QAA

Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

May 2010

South Devon College

SR91/2009

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 Devon College carried out in May 2010

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 agreement, 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 positive engagement between the College and the University of Plymouth results in valuable cooperative support being freely given by staff of the awarding body. It also provides a thorough and effective mechanism for the assurance of standards and quality of the College's higher education provision

- the excellent working relationship with University of Plymouth Colleges is valuable in supporting the College in enhancing the quality of learning opportunities

- a rigorous course review process results in clear action plans which promote improvement

- there is a robust pilot lesson observation process which aligns with the requirements of higher education teaching and learning

- the strong links with employers significantly enhance the quality of teaching and learning and enable students to demonstrate learning outcomes directly linked to vocational practice

- feedback and support is readily available from tutors, and is effective in promoting learning and in enabling students to achieve high standards

- the College is effective in disseminating information on progression from further to higher education and local employment opportunities, and this is commended by employers.

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:

- produce an annual monitoring report on its higher education programmes to provide an overview of its provision and to facilitate the dissemination of good practice.

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

- continue to strengthen its procedures, including pre-course guidance, to reduce the number of student withdrawals

- ensure the provision of staff development opportunities to update and embed procedures relating to internal verification

- enhance the support provided for higher education staff through a practitioners' handbook, which should provide key information pertinent to those new to higher education

- proceed as soon as possible to ensure that its virtual learning environment allows more effective access to that of the University of Plymouth.

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 Devon 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 the University of Plymouth. The review was carried out by Mr Maldwyn Buckland, Ms Ann-Marie Colbert and Professor David Eastwood (reviewers) and Dr John Barkham (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 in gaining information to assist with the assessment of the impact of Foundation Degree awards, Section D of this report summarises details of the Foundation Degree programmes delivered at the College.

4   South Devon College is a medium-sized general further education college. It was recognised by Ofsted in November 2008 as an outstanding college. The College received Beacon status in July 2009 and was one of the first colleges to be awarded the Training Standards of the Skills Funding Agency. It predominantly focuses on serving the learning needs of Torbay and South Devon. The College benefits from the nationally recognised, largest and longest-established regional partnership with the University of Plymouth. The University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty (the Faculty) educates over 10,000 students, runs 301 live programmes and works with 1,800 staff in partner colleges across the South West Peninsula.

5   The College enrols over 14,000 further and higher education and adult community learners of whom 500 are studying at higher education level. The College's mission is 'inspiring our community through learning for all'. It demonstrates the College's commitment to the pursuit of excellence through a process of continous improvement. The total number of college staff is currently 572 full-time equivalents, with annual income and expenditure around £27 million. The College consists of a main campus, opened in 2005, located in Paignton. It also includes off-site centres, including the Noss Marine Academy at Kingswear, the Music Mill at Newton Abbot, Adult Community Learning Centres at Paignton, Brixham and Torquay, and a Management Centre at Heathfield, Newton Abbot.

6   Higher education programmes provided by the College under the auspices of the University of Plymouth are as follows:

University of Plymouth	Student numbers
• HNC Construction	23
• FdA Business	24
• FdA Creative Digital Media	39
• FdA Events and Conference Management	9
• FdA Early Years Care and Education	52
• FdA Integrated Crafts	7
• FdA Interior Design	7
• FdA Performance Practice and Events Management	6
• FdA Three Dimensional Design	14
• FdA Visual Studies	10
• FdA Young People and Community Services	25
• FdSc Animal Science	12
• FdSc Biosciences (Approved for 2010-2011 start)	
• FdSc Computing	25
• FdSc Exercise Science and Fitness	24
• FdSc Healthcare Practice	33
• FdSc Law	7
• FdSc Outdoor Education	19
• FdSc Tourism and Hospitality Management	22
• FdSc Yacht Operations	9
• Cert HE Combined Studies	13
• BSc (Hons) Extended Science Year 0	15
• Post Graduate Certificate of Education	8

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

7   The College has a partnership with a single awarding body, the University of Plymouth. The Academic Cooperation Agreement with the University dates from March 2002. In the agreement, the College acknowledges that the higher education programmes are courses of the University and that the academic responsibility for them is vested in the University's Academic Board. The College is obliged to provide suitably qualified staff to conduct and manage each approved programme in accordance with its definitive document and handbook. Students enrolled on the programmes have the status and rights of any other student of the University in relation to academic matters. The only significant recent change has been moving the HNC Construction from under the auspices of Edexcel to those of the University.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

8   The College has expanded rapidly over the past five years. It has significantly increased the number of higher education programmes and distinct pathways. However, student numbers are now restricted by HEFCE and it is anticipated that these will remain at a target number of 457 for the immediate future. An £8.9 million University Centre building is planned to open on the campus in 2010. The centre will provide a designated higher education student social area, extensive lecture and conference facilities, flexible teaching spaces, a research centre and an ideas laboratory for business start-ups. This new centre will be operational for the 2010-11 student cohort, will encourage more flexible delivery to allow further widening of participation, and will facilitate employer needs and progression to university.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

9   Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a written submission to the Summative review team. A working party representing students from different programmes and stages was supported in this activity by the University of Plymouth's Partner Colleges Coordinator. The submission was compiled by reviewing the responses from a specially designed questionnaire, the 2009 National Student Survey, the College's induction survey and minutes of the Student Consultative Forum and programme committees. The submission helpfully pointed towards a number of areas of good practice and some issues. The team found the submission useful in preparing for the review and before meeting two groups of current students.

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?

10 The College's confirmation of the value it places upon its higher education provision is reflected in the addition of the new University Centre building planned to open in September 2010. The centre, partly funded by HEFCE and the South West Regional Development Agency, will provide a range of facilities and resources appropriate to the needs of future learners and demonstrates a clear commitment to the College's approach to the management of standards and the quality of learning opportunities of its higher education provision. The continued expansion of the College's higher education facilities reflects the increased demand for university-level and professional business programmes at the College whose student numbers have grown by over 30 per cent in the past two years.

11 Overall responsibility for the management and monitoring of higher education standards lies with the Vice Principal and Deputy Chief Executive. Higher education provision is organised across five academic departments. Each is managed by a head of department supported by section heads representing the individual curriculum areas. The management of higher education strategy, quality assurance and performance is undertaken by the HE Strategy Group and is supported by the College's Quality Assurance and Development Manager. Heads of department and section heads assume responsibility for the management and coordination of quality assurance. This provides a robust set of

effective central and devolved mechanisms that ensure a clear oversight and shared ownership at both corporate and programme level.

12   The College has a formal partnership agreement in place with the University of Plymouth and acknowledges the benefits of engagement with a nationally recognised and long-established partnership network. The Academic Co-operation Agreement clearly outlines the obligations of both institutions. In issues relating to consultation, the document recommends that senior members of the College involved in the conduct and management of programmes and members of the University responsible for the oversight of these processes attend a consultative meeting at least once in each academic term. Staff indicated that consultation occurred on a regular basis, confirming strong links between the College and its validating partner. The team found substantial evidence of supportive and productive collaboration between awarding body academic liaison tutors from both university and college staff. This facilitates the development of a shared understanding of partner responsibilities ensuring that procedures for higher education quality assurance and enhancement are matched to awarding body requirements. In addition, the Vice Principal sits on the University of Plymouth's Academic Development Committee as an elected member of the Faculty.

13   The positive engagement between the College and the University of Plymouth results in valuable cooperative support being freely given by staff of the awarding body. It also provides a thorough and effective mechanism for the assurance of standards and quality of the College's higher education provision. The team confirms this to be an area of good practice.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

14   Overall responsibility for embedding the Academic Infrastructure resides with the Vice Principal and Chief Executive. Programme development with the Faculty is structured to take account of the FHEQ. Team engagement with the Academic Infrastructure during programme development is supported by the awarding body, the College's Quality Improvement and Development Manager and the HE Coordinator. The team confirms that those areas relating to the design, approval and delivery of Foundation Degrees are aligned with the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, published by QAA. In addition, there is extensive engagement with employers who, in meetings with the review team, confirmed their individual involvement in the design, delivery and validation of new awards.

15   In addition to the College's wide-ranging professional development and scholarship activities for higher education staff, described in paragraphs 20 and 34, the University of Plymouth has been active in providing further opportunities for scholarly development relating to aspects of the Academic Infrastructure. The College has a clear process for managing changes to the *Code of practice*. The HE Coordinator has overall responsibility for this. It is undertaken through discussion and action planning at the HE Strategy Group meeting.

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

16   The College's reporting structure includes a range of strategic and operational groups, some of which are specific to higher education. These include the HE Managers Group, HE Strategy Group, joint boards of study and Academic Board. The HE Strategy Group takes

overall responsibility for assuring the quality and standards of higher education provision, leading on standardisation, reviewing annual monitoring reports and programme action plans, and monitoring cross-college action plans. The work of this strategy group is informed by a range of other higher education groups, including the HE Conference, HE Programme Management, HE Quality Assurance, HE Curriculum Development and HE Marketing.

17 The College maintains the consistency of quality and standards of its higher education provision in providing responses to the awarding body through the outcomes of the annual monitoring review process. The Developmental engagement report confirmed that the annual higher education monitoring process is well established and effectively managed. Annual monitoring review reports are well prepared by curriculum teams, utilising and considering a range of data in the production of evaluative overviews of the provision, resulting in action planning for its continuous improvement. The team, however, when reviewing data and meeting with students, found evidence of poor retention on a number of programmes. This was particularly so in FdA Performance Practice and Events Management, where eight students left during 2008-09, and in FdA Creative and Digital Media, where progression between stages was 58 per cent. Exit interviews confirmed a range of reasons, but students were clear that problems with pre-course information were responsible for the majority of students leaving the College. However, the College considers that meetings with students did not reflect the full range of reasons for withdrawal. The College reported taking a proactive approach in addressing student retention issues and confirmed that quality improvement measures were now in place to ensure continuous scrutiny through the HE In-Year Review and the annual monitoring review processes. The In-Year Review 2009-10 confirmed that seven students on the FdA Creative and Digital Media programme had been identified as at risk of leaving and actions were noted and reported. The FdA Creative and Digital Media programme reported that annual programme monitoring in November 2009 had identified low success and retention rates with appropriate action planning implemented. The action plan arising from the November 2009 Programme Committee meeting for annual programme monitoring relating to the FdA Creative and Digital Media programme confirmed the need to improve early screening processes through formative assessment and to increase tutorial support to identify potential problems early. It is desirable for the College to continue to strengthen its procedures to ensure all measures, including pre-course guidance to students, are taken to reduce the number of withdrawals.

18 Responses to external examiners' reports and action plans are reviewed and coordinated by the Quality Manager. Additional scrutiny and evaluation of reviews is undertaken by the HE Coordinator reporting through the HE Strategy Group to the Vice Principal. In addition, the University's joint boards of study receive and consider these reviews. The Developmental engagement confirmed that it would be desirable for the College to implement an annual higher education self-assessment report. While the annual monitoring process is a clear strength, the team considers that, in the absence of an overarching higher education self-assessment report, it is unclear how the College fully considers and evaluates the overall outcomes of the annual review. The team confirms that the annual monitoring review process continues to provide an effective vehicle for demonstrating how the College assures itself that it is fulfilling its obligations to its awarding body. However, the College is advised to produce an annual monitoring report on its higher education programmes to provide an overview of its provision and to facilitate the dissemination of good practice.

19 The College's internal verification procedures assure the internal moderation of all higher education programmes, with assignments being checked for compliance with

college procedures and module descriptors to ensure effective coverage of learning outcomes. The Developmental engagement report confirmed that the College operates a thorough and comprehensive verification procedure, following the guidelines of the University of Plymouth Colleges Assessment Policy. External examiner reports for the FdA Creative and Digital Media programme noted an effective system of internal verification, ensuring assignment briefs are inclusive and equitable. The report, however, highlights some inconsistencies in relation to assessed work. Further investigation of assessed work at the Summative review confirmed that a standardised approach to internal verification of student work continues to challenge some programme teams. The team noted inconsistencies in the implementation of some aspects of the moderation procedure, for example within the FdA Business programme. It is desirable for the College to ensure the provision of staff development opportunities to update and embed procedures relating to internal verification.

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

20   At programme level, a formal appraisal procedure is in place to assist in the identification of bespoke training requirements. Section heads implement individual action plans informed by lesson observation feedback, programme action plans, external examiners' reports and outcomes of HE Committee evaluations. The team confirms that the College has a strong track record of supporting the continuing professional development needs of higher education staff, including the acquisition of higher qualifications. Currently, the College is providing staff with the opportunity to undertake 21 days of professional development activities in line with workforce reforms. The College is active in supporting staff to undertake university-level scholarly activity as part of their continuing professional development entitlement. The Faculty consistently provides appropriate and relevant staff development opportunities, encouraging and supporting college staff in applying for research projects from the Higher Education Learning Partnership Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. In recent years, the College has successfully achieved continuing professional development awards, mini-teaching fellowship awards and full teaching fellowship awards.

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 process for curriculum and quality is overseen by the Vice Principal and Deputy Chief Executive as outlined in paragraph 11. Roles and responsibilities are clearly identified, function effectively and are understood at all levels. The monitoring of the quality of learning opportunities is reported to the HE Strategy Group which is comprised of the Senior Management Team. This in turn reports to the Academic Board which is chaired by the Principal. The work of the HE Strategy Group is informed by regular formal meetings of the HE Managers Group and other committees and information sources outlined in paragraph 16.

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 The principal features of the relationship with the Faculty are as described for academic standards in paragraph 12. The excellent working relationship with the Faculty is valuable in supporting the College in enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. As indicated in paragraphs 20 and 34, the benefits derived from the partnership are particularly strong in respect of staff development opportunities and the sharing of good practice between partnership colleges.

23 The quality of learning opportunities is evaluated through a rigorous course review process, which the team judges to be good practice. The College's twice-yearly review results in clear action plans which promote improvement. It aligns with the Faculty's annual programme monitoring and is timely in enabling teams to review programme performance and take action where necessary. Programme committees and annual monitoring inform Faculty joint boards of study, which meet each spring and autumn. The quality of learning opportunities is also reviewed at regular, course-level, formal minuted meetings and programme committee meetings. The cross-college action plan is informed by the action plan from each individual course. Matters for improvement arising from these plans inform the operating plan and action plans for development which each curriculum area takes forward. Reporting is through the HE Strategy Group and Academic Board. Exceptional cases are reported directly to Academic Board, for example where performance indicators result in a programme being placed in 'special measures'. The arrangements operate effectively and are well understood by staff at all levels.

24 Matters which have the potential to enhance the quality of learning opportunities are captured and taken forward through the review process and deliberative committees. For example, the College seeks to increase the variety of student learning experiences through a range of lecture activities, group sizes and blended learning opportunities. Good practice is shared in staff development events and at the HE Conference.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

25 Teaching staff are familiar with the key features of the Academic Infrastructure and demonstrate a clear understanding of the setting and maintenance of quality and standards for higher education developments. Existing programmes are supported in planning, delivery and quality management through college training events such as the HE Conference. The sharing of good practice and discussion to support the embedding of the Academic Infrastructure also takes place through the Faculty. The Academic Infrastructure and its use are considered further in paragraphs 14 and 15.

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

26 The rigorous annual monitoring procedures described in paragraphs 11, 12 and 16 to 19 contribute effectively to the College's assurance that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced. A robust lesson observation process has recently been piloted which aligns with the requirements of higher education teaching and learning. The observation process is comprehensive and explicitly addresses the development of higher level skills and the contribution of scholarly activity to teaching. Professional discussion and student perception combine with judgements made during observation to inform clear action plans. Training needs are linked to appraisal and taken forward to the continuing

professional development programme. Good practice is shared, for example, at the College's HE Conference. The lesson observation process includes moderation and is implemented by an observation team that is composed of managers and higher education practitioners who have been identified as outstanding teachers.

27 Assessment is agreed for each module as part of the approval process. Subsequently, consistency in the range of assessment is ensured by programme managers. The quality of assessment instruments is monitored and assured through the thorough and comprehensive internal verification procedure. This is effective in ensuring assessments that are fit for purpose across the majority of programmes; verification is considered further in paragraph 19. External examiner comments, employer views and student opinion are used to contribute to improvements. The College recognises that further improvement can be made in this area and a working party on assessment is operating to harmonise assessment practice across the provision.

28 The College's strong links with employers significantly enhance the quality of teaching and learning and enable students to demonstrate learning outcomes directly linked to practice. Employer contributions are effective in the development of programmes, for example feedback from employers informed the development of a module for the FdSc Yacht Operations. Employers also make a valuable contribution to programme delivery through the provision of a range of workplace opportunities. These include a live marketing project for a maritime restoration project for the FdA Business and close working relationships with a local commercial music recording studio which significantly enhance the learning opportunities for the FdA Creative Media. Some employers are actively involved in assessment. For example, where trained assessors are in place in the FdSc Healthcare Practice they are supported by college-produced documentation and are subject to observation.

29 Work-based learning opportunities, including the resources available, are evaluated through reflection on external examiners' comments about the assessment of work-based learning and student achievement of learning outcomes. The quality of teaching and learning is also confirmed in feedback from external examiners. External examiner comment is very positive about the value of the workplace learning experience across many programmes, including its impact on achievement.

30 Students clearly value the quality of teaching on their programmes and those met by the review team were very positive about their learning experiences. A few students expressed concerns about 'Enterprise Exchange' in which first-year Foundation Degree students work with local businesses. This is a mutually beneficial approach to live projects through which skills are provided to local businesses and students develop their employability. The College has been responsive to these concerns and plans additional support to ensure that students understand the relevance of this imaginative opportunity.

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

31 Feedback and support from tutors is readily available and effective in promoting learning and enabling students to achieve high standards. Academic and pastoral tutorials are undertaken on an individual and group basis, while personal tutorials support career choice and progression. On some programmes there is the opportunity to book tutorial appointments by email. All part-time students have access to tutorial support.

32 Opportunities for formative feedback to support learning are excellent across all programmes, and tutorials enable students to feel well supported. Students confirm the value and quality of their feedback. However, some students consider there are inconsistencies between programmes in assessment process and feedback.

33 Students benefit from general study skills support on a one-to-one basis. There is a dedicated Higher Education Learning Resource Assistant and a Higher Education Advisor who provides support for items such as finance. There is also a referral system to support these services. Learning support needs are identified during interview, induction and through early assessment. Students confirm the value of the support provided, particularly that by tutors over the telephone and through email communication.

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

34 Staff benefit from a good range of continuing professional development opportunities provided by the College and the Faculty. The College provides training sessions and opportunities to share good practice each term. Specific sessions for higher education staff are also provided during the summer staff development days. Training to enable staff to engage with the virtual learning environment is provided each term with one-to-one support provided on request. Staff development needs are informed by annual appraisal and may also be identified as a result of lesson observations.

35 Staff engage extensively with the development opportunities offered through the Faculty partnership, including, for example, assessment 'benchmarking' activities. Staff are encouraged to acquire continuing professional development awards and are supported in applying for research projects from the Higher Education Learning Partnerships Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. Recent scholarly activity has contributed to teaching and learning. Examples include project management and software development on the FdSc Computing and integrative counsellor training on the FdSc Law. New staff are supported by a mentor, the HE Coordinator and through the College and Faculty induction activities.

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?

36 The sufficiency of resources is initially considered during the College and Faculty course approval process. The subsequent evaluation of sufficiency and availability of resources is undertaken through course review, drawing upon external examiner feedback and student comment. The physical resources currently available to higher education students are good. These include many practical resources based both on and off site, for example those in use by the South Devon College Marine Academy FdSc Yacht Operations and the music resources for the FdSc Digital Media. The major building programme due for completion in September 2010, described in paragraphs 8 and 10, will provide dedicated space for the higher education provision and demonstrates a clear commitment to creating a higher education culture.

37 Use of the virtual learning environment is encouraged as a tool for independent study. Students met by the review team confirmed that the virtual learning environment is a valuable resource. All programmes have a standard minimum content, which includes the relevant handbook and a message forum. There is some integration of e-books into the curricula to increase access to resources.

How does the College collect and act on student opinion?

38   The College is responsive to student views and has established formal and informal processes for the collection of student opinion. Students feed back through a range of mechanisms, including representation at the joint boards of study, Student Consultative Forum and through surveys. The information gathered informs future actions, for example through course review and subsequent operating plans. Students met by the team confirmed that their views are valued and addressed and that feedback is provided by course leaders and is posted on the virtual learning environment.

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?

39   The College publishes an attractive and comprehensive higher education prospectus, which provides clear information on all of its higher education programmes. It also produces a smaller brochure for the part-time higher educational and professional programmes. Information from the prospectus is published on the College website, which has recently been re-designed for greater clarity, with the involvement of students. Higher education awards delivered at the College are also publicised in the University of Plymouth's prospectus and website. The University also produces a variety of promotional guides and mini prospectuses detailing all of the partner college courses.

40   The College publishes an HE Strategy in which it offers a clear statement of its institutional mission, values, strategic aims and objectives. The latest version covers the 2009-12 period and meets the January 2010 HEFCE deadline. From these published documents, it is clear that the role of higher education is carefully integrated within the key business functions of the College.

41   The College publishes course handbooks for each award, using a standard template that aligns with the one used by the University of Plymouth. The College has the flexibility to adjust the content to ensure maximum relevance for its students. The handbooks are comprehensive and student friendly. They include programme specifications and course data, course management and tutoring information, and assessment regulations and guidance on mitigating circumstances. Students attested that the information they receive is accurate and sufficient, especially when supplemented by the materials published on the College's virtual learning environment.

42   The College's virtual learning environment is used to publish generic higher education information, programme specifications, module guides, assessment plans, and discussion forums. The system operates effectively and is widely used and appreciated by students, one of whom described the virtual learning environment as 'a lifeline'.

43   The College publishes a variety of targeted marketing and publicity leaflets, including an adult learning guide, a part-time training directory, business news and brochures on apprenticeships and bursaries. The employers interviewed by the team commented positively on the College's information marketing, citing multiple open evenings, higher education events and public advertising. Employers commended particularly the published

information on progression from further to higher education, together with the College's energetic dissemination of local opportunities. This is an area of good practice.

44 College staff have ready access to a variety of printed and electronic information to support their work. The College publishes a web-based staff handbook covering current procedures for all cross-college human resources. As yet, there is no specific higher education staff handbook, either for programme management or staff development. The College has Registered University Teacher links to the University of Plymouth's portal. The University, particularly through the Faculty, provides significant published assistance to the College's staff by providing key information and templates. In tandem with the University's Higher Education Learning Partnership Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, the Faculty also publishes a comprehensive and useful hard-copy brochure of registered university teacher staff development opportunities. It is desirable that the College enhance the support provided for higher education staff through a practitioners' handbook, which should provide key information pertinent to those new to higher education.

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?

45 The College manages its responsibilities for public information with a clear awareness of the expectation expressed in the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, that the awarding body should exercise effective control over the accuracy of all public information about its awards. It also recognises the importance that Government places on ensuring that potential students have the best possible information about the content of courses and the value of specific qualifications.

46 The core information for use in the prospectus and course handbooks is drawn directly from validation documentation to ensure accuracy and it is routinely checked through annual course monitoring and periodic reviews. Programme managers are responsible for the annual updating of the programme information, which is collated by the HE Coordinator. The HE Marketing Officer collates and checks updates to generic information before they are forwarded to the Faculty for awarding body confirmation. The overall production of the prospectus is overseen by the College's HE Marketing Group. There is a clear cycle for the production of the higher education prospectus, including the approval of content, which is mirrored for course leaflets. Key roles and responsibilities are well defined within the cycle. Draft copy is submitted to the Faculty for approval, before being finally signed off by the vice principal responsible for the higher education provision. A parallel process, overseen by the HE Marketing Officer, is in place for the updating of the information provided on the College website.

47 The partnership agreement with the University of Plymouth includes explicit procedures for agreeing the form and content of external advertising and publicity. The agreement confirms that material using 'standard wording' will receive 'automatic' agreement, but that all other news releases, advertising materials and web pages should be copied to, and signed off by, the University's Marketing and Public Relations Department.

48 The College recognises the growing importance of providing students and staff with information electronically. There is some shared use of virtual learning environments with the University, but both students and staff have experienced difficulties in obtaining access to up-to-date university information, a situation confirmed by the Faculty representative. It

is desirable that the College proceed as soon as possible to ensure that its virtual learning environment allows more effective access to that of the University.

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

49   The Developmental engagement visit took place in May 2009. The lines of enquiry were:

Line of enquiry 1: How effective is the assessment practice in promoting effective learning and is work-based or placement learning assessed appropriately?

Line of enquiry 2: How transparent and fair are the mechanisms for marking and for moderating marks?

Line of enquiry 3: To what extent does South Devon College provide constructive and timely feedback to students on assessed work in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvement but does not increase the burden of assessment?

50   The team identified a number of areas of good practice, including the benefit to the College of the extensive support for assessment given by the University of Plymouth. This support includes continuing professional development for staff, robust quality assurance processes and administrative support. Staff undertake assessment benchmarking activities between programmes to ensure appropriate academic levels are maintained. They also benefit from higher-level continuing professional development, within the College and by the University. Most module guides provide detailed guidance on assessment methods, deadlines, and how students can receive support. Students' learning needs in relation to assessment are identified at an early stage and are well supported. Overall, students have a high level of access to staff, while the arrangements for tutorial support and formative assessment feedback enable students to achieve their full potential. Higher education students value the opportunities for peer assessment, which on the arts programmes is imaginative and comprehensive.

51   The team made a number of recommendations. It advised the College to implement a formal examination board procedure for its Edexcel provision, ensuring that the integrity of assessment decisions is maintained through the inclusion of an independent chair. The team also concluded that it was desirable for the College to include assessment as a standing agenda item at the HE Focus Group to identify and share areas of good practice and for development, and to provide additional support for Enterprise Exchange. It was also desirable to adjust the timing of the production of the cross-college action plan in order that individual actions from programmes can inform it. In addition, other higher education forums in the College need to review the action plan and formally monitor progress on identified actions and produce an annual higher education self-assessment report. The College should ensure that all programmes outline their assessment methods in the paper and electronic prospectus so that students are aware from application of the nature and rigour of assessment, and publish the assessment schedule across all programmes at the start of the academic year. All staff and students need to be aware of, and comply with, explicit timescales for the returning of marked student work. All students should be aware

of what is available in terms of formative feedback through tutorials and what to expect in terms of summative feedback and how this can be used to improve their performance.

D Foundation Degrees

52 Student numbers are now restricted by HEFCE and it is anticipated that these will remain at a target number of 457 for the immediate future. An additional 66 students were secured for 2009-10, with a further 19 for 2010-11 to facilitate the planned growth in higher education numbers. There are currently 18 Foundation Degree programmes, including FdAs and FdScs across a wide range of subjects. Some, such as the FdSc Yacht Operations, are of particular local relevance. One new Foundation Degree, the FdSc Biosciences, will start in September 2010.

53 The team found that the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities of all the Foundation Degree programmes were fully fit for purpose. Students are consistently complimentary about the opportunities with which they are provided, the support they receive from staff and the learning resources to which they have access. The conclusions set out below in paragraphs 55, 57 and 58 apply to all the programmes.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

54 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in South Devon 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 body, the University of Plymouth.

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

- the positive engagement between the College and the University of Plymouth results in valuable cooperative support being freely given by staff of the awarding body. It also provides a thorough and effective mechanism for the assurance of standards and quality of the College's higher education provision (paragraph 13)

- the excellent working relationship with University of Plymouth Colleges is valuable in supporting the College in enhancing the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 22)

- a rigorous course review process results in clear action plans which promote improvement (paragraph 23)

- there is a robust pilot lesson observation process which aligns with the requirements of higher education teaching and learning (paragraph 26)

- the strong links with employers significantly enhance the quality of teaching and learning and enable students to demonstrate learning outcomes directly linked to vocational practice (paragraph 28)

- feedback and support is readily available from tutors, and is effective in promoting learning and in enabling students to achieve high standards (paragraph 31)

- the College is effective in disseminating information on progression from further to higher education and local employment opportunities, and this is commended by employers (paragraph 43).

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

57 The team agreed one area where the College is **advised** to take action:

- produce an annual monitoring report on its higher education programmes to provide an overview of its provision and to facilitate the dissemination of good practice (paragraph 18).

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

- continue to strengthen its procedures, including pre-course guidance, to reduce the number of student withdrawals (paragraph 17)

- ensure the provision of staff development opportunities to update and embed procedures relating to internal verification (paragraph 19)

- enhance the support provided for higher education staff through a practitioners' handbook, which should provide key information pertinent to those new to higher education (paragraph 44)

- proceed as soon as possible to ensure that its virtual learning environment allows more effective access to that of the University of Plymouth (paragraph 48).

59 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.

60 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.

61 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 Devon College action plan relating to the Summative review: May 2010						
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:						
• the positive engagement between the College and the University of Plymouth results in valuable cooperative support being freely given by staff of the awarding body. It also provides a thorough and effective mechanism for the assurance of standards and quality of the College's higher education provision (paragraph 13)	Monitor and maintain level of engagement Annual lunch for subject forum chairs, academic liaison personnel and administration post joint boards of study Develop benchmark data within the UPC partnership Encourage staff to undertake staff	October 2010	HE leads/HE Manager	Student survey of use and functionality	HE Management Group	Positive learner feedback

South Devon College action plan relating to the Summative review: May 2010						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
	development provided by UPC and attend events such as UPC conferences and staff inductions for staff that are new to teaching HE					
• the excellent working relationship with University of Plymouth Colleges is valuable in supporting the College in enhancing the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 22)	Monitor and maintain relationship with UPC Annual lunch for subject forum chairs and specific administration post joint boards of study Continue to engage with staff development	November 2010	HE Manager	Maintained relationship with UPC staff Improved learner views	HE Management Group Academic Board	Feedback from UPC

South Devon College action plan relating to the Summative review: May 2010						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
	opportunities to enhance teaching and learning					
• a rigorous course review process results in clear action plans which promote improvement (paragraph 23)	SDC staff share good practice of course review with UPC partnership at HELP-CETL seminar series Internal sharing and moderation of course reviews and disseminating good practice via Moodle and via the UPC Teaching & Learning Exchange. Share our good practice across the UPC	February 2011	HE Manager and HE leads	Improved rigour of the course review process, and continued development of the process with external input Improved learner views	HE Management Group	Tutors' use of process, improved rigour and quality of reviews produced

South Devon College action plan relating to the Summative review: May 2010						
Good practice	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
	network and build on existing relationships as a college collaborative approach					
• there is a robust pilot lesson observation process which aligns with the requirements of higher education teaching and learning (paragraph 26)	HE manager to present at the HELP-CETL seminar series on peer observation Production of a DVD of good practice for the partnership	July 2010	HE Manager	Moving from pilot to full implementation of process	HE Management Group	Tutor evaluation during observation
• the strong links with employers significantly enhance the quality of teaching and learning and enable students to demonstrate learning outcomes directly linked to vocational practice (paragraph 28)	Implement an annual cross-faculty employers' forum. Employer projects development standing agenda	February 2011	HE Manager Sector advisory chairs	Increased employer uptake and attendance	HE Management Group	Annual programme monitoring and course reviews HE Annual Monitoring Report

South Devon College action plan relating to the Summative review: May 2010						
Good practice	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
	item on the sector advisory groups with HE Manager in attendance					
• feedback and support is readily available from tutors, and is effective in promoting learning and in enabling students to achieve high standards (paragraph 31)	Examples of good feedback forms to be included in University-level Management Moodle Specific training during CPD days on providing effective feedback to students	January 2011	HE leads	Cross college use of documentation Updated Moodle	HE Management Group	External examiner reports Learner views
• the College is effective in disseminating information on progression from further to higher education and local employment	Case studies to be disseminated through UPC network	November 2010	HE leads	Cross college use of documentation	HE Management Group HE Management Group	External examiners' reports

South Devon College action plan relating to the Summative review: May 2010						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
opportunities, and this is commended by employers (paragraph 43).	Presentation of good practice at a national HE in FE focused conference	June 2011	HE Manager and HE Curriculum Development lead	Production of conference materials		Conference feedback

South Devon College action plan relating to the Summative review: May 2010						
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:						
• produce an annual monitoring report on its higher education programmes to provide an overview of its provision and to facilitate the dissemination of good practice (paragraph 18).	To produce an HE Annual Monitoring Report with external moderation	November 2010	HE Manager with input from HE Management Group and HE leads	An annual report that provides an overview of the quality of provision and is externally moderated via a UPC partner	HE Strategy Group	Internal and external moderation

South Devon College action plan relating to the Summative review: May 2010						
Desirable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The team agreed the following areas where it would be **desired** to take action:						
• continue to strengthen its procedures, including pre-course guidance, to reduce the number of student withdrawals (paragraph 17)	To develop a more robust interview process To organise a pre-start screening event To increase current student involvement in the course guidance process	December 2010 September 2010 October 2010	HE Manager and HE Administrator	Higher retention and achievement rates	HE Management Group Academic Board	Feedback from learners on pre-course guidance information
• ensure the provision of staff development opportunities to update and embed procedures relating to internal verification (paragraph 19)	To provide annual updating on the IV process To undertake an annual review of the IV process	October 2010	HE Manager, HE leads, HE section heads.	Compliance with the harmonized process	HE Management Group	Learner feedback based on harmonized documents giving learner assessment feedback

South Devon College action plan relating to the Summative review: May 2010						
Desirable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
	To provide bi-annual training on HE IV and moderation					
• enhance the support provided for higher education staff through a practitioners' handbook, which should provide key information pertinent to those new to higher education (paragraph 44)	Develop a new section on the HE Management Moodle relevant for staff new to HE teaching Ensure staff new to teaching HE are allocated a HE teacher mentor Ensure staff link with the 'virtual staff handbook' provided by UPD on the University of Plymouth portal, UPC Faculty	October 2010	HE Manager/ HE leads	Increased use of Moodle Learner views	HE Management Group	Feedback from staff new to HE

South Devon College action plan relating to the Summative review: May 2010						
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
• proceed as soon as possible to ensure that its virtual learning environment allows more effective access to that of the University (paragraph 48).	To embed more linked aspects of the University of Plymouth VLE within the SDC Moodle interface To provide University of Plymouth VLE training for all students during the first week of their course To provide a support member of staff to work with students to support navigation of the University of Plymouth VLE To provide continual 'refresher sessions'	October 2010	HE leads/HE Manager	Student survey of use and functionality	HE Management Group	Positive learner feedback

South Devon College action plan relating to the Summative review: May 2010						
Desirable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
	throughout the programme to support and develop individuals with the University of Plymouth e-resources					