



Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

City of Sunderland College

June 2011

SR 70/2010

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ISBN 978 1 84979 379 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 City of Sunderland College carried out in June 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 approach taken by the College to engage proactively with the Academic Infrastructure, strongly underpinning academic standards
- the highly effective process for monitoring responses to external moderator and examiner reports
- learning support for students is excellent, with a wide range of support materials available enabling the enhancement of learning
- the development of a culture of research and scholarly activity that clearly supports the enhancement of learning opportunities
- the College has effective mechanisms to ensure that all students and staff have access to key information from pre-enrolment to completion of a programme
- the introduction of the 'mystery customer' to act as an additional mechanism for checking the accuracy of public information.

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:

- achieve coherence between policies and procedures to ensure that all higher education roles and committees enable the College to achieve its strategic aims and enhance provision
- ensure that students on all programmes receive comparable quality of assessment feedback
- develop a more effective employer engagement strategy
- formalise and develop a more consistent tutorial system across all programme areas and ensure the timetabling process reflects this for all learners.

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 City of Sunderland 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 the University of Sunderland and Edexcel. The review was carried out by Mr David Gardiner, Mr Mark Langley and Ms Daphne Rowlands (reviewers) and Dr Mark Mabey (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 extensive documentation supplied by the College and awarding bodies, meetings with staff, students and partner institutions, reports of reviews by QAA and from inspections by Ofsted. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagement in assessment. A summary of findings from this Developmental engagement is provided in section C of this report. The review also considered the College's use of the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers, with reference to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, subject and award benchmark statements, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and programme specifications.

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

4 City of Sunderland College is a large and vibrant tertiary and general further education college situated in Wearside. The College was formed by a merger in 1996 of Wearside College in the south and Monkwearmouth College in the north of the city. The College is currently the 14 largest in the country. For the academic year 2010-11 there were 4,187 learners studying on full-time programmes and 6,053 studying on part-time programmes. Additionally, the College provided employer-responsive courses to a further 3,199 employed students. The number of higher education enrolments in October 2010 was 472 full-time students and 809 part-time students.

5 The College has five sites positioned around the City of Sunderland. Three of these sites are dedicated sixth forms (Bede Academy, Usworth and St Peters). The Hylton site operates as a dedicated skills academy and the Shiney Row Centre specialises in adult and higher education programme provision. The College is located in an area of considerable disadvantage; Sunderland ranks 22 out of the 354 most deprived local authorities in England.

6 The following programmes are offered at the College, with full-time equivalent (FTE) student numbers in brackets:

University of Sunderland

- Foundation Year Pharmaceutical Sciences (19 students) (19 FTEs)
- Certificate in Higher Education (Accountancy and Management) (29 students) (18.5 FTEs)
- FdA Accountancy and Management (11 students) (5.5 FTEs)

Integrated quality and enhancement review

- FdA Applied Art (27 students) (18.5 FTEs)
- FdA Applied Music Practice (22 students) (22 FTEs)
- FdA Counselling (55 students) (22.5 FTEs)
- FdA Dance (19 students) (19 FTEs)
- FdA Drama (13 students) (13 FTEs)
- FdA Education and Care (80 students) (40 FTEs)
- FdA Photography (38 students) (25 FTEs)
- FdA Health and Safety Management (23 students) (11.5 FTEs)
- FdA Health and Social Care (32 students) (32 FTEs)
- FdA Leadership and Management (143 students) (71.5 FTEs)
- FdA Retail Management (8 students) (4 FTEs)
- FdA Service Management (29 students) (14.5 FTEs)
- FdA Sports Coaching (37 students) (37 FTEs)
- FdA Training and Work Based Learning (17 students) (8.5 FTEs)
- FdA Travel and Tourism (32 students) (32 FTEs)
- FdA Working with Young People (12 students) (6 FTEs)
- FdSc Exercise, Health and Fitness (27 students) (27 FTEs)
- FdSc Network Securities Technologies (42 students) (42 FTEs)
- HNC Business and Management (34 students) (17 FTEs)
- HND Business and Management (32 students) (26 FTEs)
- BSc Level 0 Sciences (86 students) (86 FTEs)
- Professional Certificate in Post-Compulsory Education and Training (50 students) (25 FTEs)
- Professional Graduate Certificate in Post-Compulsory Education and Training (83 students) (43.5 FTEs)

Edexcel

- HNC Building Construction (30 students) (15 FTEs)
- HNC Building Services (6 students) (3 FTEs)
- HNC Computing (general) (7 students) (3.5 FTEs)
- HNC Computing (software development) (7 students) (3.5 FTEs)
- HNC Electrical Engineering (26 students) (13 FTEs)
- HNC Manufacturing Engineering (58 students) (27 FTEs)
- HND Construction (11 students) (5.5 FTEs)
- HND Computing (general) (33 students) (33 FTEs)
- HND Computing (software development) (21 students) (21 FTEs)
- HND Electrical Engineering (5 students) (2.5 FTEs)
- HND Manufacturing Engineering (9 students) (4.5 FTEs)
- HND Working with Children and Families (14 students) (14 FTEs).

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

7 The College has worked with the University of Sunderland (the University) on the delivery of a range of higher education programmes since 1992. The College is the largest strategic collaborative partner of the University and has over 900 students registered on franchised programmes. The partnership is governed by a Strategic Partnership Agreement and a Memorandum of Agreement, which give clear guidance on the responsibilities of higher education provision to both organisations. The College also delivers Edexcel-validated Higher National Diploma and Certificate programmes, which are directly funded by HEFCE. Higher National business programmes are operated in partnership with the University of Sunderland in accordance with its licensing agreement with Edexcel.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

8 Recently, the former library has been extended and renovated to form an open space and learning centre for the benefit of the higher education community. This was co-funded with the University of Sunderland and coupled with an investment in wireless-enabled laptops.

9 A restructure of higher education management, to combine the dual roles of Director of Teaching and Learning and Assistant Principal for Higher Education, took place in 2010 to embed the quality assurance and enhancement functions. There was also the appointment of a new role, the Higher Education Manager, to coordinate the operational management of the overall portfolio.

10 The College has for the past two years actively developed a culture of scholarly activity and research, and in 2010 the peer-reviewed higher education research journal, Praxis - the Journal of Practitioner-based Research, was launched, the purpose of which is to support and motivate nascent research capability. The editorial advisory board consists of nine members: three from new universities including a dean, one national teaching fellow from a Russell Group university, the principal of a large further education college in the Midlands, as well as experienced lecturing and research staff from within the institution. In 2009 the College introduced funded research fellowships, of which there are currently seven initial active projects within the higher education community.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

11 Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. Extensive student consultation, led by the Higher Education Student Representative Coordinator, informed a detailed and comprehensive student written submission. Extensive consultation was conducted via the College's virtual learning environment and the higher education student Plaza site, which is a social networking and information service. A student editorial team, recruited from higher education representatives, drafted and edited the report

B Evaluation of the management of HEFCE-funded higher education

Core theme 1: Academic standards

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

12 A licensing agreement with Edexcel and a Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Sunderland outline well-established and long-standing relationships between the College and its awarding bodies. The University's most recent QAA Audit of collaborative provision expressed confidence in the College's ability to maintain academic standards on its behalf. The Principal and Pro Vice-Chancellor manage strategic agreements institutionally. The Vice Principal (Curriculum) steers the College's overall curriculum strategy, but devolves responsibility for the higher education strategy to the Assistant Principal for Higher Education. This postholder is also the College's Director of Teaching and Learning, reporting to the Vice Principal (Quality and Business Support), who also manages the Director of

Integrated quality and enhancement review

Quality and Standards and oversees all college quality assurance procedures. They are assisted by the Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Coordinator, who manages the Higher Education Student Representative Coordinator and acts as the interface with the student body. College curriculum leaders manage combined further and higher education departments, but assistant programme leaders have operational responsibility for individual higher education programmes, linking with the university programme leaders.

13 The Higher Education Course Committee is informed by programme management and annual monitoring reviews, which feed into the Higher Education Management Committee, chaired three times a year by the Assistant Principal for Higher Education. This committee continuously reviews and address issues relating to higher education learning and quality, receives reports from the Higher Education Forum (chaired by the Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Coordinator) and the Higher Education Student Forum (chaired by the Higher Education Student Representative Coordinator). Forum meetings capture staff and student views respectively, disseminate good practice and consider areas for improvement. Through the Assistant Principal, the Higher Education Management Committee reports to the Academic Board: this assures academic standards. The Principal chairs these meetings six times a year and reports key issues to the Board of Governors. Operationally, the Higher Education Manager chairs monthly Higher Education Managers' Meetings and the Director of Quality and Standards operates Curriculum Reviews, which use Integrated quality and enhancement review's core themes as their chief criteria, which the team found to be highly effective.

14 A Quality Manual sets out the College's Higher Education Strategy, committee structures and role descriptors. The aspirational focus of the Higher Education Strategy 2009 to 2012 drove recent developments and the restructure of the senior management roles, with the appointment of the Assistant Principal for Higher Education, Higher Education Manager and Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Coordinator. While the revised committee structures and postholders maintain academic standards, this process is still at an early phase of development. It needs time to become thoroughly embedded in order to be able to demonstrate a clearer articulation between the College's strategic and procedural documents, which will further enhance the management and delivery of academic standards. The team considers it desirable for the College to consider the coherence between policies and procedures to ensure that all higher education roles and committees enable the College to achieve its strategic aims and enhance provision.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

15 A recent College audit of higher education programmes and support systems against the *Code of practice* had several positive outcomes. For instance, increased awareness of the *Code of practice, Section 8: Career education, information, advice and guidance* resulted in the appointment of a specialist Higher Education Recruitment Officer. University validation processes produce programme specifications and, as part of its internal validation process, the College now produces programme specifications for all Edexcel courses. Both validation processes cross-reference with the FHEQ, the *Code of practice*, subject benchmark statements and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. This process indicates clear engagement with all the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. The College and University work together to provide staff development activities focusing on the Academic Infrastructure. The team considers that the approach taken by the College to engage proactively with the Academic Infrastructure, thus strongly underpinning academic standards, is an example of good practice.

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 The College has aligned all of its higher education quality procedures with the principles of Integrated quality and enhancement review, with an internal focus on reviewing and evaluating and improving the management of higher education, with the Academic Infrastructure and student voice central to the process. Annual programme reports are the chief quality instruments between the College and the University. For Edexcel programmes, external verifiers work closely with the college Quality and Standards team to monitor reports and action plans, as described in the External Verification/Moderation Handbook. All quality documents are readily available online.

17 In monitoring the attainment of academic standards at programme and departmental levels the College works closely with the University. Assistant programme leaders complete university annual monitoring reports, which curriculum leaders and the Director of Quality and Standards approve before submitting them to university programme leaders. Curriculum leaders produce a departmental self-evaluation report from these, from which the Higher Education Manager produces an institutional Higher Education Self-Evaluation Report. This report is then approved at vice principal level and received by the University's Collaborative Quality Manager. The reports are the formal instruments of communication between the College and University, but University committees, assessment boards, staff developmental activities and constant communication between programme teams also support staff delivering the programmes.

18 The College's internal validation process for higher education mirrors the Academic Infrastructure and university validation processes. Validation documentation is thorough, with new and existing programmes validated internally for three years, but university-validated programmes observing university timescales. Validation processes fully engage with academic standards.

19 External examiners confirm that programmes use a good variety of assessment methods. Recently the College adopted a standardised assessment sheet for its Foundation Degrees, and students confirmed that the quality and timeliness of assessment feedback is very good. However, some discrepancies in computing programmes and attempts to reconcile similar issues in engineering provision highlight that the College has yet to find a comparable means of assuring the quality of feedback for Edexcel programmes. The team considers it desirable that students on all programmes receive a comparable high quality of assessment feedback.

20 The University assures the setting, marking and moderation of assessment activities, and module guides precisely set out the required criteria. Students confirm that these and assignment briefs are available online and that lecturers explain them fully. An internal verification and moderation handbook details an effective scheme for verifying assessments, including meetings to facilitate internal moderation of student work. Achievement or examination boards make the final decisions on all assessment grades, ensuring that the academic standards of the higher education provision are assured.

21 Both awarding bodies appoint external examiners/verifiers to confirm the veracity of assessment. Assistant programme leaders reflect their comments in annual monitoring reports. The University has recently adjusted its training for examiners to enable the College to extract focused information from the multi-centre reports. This should enable a clearer focus on academic standards. The highly effective process for monitoring responses to external moderator and examiners reports, however, is good practice.

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

22 Senior managers identify training needs and monitor staff development activities through annual performance management review. A bilateral approach to continuing professional development by the University and College ensures that staff have many developmental opportunities, for which the College identifies annual training days, with attendance by staff who teach exclusively in higher education being 100 per cent. Students rate the quality of teaching highly.

23 Of all higher education staff, 64 per cent have a first degree and 23 per cent have a higher degree, of which three are currently studying for a doctorate. The University approves the appointment of all staff on its programmes, and accepts staff who have not attained degree level but who have comparable professional experience. In these instances, the University and the College assure the maintenance of academic standards by providing thorough mentoring and training and require attendance at moderation meetings and assessment boards.

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

Core theme 2: Quality of learning opportunities

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

24 The management of the quality of learning opportunities is rigorously maintained and facilitated through a robust line management structure which includes a number of key senior appointments made in 2010, as outlined in paragraphs 12 to 14. The committee structure is now starting to have an impact upon the overall coordination of the learning experience. The Higher Education Staff Forum, which has now been operating for two years, has been received extremely positively by all staff and allows the exchange of good practice and debate across, as well as between, academic programme areas to further enhance a range of learning opportunities.

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

25 The College works with two awarding bodies; the larger partnership is with the University of Sunderland, where a strong partnership is maintained. Systems for monitoring higher education partnerships are described in detail in paragraph 12. There are rigorous validation processes, internally for Edexcel programmes, while university-validated programmes are scrutinised by a panel comprising members of the College and University. Validation documentation provides the basis for programme planning. Most programmes include employer input to ensure that Foundation Degrees are fit for purpose. Continued employer involvement is present in many programmes at departmental level, which ensures currency of the qualification; however, there is no overall coordination, and engagement with employers is fragmented and has the potential for lost opportunities. The College should consider developing a more effective and coherent employer engagement strategy, to

ensure a more effective and coordinated college-wide approach to employer development and to capitalise on good individual tutor links with employers.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

26 The College is meeting the requirements of the precepts of the *Code of practice*, relevant subject benchmark statements and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. All higher education self-evaluation documentation has been designed to embed the Academic Infrastructure (see paragraph 15). The College has recently conducted an audit of its practices to ensure alignment with the *Code of practice*, and this demonstrates a well-understood process and clear implementation across all academic programmes.

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

27 Improving teaching and learning is a key aim within the College's Higher Education Strategy. The College has a robust teaching observation process whereby staff are observed regularly both formally and informally, including peer observation, which is a key element of measuring teaching quality. The College also operates a Teaching and Coaching Project in order to improve the quality of teaching, which involves colleagues being mentored to improve their teaching when appropriate. Students confirm that teaching and learning on higher education programmes is good. Responses to the National Student Survey state that 87 per cent of students are satisfied with teaching and learning. All staff are appropriately qualified and have a higher degree or are working towards one, and this is audited on an annual basis by the University of Sunderland.

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

28 Students confirmed that support is available to them from tutors, either by means of the tutorial system or by open access to their tutors. Some students were unclear as to whether or not tutorials were a formal timetabled part of their programme, tutorial support being provided by tutor accessibility and flexibility. Tutorials on some full-time programmes are described as workshops and there was some confusion among learners. The team considers it desirable that the College should formalise and develop a more consistent tutorial system across all programme areas and give due consideration in the timetabling process to ensure clarity for all students. Additional support provided by the College and commended by the students includes the partnership Liaison Officer, as well as the dedicated additional learner support team, who offer a comprehensive and wide range of support for students, including in areas such as dyslexia and counselling services.

29 The College has created dedicated higher education resources, including study areas and meeting rooms, which are valued by students. These developments have been informed by the student voice, and in addition to these physical resources high-quality interactive support is available via the college virtual learning environment, which enables easy access to course and module information. The higher education toolkit contains excellent advice and information for students on issues such as writing assignments, research methods and referencing. The team concluded that learning support for students is excellent, with a range of support materials and staff available for the enhancement of learning and this is clearly an area of good practice. However, in order to provide equity of tutorial support for all students, the College could consider formalising its tutorial programme.

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

30 The College has a robust staff development scheme which provides specific higher education staff development events three times per year. Attendance by staff teaching on higher education programmes at these development days is good, with all staff teaching solely on higher education programmes attending them. Attendance is monitored both on individuals' records and centrally. Staff may also attend higher education training events which are provided by the University of Sunderland. Attendance at these events is not recorded. The College has developed a Research and Innovation Group, comprising members from both the College and University, which pairs staff from both institutions to promote and share good practice, and this has proved to be highly successful, with the development of some joint subject-specific projects. Staff are encouraged to submit research proposals, for which a sum of money from the Continual Professional Development budget is dedicated, and which follow university models for research project approval. The team concluded that the development of a culture of research and scholarly activity that clearly supports the enhancement of learning opportunities is an example of good practice.

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?

31 Students benefit from a range of dedicated higher education resources. The library has recently been refurbished and includes support offered from the University to its franchised students through the University of Sunderland Gateway located in reception. The Information and Learning Centre also offers the use of discrete study areas and updated information technology areas, including the borrowing of laptops, and students commented very positively regarding the availability of and access to learning resources. A change in the provider of the virtual learning environment has caused some early issues for students, but these had now all been overcome. The new system has greater potential and staff are using it to good effect in providing information to students.

32 Self-assessment and annual monitoring informs the adequacy of resources needed for effectively running programmes. Resource levels are outlined in programme specifications. Curriculum review meetings take place three times a year, at which resource issues are examined and used to inform the curriculum review at the end of the year. Requests for equipment identified as necessary are taken to the Strategic Planning Group and approved if commensurate with the College's strategic plan, as demonstrated by the Music Department's request for music equipment.

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?

33 The type and range of information that the College is responsible for publishing includes the higher education prospectus, course fact sheets and comprehensive website information at course level. The College's virtual learning environment platform was changed in 2010 and is now well managed and maintained. All higher education programmes have produced clear programme specifications which include details of aims, intended learning outcomes, module content and assessment. All students are supplied either at enrolment or induction with a copy of the College Student Handbook and Student Entitlement Policy. The College has effective mechanisms to ensure that all students and staff have access to key information from pre-enrolment to completion of a programme. This is good practice. The procedure for the accreditation of prior learning has also been added to the college website and distributed to the higher education community.

34 The main channels for publishing information are paper-based and electronic. A wide range of college policies and procedures are available on the college website, as is the current Strategic Plan and Higher Education Strategy. The following are readily available on the college intranet: the higher education toolkit (see paragraph 29), which is designed to assist with study skills issues; higher education finance; the higher education staff site and the higher education Plaza site. The prospectus and all programme specifications and programme handbooks are available in both paper-based and electronic formats. As part of the process of developing and enhancing a higher education ethos among staff, the College has published a journal of practitioner-based research (see paragraph 10). This is a compilation of the findings of college staff engaged in higher education research linked closely to teaching and learning, which is clearly informing and enhancing student opportunities, and the team recognises this as an area of good practice.

35 Responsibilities are assigned and delegated within the College by the Marketing Manager for the production and monitoring of all higher education public information. The most recent university collaborative report states that the College draws upon the programme specification approved at validation to inform the accuracy of its marketing materials. These are submitted to the college marketing personnel for internal approval prior to submission to the university public relations and marketing department for final approval.

36 Public information is made accessible to relevant audiences through the College's higher education website and intranet as well as in paper-based form. Control of the content in the virtual learning environment and how it is monitored and updated is led by the e-learning manager. Students confirmed that they found the virtual learning environment extremely useful and friendly to use.

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?

37 The current five-year Memorandum of Agreement between the University and the College states that all publicity materials produced by the partner college will be sent to the University for approval prior to implementation, and this was clearly found to be the case. It also includes the University's responsibility for ensuring that all appropriate guides and handbooks are issued to students in accordance with the arrangements specified in the Operations Manual. The prospectus, course fact sheets and website materials are published after content has been checked by the college marketing department.

38 The College carefully follows the public information policies of the University. Published information about any university-validated programme is appropriately formatted and approved by the relevant University faculty before publication. During the current academic year the University has devised a process where each faculty has nominated a centre leader who visits the College's programme team on two occasions a year. At the second end-of-year meeting the centre leader conducts a review of publicity information (including websites and handbooks) and draws inaccuracies to the attention of the College for remedial action.

39 The marketing department of the College liaises with the University to ensure that details published about franchised courses comply with university policy. The content of every programme specification is subject to scrutiny by an appropriate validation panel and subsequently to annual review by departmental teams and the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Coordinator. The programme specification is the source document for all public information. All heads of department are required to scrutinise their department's published programme information and required to make a judgement with reference to accuracy in their annual self-evaluations. The content of published policies and procedures is subject to scrutiny by the academic board and associated subgroups.

40 At the end of each academic year, during the annual review process, the curriculum leader signs off all public information to ensure consistency, correctness, currency and appropriateness for the target market. The last academic year appears to have been difficult for a minority of students as the College has changed its virtual learning environment. The e-learning team expects all programmes to be on the new learning platform by the new academic year. Consistency of quality and currency are ensured by ongoing course site health checks. There is also, in the annual review, a section to ensure engagement with the sections of the *Code of practice*.

41 Higher education students at the College have a voice in all aspects of procedure and process of higher education by their involvement and participation in the student representative group. However, employers do not currently have the opportunity to offer feedback on their perceptions of the usefulness of the College's public information, and the College recognises that this would be a distinct advantage with the wide range of current work-related courses and materials that have been produced and those planned for the future.

42 The College focuses on ensuring that prospective students have access to all the information they require to make an informed selection about the programme they may wish to embark upon. Since September 2010, there has been in place a newly devised 'mystery customer' process which is carried out monthly. This process has been devised to ensure the accuracy of the public information for a specific programme against its programme specifications, and resulted in an ongoing monitoring and updating process for the programme fact sheets, the prospectus, the college newspaper, marketing flyers and programme handbooks. The findings of each monthly check are fed back in a report to the Higher Education Management Committee for action. This extra mechanism for checking the accuracy of public information is recognised as an example of good practice.

43 The College valued the Development engagement process. Staff acknowledge that they had not given as much focus to public information as they should, and this has now been clearly rectified. All public information being developed and constructed either internally or externally is approved by the senior management team.

44 There is comprehensive and academically attractive information for students on scholarship help and support, researching and writing higher education assignments, and

the student experience, all of which is reviewed and monitored annually. These new publications have been much appreciated by students, who report that, as a result, they feel more confident in approaching, researching and submitting work.

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 took place in April 2010. There were three lines of enquiry: the extent to which assessment strategies ensure the maintenance of academic standards; the effectiveness of the written and oral feedback given to students to inform their future learning; and the effectiveness of the College in ensuring the accuracy and completeness of its public information on assessment.

46 The Developmental engagement team identified a number of areas of good practice. There is a productive partnership with the University of Sunderland and Edexcel and active engagement with a range of local and public sector employers, reflecting the key priorities identified by the Regional Development Agency strategic plan. The programmes offered by the College are proactively filling identified skills shortages on a local basis. All College higher education quality documentation, including the robust procedures for assessment and internal moderation of work, is comprehensive and rigorous. The higher education toolkit, which includes a series of comprehensive guides such as Harvard referencing and 'researching and writing your assignments', is clear, concise and valued by learners. The personal development plans that learners develop on Foundation Degrees are used in the workplace to cascade to other employees. The Higher Education Staff Forum is highly effective in developing ideas, coordinating initiatives, piloting new developments and in sharing good practice in assessment. The higher education teams use the Academic Infrastructure effectively and the College has a well-developed higher education strategy that is linked clearly to the quality assurance framework. Students' views are used effectively to inform developments and improvements in the range and quality of feedback on students' work. The College has identified a single, easily accessible source document as the programme specification to ensure that the marketing department, the awarding bodies and programme teams all refer to one source to maintain the accuracy and currency of all public information.

47 The team also made a number of recommendations. It considered that the College should encourage further sharing of the outcomes and good practice identified in the many research and project initiatives undertaken to benefit all staff in the higher education community. The College was also encouraged to engage more with employers to develop further and support the assessment process, and to ensure the inclusion of clear guidance on the accreditation of prior experiential learning within all published information.

48 The team was satisfied that all points raised in the Developmental engagement action plan have been fully addressed. All of the issues have been implemented and embedded within the institution to enhance the management of higher education.

D Foundation Degrees

49 The College has been involved with Foundation Degree development from the inception of the award. It was involved in the initial regional pilot, which resulted in the development of the now full-time FD in Network Security Technology with the University of Sunderland. In parallel, the College and University developed the part-time FD in Service Management outside of the pilot. Each programme was developed to run in each of the College's Centres of Vocational Excellence to provide higher-level progression opportunities for full and part-time further education students. Driven by the College's mission statement and strategic plan, the College and University have continued to collaborate on Foundation Degree development, and 19 programmes are now in operation. A further five programmes are in suspended development because of funding cap issues. Courses include full and part-time, day and evening modes of attendance. Approximately 60 per cent of all higher education students in the College are studying for Foundation Degrees.

50 Foundation Degrees are now well established within the College and contain well-integrated work-based learning opportunities. They have been designed to meet local and regional needs and are both demand led and developed.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

51 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in City of Sunderland College's management of its responsibilities for academic standards and for the quality of learning opportunities of the awards the College offers on behalf of its awarding bodies. This was based upon discussion with staff and students and scrutiny of evidence provided by the College and its awarding bodies, the University of Sunderland and Edexcel.

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

- the approach taken by the College to engage proactively with the Academic Infrastructure, strongly underpinning academic standards (paragraph 15)
- the highly effective process for monitoring responses to external moderator and examiner reports (paragraph 21)
- learning support for students is excellent, with a wide range of support materials available enabling the enhancement of learning (paragraph 29)
- the development of a culture of research and scholarly activity that clearly supports the enhancement of learning opportunities (paragraphs 30 and 34)
- the College has effective mechanisms to ensure that all students and staff have access to key information from pre-enrolment to completion of a programme (paragraph 33)
- the introduction of the 'mystery customer' to act as an additional mechanism for checking the accuracy of public information (paragraph 42).

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

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

- achieve coherence between policies and procedures to ensure that all higher education roles and committees enable the College to achieve its strategic aims and enhance provision (paragraph 14)
- ensure that students on all programmes receive comparable quality of assessment feedback (paragraph 19)
- develop a more effective employer engagement strategy (paragraph 25)
- formalise and develop a more consistent tutorial system across all programme areas and ensure the timetabling process reflects this for all learners (paragraph 28).

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 standards of the awards of its awarding bodies.

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 quality of learning opportunities to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

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, 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.

City of Sunderland action plan relating to the Summative review: June 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 approach taken by the College to engage proactively with the Academic Infrastructure, strongly underpinning academic standards (paragraph 15) 	<p>To prepare for and embed QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education as a successor to the Academic Infrastructure throughout the HE community</p> <p>To provide two half-day continuing professional development (CPD) sessions to HE community</p>	31 Dec 2012	<p>Director of Quality and Standards (Q&S)</p> <p>HE Quality and Enhancement Co-ordinator</p>	<p>New UK Quality Code is appropriately referenced within HE Quality Manual and Self Evaluation templates (and published on staff intranet)</p> <p>At least 50 per cent of HE community attend an Academic Infrastructure/Quality Code CPD session</p>	HE Management Committee	<p>Curriculum Area Self Evaluation Reports</p> <p>CPD Evaluation documentation</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the highly effective process for monitoring responses to external moderator and examiner reports (paragraph 21) 	To review and update Process Map within the College External Examiners' Handbook to ensure continued conformance to precepts	31 Dec 2011	<p>HE Quality and Enhancement Co-ordinator</p> <p>Quality Manager</p>	<p>Consistently high proportion of positive external examiner report feedback</p> <p>Revised external examiner/external</p>	HE Management Committee	<p>Annual Curriculum Area Self Evaluation Reports and associated documentation</p> <p>Standing agenda item at HE</p>

	To review and further improve tracking spreadsheet with integrated actions where required for all HE External Examiner Reports		Quality Manager	verifier (EE/EV) Handbook in place Outcomes from all External Examiner/Moderator Reports monitored and reported (and published on staff intranet)		Management Committee to review outcomes from EE reports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> learning support for students is excellent, with a wide range of support materials available enabling the enhancement of learning (paragraph 29) 	<p>To revise and update 2011-2012 version of the HE Toolkit Resource, incorporating full accessibility for visually impaired learners and learners with a disability</p> <p>To further improve effectiveness and liaison between HE curriculum teams and learning centre services staff to benefit of learners' experience</p>	01 Oct 2011	<p>Virtual learning environment Manager</p> <p>HE Quality and Enhancement Co-ordinator</p> <p>Learning Centre Services Manager</p>	<p>Publication of updated Toolkit to HE community</p> <p>National Student Survey and Internal HE Learner Survey Feedback comments continue to show high levels of student satisfaction and/or measurable improvement on previous year</p> <p>At least 50 per cent of learning centre staff undertake PTLS qualifications</p>	HE Management Committee	<p>Analysis reports of student survey data and HE student representative feedback</p> <p>CPD Evaluation documentation</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the development of a culture of research and scholarly activity that clearly supports the 	<p>To complete 15 Research Fellowships within the Research Community at the College</p> <p>To publish 'Praxis',</p>	01 Sep 2012 01 Sep	<p>HE Quality and Enhancement Co-ordinator</p> <p>HE Quality and</p>	<p>15 completed research projects shared with the HE community (an increase from 7)</p> <p>Two published</p>	HE Management Committee HE Management	<p>CPD Research Review Evaluation Forms</p> <p>Institutional</p>

enhancement of learning opportunities (paragraphs 30 and 34)	the College research journal, twice in the academic year and distribute the journal on a national basis To host an HE Conference	2012	Enhancement Co-ordinator Assistant Principal Higher Education (HE) and Teaching and Learning (T&L)	editions of 'Praxis' completed and distributed nationally HE Conference takes place	Committee	evaluation data following national distribution of the internal 'Praxis' journal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College has effective mechanisms to ensure that all students and staff have access to key information from pre-enrolment to completion of a programme (paragraph 33) 	To conduct an HE Student Representative Review and Audit of HE Public Information, led by an HE lead student rep, to enhance the current public information provided and consider new formats and media	01 July 2012	HE Quality and Enhancement Co-ordinator HE Administrator Marketing Manager HE lead student representative	Completed Review and HE student representative recommendations identify further actions for improvement to be carried out in 2011-12 and/or beyond High, or measurable improvement on previous year, student satisfaction with key information	HE Management Committee and HE Curriculum Reviews	Completed Review and HE student representative recommendations Outcomes from course committees and internal student surveys
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the introduction of the 'mystery customer' to act as an additional mechanism for checking the 	To extend 'mystery customer' system to all HE programmes (both HEFCE-funded and full-cost programmes) to check	01 Dec 2011	HE Administrator HE Quality Enhancement Co-ordinator	Completed and Signed off 'mystery customer' documentation Non-HEFCE funded	HE Management Committee	Continued review and summary report of HE 'mystery customer' activity reviewed at HE Management

accuracy of public information (paragraph 42).	the accuracy of HE public information			programmes included in 'mystery customer' system		Committee
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"> achieve coherence between policies and procedures to ensure that all higher education roles and committees enable the College to achieve its strategic aims and enhance provision (paragraph 14) 	To inform the College's 2011-14 Strategic Plan in relation to HE and to progress the relevant Strategic Plan aims and objectives	01 March 2012	Assistant Principal HE & T&L	Successful and timely progression of HE-related strategic targets	College Governors	Report to Board of Governors (by Director of Quality and Standards) on progress and achievement of strategic objectives/targets
	To update and complete the college HE Strategy aims and objectives	01 Jan 2012	Assistant Principal HE & T&L HE Manager	Public launch of updated college HE Strategy	College Principal and College Governors	HE Management Committee and Governors' Minutes
	To review HE Quality Manual to improve HE roles and committee flowcharts	01 Jan 2012	Director of Quality and Standards	Updated HE Quality Manual in place (and published on staff intranet)	Assistant Principal HE & T&L	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that students on all programmes receive comparable quality of assessment feedback 	To audit a specified sample of student marked work during all internal HE Inspections	01 Sep 2012	Director of Quality and Standards	Consistent and good-quality feedback observed and reported	HE Management Committee	Internal Inspection Reports and Grading
	To provide CPD session on giving	01 Aug 2012	Assistant Principal HE	At least 50 per cent of HE community		CPD Activity Evaluation Forms

(paragraph 19)	written and oral feedback (good practice) for all members of the HE community; supported by embedded coaching opportunities		&T&L HE Manager HE Quality and Enhancement Co-ordinator CPD Co-ordinator	participate in assessment CPD HE learner surveys show measurable improvement in student satisfaction on previous year with assessment feedback		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop a more effective employer engagement strategy (paragraph 25) 	<p>To appoint a College Employment Engagement Manager to establish and oversee the development of a College Employment Engagement Strategy</p> <p>To establish a College Employer Intelligence Group, of which the HE Manager is a full member, to represent the views and links with the HE community</p> <p>To adopt the CRM database to capture and manage employer contact details</p>	30 June 2012	<p>HE Manager</p> <p>Employer Engagement Manager</p> <p>HE Quality and Enhancement Co-ordinator</p>	<p>The production of a whole-college Employer Engagement Strategy, of which HE will be a major component</p> <p>Adoption of an agreed Employer Engagement Strategy for HE</p> <p>CRM database in operation</p>	HE Management Committee	Minutes and actions of the College Employer Intelligence Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> formalise and develop a more 	To introduce a standardised HE	30 June 2012	HE Manager	Approved Tutorial Policy in place	HE Management Committee	Course Committee Minutes, Internal

<p>consistent tutorial system across all programme areas and ensure the timetabling process reflects this for all learners (paragraph 28).</p>	<p>College tutorial system and time allocation for all HE programmes (from Oct 2011)</p> <p>To introduce a standardised set of HE tutorial materials for all HE programmes</p> <p>To audit compliance with HE Tutorial Policy</p>		<p>Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Co-ordinator</p> <p>HE Manager</p>	<p>High, or measurable improvement on previous year, student satisfaction with tutorial</p> <p>Fully operational and standardised HE Tutorial System with a standardised tutorial experience for all HE learners</p>	<p>HE Management Committee</p>	<p>Quality Surveys and National Student Survey</p> <p>Audit of compliance with HE Policy conducted by HE Manager</p>
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