and Care (43)
- FD in Counselling (50)
- FD in Health and Social Care (21)
- FD in Applied Music Practice (13)
- FD in Working with Young People (15)
- FD in Leadership and Management (6)
- FD in Computing (11)
- FD in Packaging Design and Branding (3)

University of Huddersfield

- Part-time Certificate/Professional Certificate in Education (QTLS) (61)
- BA Education and Training (21).

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

10 The College has established partnerships with the University of Northumbria, the University of Huddersfield and the University of Sunderland, with the latter being particularly strong and covered by the University's designation of the College as a 'strategic partner'. The College also has a standard partnership agreement with Edexcel covering higher national awards.

11 All partnerships have written Memoranda of Agreement, which explicitly outline the College and the awarding body responsibilities with respect to programme management and quality. In all cases, the awarding body approves and appoints the appropriate external examiners. The team confirmed that these partnerships are strong, well managed and mutually beneficial.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

12 The strategic direction for higher education at the College is stated in the self-evaluation document as growth through Foundation Degrees and, in the past three years, provision has grown from two to 17 programmes. Due to circumstances dictated by HEFCE, growth is currently capped. The College has detailed plans at an advanced stage for a major rebuild of its campuses and to concentrate all higher education provision on one site. The current economic climate has delayed progress on this. The College's higher education strategic plan is monitored by the Learning and Skills Committee, and progressed through the higher education action plan.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

13 Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team and this was submitted along with the College's self-evaluation document. In preparing this, the College provided students with appropriate briefing information and arranged for an independent consultant to help the students shape their written submission through a focus group discussion. This helpful document was supplemented through an informative meeting with the team during the review visit.

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?

14 The team confirmed the self-evaluation document claims that the College's management of academic standards is robust and supported by all staff and a clearly defined set of procedures in the comprehensive higher education Quality Handbook. The Handbook is updated annually and is available on the virtual learning environment.

College committees are well informed of quality and standards issues through a rigorous reporting structure and appropriate staff and staff-student meetings.

15 Across the College, programme evaluation makes good use of key performance indicators to inform student progress and achievement. Annual programme self-assessment reports provide an excellent basis for monitoring standards and programme improvement developments. These reports are appropriately informed by reflection on external examiner, student and employer views and, in turn, inform the annual College higher education action plan. This is monitored by the higher education Academic Standards and Policy Committee, as well as the departmental self-assessments and the College-wide higher education self-assessment report. Programme self-assessment reports are reviewed at the departmental level via the faculty boards of study.

16 The College Validating Committee has external peer representation and validates the College. This process contributes significantly to maintaining and enhancing standards, and enables the College to identify areas of good practice and areas for improvement. Departmental operational issues are addressed through the resulting departmental action plans. The Academic Standards and Policy Committee considers all reports concerning programme standards, and has the responsibility for developing and implementing quality assurance procedures. The committees involved in this process discharge their duties in an efficient and effective manner.

17 The College operates robust and effective arrangements for curricular development with strong involvement of its staff in conjunction with partner institutions, students and employers and utilises the major components of the Academic Infrastructure in doing so, as outlined in paragraphs 20 to 27 of this report. Annual monitoring processes and annual curriculum audits are used well to identify where changes in the curriculum need to be addressed.

18 College arrangements for internal moderation are rigorous and clearly understood by academic staff. All assessments have an internal moderator, or a verifier for Edexcel units with clearly documented responsibilities. The Quality Unit collects all external examiners' reports, which are read by the Principal and Vice-Principal, and ensures in conjunction with awarding bodies that actions arising from reports are acted upon by academic staff. External examiners' reports indicate that assessments are well planned and at an appropriate academic level.

19 The College has responded to the Developmental engagement action plan in a systematic and robust manner. An updated action plan shows that good progress has been made against all of the conclusions listed in the Developmental engagement report. For example, the College has strengthened its mechanisms for sharing good practice across its higher education provision principally through the new higher education Best Practice Group and through developing peer review. The appointment of quality and learning advisers is also being well received by staff. These are examples of good practice in response to the Developmental engagement.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

20 A number of robust and effective internal audits of College processes against the *Code of practice* have been implemented and reports on these are presented to the Academic Standards and Policy Committee and appropriate action steps are identified in the higher education action plan. For example, the College has made good progress in minimising inconsistencies in its assessment practice through an annual assessment audit of student feedback practices as a formal part of the quality assurance process.

21 Other good examples of the audit processes employed include the new internal programme validation policy; the introduction of a booklet for higher education students on finance; improvements in procedures for academic appeals and complaints; enhanced admissions processes; career information and guidance; and work-based learning. The commendable audit-based approach taken by the College to enhance and develop its use of the Academic Infrastructure, supported by appropriate staff development, is a feature of good practice.

22 Staff have also made good use of their understanding of the Academic Infrastructure in writing intended learning outcomes and assessment briefs for Edexcel designed modules and in the development of programme specifications with collaborative partners and, in some cases, other colleges.

23 A further robust use of the *Code of practice* has been to enhance programme validation procedures, giving the College a more strategic oversight in the context of its new higher education strategy. Particularly effective examples of this are the more strategic, secure and streamlined pilot process for new higher education Validation Panel reporting routes and the validation of Foundation Degree programmes written by College staff that make appropriate reference to the FHEQ and the FDQB. Employers are closely involved in the process to ensure currency and work-place relevance.

24 Most Foundation Degrees are effectively engaged with the FDQB, particularly with respect to changes in philosophy from work placements to work-based learning. However, this is not universal practice and the team noted some examples where this practice could be enhanced. The higher education Best Practice Group has identified this area for progress to meet the necessary standards and for dissemination of good practice in work-based learning.

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?

25 As outlined in the self-evaluation document, there are strong and well-established partnerships with the awarding bodies and all staff apply regulations appropriately, as confirmed in external examiner reports. Higher education quality assurance procedures are very effectively aligned with awarding body requirements and expectations and are covered initially through well structured Memoranda of Agreement. Each partnership has well-defined responsibilities for the validation, assessment and annual monitoring of awards. College defined self-assessment reports are a primary focus for the development of action plans to enhance student learning, and are an effective and required source for the awarding bodies to ensure that the academic standards of their awards are secure. A particularly commendable example of this is the self-assessment report for the University of Huddersfield franchised programmes in education, and demonstrates well how the College team engages in a full and reflective analysis of the operation of the programme and external examiner comments. All partnership links are strengthened through College representation on relevant University committees and examination boards.

26 Assessment is effectively designed to fit the intended learning outcomes and is agreed in advance with the partner universities or Edexcel, in conjunction with their external examiners. Analysis by the team of external examiner reports shows that these comment favourably on the College's procedures for assignment briefs and assessment decisions, and that internal moderation and verification processes are fit for purpose. All internal

moderation procedures directly involve all staff delivering its awards and ensure effective and appropriate standardisation of assessment. This process also enables College staff to draw effectively on beneficial examples of good practice in internal moderation.

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

27 Staff development activities with partner universities have provided College staff with good support in maintaining appropriate academic standards and in making use of the Academic Infrastructure in all aspects of programme design and delivery. For example, in partnership with the Universities of Sunderland and Huddersfield there is good cross-marking and shared moderation including all partner colleges, which leads to the promotion and dissemination of good practice through staff development events. In addition, the University of Huddersfield holds annual network meetings at which assessment design is discussed. These are effective and efficient methods of staff development.

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?

28 The arrangements for effective management of academic standards, as outlined in paragraphs 14 to 18, also contribute to the effective management of the student learning experience. Programme leaders coordinate a robust process of regular staff meetings to identify and resolve problems that are affecting the student learning experience. Faculty boards of study have a robust process of oversight of the student learning experience that includes meeting each term to review and monitor relevant academic matters identified through the various College quality assurance procedures. The boards are also charged with regular response to matters arising through student feedback and these responsibilities are clearly understood and effectively carried out.

How does the College assure itself that it is fulfilling its obligations to its awarding body(ies) to ensure that students receive appropriate learning opportunities?

29 The College operates an effective and robust process in providing appropriate learning opportunities for students. For example, all higher education students receive a set of standardised documents, including a programme specification with stated learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and a series of module guides, completed following dialogue with awarding bodies. Students comment favourably on these documents and find them useful.

30 There is also a robust process in place for approval and moderation of assessment assignments that leads to effective maintenance of the student learning experience. After initial design by the College, assignments are sent to the appropriate awarding body for either direct approval or consultation with external examiners. There are appropriate second-marking and internal moderation procedures in place, involving awarding bodies where required.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

31 The College utilises the Academic Infrastructure effectively in a range of ways, as outlined in paragraphs 20 to 24, including in the design of programmes, the preparation of programme specifications, defining and revising learning outcomes, and in the use of subject and qualification benchmarks in the validation process. All of these contribute to the maintenance of the quality of learning opportunities.

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

32 The self-evaluation document notes that student success on higher education programmes (number of achievers as a percentage of the number of starters), was 81 per cent in 2007-08, which is consistent with previous years. The College attributes this success to a number of factors, including the significant levels of employer engagement and Sector Skills Councils, helping to ensure the strong employment focus of many of the programmes. There is also a strong and proactive input from support services. However, in marine engineering programme areas the success rate is lower. This is partly due to students leaving, due to successful completion of the further education vocational qualification and Certificate of Competency. There is a strong College action plan to rectify any pedagogical and support issues in this problem area. This plan is a good example of the College responding quickly, robustly and effectively to its various performance indicators emanating through annual monitoring to effect improvements to retention, achievement and success.

33 Grading criteria are developed well by staff and provided to enable students to meet the intended learning outcomes for each assessment, although some of the student work sampled did not show these. All programme specifications have a good assessment matrix showing how individual modules contribute to the overall programme intended learning outcomes. These are effective for student guidance and clarification of workloads. Student concerns on assessment practice in the marine courses regarding the volume of assessed work and loading is being acted upon appropriately and in a timely manner.

34 Students receive appropriate and well-formed information during induction about assessment and the relationship between assessment criteria and intended learning outcomes. This is well appreciated by students. Students in employment commented favourably that an understanding of this relationship in theoretical academic work is helpful in the context of their practical experiences in the workplace.

35 The team confirmed the self-evaluation document's assertion that the College higher education assessment audit earlier this year had prompted a good and well received improvement in the approach to assessment feedback given to students. Students confirmed that there is now a more effective two-week turnaround time in most cases, and dates are tracked. This action to improve inconsistencies in feedback timescales is another good example of effective and timely action taken after the Developmental engagement. The College has also recognised that it needs a more stringent policy for standardised assessment paperwork for all programmes. This is currently being developed through the higher education Best Practice Group.

36 The College has a variety of effective and well-developed mechanisms for obtaining stakeholder feedback on curricular design and assessment. This includes employer involvement in programme advisory boards, from awarding bodies and through the validation/revalidation process. This is supplemented through a robust variety of measures to harness the student voice including student representatives on committees and initiatives

such as 'Buzz the Boss'. There are several examples where student views have been acted upon to effect changes to programme delivery.

37 There is a well-developed and maintained system of strong employer engagement and this is utilised effectively to enhance the student learning experience in a number of ways. For instance, there is good practice in marine programmes where a close relationship between the College, employers and the Merchant Navy Training Board is influential in the design of work-based learning. Traditional work placements for Edexcel programmes are well designed and beneficial to the students. Employers indicated that the courses are relevant to industry, and students gain appropriate practical skills using up-to-date College equipment.

38 The College has a formal system for reporting on student attendance and performance, and for making visits to learners on placement. This mostly operates very well; however, in the meeting with employers, the team noted that some sponsors had not received adequate feedback on their students after they had returned to College. The team concluded that the College could consider providing more feedback to employers following such placements.

39 The team noted that College staff involved with the delivery of the FD in Education and Care are taking part with the University of Sunderland in a Higher Education Academy project on formative assessment in higher education. This has been an effective and well-developed initiative and the College is disseminating the good practice from this to all staff involved in higher education programmes.

40 The College plagiarism policy is clear to students and implementation is effective and enhanced through guidelines and study skills support at induction and from the library. Appropriate plagiarism detection software is used to good and growing effect with essay-type assignments. In an effective response to findings in the recent audit of assessment, first-year students are now allowed to use the software in its formative capacity. This is improving their understanding of how to avoid poorly referenced work. Good practice in this area has been shared across all programmes to improve this perceived weakness. Students recognise the benefit of the detection system, and support the College in its aim of ensuring fairness in assessment. As an alternative method of preventing plagiarism and where appropriate, individualised assessments are being developed, such as reflective work in music through an e-portfolio.

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

41 The team noted low enrolments on some higher education programmes, which the College maintained was due to a variety of reasons including late validation affecting marketing. A range of measures has been developed in an innovative way to overcome the impact of small groups on the student experience, including combining first and second-year or full and part-time students into a larger group and modifying the learning strategy by providing more one-to-one support. The College also maintains that such small-group experiences enrich the student learning experience in several ways. The College will, in future, require a minimum enrolment of 12 students in the first year of a programme. The College is aware that this may affect provision in some areas, although they have recently strengthened marketing efforts.

42 During induction, there is a robust and effective process in place to inform students of the wide range of student services available and the activities in which they can participate, and this also includes well-received and effective visits to the two local university partners. Student representatives also help to engender a higher education community by talking

to new students. All students are assigned a personal tutor at induction and this process is an effective and appropriate part of the overall support model. The College also has a Learner Involvement Policy that ensures students are supported effectively through open lines of communication, where problems can be readily brought to the attention of programme leaders.

43 There is a range of appropriate support services that provides assistance with learning disabilities, including literacy and numeracy, and support with dyslexia. A recent restructuring of Student Services now provides a more visible and effective service for students across the College and has also led to the appointment of an initial advice and guidance specialist for higher education. Students confirmed that initial advice and guidance was satisfactory.

44 There is an effective and well-developed process in place to assure appropriate library support, including the librarian attending programme committees and liaising with curriculum managers, and through the Library Committee. Library induction for students is provided both to the College facilities and to the library of validating universities through the virtual learning environment and is accomplished in an efficient and helpful manner.

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

45 Considerable improvements to overall staff development strategy and management have been made since the Developmental engagement. There is now a clear and robust overall strategy for staff development, and budgets are set to ensure funding for priority areas as well as to meet individual needs. The Staff Development Manager proposes a forward plan, which College senior management approves in relation to the College strategic plan.

46 The College has a strategic aim to have well-qualified staff and ensures that staff have subject expertise and currency to deliver higher education by requiring them to hold a degree in their teaching area. All staff are teacher trained and new staff are undertaking a Certificate in Education. Students indicated that teaching staff were professional and knowledgeable, and easily contactable. However, they noted that cover for illness was not always satisfactory. Also, in marine engineering, students reported some difficulty in accessing workshop equipment. The team was assured that actions were underway to address issues with staffing and equipment in this area.

47 The College has a wide range of staff development activities open to, and effectively engaged with, by both higher education teaching and support staff. These include pilot schemes for peer observation and a comprehensive programme of cross-College events, put together and run by the Staff Development Manager. The College effectively supports this by blocking out non-teaching weeks for training. The identification of needs and stimulus for staff development activities is appropriately accomplished through a number of sources, including individual performance review, teaching observation, and the programme validation process. Good practice from awarding bodies is disseminated in the College through a range of staff development activities. For example, the University of Sunderland runs an Higher Education in Further Education Practitioners Group.

48 All teaching staff are members of the Institute for Learning and undertake 30 hours of continuing personal development per year. Activities include studying for higher degree qualifications; participation in events at awarding bodies and at in-College training events; and updating through placements or courses on technological advancements in

equipment. Staff are very appreciative of this initiative and maintain that it is effective in enhancing their overall development.

49 As a further effective and well-developed outcome of the Developmental engagement action plan, quality learning advisers have been established in the last academic year. There is one per faculty, with a variable role to support and mentor staff. There are also advanced tutors with a complementary role to quality learning advisers and subject learning coaches.

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?

50 The College has an effective process for allocation of resources, which entails assigning a proportion of the higher education capital grant to faculties. Curriculum plans are produced each year, which indicate the hours of staffing and resources required, and these plans are reviewed and monitored by line managers. Awarding bodies are involved in resource matters, and when a new course is validated a declaration of resources is required.

51 Students indicated that specialist equipment is current and relevant to the workplace. The College has a four-year cycle for the renewal of information technology equipment, and staff and students confirmed that there are sufficient and appropriate levels of this and associated computer software. Some partner universities have provided financial support for the purchase of specialist equipment.

52 The library has an appropriate budget for books and electronic media, and is able to stock recommended texts on a 1:8 student ratio. Students were of the view that the library is well stocked, with good access. In addition, students make use of the library facilities of validating universities, directly with the local ones and remotely with the University of Huddersfield through an associate online virtual mentoring scheme for students. The availability of College library books for students on certain courses was affected by the scheduling of coursework, and the College may wish to consider ways of smoothing the demand on textbooks with consideration of short-loan periods.

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?

53 The College publishes a range of publicity and marketing information about its higher education courses including a higher education prospectus, course leaflets and general information for employers and students. This is supplemented with a range of programme specifications, student handbooks and module guides. This information is found to be very useful to students both before and during study. Programme specifications and most module guides issued to students contain intended learning outcomes that are clearly mapped to assessments.

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?

54 All publicity and marketing-related information is subject to rigorous procedures to ensure accuracy, completeness and clarity. These processes are stipulated by the awarding bodies which have the final approval function. However, as noted in the Developmental engagement, the situation with student information is more variable with high accuracy for 'franchised' provision but less so for 'approved' provision. This is demonstrated in some of the module handbooks. Some (for example, FD Leadership and Management) have clear assessment criteria whereas others (for example, FD Counselling) have none. There is good practice in FD Applied Music Practice, where students are encouraged to write reflectively about their learning, performance and experience of the module, and this could be incorporated into the developing cross-College template rather than being unique to this course.

55 The action plan developed as part of the Developmental engagement is allowing the College to make commendable progress in addressing this issue with a cross-College template for a student handbook in place and used by all courses from September 2008. Guidance on work-based learning and standardisation of module guides are to follow for next session.

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

56 The Developmental engagement of assessment at the College took place in May 2008. The lines of enquiry agreed with the College in advance were the match between learning outcomes and assessment; the quality of learner feedback; and the role of assessment in developing job readiness, including links with employers and the 'work-based' nature of assessment. The College has four awarding bodies: the University of Sunderland; the University of Northumbria; the University of Huddersfield, and Edexcel.

57 The Developmental engagement team identified a number of areas of good practice in all three core themes. The good engagement with the Academic Infrastructure in designing assessment on higher education programmes and the way in which input from staff, employers, professional and industrial bodies is also used for this purpose. Also good practice was the strong relationship with all awarding bodies at staff and college level, which ensures clear monitoring and reflection on the relationship between outcomes, assessment and student feedback and the way in which programme reviews and annual reporting cycles lead to action steps on assessment practice and design in response to feedback from staff, students and employers. There had been an excellent recent College audit of assessment leading to enhanced assessment practice and design, within a framework structured around relevant sections of the *Code of practice* and other key aspects of the Academic Infrastructure. The College encourages higher education teaching staff to develop clear links between intended learning outcomes and assessment, and communicates this well to students. There is mostly effective feedback to students on assessment that is understood and given in a timely and supportive manner. The Developmental engagement team found that assessment

is conducted with rigour and fairness and that excellent student support is provided by staff. The strong links that the College develops and maintains with employers leads to effective engagement in assessment feedback and monitoring and contributes to enhancement of the student learning experience. Finally, the published information on assessment given to students and employers is clear and helpful.

58 The Developmental engagement team also made a number of recommendations, including the advisability of extending existing good practice in writing assessment plans and matrices that link together outcomes and assessment assignments and working towards standardisation of information on assessment in student handbooks for all higher education provision. The College was also advised to ensure standardisation of assessment feedback forms, using good practice evident in some programmes and to develop the already strong links with employers that enhances student assessment in some areas, to all provision. The Developmental engagement team asked the College to consider keeping records of attendance at all staff development events including those on assessment practice and design and to consider continuing to work towards consistency in application of academic policy relating to assessment in all areas of higher education. Finally, the team asked the College to consider amending the College Higher Education Quality Manual to reflect current arrangements and practice for developing and maintaining employer engagement.

D Foundation Degrees

59 Driven by the College's mission statement and higher education strategic plan, there has been a rapid expansion in Foundation Degrees at the College from two programmes four years ago to the 17 planned to run in 2009-10. Of these, 14 courses are validated through the University of Sunderland and the remaining three by Northumbria University, and all reflect needs in the local community.

60 The courses include full and part-time, day and evening modes of attendance, for those already working in the appropriate sector and for those who would like to do so. In 2008-09 approximately 25 per cent of all higher education students are studying for Foundation Degrees and this is likely to grow next year with new intakes for the five new courses beginning in September 2008, and second-year groups for the two programmes that ran their first year in 2008-09.

61 In developing, running and reviewing these courses the College makes use of the excellent relationship it has with employers, training providers and professional bodies and, following the Developmental engagement, responded to concerns raised by producing an employer leaflet in March 2009 and making this available. There were other development points identified concerning work-based learning and, although these have been partly addressed, some concerns, principally the incorporation of work-based learning (as defined in the FDQB and in the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*) persist, for example the work placement handbook from the FD Criminal Justice. The College is aware of the need to take action but further activity is needed to ensure all students experience work-based learning and not merely a work placement.

62 Engagement by the College with key national, regional and local employers is very good and helps to ensure academic relevance of the curricula for Foundation Degree programmes; for example, links with the Merchant Navy Training Board in the continuing development of marine programmes such as the new FD in Marine Operations, and the FD in Criminal Justice Studies.

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

- the careful and very effective management of the strategic planning process which ensures that programme development responds to the College's strategic aims in partnership with its awarding bodies (paragraphs 10, 15, 16)
- the well-established, close and effective partnership links that the College has formed with its awarding bodies (paragraphs 10, 25, 26)
- the robust and consistent overall management of quality assurance processes leading to the security of academic standards and programmes that are fit for purpose (paragraphs 14 to 18)
- the close and very effective links that the College has developed with employers in general and the way it responds to their needs (paragraphs 17, 23, 32, 36, 37, 53)
- the way the College has responded to the Developmental engagement, including the formation of the higher education Best Practice Group to oversee the dissemination of good practice across all programmes and the appointment of quality learning advisers (paragraphs 19, 35, 45, 49, 54, 55)
- the extensive range of mechanisms in place to actively seek student views and the use of student feedback to improve provision (paragraphs 20, 28, 57)
- the comprehensive and systematic needs analysis based nature of the staff development plan and arrangements to support both teaching and support staff across a wide range of activities (paragraphs 26, 27, 45, 47, 58)
- the range of measures taken to engender a higher education community within small teaching groups and the way in which this impacts positively on the student experience (paragraph 41)
- the strong approach to, and consistent effectiveness of, the procedures for assuring the accuracy and completeness of public information (paragraph 54).

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

The team agreed a number of areas where the College is advised to take action:

- ensure that grading criteria for assessed work are consistently made clear to students and utilised fully by all staff through the student assessment feedback form for all programmes (paragraph 33)
- ensure that action steps currently being taken to achieve a more effective and robust allocation of staff and equipment in the marine engineering areas of provision are progressed as soon as possible (paragraph 46)
- ensure areas of good practice in franchised programmes in designing and using templates for module guides are consistently applied and monitored in all validated programmes (paragraph 55)
- ensure that policies and procedures for the implementation of work-based learning in all Foundation Degree programmes are consistent with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* and the FDQB (paragraph 61).

The team also agreed the following area where it would be desirable for the College to take action:

- ensure that for cohorts with large numbers of students, there is more effective availability of key textbooks at all times through consideration of short-loan periods of issue and scheduling of coursework (paragraph 52).

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

65 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in the 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: the University of Sunderland, the University of Northumbria, the University of Huddersfield, and Edexcel.

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

- the careful and very effective management of the strategic planning process which ensures that programme development responds to the College's strategic aims in partnership with its awarding bodies (paragraphs 10, 15, 16)
- the well-established, close and effective partnership links that the College has formed with its awarding bodies (paragraphs 10, 25, 26)
- the robust and consistent overall management of quality assurance processes leading to the security of academic standards and programmes that are fit for purpose (paragraphs 14 to 18)
- the close and very effective links that the College has developed with employers in general and the way it responds to their needs (paragraphs 17, 23, 32, 36, 37, 53)
- the way the College has responded to the Developmental engagement, including the formation of the higher education Best Practice Group to oversee the dissemination of good practice across all programmes and the appointment of quality learning advisers (paragraphs 19, 35, 45, 49, 54, 55)
- the extensive range of mechanisms in place to actively seek student views and the use of student feedback to improve provision (paragraphs 20, 28, 57)
- the comprehensive and systematic needs analysis based nature of the staff development plan and arrangements to support both teaching and support staff across a wide range of activities (paragraphs 26, 27, 45, 47, 58)
- the range of measures taken to engender a higher education community within small teaching groups and the way in which this impacts positively on the student experience (paragraph 41)
- the strong approach to, and consistent effectiveness of, the procedures for assuring the accuracy and completeness of public information (paragraph 54).

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

The team agreed a number of areas where the College is advised to take action:

- ensure that grading criteria for assessed work are consistently made clear to students and utilised fully by all staff through the student assessment feedback form for all programmes (paragraph 33)
- ensure that action steps currently being taken to achieve a more effective and robust allocation of staff and equipment in the marine engineering areas of provision are progressed as soon as possible (paragraph 46)
- ensure areas of good practice in franchised programmes in designing and using templates for module guides are consistently applied and monitored in all validated programmes (paragraph 55)
- ensure that policies and procedures for the implementation of work-based learning in all Foundation Degree programmes are consistent with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* and the FDQB (paragraph 61).

The team also agreed the following area where it would be desirable for the College to take action:

- ensure that for cohorts with large numbers of students, there is more effective availability of key textbooks at all times through consideration of short-loan periods of issue and scheduling of coursework (paragraph 52).

68 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.

69 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.

70 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/or completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

South Tyneside College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 2009						
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 good practice that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the careful and very effective management of the strategic planning process which ensures that programme development responds to the College's strategic aims in partnership with its awarding bodies (paragraphs 10, 15, 16) 	Careful monitoring of external environment to maximise opportunities for HE strategic development	ongoing	HE Strategy group	Continued HE development	Senior management and governors	Through college systems in strategic and development planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the well-established, close and effective partnership links that the College has formed with its awarding bodies (paragraphs 10, 25, 26) 	Continue membership of all AW body groups and take advantage of all opportunities for joint training and development	ongoing	Head of HEPS and HOFs	Continuance of close and effective partnership links	Head of HEPS	Through reports to SMT

South Tyneside College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 2009						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the robust and consistent overall management of quality assurance processes leading to the security of academic standards and programmes that are fit for purpose (paragraphs 14 to 18) 	Continue to annually review QA processes to ensure that they are fit for purpose and incorporate all changes to the AI	Annually	Head of HE and Professional Studies and Quality Unit	Continuance of robust QA processes that are fit for purpose	HE Academic Standards and Policy	Through internal QA processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the close and very effective links that the College has developed with employers in general and the way it responds to their needs (paragraphs 17, 23, 32, 36, 37, 53) 	Continue membership of employer groups continue to take advantage of opportunities for close partner working with employers	Ongoing	All HOFs	Maintain close and effective relationships with employers	VP C+G	Through the college HE development of new programmes and approval for new programmes

South Tyneside College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 2009						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the way the College has responded to the Developmental engagement, including the formation of the higher education Best Practice Group to oversee the dissemination of good practice across all programmes and the appointment of quality learning advisers (paragraphs 19, 35, 45, 49, 54, 55) 	Continue to review and develop the role of the best practice group and look for opportunities to develop	ongoing	HE Academic Standards and Policy group	Continued dissemination of good practice	HE ASP	Through reports to the college Quality Improvement forum

South Tyneside College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 2009						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the extensive range of mechanisms in place to actively seek student views and the use of student feedback to improve provision (paragraphs 20, 28, 57) 	<p>Continue to assess the effectiveness of methods used in capturing the student voice through regular dialogue with students and concentrate on the students return to the NSS in 09/10</p>	<p>March 2010</p>	<p>Quality manager</p>	<p>Continuous improvement in responsiveness to the students voice</p>	<p>CMT and HE ASP</p>	<p>Through the Quality Improvement Forum</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the comprehensive and systematic needs analysis based nature of the staff development plan and arrangements to support both teaching and support staff across a wide range of activities (paragraphs 26, 27, 45, 47, 58) 	<p>Maintain the comprehensive and needs based nature of staff development</p>	<p>Annual reports</p>	<p>Staff development manager</p>	<p>Continued focus on teaching and learning</p>	<p>SMT and governors</p>	<p>Through HR processes</p>

South Tyneside College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 2009						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the range of measures taken to engender a higher education community within small teaching groups and the way in which this impacts positively on the student experience (paragraph 41) 	Continues to review class numbers and continue to explore ways of fostering an HE community	Ongoing	Head of HEPS and VP C+G,	Effective HE Ethos within the college	SMT	Through college Curriculum audit process and feedback from students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the strong approach to, and consistent effectiveness of, the procedures for assuring the accuracy and completeness of public information (paragraph 54). 	Maintain and develop current procedures for assuring the accuracy of public information	Ongoing	All HOFs	Maintain effective public information	HE ASP and QUIF	Through internal QA procedures using college Quality and Learning Advisers

South Tyneside College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 2009						
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team agreed a number of areas where the College should be advised to take action:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that grading criteria for assessed work are consistently made clear to students and utilised fully by all staff through the student assessment feedback form for all programmes (paragraph 33) 	Introduce new assessment feedback form which was trialled in 08/09 and ensure that all students and staff are briefed about its use	September 2009	Head of HEPS and Good Practice group	Student feedback on assessment feedback is improved	HE ASP and HOFs	Through annual Assessment Audit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that action steps currently being taken to achieve a more effective and robust allocation of staff and equipment in the marine engineering areas of provision are progressed as soon as possible (paragraph 46) 	Staffing and resources in the marine college to be reviewed and an action plan to be produced.	September 2009	Head of marine college and SMT	More effective use of resources	SMT	Through termly staff utilisation audits and from student feedback

South Tyneside College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 2009						
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure areas of good practice in franchised programmes in designing and using templates for module guides are consistently applied and monitored in all validated programmes (paragraph 55). 	Produce guidelines for the production of module guides and disseminate to all HE programmes	December 2009	Quality manager	Standardisation of the presentation of information for students	HE ASP	Through internal QA procedures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that policies and procedures for the implementation of work-based learning in all Foundation Degree programmes are consistent with the precepts of the <i>Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning</i> and the FDQB (paragraph 61) 	Review and map college policies and procedures on WBL against the code and FDQB and produce new policies and systems where necessary	Christmas 2009	Head of HEPs and Quality manager	College systems are fully compliant with all new aspects of the AI	HE ASP	Through Curriculum audits

South Tyneside College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 2009						
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<p>The team agreed the following areas where it would be desired to take action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ensure that for cohorts with large numbers of students, there is more effective availability of key textbooks at all times through consideration of short-loan periods of issue and scheduling of coursework (paragraph 52). 	<p>Review of all course books required and action with the library staff on numbers, and loan procedures</p>	<p>September 2009</p>	<p>HOFs and Head librarian</p>	<p>Better access to library resources for all students</p>	<p>SMT</p>	<p>Through Library committee and student feedback</p>

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