



Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

Stafford College

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Preface

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

Purpose of IQER

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

The IQER process

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

Developmental engagement

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

The main elements of a Developmental engagement are:

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

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

Summative review

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

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

Evidence

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

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

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

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

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

Outcomes of IQER

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

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

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

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

Executive summary

The Summative review of Stafford College carried out in March 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:

- the College collaborates effectively with external partners, including the Staffordshire University Regional Federation, to support the curriculum and academic standards
- a recent review of College policies and practices has ensured that the various elements of the Academic Infrastructure are embedded within the provision and are regularly used as reference points by academic staff
- the College provides staff with access to a comprehensive programme of staff development and supports this with financial incentives and a protected allocation of time
- there are extensive arrangements for student support, exemplified by the highly responsive role of the personal tutor
- the higher education course leaders' handbook brings together a range of key College and University information to provide clear and comprehensive guidance, which is underpinned by explicit reference to the Academic Infrastructure
- in making improvements to the assessment information provided in course handbooks, the College used its membership of the Staffordshire University Regional Federation to test its proposals and agree the improvements with partner colleges across the region.

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 **desirable** for the College to:

- build on existing initiatives and good practices to establish a strategic college-wide approach to employer engagement
- reinforce the place of student opinion by encouraging the more consistent use and understanding of existing representation mechanisms, as well as considering the value of the National Student Survey
- continue to develop the virtual learning environment, particularly in relation to programme-specific and interactive content

- ensure that all students are made aware of and have better access to the formal programme specification for their award.

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 Stafford College (the 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 Edexcel and Staffordshire University (the University), the latter as part of the Staffordshire University Regional Federation (the Federation). The review was carried out by Dr Patsy Campbell, Mr Mark Cooper and Mr Seth Crofts (reviewers), and Mr David Lewis (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 the main partner institution, 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 Stafford College (the College) is a general college of further education operating on a main and two smaller campuses within the town centre. The College has about 13,500 students overall. The last five years have seen a steady, managed growth in higher education student numbers from 385 in 2005-06 to nearly 520, or 406 full-time equivalents, in 2010-11. The growth has been largely in part-time students, with full-time numbers, currently 289, remaining broadly constant. The College has offered higher education for more than 25 years and has been a member of the Staffordshire University Regional Federation, generally known as SURF, since the creation of the Federation in 2002. Virtually all of the academic staff who teach the higher education programmes also contribute to the further education provision.

5 The list of current higher education awards funded by HEFCE, with the relevant awarding bodies and full-time equivalent numbers in parentheses, is as follows:

Staffordshire University

- FdA Adult Social Care (2.5)
- FdA Contemporary Art Practice: pathways in 3D Design and Contemporary Crafts; Fine Art and Sculpture; Illustration (25)
- FdA Digital Media Production: pathways in New Media; Photography (23.5)
- FdA Early Childhood Studies (25)
- FdA Education (Teaching Assistants) (9.5)
- FdA Fashion Studies (42.5)
- FdA Film and Television Production (Technology and Management) (19)

- FdA Graphics and Digital Design (22.5)
- FdA Offender Management (11)
- FdA Small Business (Salon) Management (7.5)
- FdA Sports Development and Coaching (36)
- FdA Sustainable Communities (5)
- Foundation Year Psychology (12)
- Foundation Year Science (40)
- HNC/D Business (50)
- Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (36)
- Working in Post Compulsory Education, level 4 Certificate in Continuing Professional Development (2.25)
- Technical Skills in the Automotive Sector, University level 4 award (00)

Edexcel

- HND Music Production (23)
- HND Performing Arts (Performance) (14).

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

6 Stafford College has formal partnership agreements with two awarding bodies for its higher education programmes. These are Staffordshire University and Edexcel. All but two of the programmes provided by the College are awards of the University, provided as part of a consortium arrangement, the Staffordshire University Regional Federation. The partnership agreement with the Federation is detailed and comprehensive, with the responsibilities of each partner clearly articulated. The provision is subject to the University's policies and regulations in respect of academic standards. The College has clearly devolved management responsibilities that include meeting agreed recruitment targets, staff appointments, the provision of student support, student complaints, and ensuring the quality of learning opportunities and students' achievement of agreed academic standards. The College operates within a standard agreement for its Edexcel awards.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

7 The College has an agreed programme of new building that is due to be completed over the next three years. The plans include the creation of a new higher education centre within one of the existing buildings. The University is currently revising its partnership funding arrangements in response to the loss of HEFCE Recognised Funding Consortia recognition from 2009-10. The University and College are committed to retaining a relationship for the provision of higher education, and new arrangements are due for 2011-12. To prepare for the changed funding situation, the University has recruited a Partnership Manager to work with each of its partners. In response to the HEFCE restriction of new full-time student numbers, the University has set a lower full-time student number target for the College in 2010-11. The target will not increase in 2011-12. Many higher national awards have recently been replaced by FDs in equivalent subject areas, and there has been a significant growth of FDs in new subject areas. Any new provision is expected to consist of part-time FDs or part-time continuing professional development awards, validated by Staffordshire University.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

8 Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. The submission was developed from a meeting of full and part-time students from across the curriculum areas. The final submission was written by two students and facilitated by a member of College student services and an intermitting student who had been involved in the Developmental engagement. It gave the team useful insight into student opinion in advance of the visit and helped to inform the agenda that was explored during the review. During the visit the team also had a useful meeting with a group of full and part-time 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?

9 Stafford College has a long experience of delivering higher education. Its membership of the Federation provides an extensive support structure for the management of its higher education programmes. University link tutors have a pivotal role in providing a supportive dialogue with individual curriculum teams and safeguarding University regulations and academic standards. This support has recently been enhanced by the appointment of a University Partnership Manager, who operates as a focused management link for the whole College. The partnership agreement sets out explicit procedures for course approval, review and annual monitoring. In addition, the Federation provides regular opportunities for the benchmarking of standards between partner colleges, including annual assessment standardisation meetings.

10 The College has a comprehensive higher education strategy that makes explicit the strategic direction for the management and delivery of the provision. There are well-understood lines of accountability between those senior staff with leadership responsibilities for higher education. The executive responsibility resides with a Vice Principal, Curriculum and Quality, who reports to the College Board of Governors. A Higher Education Coordinator oversees operational matters, working closely with the course leaders and subject teams. The Coordinator is directly accountable to the College Quality Manager. The heads of faculty, who are members of the Senior Management Team, have responsibility for assuring standards and quality for all higher education within their faculties.

11 There are clear arrangements for deliberating on academic standards, supported by regular and effective communication up and down the higher education management structure. Course leaders, operating within their faculty structures, have responsibility for the delivery and management of their programmes. There is excellent communication between the course leaders, the heads of faculty and the senior staff with a college-wide responsibility for the higher education provision. There is close and effective collaboration between the Higher Education Coordinator, Quality Manager and the Vice Principal. There is an active and well-attended Higher Education Course Leaders' Group that is chaired by the Higher Education Coordinator. The group facilitates the discussion of academic standards between programmes, including the sharing of good practice with explicit reference to the Academic Infrastructure.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

12 The College has completed a significant part of a systematic review of its policies and procedures relating to higher education. It has been assiduous in referencing all revised documentation to the relevant elements of the Academic Infrastructure. This has provided staff with valuable and systematic guidance that is allowing the Academic Infrastructure to become embedded within the provision. Operationally, the Higher Education Course Leaders' Handbook, which drives the management and delivery of programmes, ensures that proper account is taken of College policies and the Academic Infrastructure more widely. Academic staff are familiar with the Academic Infrastructure and comfortable when describing their engagement with it. They are able to cite examples of this engagement, including using the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* when developing approaches to assessment feedback. More generally, staff are supported in their use of the Academic Infrastructure through the work of the University link tutors and the useful information provided on the College intranet.

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?

13 The partnership agreement and associated University documents make clear what the awarding body expects of the College. The records of the Federation's quality committee, which involves the partner colleges as well as the University, show it to be an effective mechanism for overseeing the maintenance of appropriate academic standards.

14 Robust internal College arrangements for developing new provision, coupled with Edexcel and the University's procedures, require that appropriate academic standards are established at the time of programme approval. Subsequently, well-defined programme monitoring arrangements ensure that standards are regularly checked. Each programme produces an annual monitoring report, which draws upon a range of inputs, including student feedback. The reports, which are thorough and focused, are considered within the College faculties, at the Higher Education Course Leaders' Group and at the Federation's partnership committee. The University link tutors work with course teams to coordinate the annual monitoring process. The College completes an annual summary report for its Edexcel provision, which incorporates the findings of the external examiner's verification visit. The systematic implementation of internal verification and external benchmarking procedures also help to ensure that the requirements of the awarding bodies are met.

15 The College is committed to working strategically with the awarding body and partner colleges within the Federation to develop new curriculum proposals. This close cooperation helps to ensure that developments meet the requirements and standards of the University. The College also makes use of relevant market intelligence and employer engagement in the design and delivery of awards, including work-based learning. This is evident in the FdA Offender Management, which has been developed to meet the specific needs of a group of local prisons. While there are many examples of effective employer participation, it is desirable that the College build on existing initiatives and good practices to establish a more strategic approach to employer engagement.

16 A further important element in assuring standards is the contribution of external examiners, whose reports consistently express confidence in the academic standards of awards delivered by the College. There is a clear process for responding to external examiners' recommendations. Initially, the University send reports to the Quality Manager, who oversees the College response with the Higher Education Coordinator. Course leaders work with their University link tutor to carry out any specific actions that are required.

The College has responded promptly to a recommendation from the Developmental engagement that it should liaise with the University to ensure that external examiners' reports provide information specific to its delivery of Federation-wide awards. The deliberations have involved other partner colleges and a revised arrangement will be in place by the time external examiners report for the 2010-11 year.

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

17 The College has a clear strategy for staff development, which has resulted in a comprehensive range of opportunities provided through the Learning Development Unit and a high level of take-up. In addition, College staff have access to a variety of activities that are made available by the University for colleges in the Federation. The staff development strategy offers opportunities for academic and support staff and gives all higher education staff an annual allocation of 11 development days. It includes a sophisticated approach to staff incentives. This uses specific financial rewards for staff who complete higher awards, teaching qualifications and agreed continuing professional development routes.

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?

18 The quality of learning opportunities is managed within the comprehensive framework provided by the wide range of College policies and procedures, and the clear regulations and requirements of the University. Operationally, the maintenance of quality is helped by uncomplicated and robust College reporting arrangements, as outlined in paragraphs 10 and 11, and the supportive structure of the Federation, described in paragraph 9. University link tutors maintain a supportive oversight of programme delivery and close communication with course teams. Their role is an important additional factor in assuring the quality of learning opportunities.

19 A well-developed committee structure supports effective internal reporting of quality matters within the College. There is regular and effective communication between course committees, faculty management teams, the weekly College curriculum strategy meetings and the Senior Management Team. Topics relating to programme delivery and support can also be shared across the College at the meetings of the Higher Education Course Leaders' Group.

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

20 The College has responded promptly to the Developmental engagement recommendation that it should clearly communicate the timescale for the return of students'

assessed work and feedback. Clear guidance is now provided within the checklist for course handbooks.

21 In seeking to ensure that students receive appropriate learning opportunities, the College uses a number of mechanisms for sharing good practice. Internally, the Higher Education Course Leaders' Group, described in paragraph 11, has an explicit objective to identify and share good practice with reference to the *Code of practice*. Externally, the College makes extensive use of Federation mechanisms for the sharing, discussion and adoption of good practice. The success of this strategy is evident in the use of forums to consider annual teaching and learning observations, action planning for the Developmental engagement, and feedback from staff development activities, such as those to promote innovation in teaching.

22 Student module questionnaires, the written submission for the review and the views expressed in a meeting with the team all confirm that there is a high level of student satisfaction with learning opportunities that are available to them. Student opinion is also collected through other mechanisms, including course representatives. However, students are not always well informed about the range of mechanisms for expressing their views or the identity of their course representative. While the College clearly regards the views of its students as important, it is desirable for it to encourage a better understanding and deployment of existing representation mechanisms. It should also consider how to employ the National Student Survey, which currently has limited use within its quality assurance arrangements.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

23 The review of College policies and procedures described in paragraph 12 is resulting in the embedding of the Academic Infrastructure across all of the higher education provision. For example, the systematic updating of policies has involved a detailed consideration of the *Code of practice*, notably *Section 3: Disabled students*, *Section 8: Career education, information, advice and guidance*, and *Section 10: Admissions to higher education*, as well as *Section 6: Assessment of students*.

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

24 The College uses a thoroughly documented and supportive annual teaching observation scheme. The scheme is shared across the Federation partner colleges and is a requirement of the partnership agreement. Trained peer observers record good practice and areas for improvement. They also advise on the support that is available through staff development programmes. The Quality Committee of the Federation receives a report on the outcomes of annual observations and is able to use it to inform subsequent staff development planning.

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

25 Under the terms of its partnership agreements, the College is responsible for the level of support it offers to its higher education students. The College has clear policies and procedures for the provision of academic, pastoral and additional learning support. These have been or are being checked against the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*. The effectiveness of its support arrangements are systematically monitored through a variety of mechanisms, including questionnaires, feedback from student representatives and reflections as part of annual programme monitoring.

26 The College has a comprehensive system of support for its students. This begins after enrolment with a thorough programme-specific induction, which includes preliminary training in the use of computers and specialised equipment where appropriate. Academic support is provided through regular academic tutorials, with additional support available through a range of communication methods, including telephone, texting, email, a social networking site and the College's virtual learning environment. Part-time and work-based students particularly value this range of optional communication. Students with disclosed disabilities have access to suitable additional support.

27 The College also provides support and guidance on student finance, careers, further study and academic progression, as well as counselling, childcare and varied sports facilities. Some of these services are supplemented or provided through access to University facilities.

28 Students report a high level of satisfaction with the support available to them. In particular, the role of personal tutors is highlighted for the quality of support, flexibility of access and the responsiveness to individual needs. The Mature and Higher Education Students' Association is one of a range of student-run interest groups that are linked to the Student Council and supported by staff. The association enables students returning to education and those studying while in work to liaise electronically with peers and tutors.

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

29 The College provides a thorough induction for new staff and a comprehensive programme of continuing staff development. The Staff Handbook offers valuable guidance in formulating individual professional development plans. Some activities focus specifically on the needs of higher education and have included opportunities to enhance the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. Staff can also access external development activities, for example funded conference attendance and University activities that include programme-specific development with link tutors. Many staff have benefited from the opportunity to study for higher academic awards at the University for which fees are waived. As reported in the Developmental engagement, staff development has contributed to a high level of awareness of the Academic Infrastructure and the establishment of robust higher education assessment practices, including high-quality feedback to students. A scrutiny of staff profiles confirms a high level of participation in formal staff development activities within the past year.

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?

30 The approval process for new courses includes clear mechanisms for looking at resources. These include two external panel members appointed by the University, who are able to consider the specialist needs of the programme. The College's internal quality systems monitor the sufficiency of resources through annual reports. The College has invested in high-quality resources in recent years, in some cases with the support of HEFCE capital funding. Specific improvements have been made across a range of facilities, notably in music technology, a theatre for performing arts, a dance studio and a sports hall.

31 The College is committed to a strategy of recruiting and retaining specialist staff to provide a higher education experience of high quality for students. It has clear arrangements for the appointment of all staff. Most of those appointed to teach on higher education awards

also contribute to further education. The University checks the qualifications and experience of all staff who teach on its awards. Staff teaching on University awards are recognised as associate lecturers of the University and enjoy a range of benefits, including access to facilities and professional development opportunities. Overall, the information available to the team indicates that teaching staff are well qualified and appropriately experienced. Well-qualified technicians provide support to staff and students in the management and use of specialist and information technology equipment.

32 Each new higher education award is allocated a dedicated library budget and a target of ensuring that required texts are provided at a ratio of one text for each five students. The Library and Information Services Manager is a member of the Higher Education Course Leaders' Group and the Federation's Library Resources Management Group. This enables changing needs to be identified and communicated within the College.

33 The College has a spacious and well laid-out library with appropriate higher education materials. Students on University awards have access to University libraries and can make requests for materials to be delivered to the College. Delays in providing a University identity card created access problems for students at the start of the current academic year and the College is working with the awarding body to avoid a repeat in 2011. Part-time students appreciate the evening opening times of the College library and the wide range of course reading materials that are available electronically from off-campus.

34 Student feedback suggests general satisfaction with College resources, with some concerns about the lack of a study area dedicated to higher education, some problems with the virtual learning environment, and access to some key course texts.

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?

35 The College has a detailed and rigorous marketing plan for its provision. It produces an overarching promotional plan which details the itinerary for marketing and publishing activities, including open days, for each academic year. The range of information published includes course information sheets, full and part-time prospectuses and press releases. The College also maintains a detailed and attractive website, which includes a dedicated area for higher education study. The site incorporates direct links to the websites of the University and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. Students attested to the accuracy of the information they receive prior to enrolment. It is helpful in allowing them to make informed choices about studying at the College. The feedback data from questionnaires also indicates that students feel well informed about the College, the programmes and their studies more generally.

36 The College virtual learning environment is accessible from the website, allowing students easy access on or off site to a range of course and support materials. Students on university awards also have access to the University's virtual learning environment. Each programme has an area on the virtual learning environment where useful documents are

uploaded including course handbooks and assignment briefs. Some programme teams maximise the use of their pages with additional interactive activities and learning opportunities, while others see it as an area for development. Students on some programmes are able to submit assignments online, which is particularly valued by part-time students. In the light of current variability, it is desirable that the College continue to develop the virtual learning environment, particularly in relation to course and interactive content.

37 Programme handbooks are well presented for both University and Edexcel awards. They are clear for the user and contain helpful information relating to the programme, its delivery and assessment. They also include the procedure for challenging assessment decisions, a form to apply for extenuating circumstances and a host of other useful College and course-specific information. The formal programme specifications for university and Edexcel awards are provided in some handbooks or on the virtual learning environment. For the most part, however, they are available separately when requested by the students. Module handbooks for University awards are published in a common, easily usable format. Students treat the module handbooks as their primary source of programme information and their key reference for understanding the expected academic standards. Although students feel well informed about their studies, it is desirable that the College make the status of the programme specifications better understood and the formal documents more readily available.

38 The College has published its higher education strategy in line with HEFCE requirements. The strategy accurately meshes with other key documents, including the College's development plan for 2007-10, the College mission, quality improvement plan, risk management plan, financial plan and capital strategy.

39 A clear and comprehensive Higher Education Course Leaders' Handbook is published and issued to all staff teaching on higher education awards. New staff receive the handbook, which is also available on the College intranet, as part of induction. The handbook contains systematic references to the various elements of the Academic Infrastructure and their use as part of programme management and delivery. Other useful content includes information on College quality procedures, the support available to students and how to maximise the virtual learning environment. Staff confirm their regular use of the handbook, citing it as the definitive shared reference source for everyone teaching on higher education programmes in the College.

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

40 Each faculty is initially responsible for the accuracy of its own course information sheets. These are then used as a basis for producing course guides and website entries. The information sheets are reviewed annually by curriculum teams and submitted for approval by the course leader. The timeline for the design, proofing and production of each course guide is clearly identified and monitored, using the annual promotion plan that is issued to all staff and shared with the awarding body.

41 The College has appropriate arrangements for ensuring the accuracy of information provided on its website. The Head of Marketing and Student Services is a member of the Federation's marketing group and liaises with this group and the Higher Education Coordinator. This process ensures that the external College website contains relevant, sufficient and up-to-date information about the higher education provision. The site includes course information sheets for each programme, which can be downloaded and printed. Students can access general College information on the website and apply for courses.

In line with the *Code of practice, Section 3: Disabled students*, the website is fully compliant with the relevant legislation. It provides links to information relating to student finance, disability support and academic regulations.

42 Stafford College has, in association with the University, developed a checklist of essential information to be included in student award handbooks. This has improved the consistency, as well as the level of the information issued to students in 2010-11. The handbooks, along with module guides and assignment briefs, contain detailed information about the specific award and student support. Students are also actively signposted to further information regarding the academic regulations that govern their award.

43 The College has made substantial progress in responding to the Developmental engagement recommendation that it provide more specific assessment information in course handbooks. In responding to the recommendation, discussion was shared at Federation meetings. This allowed ideas to be tested and the best approach agreed with all of the partner colleges. This good practice has helped to ensure that the improvement to handbooks is adopted regionally within the Federation.

44 The University has explicit requirements of partner colleges regarding the approval of marketing materials, including the use of University and College logotypes and other images. The procedure is the subject of detailed documentation and included in the partnership agreement. It is well understood and implemented by the College. There is a strict timetable for the process of approval of information, which is dependent on the size and complexity of the materials to be published.

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

45 The Developmental engagement in assessment was undertaken in May 2010. It focused on three lines of enquiry, which were agreed with the College in advance. The lines of enquiry reflect a broad range of assessment issues and allowed the team to explore the three IQER core themes. They were as follows:

Line of enquiry 1: How does Stafford College ensure that its assessment strategy, policy and procedures ensure appropriate academic standards are understood, applied and maintained?

Line of enquiry 2: How does Stafford College ensure that requirements for formative and summative assessment feedback are understood and applied, and that feedback supports all students in the achievement of intended learning outcomes?

Line of enquiry 3: How does Stafford College ensure that published information relating to assessment for which it is responsible is accurate, complete and accessible, and is effectively communicated to all relevant stakeholders?

46 The Developmental engagement report identified a range of good practice across all three core themes. The good practice included the College's use of its links within the Federation to support the development and security of its assessment practices. In addition, assessment policies and procedures align well with the Academic Infrastructure, while the College's assessment arrangements for higher education strongly reflect the needs of current employment. Academic staff have access to a comprehensive programme of staff development. The report noted that the College is clear about its responsibilities for published information and has secure arrangements to ensure the accuracy and currency of the assessment and marketing materials it produces. The new higher education course leaders' handbook provides clear and comprehensive guidance for managing assessment.

47 The report included a number of desirable recommendations for improving the provision. These included a need to liaise with its awarding body to consider how external examiners' reports might provide differentiated information about the College's delivery of those awards that are offered across a number of Federation partners. It recommended that the timescale for the return of indicative assessment grades and written feedback should be clarified and communicated clearly to students and staff. Student handbooks and the virtual learning environment should contain a minimum agreed level of standard assessment information. The College should continue the development of its website so that it contains a more appropriate amount of higher education assessment information.

D Foundation Degrees

48 Stafford College has been an active member of the Staffordshire University Regional Federation since its inception in 2002. All new HEFCE-funded provision since 2005-06, when the College introduced its first Foundation Degrees, has been developed within the Federation. The large majority of the higher education is now provided through 10 Foundation Degrees, with most having replaced previous higher national awards. The awards are mapped to the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, Sector Skills Councils' Foundation Degree frameworks and national occupational standards where appropriate. They have incorporated employer feedback during development to ensure the relevance of intended learning outcomes. A small number of higher national awards are recruiting well and are likely to be retained, but any new provision is likely to be in the form of Foundation Degrees and delivered part-time. The College strategy is to align provision with the needs of employers and where there is perceived student demand. New Foundation Degrees in Adult Social Care, Offender Management and Sustainable Communities have been introduced for the 2010-11 year. Other programmes being considered include a Federation-wide award in business and law.

49 The areas of good practice and recommendations relating to Foundation Degrees are common to the whole provision. They are listed in the main conclusions, paragraphs 50 to 53 below.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

50 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Stafford 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, Edexcel and Staffordshire University.

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

- the College collaborates effectively with external partners, including the Staffordshire University Regional Federation, to support the curriculum and academic standards (paragraphs 9, 15, 16, 21, 43)
- a recent review of College policies and practices has ensured that the various elements of the Academic Infrastructure are embedded within the provision and are regularly used as reference points by academic staff (paragraphs 12, 23)
- the College provides staff with access to a comprehensive programme of staff development and supports this with financial incentives and a protected allocation of time (paragraphs 17, 29)
- there are extensive arrangements for student support, exemplified by the highly responsive role of the personal tutor (paragraphs 26 to 28)
- the higher education course leaders' handbook brings together a range of key College and University information to provide clear and comprehensive guidance, which is underpinned by explicit reference to the Academic Infrastructure (paragraph 39)
- in making improvements to the assessment information provided in course handbooks, the College used its membership of the Staffordshire University Regional Federation to test its proposals and agree the improvements with partner colleges across the region (paragraph 43).

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

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

- build on existing initiatives and good practices to establish a strategic college-wide approach to employer engagement (paragraph 15)
- reinforce the place of student opinion by encouraging the more consistent use and understanding of existing representation mechanisms, as well as considering the value of the National Student Survey (paragraph 22)
- continue to develop the virtual learning environment, particularly in relation to programme-specific and interactive content (paragraph 36)
- ensure that all students are made aware of and have better access to the formal programme specification for their award (paragraph 37).

54 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.

55 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.

Integrated quality and enhancement review

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, 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.

Stafford College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 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 good practice that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College collaborates effectively with external partners, including the Staffordshire University Regional Federation, to support the curriculum and academic standards (paragraphs 9, 15, 16, 21, 43) 	Annual review of HE provision	March 2012	Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality	Continued partnerships with Staffordshire University and within Staffordshire University Regional Federation (SURF)	Senior Management Team	<p>SURF Annual Report</p> <p>Senior Management Team Minutes</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a recent review of College policies and practices has ensured that the various elements of the Academic Infrastructure are embedded within the provision and are regularly used as reference points by academic staff (paragraphs 12, 23) 	Annual review of College policies and procedures	Sept 2012	Quality Manager	HE-related policies and procedures updated annually as appropriate	<p>Quality Committee</p> <p>HE Course Leaders' (CL) Group</p>	<p>Quality Committee Minutes</p> <p>HE CL Group meetings minutes</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College provides staff with access to a comprehensive programme of staff development and supports this with financial incentives and a protected allocation of time (paragraphs 17, 29) 	Annual programme of HE-related staff development	Jan 2012	HE Coordinator	Record of College continuing professional development (CPD) programme and individual CPD records	HE Course Leaders' Group	HE CL Group meetings minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there are extensive arrangements for student support, exemplified by the highly responsive role of the personal tutor (paragraphs 26 to 28) 	Course Annual Monitoring Reports	Sept 2011	HE course leaders	Continued high-quality provision of HE student support	HE Course Leaders' Group	Questionnaire results Annual Monitoring Reports HE CL Group meetings minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the higher education course leaders' handbook brings together a range of key College and University information to provide clear and comprehensive guidance, which is underpinned by explicit reference to the Academic Infrastructure (paragraph 39) 	Annual review of HE Course Leaders' Handbook	July 2012	HE Coordinator	HE Course Leaders' handbook updated annually as appropriate	HE Course Leaders' Group	HE CL Group meetings minutes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in making improvements to the assessment information provided in course handbooks, the College used its membership of the Staffordshire University Regional Federation to test its proposals and agree the improvements with partner colleges across the region (paragraph 43). 	Continued partnership and collaboration within SURF	March 2012	Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality	Continued positive partnerships with Staffordshire University and within Staffordshire University Regional Federation (SURF) SURF Annual Report	Senior Management Team	SURF Quality & Curriculum Committee Minutes
Desirable	Action to be taken	date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team agreed the following areas where it would be desired to take action:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> build on existing initiatives and good practices to establish a strategic college-wide approach to employer engagement (paragraph 15) 	College-wide review of approach to HE employer engagement	July 2012	HE Coordinator	Recommendations for the dissemination of good practice and strategic approach	Senior Management Team	Review of recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reinforce the place of student opinion by encouraging the more consistent use and understanding of existing 	Further reinforce the inherent significance of 'learner voice'	July 2012	Quality Manager	Annual Monitoring Reports	Student Council HE Course Leaders' Group	HE CL Group meetings minutes Annual Monitoring Report

representation mechanisms, as well as considering the value of the National Student Survey (paragraph 22)						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue to develop the virtual learning environment, particularly in relation to programme-specific and interactive content (paragraph 36) 	Further development of HE Course Moodle sites	Sept 2012	HE course leaders	Updated HE virtual learning environments (VLEs)	HE Course Leaders' Group	VLE site reviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that all students are made aware of and have better access to the formal programme specification for their award (paragraph 37). 	<p>Programme specifications to be included on all course VLEs</p> <p>Liaise with Staffordshire University to increase student access to programme specifications</p> <p>Publish Edexcel specifications on College website</p>	May 2012	HE Coordinator	<p>Programme specifications on all HE VLEs and University website</p> <p>Edexcel specifications on College website</p>	HE Course Leaders' Group	<p>HE CL Group meetings minutes</p> <p>Updated College website</p> <p>Updated University website</p>

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