



# **Integrated quality and enhancement review**

**Summative review**

**Amersham and Wycombe College**

**January 2011**

**SR 022/2010**

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ISBN 978 1 84979 265 3

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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 Amersham and Wycombe College carried out in January 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 understanding of the Academic Infrastructure among staff leads to its effective use in programme development and to helpful mapping of the provision
- the clear and effective analysis within the College of actions in response to external examiner reports aids the assurance of standards
- good use is made of industry expertise, experience and work environments to enhance curriculum delivery and the development of employability skills
- the flexible and effective tutorial system allows differentiation between courses and levels to meet students' requirements
- an effective training and development programme provides staff with essential updates needed to support good standards in higher education.

### 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:

- embed and further develop the role of the Higher Education Forum in monitoring standards and disseminating good practice
- put in place systems to ensure the sharing of scholarly activity and research in supporting academic standards and enhancing of relevant curriculum
- ensure the teaching and learning policy is fully implemented so that the identified quality cycle improvements can be completed in a timely manner
- improve management of resources to ensure that those needed to support specialist teaching in television production are readily and safely provided and are accessible to students in all areas
- ensure a consistent and comprehensive approach to the development and use of the virtual learning environment by staff teaching on all higher education courses.

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

- link professional development plans more consistently to the curriculum in courses where they are not formally assessed
- continue to develop consistent formats for course handbooks which reflect and build on university templates
- ensure that handbooks are checked annually for currency and accuracy of information, including assessment details.

## 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 Amersham and Wycombe 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 Buckinghamshire New University and the University of Westminster. The review was carried out by Mr Jonathan Baker, Mrs Angela Maguire, Mr Paul Monroe, (reviewers) and Mrs Mandy Hobart (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 annual monitoring reports and action plans, College policy documents, minutes of meetings, partnership agreements and meetings with staff and students. 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* (the *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 Amersham and Wycombe College is a medium to large general further education College in South Buckinghamshire. The College is based on two main campuses at Amersham and Flackwell Heath, with two smaller centres in High Wycombe which house construction skills and the teaching of English as a second or other language, as well as a centre in Chesham. In 2010-11, the College enrolled 1,620 16-18 year olds and 1,103 adults, including 157 full-time and 70 (53 full-time equivalent) part-time higher education students. The full-time higher education provision is in the creative industries sector and is based at the main Amersham Campus. Part-time provision is offered at the Flackwell Heath campus with the exception of the teacher training programmes. All programmes, other than the first year Diploma to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector which is now validated by the University of Westminster, are offered in collaborative partnership with Buckinghamshire New University which has been the longstanding validating body for the College.

5 The College has three centres of vocational excellence which cover the sector areas of information communication technology, arts, media and publishing, and construction. The College mission states 'We are committed to developing achieving, successful and inspired students who fulfil their potential in life and employment'. The College seeks to meet the needs of learners who want to progress through an academic route into employment, and employers who are seeking employees with higher level skills and knowledge to support their businesses.



6 The higher education provision offered by the College is:

### **Buckinghamshire New University**

- FD Animation and Visual Effects (10 FTEs)
- FD Business Management (12 FTEs)
- FD Early Years (21 FTEs)
- FD Graphic Design (7 FTEs)
- FD Musical Theatre (38 FTEs)
- FD Photography and Digital Imaging (10 FTEs)
- FD Project Management (4 FTEs)
- FD Television Production (12 FTEs)
- Diploma to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (16 FTEs)
- BA (Hons) Musical Theatre (36 FTEs)
- BA (Hons) Photography and Digital Imaging (11 FTEs)
- BA (Hons) Television Production (10 FTEs)

### **University of Westminster**

- Diploma to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (8 FTEs).

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

7 The higher education provision at the College is delivered through partnership agreements with Buckinghamshire New University and the University of Westminster. The partnership agreements with both universities require that programmes are subject to the quality assurance procedures of the respective universities. Link tutors are appointed by both universities to work with course teams and to ensure effective management of quality assurance and academic standards. The partnership agreement with the University of Westminster, which commenced in September 2010, clearly defines the College's responsibility for delivering the teacher training courses according to the specifications of the Course Definitive Document. The mature 15 year partnership with Buckinghamshire New University devolves assessment and verification systems to the College, subject to additional moderation by the University.

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

8 The number of higher education students has almost halved since 2006-07, when the College enrolled 310 full-time higher education students. Until 2010, the College worked solely with Buckinghamshire New University, formerly Buckinghamshire and Chilterns University College. The College has extended its collaborative provision and established a new partnership with the University of Westminster, which currently only relates to Diploma to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector qualifications. The College is seeking to explore partnerships with other universities in the light of the 60 full-time new enrolments limit applied by their principal higher education partner. The College has recently validated Foundation Degrees in Fashion and Advanced Beauty Therapy Practice. However, these have not run because of limits placed on the number of indirectly-funded students. For the same reason, three established Foundation Degrees have been withdrawn.

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

9 Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. The student written submission was produced with the assistance of an external consultant commissioned by the College. Two focus group meetings were held with students and information referenced from the National Student Survey results and internal student surveys. The report was circulated to students who were invited to comment on the document produced, and revisions were incorporated to produce a clear commentary. The team found the student submission helpful and explored the content in meetings with students to gain a clear picture of the student learning experience.

## **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 College has effective arrangements for the management and development of higher education which supports the maintenance of academic standards. Responsibility for higher education lies with the Curriculum Director for Higher Education, who also has overall responsibility for the Directorate of Creative Industries, where most full-time higher education currently sits. The Curriculum Director for Higher Education reports directly to the Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality, and works closely with the Director of Quality and Standards. The Higher Education Co-ordinator reports to the Curriculum Director for Higher Education and provides a direct conduit to the partner universities registries, admissions departments and link tutors. The Higher Education Co-ordinator is a key figure in the organisation of enrolment and the provision of guidance and support for students. She is also responsible for maintaining links with the Student Loans Company, and the management of progression/examination boards and external examiner visits.

11 The College works within the terms and conditions of the respective partnership agreements and complies with the protocols and quality assurance procedures of the two awarding bodies. There are some minor differences between the requirements of the two awarding body partners, but the College is able to manage both quality assurance systems in an effective and harmonised manner. The Higher Education Co-ordinator is responsible for collating the Annual Review and Evaluation documents which summarise module reports, student feedback and external examiner reports and lead to the production of an overall action plan. The Higher Education Co-ordinator summarises individual annual review and evaluation reports in an annual report for all higher education validated by Buckinghamshire New University. This report effectively communicates key areas of strength and issues to be taken forward. The report is presented to the relevant faculty quality enhancement committee in November, and areas for development monitored throughout the academic year by the higher education team, headed by the Curriculum Director for Higher Education.

12 Higher education quality assurance procedures are integrated into the College's calendar. The management and delivery of academic standards is supported by the use of clear and effective documentation, including: the Amersham and Wycombe College Corporate Goals 2010-2011, Strategic Plan 2010-11 to 2012-13, Quality Assurance Policy,

and Higher Education in Further Education Strategy 2009-10 to 2011-12. The reporting arrangements are based on an effective committee structure that incorporates clear lines of responsibility and lines of communication. Each programme has a programme board which exercises responsibility for monitoring quality and standards. The programme boards constitute a rigorous means of monitoring quality assurance processes and provide effective support for the management of the provision. The Higher Education Forum receives reports from programme boards and also makes good use of the Higher Education in Further Education Strategy document to inform the management of higher education across the College. Student representatives attend the Forum meetings, so ensuring that their views are noted in the reporting structure.

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

13 Effective use is made of the Academic Infrastructure by the College during course development and validation by awarding partners. Academic staff have a good understanding of how the Academic Infrastructure is used to ensure the rigour of relevant processes. The programme modules are mapped against the FHEQ and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. This mapping ensures that delivery and assessment of the learning outcomes are referenced to relevant precepts within the Academic Infrastructure. The effective use of the Academic Infrastructure and its mapping to the provision constitutes good practice. Students are provided with programme specifications which they find of value and an aid to their studies. In response to a recommendation in the Developmental engagement report, staff have addressed the use of grading criteria to ensure consistency of marking. This is further checked by internal moderation and external sampling by link tutors.

### **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 the validating partners and awarding bodies?**

14 The College is responsible for the design of many of the courses it offers, including FD Animation and Visual Effects, FD Musical Theatre and FD Television Production. Assignments are reviewed annually and new assignments are internally verified before being sent to the external examiner and link tutor for further scrutiny to ensure relevance to learning outcomes. The review and verification of assessments ensures that current and emerging practices are reflected in course delivery and assessment, and that the College is fulfilling its obligations to assure standards and quality of provision in a clear and organised manner.

15 The College has well-structured and effective systems in place to ensure that academic standards meet the requirements of the validating partners and awarding bodies. Quality enhancement and monitoring processes include those for programme review, observation of higher education teaching and learning, monitoring of assessment practice, internal moderation and annual self-assessment. The outcomes of the enhancement and monitoring processes are formally recorded and fed back to departments for further action as appropriate. Recommendations are discussed at the Higher Education Forum and reported to senior management. Annual reports are sent to the awarding bodies and reviewed by link tutors and course committee meetings to ensure that the College's monitoring of standards is sufficiently rigorous.

16 External examiner reports are analysed by the quality managers and Higher Education Co-ordinator, who identify any action points and recommendations. These are then referred to the course leader for follow-up by the course team and responses recorded in team minutes and action plans. The course leader reports back to the Higher Education Forum on actions in response to key recommendations, and improvements are monitored by

the Higher Education Co-ordinator. The external examiner reports and course action plans are integrated into an overall report and monitored by the Faculty Quality Enhancement Committee of the University. Formal responses sent to the external examiner are shared at the Higher Education Forum, ensuring that improvements are monitored in a transparent and effective manner. The team considers that the clear and effective analysis and monitoring within the College of actions in response to external examiner reports aides the assurance of standards and represents good practice. To further help maintain standards, information on academic regulations information is included in course handbooks. In particular, the plagiarism policy is explained to students at induction and illustrative examples are provided to clarify both methods and penalties. Plagiarism software is employed to ensure that misconduct is detected and dealt with promptly in accordance with the partner university agreements.

17 The recently established Higher Education Forum facilitates the sharing of good practice across the College, and has a role in identifying common challenges which impact on the management of higher education provision. The Higher Education Forum is well regarded by all staff and by students' representatives who attend meetings. Emerging benefits include improved liaison and sharing between departments, better identification of training needs, and an enhanced level of professional debate. The Higher Education Forum is making an effective contribution in such areas as the provision of assessment schedules at induction; enhanced consistency in the use of grading boundaries; and the implementation of the College internal verification policy, as recommended in the Developmental engagement report. Attendance across the College at Higher Education Forum meetings has not always been representative, and the team recommends that the College continues to embed the Forum within the college committee structure, and further develop its role in monitoring standards and disseminating good practice.

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

18 The College has well-developed teaching and learning and staff development programmes and a comprehensive human resources strategy. Senior management engagement with the needs of staff underpins the effectiveness of the staff development policy and practice. Teaching staff are encouraged to undertake research and scholarly activity where appropriate. Line managers distribute information on external programmes and staff are invited to make applications. All requests for funding of external events are considered with reference to sector requirements for specialist knowledge and updating, as well as opportunities to gain expertise which can support good quality teaching. Examples include staff undertaking master's degrees and other higher level technical qualifications. In the creative industries sector, staff are encouraged to engage in external activities to enhance the currency of their knowledge and skills, including visits to professional studios, work with performance groups, and work on the production of television programmes. However, there is no mechanism for ensuring that the outcomes of the research and scholarly activity are consistently disseminated to staff and students to ensure the sharing of good practice and enhancement of the provision. The team recommends that the College put in place systems to ensure all research and scholarly activity and resulting knowledge and expertise are shared across the College.

**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?**

19 Since the Developmental engagement in February 2010, the College has restructured, enabling higher education quality systems to be more clearly integrated into the overall College quality assurance systems. This has clarified internal communications, and created a clearer reporting structure to the Senior Leadership Team. Opportunities for higher education staff and students to be involved in quality assurance have been enhanced through the Higher Education Forum as described in paragraph 12. The recent introduction of a partnership with the University of Westminster, and the prospect of more diverse partnerships in the future, provide an incentive to re-evaluate strategies for managing the quality of learning within the College to ensure consistency and sharing of effective practices.

20 There are three directors with specific curriculum responsibility on the Senior Leadership Team. One of the curriculum directors has cross-college responsibility for higher education, as well as for the Directorate of Creative Industries, where all the full-time higher education is based, as discussed in paragraph 10. The curriculum directors report directly to the Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality, and work closely with the Director of Quality and Standards to monitor and report on quality as discussed in paragraph 10. The team found there is clear evidence of the management of quality by senior management through the Higher Education Forum and the Quality Committee. Staff have a clear understanding of the College and awarding body quality monitoring processes and requirements.

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

21 All full-time courses are validated within Buckinghamshire New University's Common Academic Framework. The Foundation Degree and BA honours courses have been developed in accordance with the FHEQ and meet the requirements for intermediate and honours level. Assessment strategies reflect the Academic Infrastructure, including subject benchmark statements, programme specifications and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. External examiners are appointed to each course and review the assessment standards, feedback and grading. External examiners visit the College and reports indicate good quality teaching and learning opportunities. The establishment of a Higher Education Forum together with student surveys and attendance of students at course team meetings ensures students have clear opportunities to comment on the quality of learning opportunities. The Forum has proved to be useful in facilitating the sharing of good practice, as discussed in paragraphs 12 and 15.

22 Students have ample opportunities to engage with relevant industry practice. Performing arts students are involved in large scale, well supported productions in external venues and the College's own fully equipped theatre. Students on television production courses follow a rigorous schedule of live television programme creation, which has contributed to the high rate of employment of graduates within the television industry. Part-time students in business and project management, and early years, are able to integrate their own employment practice and institutional systems and processes into their studies. Students on the FD Early Years are also able to evaluate their own practice through their assignments. The use of industrial expertise and experience, together with

opportunities for students to experience professional work environments, serve to enhance the curriculum delivery and students' employability, and represents good practice.

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

23 Teaching staff have a good understanding of the Academic Infrastructure and its role in managing the quality of learning opportunities. Students are aware of elements of the Academic Infrastructure, including program specifications, and how these are linked to intended learning outcomes. The assessments are devised with reference to the *Code of practice: Section 2, Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning), Section 6: Assessment of students, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review and Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. Details of requirements, assessment criteria and the broader context of learning are made available to students via their course handbooks and the College virtual learning environment. Students are aware of the academic regulations covering their work as outlined in paragraph 16.

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

24 The clear teaching and learning policy employed by the College sets out expected standards for teaching and learning, monitored through graded class observations, peer observations and consideration of learner feedback. All staff teaching on higher education programs submit curriculum vitae for approval by the awarding body. Teaching observations employ the same criteria for assessing higher education teaching as for further education sessions. The College plans to ensure all relevant staff are observed delivering higher education provision at least once in 2010-11. Senior practitioners undertake observations of higher education teaching, and use their experience to judge the qualities of the classes. While the outcomes of class observations are supportive of the quality of teaching in most cases, there is little evidence of the identified needs and improvements in practice being monitored or tracked as part of the quality cycle. The team consider it advisable that the teaching and learning policy is fully implemented so that identified quality cycle improvements can be completed in a timely manner.

25 The College has an appropriate range of methods for gathering students' feedback on their learning experience. Approaches include end-of-module questionnaires; feedback from course representatives; the National Student Survey; and internal surveys conducted after induction, on-programme and at exit. The students believe that their voice is heard and are able to cite examples of where suitable remedial actions have been taken to address their concerns, including updating of resources. While students felt that the College generally responds well to their feedback, a number of concerns were cited. These include enrolment problems for part-time students, which impacted on their ability to access library and learning resource materials, problems with moving heavy TV production equipment from storage areas, cold work rooms and other building maintenance issues. The College is aware of the problems and work is being undertaken to address these issues.

26 The introduction of professional development planning has formalised the recording of transferable skills. Mapping of skills through each module plays an essential role in developing personal effectiveness for working life and tracking the development of specific vocational skills. Personal development planning is used across most of the course provision and there is good evidence that in the Foundation Degree Early Years and the Diploma to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector, it is well developed and beneficial. In courses where it is not linked to an assessed unit there is variability in experience, ranging from little specific recording of personal development to clear recording of reflective practice. The team

consider it desirable that professional development planning be more consistently linked to the curriculum in those courses where it is not formally assessed.

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

27 The College Additional Learner Support Policy is under review, and the draft document clearly outlines requirements for the initial assessment process, diagnostic assessment, approaches to assessing and meeting individual student learning support needs, as well as review and evaluation of services provided. Students indicate that they have access to learning support and that appropriate assessments are undertaken as part of the induction process. There is clear information on the College website relating to support for students.

28 All programmes now have formally scheduled tutorials, in line with the recommendation for the Developmental engagement. An effective tutorial policy which sets out students' entitlement has been developed by the College. Tutorial provision is customised to meet the needs of students on individual courses. The nature of tutorial provision changes as students progress through their course and effectively supports their understanding of learning outcomes and standards. Students and staff confirm that the different models employed for individual courses is working well. The team considers that the flexible and effective tutorial system which supports differentiation based on individual and course requirements to be good practice. Students from both full-time and part-time provision appreciate the ease of contact they have with tutors and the level of support that is provided.

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

29 Mechanisms to promote training and development opportunities specifically for staff engaged on higher education courses have been developed to help ensure the quality of teaching. The topics include the National Student Survey, the purpose and use of the College virtual learning environment, the use of plagiarism software, the Academic Infrastructure, and other relevant higher education issues. Training in assessment for higher education course tutors is provided by the College. All teachers who deliver higher education are required to have, or be working towards, qualified teacher status. In response to requirements from the awarding bodies that staff teaching on higher education courses have higher level or postgraduate qualifications, the College is sponsoring two members of staff to obtain degrees, and applications from other staff are currently under consideration. New tutors are paired with experienced course leaders and their first assessments scrutinised carefully. For FD Early Years, the university link tutors ensure that support is given to College staff in the development of their understanding of the assessment criteria. Meetings are held to address the consistency of grading and the suggested content of assessment. Tutors observe colleagues' teaching practice to help them develop and improve, so that good practice is fostered. The team identified the scope of training, development and support activities for staff teaching on higher education to be good practice in ensuring the standard of teaching and assessment.

30 The College is in the process of revising its Staff Development Policy. The College is committed to enabling all staff to access appropriate support and development activities to meet their needs, either through internally-provided training or external training. Internal staff development brings together higher education and further education needs, partly as few staff are exclusively higher education tutors, and partly because key themes - such as equality, diversity and quality assurance - are common to both sectors. The concept of mentors for new teachers in training is being extended to include tutors who have previously

only taught on further education courses. The Higher Education Forum informs and oversees teacher development requirements, and ensures that development needs are prioritised to ensure the currency of knowledge and the quality of teaching and student support.

**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 The College is investing in a discrete higher education study and resources centre as part of the Learning Resource Centre redevelopment, partially supported through £300,000 HEFCE funding. This will significantly enhance the higher education student experience at the College, offering for the first time a distinct higher education zone, with higher education resources in the form of texts, journals and electronic media. The College has a clear strategy for managing the temporary relocation of higher education programme resources, and has consulted with the students via the Higher Education Forum and tutor groups. There are inevitable problems during such changes, and the College is striving to minimise these. Students in television production, however, have concerns over the temporary storage of heavy and cumbersome equipment at a distance from the main studio areas. This involves students carrying heavy equipment up and down two flights of stairs. The team consider it advisable that the College ensures that it manages its resources so that they are readily and safely accessible to students in all areas, so avoiding the risks associated with the movement of equipment.

32 Students have access to Buckinghamshire New University learning resources, and, via its virtual learning environment, to Athens and other academic resources. For the first time, at enrolment in 2010, partner college students were inducted into Buckinghamshire New University's learning resource centre and given passwords and logins for the University systems. Students found this approach helpful in supporting their studies.

**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 information the College is responsible for producing is managed in partnership with the awarding universities and ranges from publicity materials to detailed course information. The materials produced cover course descriptors, the higher education prospectus, admissions procedures, course handbooks and information on student support. Pre-enrolment information is available through the website and through printed information.

34 The main sources of information relating to student learning are programme specifications, course handbooks and the College higher education student handbook. All are available to students in hard copy, with the programme specifications and the student handbooks also available electronically. The College plans to make all course information and additional resources available online as part of their three-year e-learning strategy. Scrutiny of the publications shows course information along with that covering student support to be clear and sufficient. Students find handbooks clear and helpful. However, information on progression opportunities is inconsistent, with the FD Animation



and Visual Effects handbook setting out options clearly, whereas for FD Graphic Design progression opportunities are less clear. The team considers it desirable for the College to develop consistent content and formats for all course handbooks, building on the awarding body templates, as recommended in the Developmental engagement.

35 The College continues to work on the advisable recommendation from the Developmental engagement to develop use of the virtual learning environment to provide information and support to all students. However, the team found that the use of the university or College virtual learning environment varied according to the subject area. Where the FD Photography and Digital Imaging team provide a good range of assessment information, materials and resource links through the online resource, other teams provide only basic assessment materials. Part-time students, including those on FD Business Management and FD Project Management, utilise the University system as a reference tool and the College system as a repository for teaching materials. The higher education student notice board is being used to give student information, but gaps and differences between courses mean that the quality of information is inconsistent. Course teams, responding to the College three-year e-learning plan, are uploading resources, but in an ad hoc way rather than as part of a defined strategy. The team considers it advisable that the College develop a consistent and comprehensive approach to future adoption and usage of the virtual learning environment.

**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?**

36 The procedures for ensuring accuracy and completeness of course information are undertaken by the course leaders. They work with the Higher Education Co-ordinator, who liaises with the link tutors and the marketing teams at both the College and the awarding body. Where course teams and the course team leader along with the link tutor are central to the checking of accuracy of information in handbooks, assignment briefs and broader course guidance, there are few additional checks in place to scrutinise materials for accuracy. The team found examples of assessment details that had not been updated in the course handbook for FD Musical Theatre and reading lists that lacked inclusion of the newest texts and reference sources. The team considers clearer lines of responsibility are desirable to strengthen the version control procedure for identifying and rectifying minor inaccuracies, and ensuring currency of information in student handbooks.

37 The Marketing Department is responsible for the editorial procedures to ensure the accuracy, accessibility and inclusivity of the information published on its website and through other promotional materials. The Department also retains responsibility for the primary checking and signing off of publications, ensuring the regular updating and clarity of information. Students confirm that they are consulted on the content and clarity of website, prospectus and updates, and that both pre-enrolment and on-course information is accessible and useful. The team identified that, by complying with the university procedures, the College has clearly established mechanisms for checking on the completeness and accuracy of information.

**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**

38 The Developmental engagement in assessment took place in February 2010. The lines of enquiry allowed a very broad consideration of the management of assessment in the College. The lines of enquiry were:

**Line of enquiry 1:** How does the College ensure that assessment strategies for the individual programmes are fit for purpose and support learner achievement?

**Line of enquiry 2:** What processes are in place to ensure the quality of feedback to students on both formative and summative assessment?

**Line of enquiry 3:** What mechanisms does the College have to ensure that public information and guidance available to students provides a realistic understanding of programme content and assessment?

39 Good practice was found in the use of commercial briefs and professional practice to inform assessments in creative industries courses. The College utilises the virtual learning environment to provide clear information on assessment briefs as well as access to support materials for a number of courses. The widespread use of formative assessment and reflective practice supports the development of skills and knowledge, and high-quality feedback assists students in gaining a clear understanding of how to improve their work. Further, the use of course committees and faculty-student meetings ensures that the student voice is clearly captured and informs the production of assessment information in course materials, prospectuses and handbooks.

40 Recommendations included improved consistency in the use of grading boundaries in assignment briefs, and the provision of assessment schedules to all students at the start of the academic year through handbooks utilising a common template. The team recommended that all tutorials should have separately timetabled slots and that a more formalised system for monitoring of summative feedback should be introduced to support consistency across all courses. The virtual learning environment should continue to be developed to provide good quality support for all course areas. A higher education forum to monitor and share good practice was recommended to support management of assessment.

## **D Foundation Degrees**

41 The College has a range of Foundation Degrees, which have replaced all previous Higher National diplomas. Currently, Foundation Degrees are being offered in animation, business management, early years, musical theatre, photography and television production. The College has developed strong provision in the creative industries sector and is developing new provision to meet the strong media and design base in the local employment market. The College is seeking to expand its portfolio of provision with the inclusion of courses in fashion and advanced beauty therapy practice, subject to funding being identified. There are a number of programmes that are validated but are not being run due to reduced allocation of student numbers fundable through partner universities, including FD Commercial Performance and Production and FD Acting for New Media.

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

- the understanding of the Academic Infrastructure among staff leads to its effective use in programme development and to helpful mapping of the provision (paragraph 13)
- the clear and effective analysis within the College of actions in response to external examiner reports aids the assurance of standards (paragraph 16)
- good use is made of industry expertise, experience and work environments to enhance curriculum delivery and the development of employability skills (paragraph 22)
- the flexible and effective tutorial system allows differentiation between courses and levels to meet students' requirements (paragraph 28)
- an effective training and development programme provides staff with essential updates needed to support good standards in higher education (paragraph 29).

43 The team agreed a number of areas where the College is **advised** to take action:

- embed and further develop the role of the Higher Education Forum in monitoring standards and disseminating good practice (paragraph 17)
- put in place systems to ensure the sharing of scholarly activity and research in supporting academic standards and enhancing of relevant curriculum (paragraph 18)
- ensure the teaching and learning policy is fully implemented so that the identified quality cycle improvements can be completed in a timely manner (paragraph 24)
- improve management of resources to ensure that those needed to support specialist teaching in television production are readily and safely provided and are accessible to students in all areas (paragraph 31)
- ensure a consistent and comprehensive approach to the development and use of the virtual learning environment by staff teaching on all higher education courses. (paragraph 35).

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

- link professional development plans more consistently to the curriculum in courses where they are not formally assessed (paragraph 26)
- continue to develop consistent formats for course handbooks which reflect and build on university templates (paragraph 34)
- ensure that handbooks are checked annually for currency and accuracy of information, including assessment details (paragraph 36).

## **E Conclusions and summary of judgements**

45 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Amersham and Wycombe 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, Buckinghamshire New University and the University of Westminster.

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

- the understanding of the Academic Infrastructure among staff leads to its effective use in programme development and to helpful mapping of the provision (paragraph 13)
- the clear and effective analysis within the College of actions in response to external examiner reports aids the assurance of standards (paragraph 16)
- good use is made of industry expertise, experience and work environments to enhance curriculum delivery and the development of employability skills (paragraph 22)
- the flexible and effective tutorial system allows differentiation between courses and levels to meet students' requirements (paragraph 28)
- an effective training and development programme provides staff with essential updates needed to support good standards in higher education (paragraph 29).

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

48 The team also agreed a number of areas where the College is **advised** to take action:

- embed and further develop the role of the Higher Education Forum in monitoring standards and disseminating good practice (paragraph 17)
- put in place systems to ensure the sharing of scholarly activity and research in supporting academic standards and enhancing of relevant curriculum (paragraph 18)
- ensure the teaching and learning policy is fully implemented so that the identified quality cycle improvements can be completed in a timely manner (paragraph 24)
- improve management of resources to ensure that those needed to support specialist teaching in television production are readily and safely provided and are accessible to students in all areas (paragraph 31)
- ensure a consistent and comprehensive approach to the development and use of the virtual learning environment by staff teaching on all higher education courses (paragraph 35).

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

- link professional development plans more consistently to the curriculum in courses where they are not formally assessed (paragraph 26)
- continue to develop consistent formats for course handbooks which reflect and build on university templates (paragraph 34)
- ensure that handbooks are checked annually for currency and accuracy of information, including assessment details (paragraph 36).

50 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.

51 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.

52 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.

Amersham and Wycombe College action plan relating to the Summative review: January 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>the understanding of the Academic Infrastructure among staff leads to its effective use in programme development and to helpful mapping of the provision (paragraph 13)</li> </ul>	Ensure all staff new to higher education teaching receive induction training on Academic Infrastructure (AI)	As appropriate on recruitment or change of role	Course leaders with support of Higher Education Co-ordinator	All new staff fully aware of Academic Infrastructure and its application on current structure	Curriculum Director Higher Education	Through probationary or personal development plan annual review (for experienced further education staff taking higher education classes for the first time)
	Ensure training for all higher education staff takes place on publication of the review of the AI now being undertaken by QAA	Deadline for submissions to review March 1 2011	Curriculum Director and Higher Education Co-ordinator via Higher Education Forum	All staff aware of significant changes to AI following QAA review report	Curriculum Director Higher Education	Through annual review and evaluation reports and moderation, reported to Higher Education Forum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the clear and effective analysis within the College of actions in response to external examiner reports aids the</li> </ul>	Ensure good practice is maintained and enhanced across all programmes, and used to inform design and delivery of all new higher education courses,	July/ September 2011 for existing programmes	Higher Education Co-ordinator	Annual Review and Evaluation reports (existing programmes)  Successful validations	Curriculum Director Higher Education  Principal and Quality Director	Quality Assurance monitoring through course reviews, particularly annual review and evaluation reports

assurance of standards (paragraph 16)	through whatever awarding body quality systems, from 2012	As required for new programmes		(new programmes)		Ensuring all previous year's actions always followed through
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>good use is made of industry expertise, experience and work environments to enhance curriculum delivery and the development of employability skills (paragraph 22)</li> </ul>	<p>Ensure good practice is disseminated to all courses, and used to inform course design for new programmes</p> <p>Regular item on Higher Education Forum agendas</p> <p>Register/audit of industry links across programmes</p>	<p>On-going for existing courses</p> <p>2011 course development</p>	Course leaders Higher Education Forum agendas	<p>All courses with industry expertise input to meet their particular requirements</p> <p>New course content closely tied to industry needs as identified through local market intelligence and sector priorities</p>	Curriculum Director Higher Education	Audit of industry links updated on an annual basis to ensure currency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the flexible and effective tutorial system allows differentiation between courses and levels to meet students' requirements (paragraph 28)</li> </ul>	Maintain good practice through ensuring tutorials are managed as appropriate for individual courses' requirements	2011-12 timetabling (July 2011)	Course leaders with curriculum managers, checked by Higher Education Co-ordinator	All students positively report on value and accessibility of tutorials in formal and informal student surveys/annual review and evaluation reports	Curriculum Director Higher Education	Responsiveness to Learner Voice and willingness to continue flexibility to maintain effectiveness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>an effective training and development programme provides staff with essential updates needed to support good standards in higher education</li> </ul>	Maintain focus upon specifically higher education development, particularly in a period of considerable change for higher education in following Government changes	<p>March 2011 - White Paper on higher education</p> <p>Ongoing in development of new higher</p>	<p>Curriculum Director HE</p> <p>Higher Education Co-ordinator</p> <p>Director Human Resources (in charge of staff</p>	Clear understanding demonstrated by higher education teaching team of new opportunities and challenges presented by changed higher education	<p>Curriculum Director Higher Education</p> <p>Principal</p> <p>Director Human Resources</p>	Will be demonstrated through innovative and practical planning for higher education in further education in 2012 at this College

(paragraph 29).		education courses for 2012	development planning)	landscape; this used to inform new programme design		
<b>Advisable</b>	<b>Action to be taken</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Success indicators</b>	<b>Reported to</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
The team agreed a number of areas where the College should be <b>advised</b> to take action:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>embed and further develop the role of the Higher Education Forum in monitoring standards and disseminating good practice (paragraph 17)</li> </ul>	<p>Ensure meetings at least once every half term, and rotate meeting time/place to maximise attendance of many fractional staff</p> <p>Ensure good practice-sharing is a regular agenda item, with each course nominated to present an aspect of its good practice</p>	Immediately for March meeting and ongoing	Higher Education Co-ordinator Course leaders	<p>All higher education staff able to access Higher Education Forum meetings at least once a term</p> <p>All courses given opportunity to demonstrate innovative good practice</p>	Curriculum Director Higher Education Director of Quality and Standards	<p>Agenda items</p> <p>Case studies - good practice shared and shown to be through observations</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>put in place systems to ensure the sharing of scholarly activity and research in supporting academic standards and enhancing of relevant curriculum (paragraph 18)</li> </ul>	<p>Devise, with Director of Human Resources, cost-effective systems for more formal sharing of scholarly activity outcomes for higher education staff</p> <p>Encourage applications from staff for external funding for research projects</p>	March 2011 - following White Paper - to inform direction of scholarly activity most appropriate	Curriculum Director Higher Education Course leaders Staff Director Human Resources	Appropriate and cost effective use of research to inform course development and curriculum enhancement in place, and understood by staff	Director Quality and Standards Principal	<p>Status reports to Higher Education Forum, reporting to Directors Quality and Human Resources</p> <p>Evidence used in proposals/validation of new programmes 2012</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure the teaching and learning policy is fully implemented so that the identified quality cycle improvements can be completed in a timely manner (paragraph 24)</li> </ul>	<p>Check observation feedback for all higher education tutors to ensure any follow up actions have been completed and shared. (No higher education tutor's observation in 2010-11 was below a Grade 2, but quality improvements can still be actioned)</p>	<p>Immediately - review all higher education tutors' observations</p>	<p>Higher Education Co-ordinator, working with Director of Quality and Standards</p>	<p>Any issues addressed and improvements seen to be effective</p>	<p>Director Quality Assurance, Curriculum Director Higher Education</p>	<p>Opportunities for debate and good practice sharing taken at Higher Education Forum and through course/team meetings</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improve management of resources to ensure that those needed to support specialist teaching in television production are readily and safely provided and are accessible to students in all areas (paragraph 31)</li> </ul>	<p>This recommendation refers specifically to a temporary housing of higher education TV equipment in an upstairs store, which is very likely to be changed following changes in personnel among the technicians in the area</p> <p>It will form part of the recommendations for re-siting of resources following this</p>	<p>April 2011</p>	<p>Course Leader Television Curriculum Manager Media, Estates Manager</p>	<p>Health and Safety concerns and safety of equipment clearly addressed and satisfactory</p>	<p>Curriculum Director Higher Education Vice Principal Finance</p>	<p>Will form part of health and safety review of the whole area and will be taken into consideration in wider discussion over zoning of curriculum areas within the College</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure a consistent and comprehensive approach to the development and use of the virtual learning environment by</li> </ul>	<p>Ensure all higher education course staff not currently using the virtual learning environment creatively are mentored by staff whose usage is more advanced, developing</p>	<p>Interim: March 2011 Audit of virtual learning environment content August 2011</p>	<p>Course leaders Higher Education Co-ordinator E-learning Co-ordinator</p>	<p>Consistent and comprehensive virtual learning environment presence for all higher education courses by September 2011</p>	<p>Curriculum Director Higher Education, Principal</p>	<p>Ensure dialogue with students is continuous, revealing their evaluation of the resource</p>

staff teaching on all higher education courses (paragraph 35).	its opportunities Involvement of E-learning Co-ordinator continues	for start of new academic year		Student usage shows increased access - November 2011		This will enable us to make the virtual learning environment a genuinely vital part of their learning
<b>Desirable</b>	<b>Action to be taken</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Success indicators</b>	<b>Reported to</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
The team agreed the following areas where it would be <b>desired</b> to take action:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>link professional development plans more consistently to the curriculum in courses where they are not formally assessed (paragraph 26)</li> </ul>	Explicit linking of the professional development plans (in courses where they are not a specific module) to be made through tutorials and career planning	Immediately and ongoing	Course leaders Tutors	All students clearly aware of the importance of the professional development plans value, and contributing actively to its establishment as part of their future plans	Curriculum Director, Higher Education	Evaluate through tutorial feedback to inform future development and meeting learners' needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continue to develop consistent formats for course handbooks which reflect and build on university templates (paragraph 34)</li> </ul>	Discuss with Buckinghamshire New University link tutors the flexibility allowed partner colleges in relation to formats/templates for handbooks  When established, develop student-friendly content that still maintains corporate Buckinghamshire New University approach to	March 2011 for initial discussions  Item for Higher Education Forum and student involvement  July 2011 for audit of handbooks	Course leaders  Curriculum managers  Link tutors  Higher Education Co-ordinator	September 2011 Buckinghamshire New University handbooks reflect more student-friendly approach	Curriculum Director Higher Education  Buckinghamshire New University link tutors	Discussions with new and returning students in 2011

	public information Use Westminster handbook as a potential source document Involve students in this discussion	to reflect recommendation				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure that handbooks are checked annually for currency and accuracy of information, including assessment details (paragraph 36).</li> </ul>	Audit of handbooks (annual event) to take particular care over assessment opportunities as noted	July/August 2011	Course leaders Higher Education Co-ordinator	All handbooks to contain all relevant information relating to assessment methods	Curriculum Director Higher Education	Review of handbooks before sending to reprographics

**RG 702 04/11**

**The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education**

Southgate House  
Southgate Street  
Gloucester  
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000  
Fax 01452 557070  
Email [comms@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:comms@qaa.ac.uk)  
Web [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)