



# **Integrated quality and enhancement review**

**Summative review**

**Northampton College**

**November 2011**

**SR 011/11**

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2012

ISBN 978 1 84979 458 9

All QAA's publications are available on our website [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://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* (FHEQ), which includes descriptions of different higher education qualifications
- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*)
- 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 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 Northampton College carried out in November 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 agreement, for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding body. The team also considers that there can be **confidence** in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreement, for the quality of learning opportunities it offers. The team considers that reliance **can** be placed on the accuracy and 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:

- clear and comprehensive programme specifications are readily available to students and staff in electronic form, and help to ensure that academic standards are explicit and understood on all courses
- the design and management of teaching, learning and assessment ensure clear relevance to real work situations, and makes systematic use of formative feedback
- a purpose designed, open access Research and Study Skills module has been introduced to support students' development of their higher education study skills
- the campus redevelopment strategy has provided many industry standard facilities, which are used to enhance the professional relevance of teaching and learning
- recent enhancements to the College website and the virtual learning environment have produced clear, comprehensive and easily navigated information sites for students and staff
- public information is produced within the context of detailed and explicit protocols, which include a policy statement, higher education marketing operational plan and production schedule.

### 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 actions arising from relevant boards and committees include additional detail to aid their implementation and monitoring
- liaise with the awarding body to ensure that responses to external examiners' reports consistently reflect the views of course teams at the College.

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

- strengthen the status of the pivotal Higher Education Group by bringing it within formal College management structures
- consider ways to improve the attendance of student representatives at Boards of Study meetings

- continue to promote scholarly activity among the higher education teaching staff and ensure more systematic monitoring of the impact of staff development generally
- give more emphasis to the specific needs and expectations of higher education through the development of the higher education teaching and learning strategy, and in the teaching observation process
- consider ways of presenting a more coherent profile for higher education in the main course directory, or separately, and ensuring that course descriptions are easier to locate.

## 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 Northampton 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 Northampton. The review was carried out by Mr David Gardiner, Mr Kevin Kendall and Mr Paul Monroe (reviewers), and Mr David Lewis (coordinator).

2 The Summative review team (the team) conducted the review in agreement with the College and in accordance with *The handbook for Integrated quality and enhancement review* (the handbook) published by QAA. Evidence in support of the Summative review included documentation supplied by the College and awarding body, meetings with staff, students and the main partner institution, reports of reviews by QAA and from inspections by Ofsted. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagement in assessment. A summary of findings from the 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 awards, section D of this report summarises details of the Foundation Degree programmes delivered at the College.

4 Northampton College is a general college of further education created by the merger, in 2004, of the original Northampton College with Daventry Tertiary College. Its mission is to 'provide our community with the opportunity to develop through learning'. Academic management operates across further and higher education provision within the College, with academic staff teaching across both levels. Apart from the Certificate in Teaching, all of the provision is located within the School of The Arts, one of seven curriculum schools.

5 For 2011-12, the College has about 10,500 students on courses leading to a diverse range of further education awards. In addition, there are 200 HEFCE-funded students, amounting to almost 170 full-time equivalents. All higher education students are indirectly funded and the College has a single awarding body, the University of Northampton (the University).

6 The higher education awards delivered by the College and funded by HEFCE are listed below, with the number of full-time equivalent students in brackets.

- HND Digital Film Making (38)
- HND Interactive Digital Media (7)
- HND Music Practice (10)
- HND Music Production (44)
- HND Photography (34)
- HND Theatre (26)
- Cert/Pg Cert in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (10)



## **Partnership agreement with the awarding body**

7 Northampton College has a formal agreement, in the form of a Memorandum of Cooperation, with the University of Northampton. The current agreement was signed in September 2010, following a review by the University of its partnerships. The Memorandum and associated schedules are clear and detailed in defining the respective responsibilities of the College and its awarding body. They are supported by two collaborative handbooks, one of them administrative, which indicate in detail the University policies and regulations that apply to the agreement. In broad terms, the College's responsibilities cover the day-to-day delivery, assessment, resourcing and student support on the awards as prescribed in the collaborative handbooks.

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

8 The number of higher education students at the College has fallen by around 30 per cent since the Developmental engagement in 2010. This fall is a result of the University's decision to discontinue College recruitment to its FD Business and a decrease in the numbers on the Cert/Pg Cert in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector. Student numbers on the core portfolio of HND programmes have remained stable overall, albeit with significant changes on individual awards. A major capital project has allowed the substantial redevelopment of the main College campus, providing enhanced library and specialist facilities for students. The new building was commissioned for occupation in spring 2011.

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

9 Students on the higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. The students were not able to produce a submission within the required timetable, with the College citing the timing of the review visit as a contributory factor. However, the College did provide a succinct summary of the findings of formal student feedback evaluations for 2010-11. In addition, a meeting of HND student representatives in October 2011 resulted in an additional set of comments, some of them reflecting on the formal feedback evaluations. In combination, the two documents gave the team a useful insight into student opinion. They informed the topics that were explored during the review, some of which were followed up in an informative meeting with students during the visit.

## **B Evaluation of the management of HEFCE-funded higher education**

### **Core theme 1: Academic standards**

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

10 The main responsibility for higher education lies with the head of each school within which the provision is delivered. The management structure is straightforward and effective, operating from course level through the Head of School to the Deputy Principal, Curriculum and Student Services, who reports directly to the College Principal. The College Executive and Senior Management Teams make strategic decisions about all curriculum issues and

monitor academic standards and quality. There is no separate dedicated structure for higher education.

11 The College has a constructive working relationship with the University, and manages the provision within the terms of the detailed and explicit Memorandum of Cooperation. Academic standards and quality matters are addressed at Boards of Study meetings, which for the arts provision are chaired by the Head of School and include University representatives. The equivalent for the certificates in teaching is a University Board of Study on which the College is represented. Teaching teams work closely with University link tutors, who provide subject level support in ensuring that academic standards are understood and maintained.

12 The College has a Higher Education Group that meets monthly and includes University representation through link tutors. It provides a valuable forum for higher education course leaders and senior College staff to consider operational matters and share good practice. Reports from the group are forwarded to the Boards of Study, the Academic Board and on to the Corporation. The Higher Education Group is playing an increasingly influential role as a conduit for the interests of higher education with the main College management groups. It is desirable that it now be brought within the formal College committee structure.

13 The recommendations arising from the Developmental engagement have, in large part, been addressed. Where action is still pending there is a clear ongoing narrative explaining the current position and how and when the actions will be completed.

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

14 For the Higher National awards, the College course development procedure and the University approval process ensure that the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure are systematically considered. Academic standards, as well as the associated student assessments, are tested for level against the FHEQ. Attention is also given to the relevant sections of the *Code of practice* and the awards are referenced against the pertinent subject benchmark statements. Subsequently, alignment with the Academic Infrastructure is monitored through annual review and as part of periodic institutional and subject re-approval procedures. The certificates in teaching, which are University designed programmes, are subject to similarly robust procedures.

15 The programme specifications produced for the awards are readily available to students and staff through clear links on the virtual learning environment. They are clear and comprehensive, providing an authoritative and usable description of the courses for students and staff. The programme specifications, which include clear learning outcomes, help to ensure that academic standards are explicit and understood on all of the awards, and are a feature 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 body?**

16 The College has a range of interrelated quality mechanisms in place to ensure that academic standards meet the requirements of the University. These reflect the quality assurance requirements that are described in the University collaborative handbook. They are formalised in two documents: an overarching institution level management and quality assurance paper; and a higher education quality assurance map, developed by the Higher Education Group. The map clearly differentiates the roles and responsibilities of the

College and the University through the stages of the various quality processes. Key events in the quality cycle are twice-yearly course reviews, annual self-assessment reports, link tutors' annual subject review, external examiner reports, boards of study, boards of examiners, periodic subject review and institutional re-approval. Overall, the arrangements for assuring academic standards are appropriate and reflect the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

17 The Developmental engagement confirmed that the College arrangements for assessment are effective and meet the requirements of the awarding body. An audit of assessment practice is undertaken annually by the College Quality Manager, with outcomes and actions being fed back to the schools for action. The College has developed its own higher education assessment policy, which has been approved by the University as being appropriate to meet College and University requirements.

18 The minutes of the Higher Education Group show that it addresses a wide range of higher education topics. It interacts with other College bodies and makes a significant contribution to ensuring that standards meet the requirements of the awarding body. However, to better ensure effective follow-up, it is advisable that the College strengthen the action planning from formal meetings, including the Higher Education Group, Boards of Study and Higher National course teams, to reflect the practice in other College and University committees. For example, some of these other committees already include the timescale for action and the nature of the evidence required to demonstrate that the actions have been successfully addressed.

19 External examiners are recruited, appointed and trained by the University. Their reports are sent initially to the University and used to inform annual reviews. The reports are fed back to the College for actions and responses to be agreed by course teams. For the Higher National awards, these are then used by the University to report back to the examiner. The arrangements are clear, although it is not evident that the process is consistently and effectively monitored.

20 The College has a range of mechanisms for capturing the 'learner voice' in relation to academic standards and quality. These include internal surveys, the National Student Survey, student representatives for Boards of Study and quality forums, and module feedback questionnaires. Student representatives receive specific training for their role. Some find it difficult to attend Boards of Study meetings and it is desirable that the College look at ways of increasing their participation.

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

21 The College has a published training and development policy and maintains accurate records of staff development activities, although those for 2010-11 have yet to be fully recorded. Development needs are identified through a mixture of College priorities and individual planning and appraisal, which take place annually. Staff regularly benefit from University training focused on higher education matters, including the Academic Infrastructure. A large complement of staff have participated in sessions on higher education teaching for the certificates in teaching, and on assessment and the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*. The College evaluates the outcomes of staff training and development mainly through the staff appraisal process and course review. It is not clear that the outcomes and benefits of development activities are systematically fed back into the curricula and monitored.

**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 body.**

## **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?**

22 The responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities are generally as described in paragraphs 10-12. A successful review and institutional re-approval was undertaken in 2010, providing evidence of the University's confidence in the College's management of standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The higher education strategy, covering the period 2009-12, would benefit from updating to better reflect the College's changing priorities, as well as recent national and regional developments. Course leaders and curriculum managers at the College are generally aware of their roles and responsibilities within the management structure. They also recognise the division of responsibilities between the College and the University.

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

23 The relevant quality assurance arrangements are as described in paragraphs 16-20 and operate within the stipulations of the University collaborative handbook. The actions arising from course reviews, annual self-assessment reports and the link tutors' annual reviews are followed up by Boards of Study and the Higher Education Group. The outcomes of the various quality arrangements indicate that students are receiving appropriate learning opportunities. A separate teaching and learning strategy for higher education is still under development.

24 The reports of external examiners offer a further safeguard that students receive appropriate learning opportunities. The arrangements for managing the reports are clear, as described in paragraph 19. As part of the process, Higher National course teams produce comments and possible actions, which are then used as part of the University's formal reply to the examiner. Overall, this process operates effectively but, in the documentation provided for the visit, a reply had been sent to the examiner without any indication that the detailed observations made by the course leader had been considered. It is therefore advisable that the College liaises with the awarding body to ensure that University responses to external examiner reports reflect the input from course leaders at the College.

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

25 Programmes and modules are designed within the University's modular framework, so ensuring that they reflect the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure. They are checked during University periodic subject review, the most recent of which in 2010 confirmed the alignment of the HND Interactive Digital Media with the Academic Infrastructure. There are clear procedures for approving changes to module specifications,

which can be undertaken annually. The College ensures that teaching staff are familiar with the *Code of practice* and subject benchmark statements, and use them regularly, along with the comprehensive programme specifications to inform their teaching and assessment. The relevant sections of the *Code of practice* are also used by the College to underpin arrangements for disabled students and admissions.

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

26 The College has a clear policy statement for the observation of teaching and learning in its Teaching and Learning Standards and Observation Protocols 2011-12 publication. The document details the thorough observation process. All teaching staff are observed annually and the College is able to disaggregate the outcomes for its higher education classes. The results for 2010-11 show all such sessions were graded 1 or 2, which supports the claim for high quality teaching. Staff who are judged to be effective are encouraged to share good practice, while there are clear mechanisms in place to support staff who are judged to be performing less effectively. While the observations are rigorously implemented, the scheme is a College-wide one, based on the requirements of further education. It is desirable that the observation process gives more attention to some expected features of higher education teaching, such as critical evaluation, accurate academic referencing and students having responsibility for their own learning.

27 Appropriate arrangements are in place to gather student opinion, which is a further important source of evidence used by the College to help ensure the quality of teaching and learning. The outcomes of feedback for the Higher National awards are processed within the College and fed into course team meetings, course reviews and the Boards of Study. The University manages the feedback from students on the certificates in teaching. Overall, the results show a high level of satisfaction, which reflects the views reported by students in the feedback report provided for the review and in a meeting with the team. The least favourable responses in the surveys relate to course organisation and the promptness of assessment feedback.

28 The planning and organisation of teaching, learning and assessment has ensured relevance to professional employment and real work situations, and is an area of good practice. The learning outcomes for units and assignments are regularly updated to align with current professional practice. Oral formative feedback is systematically provided, including within creative practice assignments, in time to allow students to make improvements before the final submission date.

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

29 The College attaches substantial importance to student support, which is made clear on its website and through a range of publications. It provides a wide range of general support services, both academic and personal, and each student is allocated a personal tutor. The University's Working Together publication for students emphasises the complementary nature of the support provided within the College and through the University. Student support needs are identified at application, after which College and University support teams act quickly to put appropriate arrangements in place. Students confirm that the support systems are in place at the College and that they are effective. The arrangements for support are formally monitored as part of the College quality assurance system, including in annual reports, annual reviews and through student surveys.

30 A notable initiative in student support is the Research and Study Skills module that has been developed jointly by library and academic staff. Set at level 4, it is designed to

deliver higher education study skills support, including academic skills such as referencing. It is provided through the tutorial system with the involvement of the learning resources centre. This valuable module, which is openly accessed through the virtual learning environment, is proving effective in enhancing students academic study skills and is an area of good practice.

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

31 As a matter of policy, the College identifies four days when staff development is prioritised and, in concert with the University, provides a useful in-house programme of development activities dealing with higher education issues. Each school has a staff development budget and training needs are determined through a combination of the outcomes of appraisal, College policies and individual applications. Individual applications, including those for higher level qualifications, must meet laid-down College criteria. All new staff attend a one-day induction. Staff development to support the certificates in teaching is largely determined and delivered by the University. A post-training meeting with a line manager may be used to consider the implications of staff development activities on teaching and student learning. However, it is desirable that the College implements a more robust system for monitoring and ensuring that such evaluation takes place consistently.

32 Ongoing subject research and scholarly activity is not a strong feature among the profiles of all teaching staff. The College recognises the distinctive needs of the creative arts provision by supporting a range of external activities, including work with professional organisations. These activities are used effectively to help sustain professional currency and practice, which can be equated with conventional scholarly activity. They include work with local theatres, as well as music and photography production companies. It is desirable that the College looks at ways of more formally promoting and recognising scholarly activity, including that which is professionally based.

**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?**

33 The suitability and sufficiency of learning resources are assessed as part of the approval of each programme. They are subsequently monitored at annual review and as part of periodic institutional and subject re-approval procedures. The College and University have systems in place for ensuring the suitability of staff, both in respect of new appointments and posts carrying added responsibility. A scrutiny of staff profiles shows that those teaching on higher education programmes are well qualified, with many having relevant professional experience. Students have dual access rights to library and information technology facilities at the College and the University.

34 The management of the campus redevelopment has ensured significantly improved higher education accommodation and facilities, both general and specialist. The new library has a dedicated higher education study area. The redevelopment strategy has also ensured that the specialist facilities for music, film, theatre and photography are of a high standard, with many of them provided to current professional specifications. The facilities, many of which are overseen by well qualified technical staff, are used to enhance the professional relevance of teaching and learning, and represent good practice. The College is confident it can maintain the currency of the facilities through its capital bidding system, which is operated by curriculum managers.

**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 body, to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.**

### **Core theme 3: Public information**

#### **What information is the College responsible for publishing about its HEFCE-funded higher education?**

35 The College, in carrying out its responsibilities for publishing information, is careful to work within the relevant policies of its awarding body. The certificates in teaching are provided as part of a consortium with other colleges in the region, and so are tightly prescribed. The Higher National programmes are college-designed awards validated through the University, an arrangement that allows more College input into published materials.

36 The College publishes a variety of course-related materials for use by students and staff. It also produces more general information, including its higher education strategy and various policies and procedures relating to higher education. It publishes information in hard copy and electronically as it judges appropriate, but with a deliberate and increasing emphasis on electronic publication.

37 A distinctive visual identity has been applied to all publications for the Higher National awards, including a magazine-style directory and individual student course guides. This identity has now been successfully applied to the College virtual learning environment and website. The latter provides a comprehensive and easily accessed and navigated range of higher education information. The graphics are well matched to the creative arts students for whom the website is intended. In addition to detailed and well presented information on each award, the website contains easy links to key University materials, such as programme and module specifications, and relevant policies and procedures. It also offers a direct application link to the UCAS site. Students have a higher education handbook, published jointly with the University.

38 Overall, the information published for students is extensive and clear, although the treatment of higher education in the College prospectus, or directory of courses, is potentially confusing. The higher education section is short and limited to directing the reader back to course descriptions in the general curriculum entries. It is desirable that consideration be given to ways of presenting a more coherent profile for higher education in the main directory, or separately, and ensuring that course descriptions are easier to locate.

39 The course guides, which are published electronically and in hard copy, are comprehensive and clearly organised. They are used and valued by students, to whom they are issued within a week of enrolment. Each guide includes general background information, programme structure and module specifications, teaching and assessment arrangements, assignments, reading lists and a calendar. Some include useful additional details, such as a profile of the teaching staff or the costs of course materials. All student guides, as well as schemes of work and assignments, are sent to the University annually for verification and standardisation.

40 Students have access to virtual learning environments within the College and the University, with easy links between the two systems. Each course team decides which to

use as their main resource. Students attest to the ease of access and valuable content of the College virtual learning environment. Each course site within the virtual learning environment contains an extensive and thorough range of well-presented course materials, including course specifications. Tutors populate the sites with thought-provoking supplementary materials, such as relevant articles and visual artefacts, while some also engage students in flexible, interactive activities. The use of the virtual learning environment is regularly monitored by the e-learning team, which reports to the group of curriculum managers. In addition, the curriculum managers undertake quality sampling twice a year. Recent enhancements to the virtual learning environment, as well as the College website, have produced high quality and well managed resources that represent good practice.

**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?**

41 In order to assure the accuracy of the information it has responsibility for publishing, the College has introduced a robust set of public information protocols. These comprise a policy statement, a higher education marketing operational plan and a production schedule. Together, they offer a coherent and detailed framework for the oversight of all published information, and represent an area of good practice. The published information policy incorporates clearly designated roles and responsibilities, and clear criteria for approval. The processes and procedures for managing public information are clearly documented in the marketing operational plan for higher education. The production schedule for 2011 offers a clear timetable for course teams and other participants to ensure the prompt and accurate production of annually published materials, such as the higher education magazine and course handbooks.

42 At the end of each academic year, during the annual review process, curriculum leaders sign off all public information to ensure consistency, correctness, currency and appropriateness for the target market. Part of this process involves a contribution from students. The annual review incorporates a check to ensure the alignment of public information with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning); Section 8: Career education, information, advice and guidance; and Section 10: Admissions to higher education.*

43 There is regular dialogue between the marketing teams at the College and University to ensure that published materials meet University requirements. Programme specifications are subject to detailed University scrutiny, with the approved version being used as the source document for all subsequent course-related publications. The content of all published policies and procedures is subject to approval by the Academic Board or its subgroups.

44 Students have opportunities to feed back their opinion on the published information they receive during induction week and subsequently through focus groups and at the annual student conference held in December. Student views are positive regarding course-related information, particularly that available through the virtual learning environment.

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



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

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

**Line of enquiry 1:** How effective is Northampton College in managing the student assessment process and engaging with the Academic Infrastructure where appropriate?

**Line of enquiry 2:** Does the assessment feedback given to students match grading criteria and is it linked to the intended learning outcomes; does it provide appropriate developmental guidance?

**Line of enquiry 3:** Do College systems ensure that the information provided to students on assessment is accurate and fit for purpose?

46 The Developmental engagement report identifies a range of good practice across the three lines of enquiry. These include the links with the awarding body that have promoted effective assessment practices, and the support to help students progressing from level 3 adapt to the demands of assessment at levels 5 and 6. The report also draws attention to the effectiveness of the assessment and feedback on the Certificate awards in education and the rebranding of promotional materials to provide a more distinctive visual identity for the higher education provision.

47 The report contains a number of recommendations for improving the standards and quality of higher education. It refers to the advisability of embedding recently implemented arrangements for addressing acknowledged inconsistencies in assessment practices, as well as ensuring more consistency in addressing the actions of external examiners. It identifies the advisability of providing more explicit schedules for the production of published information. The report lists a number of desirable recommendations for enhancing the provision. The College should produce a clear overview of the existing quality arrangements for higher education and liaise with the University to provide a version of the formal assessment requirements that is simpler and more sensitive to College needs. It should continue to address variability in the quality and timeliness of assessment feedback. It also made clear the desirability of building on the increasingly influential work of the Higher Education Group and of developing the College website to provide more effective links with the University website.

## D Foundation Degrees

48 The College has no Foundation Degrees following the decision by the University of Northampton to withdraw the franchised Foundation Degree in Business at the end of 2010-11.

## E Conclusions and summary of judgements

49 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Northampton 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 body. This was based upon discussion with staff and students and scrutiny of evidence provided by the College and its awarding body, the University of Northampton.

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

- clear and comprehensive programme specifications are readily available to students and staff in electronic form, and help to ensure that academic standards are explicit and understood on all courses (paragraph 15)
- the design and management of teaching, learning and assessment ensure clear relevance to real work situations, and makes systematic use of formative feedback (paragraph 28)
- a purpose designed, open access Research and Study Skills module has been introduced to support students' development of their higher education study skills (paragraph 30)
- the campus redevelopment strategy has provided many industry standard facilities, which are used to enhance the professional relevance of teaching and learning (paragraph 34)
- recent enhancements to the College website and the virtual learning environment have produced clear, comprehensive and easily navigated information sites for students and staff (paragraphs 37, 40)
- public information is produced within the context of detailed and explicit protocols, which include a policy statement, higher education marketing operational plan and production schedule (paragraph 41).

51 The team also makes some recommendations for consideration by the College and its awarding body.

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

- ensure that the actions arising from relevant boards and committees include additional detail to aid their implementation and monitoring (paragraph 18)
- liaise with the awarding body to ensure that responses to external examiners' reports consistently reflect the views of course teams at the College (paragraphs 19, 24).

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

- strengthen the status of the pivotal Higher Education Group by bringing it within formal College management structures (paragraph 12)
- consider ways to improve the attendance of student representatives at Boards of Study meetings (paragraph 20)
- continue to promote scholarly activity among the higher education teaching staff and ensure more systematic monitoring of the impact of staff development generally (paragraphs 21, 31, 32)
- give more emphasis to the specific needs and expectations of higher education through the development of the higher education teaching and learning strategy, and in the teaching observation process (paragraphs 23, 26)
- consider ways of presenting a more coherent profile for higher education in the main course directory, or separately, and ensuring that course descriptions are easier to locate (paragraph 38).

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

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

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

Northampton College action plan relating to the Summative review: November 2011						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
In the course of the Summative review the team identified the following areas of <b>good practice</b> that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>clear and comprehensive programme specifications are readily available to students and staff in electronic form, and help to ensure that academic standards are explicit and understood on all courses (paragraph 15)</li> </ul>	<p>Programme specifications to be updated annually, and internal monitoring ensures linkage to Academic Infrastructure</p> <p>Student and staff induction includes guidance on usage of programme specifications</p>	Dec 2012	<p>Updated by course leaders</p> <p>Monitored by Head of School</p>	Students and staff are better informed about the nature of the programme, its requirements, standards and assessment opportunities	Higher Education Group and awarding body Quality, Standards and Enhancement Committee through link tutors	<p>Student feedback</p> <p>Awarding body Institutional Review</p> <p>University website updated with appropriate programme specifications</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the design and management of teaching, learning and assessment ensure clear relevance to real work situations, and makes</li> </ul>	<p>Further develop employer links to facilitate real work experience through assignments and assessment practice</p> <p>Ensure all assignment</p>	March 2012	<p>Quality Manager</p> <p>Course leaders</p>	<p>Improved engagement with employers</p> <p>Development of</p>	Higher Education Group and heads of school	<p>Student feedback</p> <p>Employer feedback</p> <p>Assignment briefs</p> <p>Self-assessment</p>

systematic use of formative feedback (paragraph 28)	briefs and assessment feedback are internally verified within the three-week timeframe			enhanced practical skills and employability for students  Professional updating for staff		reports and course reviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a purpose designed, open access Research and Study Skills module has been introduced to support students' development of their higher education study skills (paragraph 30)</li> </ul>	<p>Ensure quality of provision through annual monitoring</p> <p>As part of Beacon Award dissemination ensure that other awarding body partner colleges receive access to materials and resources to deliver as appropriate</p>	April 2012	Head Librarian	Increased success rates for students across all higher education provision	Higher Education Group and awarding body Partner College Committee	<p>Library self-assessment report</p> <p>Student feedback</p> <p>Course reviews</p> <p>Feedback from partner colleges</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the campus redevelopment strategy has provided many industry standard facilities, which are used to enhance the professional relevance of teaching and learning (paragraph 34)</li> </ul>	<p>Use annual capital bid process to maintain and further improve standards of resource and equipment available to students and staff on higher education programmes</p> <p>Engage with employers and other professionals to scope resource development opportunities</p>	July 2012	<p>Course leaders and curriculum managers</p> <p>Purchasing Officer</p>	Resource base is further developed in line with feedback from employers and other professionals	Senior management team and governors	<p>Student feedback</p> <p>Feedback from employers and other professionals</p> <p>Inventory records</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>recent enhancements to the College website and the virtual learning environment have produced clear, comprehensive and easily navigated information sites for students and staff (paragraphs 37, 40)</li> </ul>	<p>Present web enhancements to Enrolment Centre, Student Support teams and Marketing Peer Review Network</p>	March 2012	Director of Marketing	Students find information on courses and support more easily	<p>Higher Education Group</p> <p>Marketing Team</p> <p>Marketing Forum</p>	<p>Student feedback</p> <p>Web statistics</p> <p>Support team feedback</p>
	<p>Present protocols to the Awarding Body Partner College Committee</p> <p>Apply features of enhanced web pages to whole College website redesign</p>	<p>June 2012</p> <p>April 2012</p>		<p>Web analytics data shows increase in usage</p> <p>Awarding body adopts complementary web links</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>public information is produced within the context of detailed and explicit protocols, which include a policy statement, higher education marketing operational plan and production schedule (paragraph 41).</li> </ul>	Draft process to embed policy across the College	Feb 2012	Director of Marketing	Colleagues provide timely and accurate updates	<p>Higher Education Group</p> <p>Marketing Team</p>	<p>Accuracy of materials assured by audit/student feedback</p> <p>Completeness of information checked through student feedback</p>
	Present protocols to the Awarding Body Partner College Committee	June 2012		Awarding body adopts similar protocols		
	Update operational plan annually	Sept 2012		Materials produced are accurate and complete		
	Revise production schedule for production of materials annually	Sept 2012				

Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is <b>advisable</b> for the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure that the actions arising from relevant boards and committees include additional detail to aid their implementation and monitoring (paragraph 18)</li> </ul>	<p>Composite higher education action plan to be a standing item at all Higher Education Group meetings</p> <p>Redesign action plan pro forma to provide clear tracking and monitoring of progress towards completion of actions and impact statements</p>	Jan 2012	<p>Head of School of Arts</p> <p>Quality Manager</p>	Annual review demonstrates clear progress indicators for actions identified throughout the year	Higher Education Group	<p>Higher Education Group minutes</p> <p>Action plan pro forma</p> <p>Annual higher education self-assessment</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>liaise with the awarding body to ensure that responses to external examiners' reports consistently reflect the views of course teams at the College (paragraphs 19, 24).</li> </ul>	Arrange a process with the awarding body whereby course leaders are able to validate responses to external examiner reports prior to their despatch	Dec 2011	Deputy Principal and Pro Vice Chancellor	Views and responses to external examiners' reports are properly represented in correspondence provided by the awarding body	<p>Higher Education Group</p> <p>Awarding Body Partner College Committee</p> <p>Quality, Standards and Enhancement Committee for the School of The Arts (awarding body)</p>	Minutes from groups receiving report

Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is <b>desirable</b> for the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>strengthen the status of the pivotal Higher Education Group by bringing it within formal College management structures (paragraph 12)</li> </ul>	Rewrite terms of reference for Higher Education Group ensuring that its composition and reporting lines are consistent with College management structures	Feb 2012	Deputy Principal Principal	<p>Terms of reference developed and implemented</p> <p>Higher Education Group reporting to appropriate committees both internally and at the awarding body</p>	<p>Senior and Executive Management teams</p> <p>Awarding body as part of Institutional Review</p>	<p>Senior Management Team and Executive Management Team minutes</p> <p>Higher Education Group minutes and terms of reference</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consider ways to improve the attendance of student representatives at Boards of Study meetings (paragraph 20)</li> </ul>	<p>All student reps to receive the schedule of meetings at the start of the year</p> <p>Training of student reps to include emphasis on importance of attendance at meetings</p> <p>No formal teaching to coincide with scheduled meetings</p> <p>Pre-board meetings will be held to brief students and prepare</p>	Dec 2011	Head of School of The Arts with course leaders	Improved attendance at Boards of Study meetings	<p>Awarding body</p> <p>Quality, Standards and Enhancement Committee</p> <p>Higher Education Group</p>	Records of meetings



	them for each meeting					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continue to promote scholarly activity among the higher education teaching staff and ensure more systematic monitoring of the impact of staff development generally (paragraphs 21, 31, 32)</li> </ul>	<p>All teaching staff involved in higher education programmes to be required to negotiate a plan detailing scholarly activity supported by appropriate continuous professional development with their line manager</p> <p>This will be monitored through appraisal which will also provide the opportunity to discuss and record impact</p> <p>All staff will be required to report activity and reflective log to an annual higher education conference</p>	June 2012	Course leaders with curriculum managers	Appropriate scholarly activity and continuous professional development is undertaken and impact described and shared with colleagues	Annual conference of Higher Education Group	<p>Appraisal records</p> <p>Course reviews</p> <p>Conference notes</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>give more emphasis to the specific needs and expectations of higher education through the development of</li> </ul>	Link with the awarding body's Head of Teaching and Learning to investigate the nature of the awarding body's professional standards and expectations in higher	January 2012	Head of Teaching and Learning	Agreement on standards required in higher education teaching	<p>Higher Education Group</p> <p>Awarding body</p>	<p>Review through Higher Education Group and Boards of Study</p> <p>Review strategy through Higher Education Group</p>

the higher education teaching and learning strategy, and in the teaching observation process (paragraphs 23, 26)	education teaching  Produce a higher education teaching and learning strategy for the College which encompasses the standards required in higher education teaching and systems for checking quality and improving practice	June 2012		Teaching and Learning Strategy for higher education approved and systems set up for 2012-13	Higher Education Group  Senior Management Team  Awarding body	Analysis of observed practice  Feedback from students, teachers and observers (including link tutors)  Observation feedback
	Review the College's Teaching and Learning Observation scheme to ensure that the standards required in teaching higher education are being assessed	June 2012		Observation assessment criteria are produced for higher education teaching and appropriate Core Observation Team members are trained in their assessment	Senior Management Team  Higher Education Group	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consider ways of presenting a more coherent profile for higher education in the main course directory, or separately, and ensuring that course</li> </ul>	Review course page layout in full-time directory 2013-14 to separate higher education programmes in a single section	June 2012	Director of Marketing	Positive student feedback	Higher Education Group	Student feedback
	Create separate summary of higher education courses,	July 2012		Enrolment and Support team colleagues feedback  Electronic version of higher		Enrolment and Support team feedback  Web stats on electronic downloads

descriptions are easier to locate (paragraph 38).	including electronic version for 2013-14			education course summary accessed via website		
---	--	--	--	---	--	--

**RG 830 02/12**

**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](mailto:comms@qaa.ac.uk)  
Web [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)