



# **Integrated quality and enhancement review**

**Summative review**

**Berkshire College of Agriculture**

**January 2012**

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## **Preface**

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

## **Purpose of IQER**

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

## **The IQER process**

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

## **Developmental engagement**

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

The main elements of a Developmental engagement are:

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

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

## Summative review

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

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

## Evidence

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

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

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

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (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/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 Berkshire College of Agriculture carried out in January 2012**

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 effective academic interactions between College staff and members of the University of Reading consortium promote and sustain a shared understanding of academic standards and practice
- the extent of the integration of reflection on practice and work-based learning within the University of Reading Foundation Degree courses, combined with structured tutorial support, aids students in monitoring their progressive achievement of the course learning outcomes
- the creative and effective use by staff of the distinctive environment for teaching and learning provided by the College, where appropriate, helps to put the provision into a real-life context.

### **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:

- establish internal reporting arrangements that clarify how the quality and standards of its higher education provision are given a sharper focus and a higher profile at strategic level
- develop fully and evaluate the new quality framework to ensure that it provides effective arrangements for the monitoring of actions from external examiners' reports and acts as a conduit for improvements
- fully embed the Higher Education Forum and its leadership within the College management processes to ensure it exerts the required influence in decision making, which subsequently results in actions to protect academic standards and further enhance learning opportunities
- devise and implement strategies for resource planning and communication to gather and respond more effectively to student feedback and concerns.

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

- develop its higher education staff development strategy, paying particular attention to opportunities for scholarly activity
- complete the mapping of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*, particularly in relation to work-based and placement learning, to promote the enhancement of learning opportunities
- maintain greater vigilance in preparing and checking documentation so that such information is as useful as it can be for students and stakeholders.

## 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 Berkshire College of Agriculture (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 Buckinghamshire New University and the University of Reading. The review was carried out by Mr David Fallows, Ms Catherine Hill, Dr Abigail Hind (reviewers), and Dr Chris Amodio (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 its awarding bodies, meetings with staff, students, employers, and partner institutions, and reports of reviews by QAA and from inspections by Ofsted. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagement in assessment. A summary of findings from this Developmental engagement is provided in Section C of this report. The review also considered the College's use of the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers, with reference to the *Code of practice*, subject and award benchmark statements, the FHEQ, and programme specifications.

3 In order to help 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 The College is a specialist land-based further education college serving the rural and urban areas of Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and West London. It was formed in 1949 as the Berkshire Institute of Agriculture, and was built to provide a training centre for agricultural workers. It was renamed in 1968 and has expanded greatly, now offering a core of land-based work in horticulture, countryside, floristry, animal management, and equestrian studies together with a range of vocational programmes in early years and care, motor vehicle engineering, public services, and sports studies. The College is located on a 400-acre estate at Hall Place, Burchetts Green, four miles outside Maidenhead.

5 The College's mission is to raise aspirations and career potential through high quality, inclusive education and training which meets the skills needs of businesses and the community. Its vision is to be Thames Valley's specialist vocational College of choice for students, parents and employers. The College delivers its higher education provision, currently four Foundation Degree programmes, in partnership with Buckinghamshire New University and the University of Reading. Teaching and learning is delivered through eight academies, three of which offering higher education. In the academic year 2011-12, there are 1,756 students enrolled in the College. Seventy-two of these students are following higher education courses, and all are studying full-time.

6 The College offers the following higher education programmes with two universities as awarding bodies. The full-time equivalent student numbers enrolled on each course are given in brackets:

### **Buckinghamshire New University**

- FdA Animal Behaviour and Welfare (23)
- FdA Sports Coaching and Performance (25)

### **University of Reading**

- FdEd Early Years Development and Learning (year two only) (16)
- FdEd Children's Development and Learning (started 2011) (8)

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

7 The respective responsibilities between the College and each awarding body are defined in a Memorandum of Agreement with Buckinghamshire New University and a contract with the University of Reading. In each case the University validates and awards the degree. In partnership with the University of Reading, the College works in collaboration with two other further education colleges in the delivery of the Early Years and Children's Development programmes. Maximum student numbers for each programme of study are agreed between the College and the relevant awarding body.

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

8 In 2011 the College embarked on a large scale restructure of its organisation and management, which resulted in extensive changes in personnel at senior management level. This inevitably impacted on the College's planned implementation of improvements to the cross-college management of its higher education provision following the Developmental engagement, although much has been accomplished since then. The College's modified Higher Education Strategic Plan 2011-14 includes the development of six new HND programmes in the areas of animal management, business management, environmental management, equine management, horticulture, and leisure/sport management. These programmes, which can be taken in a part-time mode of study, have been designed to provide direct progression from existing further education programmes. Following consultation with local employers and work placement providers, the College considers the HND qualification to be the most appropriate career-focused qualification linking academic study to workplace skills. In addition, the College has submitted a capital bid for a new sports hall.

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

9 Students studying on higher education courses at the College were invited to present a submission to the team. At the preparatory meeting, the coordinator explained the Summative review process to student representatives, emphasising their role in it. Subsequently, a student representative group considered the higher education provision under a number of aspects related to the core themes, including relevance of the course, information provided to employers and mentors, and student opportunities to provide feedback on the course. An overview report was compiled by the student lead representative, which was finally verified by the higher education student body as being an accurate summary. In addition the team had the opportunity to meet a representative group of 10 students and discuss the higher education provision with them during the review visit. The submission itself was well-constructed, succinct, informative, and helpful for the team's understanding of the provision. It provided a good basis for subsequent discussion.

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

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

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

11 The College's responsibilities for assuring the academic standards of the university courses it delivers are clearly specified in the partnership agreements between the College and the respective institutions. These agreements operate through effective dialogue and feedback throughout the year, together with close working relationships involving curriculum staff and their link tutors at Buckingham New University. A similarly successful relationship operates between the College, its partner colleges and university staff in relation to the University of Reading provision. The highly effective partnerships between the University of Reading and its partner colleges has matured into an energetic and productive relationship that continues to secure academic standards.

12 Management responsibilities have been significantly revised, following a large scale restructure in 2011. The responsibility for quality and standards in higher education in the College rests with the Vice Principal (Students) who maintains the strategic overview of the development and standards within the higher education provision. Higher education is managed in three Academies: Early Years and Care Studies, for Foundation Degrees in Early Years Development and Learning and Children's Development and Learning; the Academy of Sport and Adventure, for Foundation Degree in Sports Coaching and Performance; and the Academy of Animal Studies, for Foundation Degrees in Animal Behaviour and Welfare. The responsibilities of academy heads have been specified in relation to overseeing academic standards, with roles delegated to higher education course managers for day-to-day operational activities. Staff have responded very positively to these changes, confirming that they have brought about an enhanced profile for higher education and improved accountability for academic standards and programme development.

13 The Higher Education Forum was re-established in November 2011 following a pause as a result of the restructure. It is chaired by the College's higher education coordinator, with relevant academy heads and course managers as members. The terms of reference have recently been agreed and this group will act as the body with oversight of the maintenance of academic standards. These terms of reference indicate that the outputs and recommendations have the potential to take forward higher education developments and secure academic standards. The reporting arrangements and the ability of the forum to influence strategic decisions in relation to higher education will depend on how communication channels are developed between decision makers in the College.

14 Reporting processes for academic standards are based on curriculum areas, using the university processes to review and evaluate courses on an annual basis. Course teams produce action plans based on the external examiner reports, along with subsequent comments in the annual review and evaluation documents and the annual programme reports, which are approved by the respective universities. However, the internal processes do not provide clear reporting lines on standards at a strategic level or to the College governing body. Prior to the restructure, the Academic Board included some discussion related to quality and standards for higher education which was then considered by the Teaching and Learning Committee (a subcommittee of the College Corporation), but meetings of the Academic Board have not taken place since the restructure. The team

consider it advisable for the College to establish internal reporting arrangements that clarify how the quality and standards of its higher education provision are given a sharper focus and a higher profile at strategic level.

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

15 The awarding universities undertake detailed mapping of programmes to the Academic Infrastructure, and the College's procedures and regulations are all aligned to its relevant aspects. University staff manage and control much of the assessment process for programmes, including definition of assessment criteria, intended learning outcomes, and programme specifications. These are produced by the relevant university and are in line with the FHEQ, the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* and the *Code of practice*.

16 College academic staff have developed a better understanding and appreciation of the nature and role of the Academic Infrastructure since the Developmental engagement. They have started to undertake a mapping exercise to understand how their practice aligns with the different aspects of the Academic Infrastructure. For example, this process has allowed staff to appreciate how to enhance their assessment practice through engagement with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*. They do, however, still rely on the awarding universities to ensure the courses take due account of other aspects of the Academic Infrastructure, such as production of programme specifications and subject benchmarking.

### **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 awarding bodies?**

17 The awarding bodies are ultimately responsible for the quality assurance of any courses leading to their awards and credits. External examiners are appointed by the awarding bodies and staff teaching on the College's higher education courses are approved by them. External examiners' reports indicate that staff are aware of the required level of assessment and fully meet the standards of the award. Students who met the team confirmed that they understand the relevant university's academic regulations for their programmes.

18 The College has a recently developed a quality framework and quality handbook for staff that reflects the new roles and responsibilities following the restructure in 2011. This new framework defines clearer internal operational processes and lines of accountability, providing a more secure mechanism for the College to assure itself that it is fulfilling its responsibilities to the awarding bodies. However, it requires further refinement and development to include all aspects of quality assurance in relation to higher education. For example, the College does not undertake any cross-college analysis of the external examiners' reports, course reviews, and evaluations to draw together emerging themes and provide a strategic overview. This would ensure that good practice is collated and shared and would provide a vehicle for identifying areas for improvement. In addition, as the College's strategic growth in higher education is predicated on Edexcel higher national diploma provision, the newly devised quality framework and staff handbook will need to address the requirement to establish internal procedures to manage academic regulations in line with the new awarding body requirements. Consequently, the team consider it advisable that the new quality framework is fully developed and evaluated to ensure that it provides effective arrangements for the monitoring of actions from external examiners' reports and acts as a conduit for improvements.

19 The partnership arrangements, for the Foundation Degrees in Early Years Development and Learning and in Children's Development and Learning, provide a productive and proactive environment for staff delivering and assessing these courses, including the opportunity for engagement in moderation and cross-marking exercises. This supports staff new to higher education delivery and engages more experienced staff in continuous professional development. The team consider as good practice the effective academic interactions between College staff and members of the University of Reading consortium, which promote and sustain a shared understanding of academic standards and practice.

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

20 All teaching staff are members of the Institute for Learning and complete a required 30 hours of professional development activity each year, which includes a minimum of 10 hours of activity relevant to higher education for those staff involved in higher education delivery. Individual staff discuss their professional development needs with their academy heads and can bid for support from senior management. Academy heads also assess staff development needs and include them in curriculum area development plans. Staff currently delivering Foundation Degrees benefit from peer support from the link tutors and from staff development events, which they value. Most staff involved in course delivery undertake moderation and cross-marking exercises with partners, ensuring that marking and assessment is at an appropriate level for maintenance of academic standards. The University of Reading consortium provides additional staff development through the partnership network of other colleagues involved in the Early Years and Children's Development provision. This has proved highly effective and very timely in addressing a range of needs and requirements. The College recognises that staff scholarship and higher education-specific internal staff development has been under-developed prior to the academic year 2011-12. There has been some progress since the Developmental engagement, but the team consider it desirable for the College to develop its higher education staff development strategy, paying particular attention to opportunities for scholarly activity.

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

## **Core theme 2: Quality of learning opportunities**

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

21 As indicated in the partnership agreements, the College is responsible for the quality of all the teaching on the provision, admissions, induction procedures, student support, and the provision of suitable work-related learning opportunities. It is also responsible for ensuring that learning accommodation and resources are appropriate.

22 The Vice Principal (Students) and academy heads meet weekly to discuss operational and quality issues. The Higher Education Forum has a key role in the management and monitoring of the quality of learning opportunities and dissemination of good practice across the provision, as indicated by its terms of reference. The team

conclude that day-to-day delivery of higher education generally works effectively, and is supported by a high level of informal contact between managers.

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

23 College staff responsible for the management of the higher education provision understand their obligations to the university partners for management of the quality of learning opportunities, which are considered during validation and review events carried out by awarding bodies. Course managers take responsibility for conducting annual reviews and constructing action plans. Partner university systems for annual course review are engaged with thoroughly; during the period of management changes at the College these were the principal location for the evaluation of the quality of learning opportunities. The resultant annual reviews and evaluations inform the College's academy development plans that are the basis for course enhancements across all the provision within the academy. The development plan in the Academy of Sport and Adventure is particularly comprehensive in its attention to enhancement of learning opportunities in higher education. Academy heads monitor progress against action plans, and issues are raised with the Vice Principal (Students).

24 The Higher Education Forum has responsibility for monitoring and reviewing progress and required actions across all higher education courses, and for the sharing of good practice. The chair of the forum monitors progress of action plans, including that arising from the Developmental engagement, through regular meetings with academy heads and senior leadership. Annual reviews and evaluations are considered by the forum before being passed on to the relevant awarding body. College actions are also informed by partner university quality processes. The team confirm that the Higher Education Forum and its chair have the potential to take effective leadership of the provision, and therefore consider it advisable to fully embed the Higher Education Forum and its leadership within the College management processes, to ensure it exerts the required influence in decision making which subsequently results in actions to protect academic standards and further enhance learning opportunities.

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

25 As indicated in paragraphs 15 and 16, the College, with the awarding bodies where relevant, has conducted a thorough mapping of its responsibilities for learning opportunities against the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, the FHEQ, and the *Code of practice*. Engagement with relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*, *Section 3: Disabled students*, *Section 8: Career education, information, advice and guidance* and *Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* has been limited and the implications for learning opportunities in work-based learning, careers education, and for disabled students have not been thoroughly considered by all. Although all students have relevant work placements, the team found that these could be better integrated into other learning opportunities for students in the Animal Welfare and Behaviour course. The team found that students on the Foundation Degrees in Early Years Development and Learning and in Children's Development and Learning were all in relevant employment, and that their work-based learning was well integrated and supported through structured mentorship and records of learning. The team concluded that the College lacks a strategy for optimising the benefits of work-based learning across its higher education courses. The team therefore consider it desirable to complete the mapping of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*, particularly in relation to work-based and placement learning, to promote the enhancement of learning opportunities.

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

26 The College sees the Higher Education Forum as the locus for monitoring and strengthening its provision and overseeing the observation of teaching and learning, and subsequent developmental actions. The College has recently updated its monitoring approach for higher education teaching and has developed teaching observation materials and guidance based on a cross-college approach, with some appropriate amendments to accommodate higher education courses. The College's Teaching and Learning Strategy was in development at the time of the review.

27 The College collects student feedback on teaching and learning through informal discussions in tutorials, student representation on course committees, formal questionnaires, inputs from external examiner meetings with students, and results from the National Student Survey. The National Student Survey (2011) results for the Buckinghamshire New University courses show high satisfaction with teaching and learning, and students who met the team confirmed this view. Module feedback questionnaires have been issued for the first semester of the current session, but results were not available at the date of the review.

28 The Developmental engagement reported on the stimulating and relevant teaching and learning delivered by well qualified, approachable and enthusiastic staff on all courses. External examiners' reports, the student written submission and students the team met confirmed the continuing high quality, currency and professionalism of the teaching staff. Students report excellent informal contacts with staff but senior management acknowledge that they need to consider more structured approaches to hearing and responding to the student voice. Teaching staff are well qualified and have up-to-date professional experience, including a relevant teaching qualification.

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

29 Students confirmed that they have an excellent support network within the College, primarily from course tutors. They have an induction programme at the College and at their partner university. The College has developed an induction checklist to identify completion of induction activities, but this will not be fully implemented until September 2012. Each student has a personal tutor and one-to-one tutorials are provided for all students to review progress at least twice a year. There are also group tutorials with module tutors. Students with additional learning needs are encouraged to seek support from learning support tutors. The Developmental engagement reported that steps had been taken to improve retention in the animal management and sports coaching courses. At the time of the review, the team found that these steps had been effective and retention rates were good across all areas.

30 The Foundation Degree in Sports Coaching and Performance and the University of Reading courses contain professional development modules that include attention to study skills; for the FdA Animal Behaviour and Welfare there are regular seminars on specific study skills. Reflective practice is an important element of the University of Reading programmes with students well supported through mentoring and tutorials. Reflective practice is present on the Buckinghamshire New University courses, but work-based mentoring and a strategic approach to placement learning is less well developed. The team regard the extent of the integration of reflection on practice and work-based learning within the University of Reading Foundation Degree courses, combined with structured tutorial support to aid students in monitoring their progressive achievement of the course learning outcomes, as good practice.

31 The Developmental engagement found that feedback to students on assessment is seen as generally helpful and identifies learning needs. Current students confirmed that feedback includes helpful suggestions for improvement across all courses. The College is committed to achieving a three-week turnaround of assessments: students reported progress in meeting this commitment, but there remains an issue of ready access to returned work, which has been annotated by the marker and sent to the awarding body for moderation.

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

32 The general arrangements for staff development to support the provision are as outlined in paragraph 20. In terms of supporting the enhancement of learning opportunities, the Higher Education Forum is responsible for developing a rigorous Higher Education Continuing Professional Development programme for all teaching staff. A programme of events, including seminars on the Academic Infrastructure, teaching and learning, and assessment and feedback was in place at the time of review and some staff are being supported to take up higher degree programmes. Staff are also able to take up opportunities for professional updating using their many contacts with relevant employers.

33 The awarding bodies initially approve staff teaching on their programmes at validation. Staff are normally expected to hold a qualification at least one level above that which they are teaching. Academy heads provide a mentor for staff new to teaching on higher education programmes to support their teaching and learning activities and assist in the development of assessments through the internal verification processes.

**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?**

34 The College Vice Principal (Resources) determines resource provision for Academy areas, including the Learning Resources Academy, through a bidding process based on academy development plans. External examiners, staff and students report that resources are adequate to support the achievement of learning outcomes. The College is situated within a high quality landscape that provides an effective resource for learning, particularly for students following animal welfare and sports courses. The relationship with local early years providers and local authorities is also strong, enabling high quality work experience to underpin the teaching on the University of Reading courses. The Developmental engagement found that the use of the College environment was particularly effective for the FdA Animal Behaviour and Welfare, where students have the opportunity to work with a wide variety of animals and environments to support their learning. In the FdEd Sports Coaching and Performance course, students engage in a wide variety of coaching environments and are able to gain valuable practical experience relevant to the course and to their future careers. The team found the creative and effective use by staff of the distinctive environment for teaching and learning provided by the College, where appropriate, helps to put the provision into a real-life context and is regarded as good practice.

35 In the sports coaching and performance area there was some evidence at the time of the Developmental engagement that availability of specialist equipment was limited in some instances, but this has now been remedied by the purchase of targeted resources. The learning opportunities available to the FdA Animal Behaviour and Welfare students have been further enhanced, for example by the exotic animals facility, though students felt that better communication with regard to their timetabled access to routine animal welfare activity would provide even more opportunities for their learning.

36 Since the Developmental engagement, the College has ensured that the learning centre stocks the textbooks on reading lists. However journal stock does not match those identified in student handbooks. Students are provided with electronic access to journal resources through learning centre computers and partner university libraries, but access from their own computers to journal articles through ScienceDirect is limited to abstracts. Students report shortcomings in access to a sufficiency of journals, but the team found that this perception could be overcome through better communication with regard to expectations and targeted support. Generally, students report limited use of library resources; for example, students on the University of Reading courses felt that the library opening hours did not provide them with sufficient access. College staff reported that responses have been made to this concern, but accepted that better communication might be needed.

37 Students on University of Reading courses use the University virtual learning environment. Staff and students use it routinely; for example, as a means of accessing learning materials; conducting online discussions; the administration of assessment; and the compilations of e-portfolios. The College's virtual learning environment has, in the past, proved to be less reliable and, as a result, students do not use it to its full potential. Staff have populated the site with course documentation, but student use is limited and other systems, such as email services and paper copies, are employed. Students also report loss of access to the site during the summer vacation. The team therefore consider it advisable for the College to devise and implement strategies for resource planning and communication to gather and respond more effectively to student feedback and concerns.

**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?**

38 The partnership agreements with each of the awarding bodies specify the main responsibilities for the publication of information about the College's higher education provision. For pre-applicant information on the University of Reading awards, the prime responsibility lies with the College, while the University has a responsibility to monitor its arrangements for course promotion. For the FdA Animal Behaviour and Welfare and the FdEd Sports Coaching and Performance, the College is responsible for the publication of information for applicants, subject to approval by Buckinghamshire New University prior to release. This written information is supplemented by open day sessions for all courses and, for applicants to the University of Reading awards, with an application pack containing details of employers involved in the course.

39 For University of Reading courses, the programme specification and provider's handbook are those set out in approved validation documentation. Buckinghamshire New University also approves the programme specification, module descriptors, and student handbooks for its courses. The assessment arrangements for academic appeals, academic misconduct and mitigating circumstances are those of the respective awarding bodies, all of which are referenced within the handbooks for students and are available online and in hard copy. Students reported that the small size of cohorts means that they often obtain this sort of information directly from tutors, with whom they have close working relationships, rather

than relying on written information. The arrangements in place for complaints are those of the College. The team noted that these could benefit from review and update, in line with the *Code of practice, Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters*.

40 Comprehensive information for employer mentors within the University of Reading awards is provided through the consortium, which is supplemented by mentor sessions where College tutors visit students and mentors in the workplace. Information for employers on the other courses tends to be communicated on a personal basis, and could benefit from more formal documentation.

41 The College uses its website and higher education prospectus to publish information for prospective students. While the factual description of courses was considered complete and accurate by students, they also considered that access to greater levels of written guidance, in relation to learning approaches at a pre-entry stage, would be helpful. Handbooks are a key document within each of the courses, and these are generally made available in hard copy at the start of each academic session and through a virtual learning environment. Programme specifications are not generally used as a key source of information for students, although those for the University of Reading awards are referenced to the University website from the programme handbook. Course handbooks are generally used to convey key information extracted from the programme specifications in a way that tutors feel is more appropriate for a student audience. Other documents given to students at the start of each year include module handbooks and assessment briefs, in addition to handbooks from the awarding bodies. The College uses its own and awarding body websites and virtual learning environments to supplement provision of hard copies of much of the information. These enable applicants and students, including those with a disability, to easily access and customise necessary information.

**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?**

42 The College's Marketing and Student Services Director is responsible for the content of the website and prospectus. The Director receives information from each higher education tutor which has been previously checked by the relevant academy head. The awarding body finally confirms the accuracy of information. Routine meetings of the University of Reading award consortium members include a regular item on marketing. Information intended for students is similarly based on that approved by the awarding bodies. In the case of University of Reading awards, any annual updates to information are agreed through regular consortium meetings. Individual higher education tutors, following confirmation of accuracy by university link tutors, prepare annually updated handbooks for the Buckinghamshire New University awards.

43 There are documented procedures by which updates to programme specifications, module descriptors, and course handbooks are made and these are well understood by staff at the College and within the awarding bodies. These arrangements include internal verification, by the relevant academy head, of documents prepared by each higher education tutor. Awarding bodies are then asked to confirm that documentation can be circulated to students. While the arrangements for checking the accuracy and completeness are documented and are well understood by staff, the handbooks for the FdA Animal Behaviour and Welfare and for FdEd Sports Coaching and Performance courses each contained a reference to progression criteria, relating to student attendance and attitude, which does not reflect the awarding body assessment regulations.

44 Students met by the review team were content with the accuracy and completeness of published information, although the College has no formal mechanisms for establishing that this is the case. An advisable recommendation of the Developmental engagement identified the need for articulation routes to be clarified and made clear to students. While these are specified within the programme specifications for three of the four courses, and students from all courses reported that they were clear about the approved progression routes, the three agreed articulation routes for the course in Sports Coaching and Performance are only recorded in internal minutes. Accordingly, the team consider it desirable that those responsible should maintain greater vigilance in preparing and checking documentation so that such information is as useful as it can be for students and stakeholders.

**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 College's Developmental engagement in assessment took place in November 2010. The review team included two institutional nominees. The Developmental engagement encompassed three Foundation Degrees; two in partnership with Buckinghamshire New University, and the other with the University of Reading. The lines of enquiry agreed with the College were as follows.

**Line of enquiry 1:** How effective is the College in achieving consistency in the quality and standard of feedback to enhance and raise achievement?

**Line of enquiry 2:** How effective is the College's implementation of assessment strategies in allowing students to successfully demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes and ensuring high retention?

**Line of enquiry 3:** How does Berkshire College of Agriculture ensure the accuracy, currency and consistency of information that it publishes about assessment, and does the feedback to students meet expectations?

46 The Developmental engagement identified a number of areas of good practice. These included effective verification processes within the College and between members of the University of Reading consortium, the consistent availability of good, structured tutorial support, progressive development of appropriate study skills and relevant teaching and learning. It also found that clear mechanisms were in place to enable an effective response to student concerns, and that the College's evolving Higher Education Forum encouraged greater engagement with, and awareness of, higher education issues.

47 The College was advised to ensure that its annual action plans are informed by a complete set of data from the previous year's assessment cycle, to clarify processes for checking the accuracy of internal programme documentation and for ensuring rigorous version control, and to clarify and make more evident to students the nature and number of the articulated level 6 programmes available, together with any associated requirements. The team also considered that it would be desirable for the College to demonstrate greater interaction with the Academic Infrastructure and to continue development of its own higher education quality handbook and associated processes. It was also desirable for module

questionnaires to be used more frequently and consistently, and for better use to be made of programme specifications to make students more aware of intended learning outcomes. The team considered it desirable for the College to establish general marking criteria for presentation-based assignments, and to ensure that the numerical marks given for an assignment reflected more fully the accompanying textual comments. A more formalised peer observation process across the entire higher education provision was considered to be desirable, as was the compilation of a student induction checklist to ensure students receive all essential information prior to enrolment. Finally the team considered it desirable for the College to ensure that all necessary learning resources, particularly books identified as essential reading and specialist sport equipment, are readily available at the College, and that book stock is frequently reviewed to ensure currency.

## D Foundation Degrees

48 The College's higher education provision consists of four Foundation Degrees. The Foundation Degree in Early Years Development and Learning awarded by the University of Reading is currently being phased out, and only has students completing the final year. It has been replaced by the Foundation Degree in Children's Development and Learning, which recruited for the first time in October 2011. Both degrees are delivered in conjunction with two nearby further education colleges as part of a consortium. The Foundation Degrees in Animal Behaviour and Welfare and Sports Coaching and Performance are awarded by Buckinghamshire New University. The College has recently carried out a full review of its Foundation Degree provision as part of its ongoing planning processes. As a result of this review, it intends to maintain its current Foundation Degree provision, but increase its higher education provision in September 2012 by introducing six new Higher National Diplomas validated by Edexcel.

49 The Foundation Degree provision provides effective learning opportunities for students, with generally good retention and progression. It reflects the QAA defining characteristics of Foundation Degrees as defined in the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, and is appropriately mapped to the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*. The team concluded that the College effectively manages the academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities of its Foundation Degrees.

50 In the course of the review, the team identified areas of good practice and made some advisable and desirable recommendations. These are identified in Section E.

## E Conclusions and summary of judgements

51 The team has identified a number of features of good practice in the College's management of its responsibilities for academic standards and for the quality of learning opportunities of the awards it 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 Reading.

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

- the effective academic interactions between College staff and members of the University of Reading consortium promote and sustain a shared understanding of academic standards and practice (paragraphs 11 and 19)
- the extent of the integration of reflection on practice and work-based learning within the University of Reading Foundation Degree courses, combined with structured

## Integrated quality and enhancement review

tutorial support, aids students in monitoring their progressive achievement of the course learning outcomes (paragraph 30)

- the creative and effective use by staff of the distinctive environment for teaching and learning provided by the College, where appropriate, helps to put the provision into a real-life context (paragraph 34).

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

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

- establish internal reporting arrangements that clarify how the quality and standards of its higher education provision are given a sharper focus and a higher profile at strategic level (paragraphs 13 and 14)
- develop fully and evaluate the new quality framework to ensure that it provides effective arrangements for the monitoring of actions from external examiners' reports and acts as a conduit for improvements (paragraphs 17 and 18)
- fully embed the Higher Education Forum and its leadership within the College management processes to ensure it exerts the required influence in decision making, which subsequently results in actions to protect academic standards and further enhance learning opportunities (paragraph 24)
- devise and implement strategies for resource planning and communication to gather and respond more effectively to student feedback and concerns (paragraphs 36 and 37).

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

- develop its higher education staff development strategy, paying particular attention to opportunities for scholarly activity (paragraph 20)
- complete the mapping of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*, particularly in relation to work-based and placement learning, to promote the enhancement of learning opportunities (paragraph 25)
- maintain greater vigilance in preparing and checking documentation so that such information is as useful as it can be for students and stakeholders (paragraphs 43 and 44).

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

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

58 Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, 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.

**Berkshire College of Agriculture action plan relating to the Summative review: January 2012**

Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<p>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:</p>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the effective academic interactions between College staff and members of the University of Reading consortium promote and sustain a shared understanding of academic standards and practice (paragraphs 11 and 19)</li> </ul>	<p>Continue to maintain effective professional practice and working relations with University of Reading consortium</p> <p>Identify, from Summative Review report and through colleagues, the key factors that underpin this successful relationship and look at how these factors can be applied to develop a more cohesive relationship with Buckinghamshire New</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>April 2012</p>	<p>Higher Education team for Children’s Development and Learning/ University of Reading</p> <p>Higher Education Coordinator assisted by all Higher Education curriculum teams</p>	<p>Continued positive outcomes regarding implementation of Academic standards and overall standards from Berkshire College of Agriculture/University of Reading/consortia review meetings</p> <p>Positive impacts from any changes in procedures between Berkshire College of Agriculture and Buckinghamshire New University relating to the development of</p>	<p>Berkshire College of Agriculture Higher Education Forum University of Reading/consortia</p> <p>Berkshire College of Agriculture Higher Education Forum</p> <p>Buckinghamshire New University</p>	<p>Continued monitoring of standards through collaborative quality measures (i.e. Board of Studies meetings)</p> <p>Feedback from External Examiner reports, Course Committee meetings, in Annual Review Evaluations and through link tutor meetings</p>

	University around the understanding of academic standards			standards and practice		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the extent of the integration of reflection on practice and work-based learning within the University of Reading Foundation Degree courses, combined with structured tutorial support, aids students in monitoring their progressive achievement of the course learning outcomes (paragraph 30)</li> </ul>	<p>Discuss within the Higher Education Forum ways in which the good practice shown by the Early Years department and University of Reading can be implemented across all courses, including the new provision for September 2012</p> <p>Continue current approach to tutorial support across programmes to support students achieving their course learning outcomes. Higher Education Forum to discuss ways this could be further improved and integrated across all programmes for September 2012</p>	By September 2012	Higher Education Forum	<p>Any increases in the exposure of students to work-based learning</p> <p>Student feedback on tutorial process and academic support</p>	Higher Education Forum	Through student feedback on tutorial support and work-based learning opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the creative and effective use by staff of the distinctive</li> </ul>	Assess if there are further opportunities to utilise the College's unique environment to	For September 2012 delivery onwards	Higher Education Teachers	Positive student feedback on teaching, learning and assessment	Berkshire College of Agriculture Higher Education Forum	<p>Student voice feedback</p> <p>Department Annual</p>

environment for teaching and learning provided by the College, where appropriate, helps to put the provision into a real-life context (paragraph 34).	enhance curriculum delivery and assessment  Assess how new resources specified in development plans and particularly in terms of large scale projects in Sport and Animal Studies will complement module delivery	For September 2012 delivery onwards	Academy Heads, Higher Education Teachers	Feedback from link tutors at Higher Education Institutions		Review Evaluations/Annual Review  External Examiner reports
<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 considers that it is <b>advisable</b> for the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establish internal reporting arrangements that clarify how the quality and standards of its higher education provision are given a sharper focus and a higher profile at strategic level (paragraphs 13 and 14)</li> </ul>	Establish the Higher Education Forum as a body within the College that has a direct reporting line into, and interaction with, the College Senior Management Team and Governors. Monitoring of quality and standards will be channelled through the Higher Education Forum into weekly Senior Management Team meetings and	By September 2012	College Governing body  Senior Management Team  Higher Education Coordinator  Higher Education Forum	Level of influence of the Higher Education Forum in influencing/directing development of standards in Higher Education  Increase in the remit/terms of reference of the Higher Education Forum  Increased exposure at Senior	Governors Senior Management Team Higher Education Forum	Meeting minutes for Senior Management Team meetings and Governor meetings  Terms of Reference for the Higher Education Forum for September 2012

	the Governors Teaching and Learning Committee			Management Team and Governor level of course Annual Review Evaluations/Annual Reviews		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop fully and evaluate the new quality framework to ensure that it provides effective arrangements for the monitoring of actions from external examiners' reports and acts as a conduit for improvements (paragraphs 17 and 18)</li> </ul>	The Higher Education Forum will consult on the development of the quality cycle and handbook. An essential development is the inclusion of cross-college analysis of external examiners' reports and course reviews. This will allow emerging themes to be brought together and provide a sharper strategic focus. Existing measures will be reviewed and additional measures added where appropriate	July 2012 (for implementation August 2012)	Higher Education Forum  Higher Education Curriculum Areas Governors	Functionality of Higher Education Quality Cycle during 2012/13  Any improvements in the management of quality being picked up in External Examiner reports and Annual Reviews	Governors Senior Management Team Higher Education Forum	The Higher Education Forum will continually review quality procedures and their effectiveness  Quality Procedures will be shared with Higher Education institutions and External Examiners and comments invited
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fully embed the Higher Education Forum and its leadership within the College management</li> </ul>	Establish the Higher Education Forum as a body within the College that has a direct reporting line into, and interaction with, the College Senior	By September 2012	College Governing body  Senior Management Team	Level of influence of the Higher Education Forum in influencing/directing development of standards in Higher Education	Governors Senior Management Team Higher Education Forum	Meeting minutes for Senior Management Team meetings and Governor meetings  Terms of Reference for the Higher

<p>processes to ensure it exerts the required influence in decision making which subsequently results in actions to protect academic standards and further enhance learning opportunities (paragraph 24)</p>	<p>Management Team and Governors. Monitoring of quality and standards will be channelled through the Higher Education Forum into weekly Senior Management Team meetings and the Governors Teaching and Learning Committee</p>		<p>Higher Education Coordinator  Higher Education Forum</p>	<p>Increase in the remit/terms of reference of the Higher Education Forum  Increased exposure at Senior Management Team and Governor level of course Annual Review evaluations/Annual Reviews</p>		<p>Education Forum for September 2012</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>devise and implement strategies for resource planning and communication to gather and respond more effectively to student feedback and concerns (paragraphs 36 and 37)</li> </ul>	<p>The Higher Education Forum along with the Vice Principal Resources will formulate a resource strategy document detailing current requirements and processes for signposting future resource needs</p> <p>The Higher Education Coordinator, through close liaison with Higher Education teams will now take overall responsibility for responding to</p>	<p>July 2012</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Higher Education Coordinator Higher Education Forum Higher Education Curriculum Teams</p>	<p>Document in place and operational by commencement of September 2012 academic year</p>	<p>Higher Education Forum Senior Management Team Governors</p>	<p>Feedback from Higher Education Forum re functionality of Resource Strategy document</p> <p>Student feedback on quality and accessibility of learning resources</p>

	student concerns regarding learning resources					
<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 considers that it is <b>desirable</b> for the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop its higher education staff development strategy, paying particular attention to opportunities for scholarly activity (paragraph 20)</li> </ul>	<p>Revise the College's approach to the contractual obligations of staff teaching Higher Education and look to establish Higher Education-specific teaching staff. New contractual obligations to be in place from September 2012</p> <p>Develop strategic approach to engagement in scholarly activity and how this is monitored. This will be shared with staff and form part of their requirements as a Higher Education teacher</p>	September 2012	<p>Education Coordinator</p> <p>Higher Education Forum</p> <p>Senior Management Team</p> <p>Governors</p>	<p>Increases in scholarly activity and the engagement of staff in this process</p> <p>Implementation of a strategic document and associated process for staff to follow regarding scholarly activity commitments</p>	<p>Higher Education Coordinator</p> <p>Higher Education Forum</p> <p>Senior Management Team</p> <p>Governors</p>	<p>Level of scholarly activity reported at end academic year 2012/13</p> <p>Feedback from Higher Education staff</p> <p>Research publications in press/pending</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>complete the mapping of the relevant sections of the <i>Code of</i></li> </ul>	Mapping to relevant sections of the Codes of Practice will be conducted for each	Mapping completed by June 2012	<p>Higher Education Forum</p> <p>Higher Education</p>	Production of mapping documents	<p>Higher Education Forum</p> <p>Higher Education Institutions</p>	Mapping documents will be evaluated by the Higher Education

<p><i>practice</i>, particularly in relation to work-based and placement learning, to promote the enhancement of learning opportunities (paragraph 25)</p>	<p>area by Higher Education Course Managers. The Higher Education Forum will identify and prioritise areas to be mapped</p> <p>Mapping will be completed prior to formation of Annual Review Evaluations/Annual Reviews for 2011-12. This will allow any development points raised from mapping to be included in action plans for 2012-13</p>		<p>Course Managers</p>	<p>Inclusion in Annual Review Evaluations/Annual Review Action Plans of any points/issues raised from mapping exercises</p>		<p>Coordinator and the Higher Education Forum</p> <p>Impact of mapping on planning for September 2012 will be discussed by the Higher Education Forum</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>maintain greater vigilance in preparing and checking documentation so that such information is as useful as it can be for students and stakeholders (paragraphs 43 and 44).</li> </ul>	<p>Higher Education Course managers will have responsibility for the quality, usefulness and checking of information/documentation within their own area. The Higher Education Forum will have overall responsibility for checking documentation for accuracy and suitability for students and stakeholders. This will</p>	<p>Ongoing (significant proportion completed during August 2012 for September 2012 course start)</p>	<p>Higher Education Course Managers</p> <p>Higher Education Forum</p> <p>Higher Education Student Representatives</p>	<p>Student feedback regarding usefulness of information received prior to and during course</p> <p>Higher Education Forum feedback from monitoring of documentation</p>	<p>Higher Education Forum</p> <p>Governors</p> <p>Higher Education institutions</p>	<p>The Higher Education Forum will evaluate all processes as part of its meeting agenda</p>

	provide a formal mechanism for reviewing information and will form part of the quality framework. Student representatives will also be invited to input into this process					
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**RG 860 04/12**

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