



Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

West Thames College

March 2011

SR 42/2010

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2011

ISBN 978 1 84979 296 7

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

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 West Thames 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 well organised and managed individual and group tutorial system is highly effective in encouraging student personal and academic development
- there is an extensive and well managed cross-college system to support the students' academic and learning support needs, which maximises student success and achievement
- the establishment of the Higher Education Administration Group is providing the infrastructure to ensure a well coordinated approach towards the provision of accurate and timely information to applicants, students and the awarding bodies.

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:

- ensure that the Higher Education Strategy Group is provided with accurate summaries of external examiners' reports to enable it to exercise effective oversight
- develop a robust process to ensure the correctness of information in course handbooks and all reference publications relevant to higher education students.

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

- review the organisation and practices of course committees to provide a consistent student experience across the higher education provision
- review, in consultation with the universities concerned, the provision of external examiners' reports that are specific to the College
- develop and implement a comprehensive staff development strategy for higher education teaching staff
- develop a clear policy towards the use of the virtual learning environment that ensures greater use by both staff and students.

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 West Thames 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, Kingston University, St Mary's University College, Thames Valley University, and the University of Westminster. The review was carried out by Professor Paul Brunt, Ms Maxina Butler-Holmes and Mr Peter Cutting (reviewers) and Mr Robert Jones (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 engagements in assessment and in student support. A summary of findings from these Developmental engagements 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 West Thames College is a medium-sized college in West London that has offered higher education provision since the mid-1980s. The local community includes areas with high ethnic diversity and social deprivation rates, and has asylum seekers and refugees in its population mix.

5 The College is organised into six academic areas: Academic Studies and Care; Creative Arts; Information and Communications Technology and Business; Engineering and Construction; English for Speakers of Other Languages, English as a Foreign Language and Languages; and Learning and Tutorial Support. Higher education programmes are offered in the first three areas. Recent years have seen a steady growth in student numbers, enabling the College to expand its provision and meet changing demands. The growth of higher education has been a strategic target for the past five years. In 2010-11, there are approximately 4,500 further education students at the College and 388 full-time equivalent higher education students, 386 of whom are full-time and four part-time.

6 The higher education awards at the College funded by HEFCE are listed below, under the awarding body and followed by the number of full-time equivalent students.

Edexcel

- HND Specialist Makeup (Film and Television) (100)
- HND Performing Arts, including HND Dance drawn from optional units (47)
- HND Travel and Tourism Management (10)
- HND Business (7)

Integrated quality and enhancement review

- HND Computing (General) (7)

Kingston University

- FdA Early Years (26)
- FdA Business and Professional Administration (31)
- FdSc IT for e-Business (Network Specialist) (18)

St Mary's University College

- FdSc Psychology and Counselling (22)

Thames Valley University

- HND Graphics and Advertising (5)
- HND Fashion and Textiles (11)
- BA (Hons) Interdisciplinary Fine Art (Top-up) (5)
- BA (Hons) Specialist Makeup (Top-up) (10)
- FdA Costume in Practice (8)
- FdA Music Technology (17)

University of Westminster

- Certificate in Education (Cert Ed) (Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector) (24)
- Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) (Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector) (27)
- Cert Ed/PGCE ESOL Pathway (concurrent version includes Advanced Diploma ESOL) (10)
- Cert Ed/PGCE Literacy Pathway (concurrent version includes Ad Dip Literacy) (1)
- Additional Diploma In Teaching English (ESOL) in the Lifelong Learning Sector (1)
- Additional Diploma In Teaching English (Literacy) in the Lifelong Learning Sector (1)

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

7 Kingston University, St Mary's University College, Thames Valley University and the University of Westminster have partnership arrangements with the College in order to collaborate on widening participation and vocational skills for employment. The College also has programmes accredited by Edexcel.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

8 The College has been undertaking a major building project that will create a greatly improved, purpose-built campus. Every part of the campus has either been rebuilt or refurbished and building work is due to be completed by the summer of 2011. The first impact on higher education learners was in 2008, with a refurbished suite of beauty and specialist make-up salons and new dance studios. In April 2010 the first of the new buildings opened, containing a new learning centre, cafeteria, common room, higher education common room and cafeteria, sports hall, fitness gym and theatre. New accommodation was also provided for performing arts, music and media. The new teaching block - the Joseph Banks Building - will open for the academic year 2011-12. Much of the planning

for the new build has taken into account the resource needs of the higher education programmes and students.

9 Recently, Thames Valley University has been engaged in a major strategic repositioning, which included withdrawing from its partnership agreements with the College. This has resulted in a reduction in the number of students at the College and the withdrawal of some programmes. By 2012-13, the collaboration with the University will be limited to its role as a validating body for the FdA Costume in Practice and the BA (Hons) Specialist Makeup (Top-up).

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. This was produced following wide consultation within the College, facilitated by the Head of Student Services. It was a concise, evaluative paper that was helpful to the team. During the review visit, the team held a productive meeting with current students.

B Evaluation of the management of HEFCE-funded higher education

Core theme 1: Academic standards

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

11 The College's responsibilities for managing and delivering the standards of its higher education provision are specified in partnership agreements with its awarding bodies. Relationships between the awarding bodies and the College are strong and the College receives full support from its higher education partners in the delivery of its responsibilities for the management of academic standards.

12 Reporting to the Principal, the Vice Principal, Quality and Curriculum is the key senior manager with responsibility for higher education and liaison with awarding bodies. The post-holder chairs the Higher Education Strategy Group, which is responsible for developing the College's higher education strategy and, among other functions, monitors the responses to external examiners' reports. The Head of Department, Creative Arts, the department with the largest proportion of higher education activity, holds a cross-college higher education brief, is a member of the Higher Education Strategy Group and chairs the Higher Education Operations Group. This group comprises relevant curriculum managers and course leaders, focuses on operational aspects of the higher education provision and disseminates information and updates throughout the College. The Higher Education Administration Group supports higher education administrative functions, including liaison with partners and the production of an annual calendar of activities and events.

13 Each head of department is responsible for the delivery of the curriculum and ensures that suitable procedures are in place to comply with the College's and awarding bodies' quality assurance requirements. External examiners' reports and consequent action plans are signed off by the head of department and summaries are reported to the Higher Education Strategy Group. Curriculum team managers, course leaders and members of the teaching teams undertake the operational activities of running and delivering the courses.

14 Many higher education courses have a course committee that includes student representatives. Typically, agreements with universities require such a committee to be established and some, but not all, higher national courses have them. Issues and actions initiated are reported to the Higher Education Operations Group, and student representatives also have a meeting each term with the Vice Principal and Head of Student Services. Where the committees exist, they work effectively, but their procedures vary greatly and they do not routinely scrutinise annual reviews, which would enable student representatives to witness actions taken relating to their feedback. The team considers it desirable for the College to initiate a review of course committees.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

15 The awarding bodies' documentation for the approval of programmes and their assessment and quality assurance procedures ensures appropriate referencing to the *Code of practice*, the FHEQ, subject benchmarks and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. Staff demonstrated familiarity with the Academic Infrastructure in their meetings with the team and commended the College intranet as a point of reference to assist their understanding. The team endorses claims in the self-evaluation that the Academic Infrastructure has informed the development of an internal process for new course approval and that revised programme specifications are aligned to the *Code of practice*. The College has increased awareness of the Academic Infrastructure through the Higher Education Operations Group, attendance at awarding body meetings and updates on the staff intranet. New teachers are supported through informal mentoring by the Head of Department, Creative Arts.

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?

16 All the College's higher education provision is subject to annual review, which is initiated by the course leader, agreed within the department and informs an action plan. The departmental head writes a report covering both further and higher education provision, which is used to inform a college-wide self-assessment. The progress of actions is discussed by the head of department with the Principal in regular performance reviews. The team found annual reviews to be sound and noted that university partners required course leaders to comply in addition with university annual review reporting requirements.

17 External examiners, appointed by the awarding bodies, confirm that the standards and quality of the provision are generally sound. Examiners' reports are received by the Vice Principal and distributed to the relevant head of department and course leader. In examining the way issues raised in reports were addressed, the team noted two instances where the summary responses and actions presented to the Higher Education Strategy Group failed to mention major criticisms, although the team was assured that all issues raised by examiners had been addressed at departmental level, and other documentation suggested this to be the case. The team concluded that it would be advisable for the College to improve its procedures for ensuring the oversight of actions in response to external examiners' concerns. Occasionally, where courses are delivered in a consortium with other colleges, the reports are generic to the consortium as a whole and make no reference to the strengths and weaknesses of the College's own students as a cohort. Consequently, subsequent responses and action plans lack detail. The team concluded that it would be desirable for the College to approach the universities concerned and review the provision of external examiners' reports that are specific to the College.

18 College staff were closely involved in the development of FDs offered by Kingston University and St Mary's University College, developing modules and assessments and proactively taking part in the validation activities. This was also the case with the Cert Ed/PGCE education programmes developed within the Westminster Partnership. Through these mechanisms, the College has developed close relationships with its awarding bodies at subject level, which has brought about significant benefits in terms of both quality assurance and enhancement.

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

19 The Higher Education Operations Group acts as a cross-college link for alerting staff to staff development opportunities. Activities relating to updates of the Academic Infrastructure have recently been provided, and staff have also attended training events offered by the awarding universities and Edexcel. In addition, professional updating takes place through participation in shows and events, and several staff are actively involved in their vocational/professional areas. For example, specialist make-up staff are members of a cross-institutional group to share good practice.

20 The College supports staff in continuing their personal professional development. There are several instances of staff being supported for higher degrees to develop academic expertise and heighten awareness of standards in the subject. For example, two staff in performing arts are supported in higher degree qualifications, one of whom is engaged in doctoral research.

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

Core theme 2: Quality of learning opportunities

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

21 The arrangements described in paragraphs 11-13 are also effective in supporting the College's management of the quality of learning opportunities. The awarding bodies delegate responsibilities to the College for teaching, first marking of assessment and feedback to students, academic guidance and support and appropriate learning resources. During the review the awarding bodies expressed confidence that the college was effectively carrying out the delegated responsibilities for learning opportunities.

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

22 The way in which the College assures itself that it is fulfilling its obligations to its awarding bodies about the quality of learning opportunities, and the consequent quality assurance processes, reflect those for managing academic standards as described in paragraph 16. The College claims in the self-evaluation that the procedures for ensuring that it fulfils its various obligations to awarding bodies are clear and effective. The review team was provided with evidence that supports this claim. For example, at course and team level,

the well established teams discuss ideas and disseminate good practice that enhances teaching and learning.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

23 The procedures fostering the College's engagement with the Academic Infrastructure described in paragraph 15 also apply to learning opportunities. For example, the student support available to all higher education students is clearly aligned to the *Code of practice, Section 3: Disabled students; Section 8: Career education, information, advice and guidance, and Section 10: Admissions to higher education.*

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

24 The College has a well-established reporting process for lesson observation, staff appraisals, the analysis of student feedback and the production of annual course review and monitoring reports that collectively ensures the quality of teaching and learning. External examiners are positive about the quality of teaching and learning. Students are very enthusiastic about their experience of teaching and their views are gathered by a variety of means. The Developmental engagement in student support advised the College to improve the use of data in the management of the provision and the team was provided with evidence that significant progress has been made. For example, decisions to cease to offer some programmes had been informed by scrutiny of retention and achievement data by the Higher Education Strategy Group. Consideration of such data is a standing item on the agenda of the Higher Education Operations Group and ensures ongoing monitoring of student performance linked to the quality of teaching and learning.

25 Many college staff either have recent experience in their vocational field or still practice within it. This has led to a rich cross-fertilisation and enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning. This is shown in the currency of course content and the work-related curriculum enrichment in many of the courses. Staff take students out of college on visits, competitions and events. These expose students and staff to up-to-date practice in their areas and help assure staff and students that learning opportunities are relevant, positive and developmental.

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

26 The College ensures that all students have group and individual tutorials on a regular basis. Student views demonstrate very high levels of satisfaction with their teachers and personal tutors. In surveys, 94 per cent of students respond positively to questions about tutorials and general access to staff. The tutorial system is supported by a comprehensive tutorial framework document that lays out objectives, suggested tutorial topics and content linked to the time of the year, cross-college forms to record tutorial activities, and sources of further information. Widely used by teaching staff, this framework encourages effective individual and group tutorial support. The College is currently piloting innovative software to support individual tutorials and provides regular well-attended staff development sessions on running effective tutorials. Teaching staff find the tutorial framework and staff development opportunities are very useful in ensuring that they provide highly effective tutorial-based student support. The well-organised and managed individual and group tutorial system is highly effective in encouraging student personal and academic development.

27 There is an extensive and well-managed cross-college system to support the students' academic and learning support needs, which maximises student success and

achievement. The external examiners' reports consistently commend the flexible and effective student support provided by the College. It is based on well-embedded policy and procedures implemented by highly effective central student support services. Particularly significant are the roles of the Director of Learning and Tutorial Support who manages learner, disability and tutorial support, and the Head of the Student Services Department, who is responsible for the support of students from the point of initial enquiry, including financial aspects, counselling, welfare and accommodation. The Higher Education Administration Group takes initiatives to provide an effective administrative infrastructure to support these activities. This represents a well-coordinated approach towards the provision of accurate and timely information to applicants and current students (see also paragraph 37). In their meeting with the team, students spoke warmly of the support offered by these central services. They provide a high level of support for students from the point of initial enquiry through admissions, induction and during their studies. Further evidence on the high quality of support provided by student support services is the recent college audit that showed alignment with the *Code of practice, Section 3: Disabled students* and *Section 10: Admissions to higher education*.

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

28 Staff appreciate the opportunities available to them and informed the team of specific examples of the impact of staff development activities on teaching practice. A good example is the involvement of teacher education staff in the West London college consortium where areas of common concern are identified and actions planned and delivered. This group was the catalyst for the development of a successful pre-course bridging module, which helps students make the transition to higher education.

29 The College, however, does not have a fully developed system for the systematic identification of higher education staff development needs on a cross-college basis. This makes it difficult to establish priorities and then provide appropriate continuing professional development opportunities. In addition, it does not have a functioning system to evaluate the impact of higher education staff development on teaching and learning practice. There is a procedure whereby heads of department are responsible for determining the impact on practice, but this is not being used. Both of these factors reduce the opportunities for the College to manage staff development effectively and ensure the identification and dissemination of good practice. It is desirable that the College addresses this problem.

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 physical facilities in the College are currently undergoing a major transformation and when complete should provide excellent learning resources. This development is supported by a college-wide budgetary process for allocating resources. Heads of department are responsible for the resources required for the delivery of any given programme. In the annual planning cycle, managers are given the opportunity to prioritise their needs and take part in the annual bidding process prior to being allocated a budget. The needs of any course are confirmed through validation and the internal new course proposal system.

31 There is a well-stocked Learning Resources Centre and a highly effective system of link librarians who work with delivery teams to ensure that resources are available to students. The librarian also liaises with awarding body counterparts as a link between the institutions. The Learning Resources Centre has a well-equipped study room for the

exclusive use of higher education students. Students also have access to the online and library resources at partner universities. Students express positive views on the resources available to them.

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?

32 The partnership agreements with the College confirm its responsibility for the promotion of its higher education courses. The production of information for external dissemination is carried out by the College's Marketing department. It provides useful information to prospective students, including a higher education prospectus and a range of information leaflets. The prospectus is attractively produced, informative and celebrates student successes. The college website provides essential information to prospective students through a higher education section that identifies links to websites of the partner universities. It includes some interesting articles and student success stories.

33 Following a recommendation from the Developmental engagement in assessment, course handbooks for Higher National awards have been revised to address the need for consistency. There is now a college-wide higher education course handbook template, which has been developed through the Higher Education Operations Group and approved by the Head of Department, Creative Arts. This provides general information which teams then populate with course-specific information. While it has resulted in improvements, some variability of practice remains and there are examples of information that is not consistent with the College's own regulations.

34 Handbooks provided by partner universities present a comprehensive insight into the course and the university processes. They are then augmented by college-based information within the same handbook. A good example of this practice is the handbook for the FdA Business and Professional Administration. However, in many cases where there are two handbooks the college handbook provides useful local information, but sometimes contradicts the university publication. For example, the college handbook for the FdSc Psychology and Counselling refers to a standard five days' grace period for late submission, but the St Mary's University College handbook states that a mark of zero is awarded to any work submitted after the deadline. There was no evidence of students being misled, but the potential for confusion is clearly there.

35 Programme specifications are referred to in handbooks for students to download. They are produced by the partner university where appropriate. The Higher Education Operations Group has developed these for Higher National courses but it is acknowledged that further work is required to provide more detailed information, such as linking learning outcomes more closely to course units. In addition, there are some examples of incorrect information: for example, the programme specification for HND Travel and Tourism Management contains inappropriate age-related references in its admissions requirements.

36 The College produces a range of documents dealing with academic and pastoral matters that apply to both higher education and further education students. They are useful

and sometimes impressive. However, at times they focus on further education, with inadequate or incorrect reference to higher education. For example, the leaflet on the complaints procedure specifies an incorrect appeal route for higher education students, once internal procedures have been exhausted. The Developmental engagement report in student support commented that there was some confusion about the extent to which college documents apply to higher education as opposed to further education. This still seems to be the case and the team believes that it should be rectified.

37 The Higher Education Administration Group plays a proactive role in improving the provision of accurate information. Staff from the Registry, Admissions, Student Services and Marketing work in a coherent and coordinated way to provide information to both applicants and students. This has included fruitful cooperation with colleagues in partner universities. The effectiveness of this group was evident in examples of communicating timely information to students about fees, working with staff responsible for management information systems to improve the accuracy of data, checking the clarity of wording for the progression bonus scheme and generally promoting internal progression. It has also taken the initiative in providing an administrative framework for student support (see paragraph 27) and has developed into a forum for exchanging ideas and innovative ways of working. The team commends the way in which the different areas of the administration in the College have cooperated with each other and with colleagues in the partner universities in order to improve the student experience. The establishment of the Higher Education Administration Group is providing the infrastructure to ensure a well coordinated approach towards the provision of accurate and timely information to applicants, students and the awarding bodies.

38 The virtual learning environment provides students with access to learning materials and assessment information. Since the Developmental engagements, the College has made progress in encouraging greater use of this medium. For example, its use is well-developed in teacher education and the creative arts. However, in some courses it is underdeveloped so that many students remain content with paper-based materials and fail to benefit from the potential of the virtual learning environment.

39 A recommendation from the Developmental engagement in student support was to improve the institutional-level guidance on key features of higher education. Staff confirmed that information on the staff intranet is now a useful source of reference for programme and assessment design and increasing awareness of the Academic Infrastructure.

What arrangements does the College have in place to assure the accuracy and completeness of information the College has responsibility for publishing?

40 The final signing-off for both paper and web-based promotional information lies with the Vice Principal. University partners audit publicity materials to ensure the accuracy of information; a recent example saw St Mary's University College working with the College to correct an entry on the website.

41 Course leaders are responsible for the annual review of handbooks, which are signed off by the Head of Creative Arts through the Higher Education Strategy Group. As noted in paragraphs 33 to 35, however, there are instances of inaccurate and potentially misleading information that the College had not identified. It is advisable that it builds on its existing processes to ensure the accuracy of the information that it is responsible for producing.

42 It is the responsibility of course leaders to oversee the content of information on the virtual learning environment. This process is not, however, formally documented and there is no one acknowledged central gatekeeper. There are currently no minimum standards

identified for the content of learning materials or any monitoring of usage. The team welcomes a recent directive from the Executive that all course team members will be provided with a percentage target to populate the virtual learning environment. It is desirable that the College continue to address this issue.

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 engagements

43 The first Developmental engagement was in assessment and took place in December 2008. There were three lines of enquiry: the extent to which the College's institutional processes for assessment support the maintenance of standards; the extent to which the processes of formative feedback help the students to be self-reflective and to learn; and the extent to which the information about assessment is clear and explicit.

44 The Developmental engagement team identified a number of areas of good practice. There are good relationships with awarding bodies, staff development supports higher education practice, and there is a wide range of appropriate assessment opportunities. Guidance to students on how to improve their work is carefully directed, there is a well-designed range of methods for formative assessment, and regular group and individual tutorial sessions. The team commended a bridging module in academic writing, initiated by the teacher education staff, and the imaginative contribution of peer review and self-reflection to the assessment process. It also commended the award-winning marketing materials and the effective means of communicating with mentors.

45 The team also made a number of recommendations. It considered that the functions of the key higher education committees should be strengthened and that the assessment documentation and the virtual learning environment should be developed. The College should also ensure that there is a central process for signing off internal student handbooks and monitor the incidence of plagiarism and the late submission of work.

46 The second Developmental engagement was in student support and took place in May 2010. There were three lines of enquiry: the extent to which the tutorial process supports the achievement of standards; the extent to which the support activities of the College contribute to the students' learning; and the extent to which the information about student services is clear, comprehensive and accessible.

47 The Developmental engagement team identified a number of areas of good practice. The tutorial process is supportive and responsive; the enrichment programme is outstanding; and the flexible responses to student needs enhance achievement. The selection and induction processes are effective, as are the processes for supporting students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The Student Services Department, the Skills Development Department and the Learning Resources Centre all play a key role in supporting students' learning. The published information for students is of a high quality and is delivered effectively both in print and electronically.

48 The team also made a number of recommendations. The College should be able to identify and rectify weaknesses in students' technical skills on entry, take a proactive role in ensuring better use of online resources and improve its guidance on key features of higher

education. The team also thought that the College should improve the use of data in the management of the provision to help focus improvements in higher education.

D Foundation Degrees

49 The College delivers six FDs on behalf of partner universities with whom it works effectively to deliver, monitor and evaluate the courses. They are: FdSc IT for eBusiness, FdA Early Years, FdA Business and Professional Administration (Kingston University); FdSc Psychology and Counselling (St Mary's University College); and FdA Costume in Practice and FdA Music Technology (Thames Valley University). At present the College is working with partners to develop an FD in the health and care area. This will be offered in the academic year 2011-12.

50 The conclusions listed in paragraphs 52 to 55 apply to all of the higher education provision, including FDs.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

51 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in West Thames 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, Kingston University, St Mary's University College, Thames Valley University and the University of Westminster.

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

- the well organised and managed individual and group tutorial system is highly effective in encouraging student personal and academic development (paragraph 26)
- there is an extensive and well managed cross-college system to support the students' academic and learning support needs, which maximises student success and achievement (paragraph 27)
- the establishment of the Higher Education Administration Group is providing the infrastructure to ensure a well coordinated approach towards the provision of accurate and timely information to applicants, students and the awarding bodies (paragraphs 27, 37).

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:

- ensure that the Higher Education Strategy Group is provided with accurate summaries of external examiners' reports to enable it to exercise effective oversight (paragraph 17)
- develop a robust process to ensure the correctness of information in course handbooks and all reference publications relevant to higher education students (paragraphs 33 to 36, 41).

Integrated quality and enhancement review

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

- review the organisation and practices of course committees to provide a consistent student experience across the higher education provision (paragraph 14)
- review, in consultation with the universities concerned, the provision of external examiners' reports that are specific to the College (paragraph 17)
- develop and implement a comprehensive staff development strategy for higher education teaching staff (paragraph 29)
- develop a clear policy towards the use of the virtual learning environment that ensures greater use by both staff and students (paragraphs 38, 42).

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.

West Thames 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 well organised and managed individual and group tutorial system is highly effective in encouraging student personal and academic development (paragraph 26) 	Review and enhance the effectiveness of the tutorial system for higher education students by providing training for tutors	30 June 2012	Director of Learning Support and Tutorial	Improved and effective tutorial process	Vice Principal - Quality and Curriculum Higher Education Strategic Group	Course representative reports Course Board meetings NSS Retention and success data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there is an extensive and well managed cross-college system to support the students' academic and learning support needs, which maximises student success and achievement (paragraph 27) 	Review and ensure that cross-college support is monitored and data provided	30 June 2012	Director of Learning Support and Tutorial	Monitoring and data processes in place	Vice Principal - Quality and Curriculum Higher Education Strategic Group	Data reports Retention and success data

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the establishment of the Higher Education Administration Group is providing the infrastructure to ensure a well coordinated approach towards the provision of accurate and timely information to applicants, students and the awarding bodies (paragraphs 27, 37). 	Review and enhance the calendar and work of the Higher Education Administrative Group	30 June 2011	Head of Administration	Meetings planned and minuted, with actions completed	Head of Quality Improvement and Higher Education	Well planned and accurate data Events and information
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is advisable for the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that the Higher Education Strategy Group is provided with accurate summaries of external examiners' reports to enable it to exercise effective oversight (paragraph 17) 	Establish process and paperwork to ensure that accurate external examiner reports are collated and scrutinised annually	1 October 2011	Head of Quality Improvement and Higher Education	Accurate, complete and full reports that have been scrutinised and actioned	Vice Principal, Quality and Curriculum Higher Education Strategic Group	Minutes of Higher Education Strategic Group show that that reports have been scrutinised and actioned

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop a robust process to ensure the correctness of information in course handbooks and all reference publications relevant to higher education students (paragraphs 33 to 36, 41). 	<p>Course handbooks are reviewed annually and changed as necessary to ensure that information is complete and accurate</p> <p>College publications to be reviewed and amended to encompass higher education students</p>	<p>1 June 2011</p> <p>30 July 2011</p>	<p>Chair of Higher Education Operational Group</p> <p>Chair of Higher Education Administrative Group</p>	<p>Accurate and complete course handbooks</p> <p>College publications make reference to higher education students</p>	<p>Vice Principal, Quality and Curriculum</p> <p>Higher Education Strategic Group</p>	<p>Minutes of Higher Education Strategic Group show that course handbooks have been scrutinised and authorised</p> <p>Direct feedback from students and staff that changes have been operationalised</p>
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is desirable for the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review the organisation and practices of course committees to provide a consistent student experience across the higher education provision (paragraph 14) 	Ensure that all programmes have course committees	1 October 2011	Head of Quality Improvement and Higher Education	Improved engagement with students	<p>Vice Principal, Quality and Curriculum</p> <p>Higher Education Strategic Group</p>	Course representative meetings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review, in consultation with the universities concerned, the provision of external examiners' reports that are 	Request to university partners that examiners are asked to specify where good practice and recommendations relate to West Thames College, where	1 June 2011	Head of Quality Improvement and Higher Education	Examiner reports that have specific comments related to West Thames College	Vice Principal, Quality and Curriculum	Minutes of HE Strategic Group show that reports are specific

specific to the College (paragraph 17)	applicable					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop and implement a comprehensive staff development strategy for higher education teaching staff (paragraph 29) 	Write a higher education staff development strategy, implement and monitor	1 October 2011	Head of Quality Improvement and Higher Education	Strategy in place, training implemented and evaluated	Vice Principal, Quality and Curriculum	Staff development report shows implementation and evaluation of higher education strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop a clear policy towards the use of the virtual learning environment that ensures greater use by both staff and students (paragraphs 38, 42). 	Ensure that the use of the virtual learning environment is clearly embedded in the E Learning strategy	1 October 2011	Learning Technologist. Manager of IS Services	Improved engagement with the virtual learning environment	Vice Principal, Quality and Curriculum Vice Principal	Virtual learning environment data shows greater use by students and staff

RG 732 06/11

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
Email comms@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk