



# **Integrated quality and enhancement review**

**Summative review**

**Cirencester College**

**February 2011**

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## Preface

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

## Purpose of IQER

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

## The IQER process

IQER is a peer review process. It is divided into two complementary stages: Developmental engagement and Summative review. In accordance with the published method, colleges with fewer 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 Cirencester College carried out in February 2011

As a result of its investigations, the Summative review team (the team) considers that there can be **confidence** in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreements, for the standards of the 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 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:

- there is effective internal audit of higher education carried out by the College
- the staff development strategy for higher education is well-considered and effective
- there is a highly organised system of mentoring and guidance within the teacher training programme
- the higher education virtual learning environment provides a shared area with useful information on good academic practice and study skills.

### 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:

- review and improve the scrutiny at institutional level of the annual monitoring reports and link them to the subject annual reviews to realise the full potential of the systems currently in place
- ensure that quality assurance procedures result in all actions taken by course teams being recorded, reported and available for scrutiny
- develop the role of the Personal Tutor to embed the guidance from the *Code of practice* relating to the quality of learning opportunities.

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

- ensure that the actions from the Developmental engagement to enhance higher education continue to be implemented at programme level
- develop the College higher education handbook with further college-specific information and for it to direct students more strongly to the wider range of higher education resources available on the virtual learning environment.

## 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 Cirencester 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 that the College delivers on behalf of the Royal Agricultural College, the University of Bath, The University of Bolton and the University of the West of England, Bristol. The review was carried out by Mr Peter Cutting, Mrs Sandra Middleton (reviewers) and Dr John Hurley (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 and partner institutions, reports of reviews by QAA and from inspections by Ofsted. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagement in assessment. A summary of findings from this Developmental engagement is provided in section C of this report. The review also considered the College's use of the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers, with reference to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, subject and award benchmark statements, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and programme specifications.

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

4 The College was established in 1991 through the amalgamation of a large sixth form centre and an adult learning centre to form a tertiary institution. There is a main campus on the periphery of Cirencester, and the Castle, a smaller annexe in the town. The College has expanded its vocational offering through the provision of BTEC and NVQ programmes but remains the leading provider of A levels in a large catchment area, with a preponderance of programmes at level 3 or above, including Access and Teacher Training programmes. There are 2,200 full-time and 3,000 part-time students attending programmes at the College.

5 Higher education courses are managed within the College faculties and staff typically teach on both level 3 and higher education programmes. Currently, 17 staff teach on higher education programmes. The teacher training and criminology programmes are based in the main campus while the computing programme is based at the Castle annexe. Heritage management is run jointly with the Royal Agricultural College and is based on their site, which is across the road from Cirencester College. There are currently 55 full-time students and 26 part-time students (13 full-time equivalent (FTE)) on HEFCE-funded courses.

6 The programmes currently offered by the College are:

### University of Bath

- FdSc Computing - (8 FTE students, second year only)

### **The University of Bolton**

- Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector - (8 full-time and 13 FTE students)

### **University of the West of England, Bristol**

- FdA Criminology and Criminal Justice - (26 full-time students)

### **Royal Agricultural College**

- FdSc Environmental Conservation and Heritage Management - (20 full-time students).

## **Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies**

7 The College has four active partnerships. All partnership agreements require the College to provide teaching, first marking of assessment and feedback to students, academic guidance and support, and appropriate learning resources. All agreements require the College to operate to specified quality standards and reporting arrangements, which are closely monitored by the partner institutions. All partners maintain an overview of assessment standards through moderation and standardisation arrangements. All the partners provide support to develop higher education teaching, learning and assessment, and for subject updating.

8 There are some differences between partnerships which reflect upon the degree of participation staff have in the development of their programmes. The FdSc Environmental Conservation and Heritage Management is run jointly with the Royal Agriculture College, with all aspects of curriculum development, teaching, assessment, student support and resources provided by both Colleges. The Royal College, however, maintains the lead role. The long established relationship with The University of Bolton for teacher training is conducted through a consortium arrangement with a number of college partners in which Cirencester plays an active role initiating a number of developments across the consortium. The development of the FdA Criminology and Criminal Justice was conducted jointly with staff from the University of the West of England, Bristol and included college staff contributions to curriculum and assessment strategies. While the partnership agreements with the College provide close supervision of standards and quality, they also facilitate active participation by College staff. The partnership with the University of Bath is in its final year.

## **Recent developments in higher education at the College**

9 The expansion of student numbers envisaged in the higher education strategic plan has been curtailed by current funding restrictions. Two of the former higher education institution partners have withdrawn or are withdrawing programmes at the College, and a new partnership has been developed with the University of the West of England, Bristol. The curriculum is in a period of transition, with the FdSc Computing in its final year, and two other programmes withdrawn by the end of the academic year 2009-10. The first cohort of students on the recently introduced FdA Criminology and Criminal Justice and FdSc Environmental Conservation and Heritage Management are in their second year of the programmes. Two further Foundation Degrees have completed their planning stages with the Open University.



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

10 Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team, which was presented with the self-evaluation. The process was facilitated by two non-teaching members of college staff (the Higher Education Officer and the Higher Education Personal Tutor). The evidence was derived from questionnaires and focus group discussions. Reference was also made to material from routine college student feedback monitoring. The evidence was analysed and draft outcomes were prepared by the Higher Education Officer. This was submitted to a group of student representatives, which reviewed the validity of the data and suggested conclusions.

11 The reviewers also met a group of students representing all courses. There was a very close correspondence between the views detailed in the student submission and those expressed in the meeting. These perceptions were largely confirmed by the other evidence available to the team and are reflected in the report.

## **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?**

12 The responsibility for meeting the awarding body requirements for standards and the quality assurance of higher education programmes rests with each course team. The teams operate within the partnership agreements with their respective awarding bodies. Course teams are line managed by their faculty heads, but also report to the Assistant Principal (Academic Development) who has oversight of higher education. The Assistant Principal is part of the College Directorate, and reports regularly to it. Higher education management is coordinated through a higher education management group and two committees that report to it: the Academic Sub-committee and the Higher Education Scrutiny Committee, whose functions are outlined in paragraph 18. The present management structure for higher education is a recent development stimulated by the College's Developmental engagement and is still evolving.

13 All partnership agreements require the College to operate to specified quality standards and reporting arrangements, which are closely monitored by the partner institutions. There is some variation in the specific requirements of higher education partners. The College successfully manages this by close liaison with the partners, through their representation on the College Academic Sub-committee, and careful analysis of, and compliance with, the varying requirements under the oversight of the higher education management group.

14 The main reporting system for higher education in the College is based on annual reviews, which are in two forms. The subject annual review, which is carried out for all college courses, and the annual monitoring review, which is produced specifically for the higher education partners. The annual monitoring review formats vary, but all contain clear and concise action plans for improvement. The annual monitoring reviews are submitted

directly by the course leader to their higher education partner and are monitored by the college Higher Education Officer to ensure they are sent on time. Unless it is a requirement of the partnership agreement, however, they are not reviewed by the college senior management. The dual system of subject assessment review and annual monitoring review is not related to one another. This is a weakness in the otherwise effective college management of the reporting process for higher education. There is the risk that identified issues could be missed or actions not taken. The team considers it advisable for the College to review and improve the scrutiny at institutional level of the annual monitoring reports and link them to subject annual review to realise the full potential of the systems currently in place.

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

15 The close links between the College and its higher education partners ensure there is a good engagement with the Academic Infrastructure. This is shown by the use of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) in all higher education course validations. All courses provide students with clear programme specifications. The *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* informs all the College's foundation degrees, including the incorporation of elements of work-based learning. Students on the FdSc Computing and FdA Criminology and Criminal Justice reported some shortcomings in the organisation of work-based learning in their first year, but the College has identified and addressed these problems and students confirmed that the organisation of work-based learning is now effective.

16 Following the Developmental engagement there has been significant progress made in developing the staff understanding of the Academic Infrastructure, through staff development and information on the college's staff intranet. This has resulted in a good level of engagement with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*. This is evident, for example, in policies and practices relating to assessment and work-based learning, which put into effect the relevant codes of practice. Staff were confident about the use of these policies and the Academic Infrastructure in meetings with the review team. The College shows a good level of engagement with those parts of the Academic Infrastructure referring to maintaining standards, particularly considering the small higher education provision.

### **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?**

17 All the agreements with awarding bodies require the College to implement appropriate academic standards in teaching and assessment. They also require the College to monitor and review provision, respond to student feedback and to report annually. Additional involvements with awarding bodies are outlined in paragraph 8. The College uses the same review, reporting and quality assurance processes as for all college courses. This runs in parallel with reporting to the awarding bodies described in paragraph 13. Course reviews are generally thorough and detailed.

18 For higher education, there is the additional provision of a specific management structure with responsibility for partnership liaison, oversight of quality assurance and overall strategy and policy. Management of higher education is led by the Assistant Principal (Academic Development) and is coordinated by a Higher Education Officer. They are supported by the Higher Education Academic Sub-committee (including course leaders and higher education partner representatives), which is the main body for bringing together issues, identifying best practice and all aspects of the operational management of higher

education. A College Scrutiny Committee oversees and ensures compliance with college quality processes and evaluates the effectiveness of the College's management of delegated responsibilities. The team believes this structure to be substantially effective in discharging the requirements of the awarding bodies.

19 The College has recently carried out a thorough thematic inspection and review of all higher education courses. This audit evaluated standards, teaching, learning and assessment, leadership and management, student support and the role of the student voice. The audit process involved teaching observations, analysis of student outcomes, discussions with staff and students and a review of policies and implementation. The process identified some further points for improvement and good practice, which have been passed to the higher education management group for action. The team considers that the effective internal audit of higher education by the College constitutes good practice.

20 The College has made good progress in addressing the action points resulting from the Developmental engagement. It has produced its own extended version, which it now maintains as a rolling quality improvement plan, and which was incorporated into the review self-evaluation. The self-evaluation acknowledges further action needs to be taken in some of these areas, particularly to ensure that improvements are consistently implemented. The team considers it to be desirable for the College to ensure that the actions from the Developmental engagement to enhance the standards and quality of higher education continue to be implemented at programme level.

21 The emerging management structure is clear and coherent. The college structures for higher education standards, with the clearly defined responsibilities and good information flow, has the potential for fully effective management of delegated responsibility for standards. Course teams, however, also make extensive use of less formal methods of managing their responsibilities. One development has been the successful embedding of study skills in the FdSc Environmental Conservation and Heritage Management as a response to staff concerns about student engagement. A resources issue, which impacted upon a computing group for a year, was, however, ameliorated but not resolved. These informal processes have the advantage of quick responses, but contain the risk that neither the actions identified nor the effectiveness of the response are recorded or are necessarily resolved. The team considers it to be advisable that quality assurance procedures are put in place to ensure that all actions taken by course teams are recorded, reported and are available for scrutiny.

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

22 The College states that it operates effective staff development policies and processes to support standards. All staff that teach in the area take part in a range of activities with a specific focus on higher education. There is a centrally organised higher education staff development day, held annually, which has included sessions on study skills, assessment, the Academic Infrastructure and work-based learning. Staff development supports both college-led and individually identified opportunities. This produces a high level of staff ownership, commitment and motivation. Most staff members teaching on higher education programmes hold a higher degree and others are undertaking postgraduate study. Good evidence of subject updating and scholarly activity was noted among the college staff as a whole. Staff new to teaching on higher education programmes are given an induction to the sector. Staff development needs and activities are monitored through a process of annual appraisal and, in annual programme monitoring, informed by feedback from students. The team concludes that the staff development strategy for higher education is well-considered and effective, constituting good practice.

23 Higher education staff also regularly take part in development opportunities provided by higher education partners. These have included understanding of higher education levels and progression, setting and measuring standards in assessment, matching learning outcomes to assessment, and marking and moderation. This exemplifies the close and supportive relationship between the College and the higher education partners.

**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?**

24 The College's responsibilities in respect to learning opportunities are clearly based upon the relevant partnership agreements, which delegate specific responsibilities to the institution. In general, responsibility for day-to-day management of teaching and learning, student support and resources is delegated to the College by its partner awarding bodies. The exception is with the Royal Agriculture College, where there is shared responsibility for these areas outlined in paragraph 8.

25 The College management structure for higher education is outlined in paragraphs 12 and 18 and reporting in paragraph 14. In addition, higher education student support is the responsibility of the Assistant Principal (Student services) and this has been delegated to a recently appointed higher education Personal Tutor. There is a Higher Education Support Committee, which actively promotes higher education student support.

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

26 The general arrangements and activities for assuring the quality of learning opportunities are outlined in paragraphs 17 to 21. The internal audit of higher education courses, outlined in paragraph 19, is part of the regular process by which the College ensures that all its programmes provide appropriate learning opportunities. There is also evidence that staff share good practice through the Academic Sub-committee and the Higher Education Support Committee. This has improved the quality of students' learning in a number of instances. Sharing of approaches to tutor support and mentoring in work-based learning has informed a revised approach in the FdA Criminology and Criminal Justice.

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

27 The College confirmed that the embedding of elements of the Academic Infrastructure, relating to the quality of learning opportunities within the College's policies and procedures, is a work in progress. Nevertheless, staff demonstrated an awareness of relevant elements of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*. Staff and students were able to identify improving practice, in the current academic year, in some areas, including careers guidance and placement learning. The steps the College has taken through the appointment of the Personal Tutor

and the work of the Academic Sub-committee in sharing good practice offer the potential to embed the codes of practice related to learning opportunities as successfully as they have been for standards, but policy development and implementation, particularly for student support, require further consideration. The team considers it advisable that the College develop the role of the Personal Tutor to embed the guidance from the *Code of practice* relating to the quality of learning opportunities.

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

28 The College has a detailed generic Teaching and Learning Policy, which has been updated to directly refer to higher education provision. The Deputy Principal has overall responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning, but delegates the responsibility for higher education to the Assistant Principal (Academic). The College monitors the quality of teaching and learning through its programme of teaching observations and through its analyses of student satisfaction. In the latter respect, students report that their satisfaction with teaching is high. Students were able to instance where problems with teaching had been resolved satisfactorily. Overall, they were enthusiastic about the quality of their experience. This was not just because of good classroom technique, but also a supportive and helpful attitude to the totality of students' learning activities.

29 The College has a planned programme of teaching observations and staff can expect to be observed on more than one occasion during a year. The self-evaluation states that the College observation record sheet has been amended to include additional, specific, reference to higher level work. This is summarised in a chapter within the Self-Assessment Report, which still interprets the delivery of teaching and learning in terms of the further education inspection process, and which might more usefully align with the amended approach to observation. The audits of each higher education provision and the thematic review of higher education all included graded observations of higher education teaching. Overall, the quality of teaching was assessed as being strong with most sessions observed being graded as good or better. Evidence drawn from the graded observation of teaching which take place throughout the year, is included in department and faculty reports which feed into the college Self-Assessment Report.

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

30 The College acknowledges it is at an early stage in its strategy for student support for its higher education students. Overall responsibility for student support resides with the Assistant Principal, Student Services, but these are now delegated to the recently appointed higher education Personal Tutor, who provides support for higher education students. The role includes the oversight of college processes from induction to progression guidance to ensure that suitable provision is available. It also involves delivery of careers, personal and student finance guidance. The Personal Tutor is a member of the Higher Education Support Committee, which is the formal mechanism for the review of higher education student support. Student concerns are discussed and actions and feedback to students identified. The terms of reference and minutes are unclear about how the Committee in its current form establishes its agenda. In particular, the strategy that determines the role and priorities of the Personal Tutor is not stated. There is an apparent reliance on informal systems meeting immediate needs rather than an articulated plan. The process has resulted, however, in the Personal Tutor working with computing students on their career and educational progression in response to a need identified by students. Improvements have also been made to student induction to ensure that students are fully informed about college and partner awarding body support.

31 The Personal Tutor is responsible for reporting higher education student support issues to the College through the Assistant Principal, Student Services, working closely with the Higher Education Officer. The Tutor also arranges focus groups for higher education students to elicit information on issues that need to be addressed or good practice that needs to be shared.

32 There is a highly organised system of mentoring and academic guidance for the teacher training courses, which is an integral part of their programmes. Students have an appointed tutor who is responsible for reviewing and supporting their progress through regular tutorial meetings, and a workplace mentor who provides support and feedback on practice. The team considers this to be good practice. There has been some sharing of this well-organised approach to mentoring and work-based learning through the Academic Sub-committee. Tracking and monitoring of student progress in the other programmes are, however, more informal. Heritage management students reported that they have just received their first individual reviews in their second year. Other programmes do not provide regular formal review. The College does not want to impose a formal system on what it believes is done effectively informally. The College, however, could do more to ensure that feedback on overall progress is carried out consistently. The team feel that a moderate formalisation of systems may be beneficial through disseminating the identified good practice in teacher training.

33 There is a strong college emphasis on attending to student issues. There is a central complaints system, which is monitored by the Quality Systems Officer. Students are regularly asked for their views by questionnaire and in focus groups. The College has created a 'You said we did' area on its intranet that provides speedy feedback on issues, which students stated is helpful.

34 As numbers are small, students know their tutors very well and have a high degree of trust in them. Students stated that they would take any issues to their course leader in the first instance and that these issues were almost always resolved satisfactorily. This high level of tutor support is recognised as an essential part of the positive experience recorded by students.

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

35 The arrangements for staff development are detailed in paragraphs 22 and 23. These arrangements have included significant support for higher education teaching and learning and, latterly, student support. The allocation of time is generous. The Staff Development Policy states that there are 15 days of staff development available, five of which are centrally delivered, focusing largely on teaching and learning practice and developments in further and higher education; five are for locally initiated activity to meet individually identified needs, and five for personal development activity. The supportive role of the awarding bodies is, again, evident.

### **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 Resources are identified and discussed at validation and monitored by the awarding bodies in the annual reporting cycle. In addition, within the College, the students can comment on resources within the course reviews and the staff/student committee meetings, which are held by some courses in line with the requirements of the partner awarding body. Resources are allocated through normal departmental structures and higher education

programmes have access to further education resources. In the main this benefits students, although there are no dedicated spaces for private study for higher education students. There are some student complaints about accommodation and lack of specific higher education spaces.

37 The self-evaluation makes clear that, while it cannot compete with university libraries, course tutors are able to allocate funds to purchase relevant book stocks and make representation to learning centre staff for any required resources. Student judgements on the adequacy of library resources vary with FdSc Environmental Conservation and Heritage Management students being particularly positive. The library is currently developing access to electronic journals and resources through links to the awarding bodies. Students have access to e-resources via the extranet facilities of the partner higher education institutions. The college virtual learning environment holds a range of useful general and course-specific resources and also provides discussion forums. The extranet provides 24 hour access to resources, whereas the library does not have late or Sunday opening hours. Overall, access to books, journals and online resources is adequate.

38 While specific higher education resources are inevitably limited, they are generally managed effectively and meet the requirements of the awarding bodies. Some accommodation issues in the last academic year were slow to be resolved, but currently accommodation is fit for its purpose.

**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 both paper-based and electronic information about the higher education on offer. This includes information on courses for prospective students, students on courses and staff. Course leaflets are concise and clear with a good level of introductory information. The college website is perceived as the most important information source for prospective students. As a response to the Developmental engagement, the higher education section of the website has recently undergone significant revision and improvement. All courses now have outlines of content and assessment. Detailed course content is available in a 'further information' link. Course teams originate the information which is collated and checked by the Higher Education Officer before being submitted for approval to the partner awarding body.

40 Course handbooks are provided by, or in conjunction with, the awarding bodies. All of these now carry dual college and awarding body branding. The College has responded to the Developmental engagement by developing an additional generic student handbook format, which is now in use and ensures consistency in information provided for students. There is currently little reference to student support, library facilities and other resources for higher education students in the additional template. The team considers it desirable to develop the college higher education handbook with further college-specific information and for it to direct students more strongly to the wider range of higher education resources available on the virtual learning environment.

41 Current students and staff make extensive and regular use of the college virtual learning environments. A general higher education section contains substantial amounts of useful information, including that on good academic practice and study skills. The team considers this to be good practice. Links are provided to partner awarding bodies and handbooks and programme specifications can be accessed electronically. There is, additionally, specific material on programme content, assessment, and course management, plus detailed and useful module-specific content available.

**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?**

42 The consistency of material and the application of the guidelines governing logos and production are laid down in the contracts with partner institutions. Information originated by course teams is approved by the awarding body. The college Marketing Officer is responsible for liaising with the counterparts in the awarding bodies to ensure that all contractual obligations are met, for example the dual branding of publications.

43 Since the Developmental engagement, the College has worked to ensure consistency in the information provided to students once they have enrolled on their courses. The Higher Education Officer collates all course information on higher education courses and checks them for compliance and consistency prior to forwarding them to the relevant awarding body. The Officer also receives all updates and amendments from the partners and communicates these to the relevant course team. The Scrutiny Committee has reviewed the student handbooks for each higher education course and produced a generic list of essential content. The course information on the updated website appears to be consistent in style and level of detail. Students confirmed that the information that they received from the College both prior to and during their course was accurate and complete.

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

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

44 A Developmental engagement in assessment was held in at the College in December 2009. The lines of enquiry were:

**Line of enquiry 1:** How accurate and useful are assessment information and guidance materials for students?

**Line of enquiry 2:** Is formative assessment fit for purpose?

**Line of enquiry 3:** Does summative assessment meet the requirements and expectations of the awarding bodies and of the Academic Infrastructure?

45 Through these open lines of enquiry the College invited a wide-ranging review of its management of assessment and related issues in order to develop its management of higher education and prepare itself more fully for the Summative review.

46 Good practice was noted in the close relationship with awarding bodies to develop and sustain good assessment practice, including the staff development provided by the



College and its partners. Good practice was also noted in the attention the College gave to formative assessment, the use of diagnostic tools and the creation of assessment resources on the college virtual learning environment.

47 It was recommended to the College that it should try to achieve a greater parity of student experience by managing assessment practices across its portfolio of courses more consistently. This consideration prompted further recommendations to achieve a more consistent approach to the provision of information on the college website, course information, and material available on the virtual learning environment. The College was encouraged to continue its efforts to develop its commitment to the culture of higher education through support for staff understanding of the Academic Infrastructure and scholarly activity. A final recommendation was made to develop the area of student support and academic guidance.

## D Foundation Degrees

48 The College currently offers three Foundation Degrees: FdA Criminology and Criminal Justice, FdSc Environmental Conservation and Heritage Management, and FdSc Computing. The latter is in the final year of operation, following the withdrawal of student numbers by the partner awarding body. Two further Foundation Degrees have been agreed with an awarding body, but the College is currently awaiting the impact of funding changes on the sector before introducing them.

49 Significant improvement is noted in the Foundation Degree programmes since the Developmental engagement, with a closer adherence to the *Foundation Degree benchmark statement* and the *Code of practice* in areas such as skills development, work-based learning and student information and guidance. This has been achieved partly as a response to the Developmental engagement action plan and partly by sharing good practice between courses and from the teacher training programme. The team now concludes that the College offers Foundation Degree students a consistently good programme of learning.

50 All the conclusions of the Summative review below, with the exception of one area of good practice specific to teacher training programmes (paragraph 32) apply to Foundation Degrees.

## E Conclusions and summary of judgements

51 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Cirencester 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 Royal Agricultural College, University of Bath, The University of Bolton, and University of the West of England, Bristol.

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

- there is effective internal audit of higher education carried out by the College (paragraph 19)
- the staff development strategy for higher education is well-considered and effective (paragraphs 22, 35)
- there is a highly organised system of mentoring and guidance within the teacher training programme (paragraph 32)

## Integrated quality and enhancement review

- the higher education virtual learning environment provides a shared area with useful information on good academic practice and study skills (paragraphs 37, 41).

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

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

- review and improve the scrutiny at institutional level of the annual monitoring reports and link them to the subject annual reviews to realise the full potential of the systems currently in place (paragraph 14)
- ensure that quality assurance procedures result in all actions taken by course teams being recorded, reported and available for scrutiny (paragraphs 21, 32)
- develop the role of the Personal Tutor to embed the guidance from the *Code of practice* relating to the quality of learning opportunities (paragraphs 27, 30).

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

- ensure that the actions from the Developmental engagement to enhance higher education continue to be implemented at programme level (paragraph 20)
- develop the College higher education handbook with further college-specific information and for it to direct students more strongly to the wider range of higher education resources available on the virtual learning environment (paragraph 40).

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

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

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

Cirencester College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 2011						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
In the course of the Summative review the team identified the following areas of <b>good practice</b> that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>there is effective internal audit of higher education carried out by the College (paragraph 19)</li> </ul>	Regular schedule	April 2011	Quality Systems Group	Scheduled	Directorate	Evaluation of documentation
	Feed issues arising into HE action plan	Ongoing	HE Officer	On plan	Assistant Principal	Scrutiny Committee to check/evaluate
	Systemise collection of HE data as a result of the feedback	Dec 2011	Quality Systems Group	Published data on success rates and progression	Directorate	HE Sub-Committee to review
	Continue to refine process of HE observations	Sept 2011	Quality Systems Group	Increase data captured	Directorate	Training needs analysis by education team leader
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the staff development strategy for higher education is well-considered and effective (paragraphs 22, 35)</li> </ul>	Extend mandatory training to new HE lecturers	July 2011	HE Officer	Induction session	Assistant Principal	Evaluation of staff development records
	Develop Moodle staff development area	April 2011	HE Officer	Forum on Moodle	Head of Education	Appraisal by Head of Education

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>there is a highly organised system of mentoring and guidance within the teacher training programme (paragraph 32)</li> </ul>	Extend tracking of students to other HE programmes	Oct 2011	HE tutor	Central system	Assistant Principal (Student Services)	Appraised through Dept review of tutorials
	Review opportunities to extend practice in other work-based learning modules	Dec 2011	HE sub-committee/ Course Leaders	Guidelines produced and minutes from meeting	Assistant Principal	Evaluation of student voice data
	Continue to develop VLE	Ongoing	HE Officer	Published	Head of Education	Evaluation of student Feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the higher education virtual learning environment provides a shared area with useful information on good academic practice and study skills (paragraphs 37, 41).</li> </ul>	Introduce plagiarism test	Sept 2011	Web Developer	Published	HE Officer	Evaluation of staff Feedback
	Introduce a guidance aspect	Sept 2011	HE Tutor	Published	HE Officer	Evaluation of student feedback
<b>Advisable</b>	<b>Action to be taken</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Success indicators</b>	<b>Reported to</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
The team considers that it is <b>advisable</b> for the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>review and improve the scrutiny at institutional level of the annual monitoring reports and link them to the subject annual reviews to realise</li> </ul>	Assistant Principal to review all Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) and External Examiner reports prior to sending AMRs to higher education institution	Dec 2011	Assistant Principal	Completion of spreadsheet	Directorate and higher education institutions	Appraisal through Self Assessment Report

the full potential of the systems currently in place (paragraph 14)						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure that quality assurance procedures result in all actions taken by course teams are recorded, reported and available for scrutiny (paragraphs 21, 32)</li> </ul>	All complaints to go through college system	Ongoing	Course leaders	Audit by student voice	Quality Officer	Triennial review by Head of Customer Services in Directorate
	Updated action plans	July 2011	HE Sub-Committee	Published in shared file	HE Officer	Scrutiny Committee checks actions take place and evaluates success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop the role of the Personal Tutor to embed the guidance from the <i>Code of practice</i> relating to the quality of learning opportunities (paragraphs 27, 30).</li> </ul>	System for induction and regular 1:1 interviews	Sept 2011	HE Tutor (all)	Schedule advertised to students	Assistant Principal (Student Services)	Review of HE Tutor and evaluation of data collected
	Develop guidance on finance and welfare	July 2011		Clear handbooks and web-based guidance	Assistant Principal (Student Services)	Evaluation of student voice data
	Systematic collection of data from 1:1 interviews	April 2012		Personal tutor will have oversight of student data	HE Officer	Evaluation of statistics on website and as performance indicators

Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is <b>desirable</b> for the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure that the actions from the Developmental engagement to enhance higher education continue to be implemented at programme level (paragraph 20)</li> </ul>	Audit progress on Developmental engagement and Summative review action plans	July 2011	Central Team	Carry out audit at Staff Development day	Directorate	Directorate review of HE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop the College higher education handbook with further college-specific information and for it to direct students more strongly to the wider range of higher education resources available on the virtual learning environment (paragraph 40).</li> </ul>	Increase awareness of online support, especially study skills	Sept 2011	HE Tutor	Induction session	Assistant Principal (Student Services)	Evaluation of student voice data
	Continue to develop HE community at Cirencester	Sept 2012	HE Tutor	Student feedback	Quality Officer	Evaluation of student voice through department reviews

## Appendix 1

Further information on particular areas for development in the HE Tutor role and links to the code of practice:

Section of the <i>Code of practice</i> /FHEQ	Action to be taken
FHEQ: ensure assessment of outcomes is based on the outcomes of learning	HE Tutor to ensure progress of students is tracked and thus ensure that students are achieving at an appropriate level
Section 3: Disabled students	HE Tutor acts as a point of contact (other than course leader) for any students with a disability. The tutor role will be developed to include more 1:1 contact and she will arrange screening with the Academic Support department for any student who indicates on their application form that they have a disability.
Section 8: Career education, information, advice and guidance	HE Tutor will meet students during their course to discuss opportunities for progression and will provide career guidance. Details on employability skills acquired during the period of study will also be provided.
Section 9: Work-based and placement learning	Through 1:1 interviews HE Tutor will evaluate progress in the work-based learning (WBL) module and will ensure that students are happy with their placement. She will liaise with course leaders regarding any issues and will ensure complaints are passed to the Quality Officer. However, the main responsibility for organising and assessing WBL will stay with the course teams: the role of the HE tutor will be to overview students' progress and particularly to check student satisfaction.
Section 10: Admissions to higher education	From next year, the HE Tutor will be present at admission interview for teaching courses (and any other courses where the college, rather than the higher education institution) are responsible for processing applications. However, the key role of the Tutor in the admissions process is at induction day. One area for development is to ensure all students are given a standard induction day and given guidance on all services offered by the college.

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