Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

South Birmingham College

February 2012

SR 037/12

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 South Birmingham College carried out in February 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 management of the Annual Course Review process for the Foundation Degree in Early Years and the HND in Popular Music Practice provides an excellent platform for effective evaluation of academic standards
- the way in which the excellent links that have been built and sustained with Birmingham City University for all programmes contributes significantly to all aspects of higher education standards management and the quality of learning opportunities
- the student voice is captured across the College and is used as an effective source of quality enhancement and assurance
- the excellent support in all programmes for the student learning experience in all areas and particularly in study skills development and assessment feedback contributes significantly to the quality of learning opportunities
- the engagement of staff teaching with employers, particularly on the HND/C in Business Management, HNC Construction and HNC Building Services Management programmes provides real-world commercial learning environments
- the way in which the provision of an innovative learning environment for students on the HND in Popular Music Practice allows for effective assessment of non-written evaluation and reflection skills
- the use of the College virtual learning environment particularly by staff teaching on the HND in Popular Music Practice provides relevant and current programme information to students.

Recommendations

The team has also identified a number of recommendations for the enhancement of the higher education provision.

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

- ensure that the effectiveness of the Higher Education Development Plan is enhanced by including college-wide annual revision and formal monitoring through the committee structure
- ensure that current work to develop the marketing strategy is vigorously pursued with a view to providing more comprehensive, effective and useful public

information as soon as possible.

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

- extend the remit of the Academic Board to include creating a forum in which all higher education programmes can be considered on a cross-disciplinary basis
- ensure that the formal review of student performance data is extended to all programmes and evaluated consistently across disciplines to foster an integrated view of higher education provision
- extend the use of peer observation of teaching practice to all staff so as to enable an effective cross-disciplinary process of dissemination and sharing of good practice
- ensure that information in programme handbooks is made clearer, more accessible and user-friendly for all students.

A   Introduction and context

1   This report presents the findings of the Summative review of higher education funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) conducted at South Birmingham College (the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the College discharges its responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes which the College delivers on behalf of Birmingham City University and the University of Wolverhampton. The review was carried out by Ms Jenny Anderson, Ms Maxina Butler-Holmes, Mr David Fallows (reviewers) and Dr David Ross (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 comprehensive documentation supplied by the College, 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 assist HEFCE to gain information to assist with the assessment of the impact of Foundation Degree awards, section D of this report summarises details of the Foundation Degree programmes delivered at the College.

Context of the Developmental engagement

4   South Birmingham College is a general further education college incorporated under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. The College's mission is to provide outstanding education and training which is primarily vocational, in response to the needs of learners and employers. It is a large and diverse College with three major campuses and one smaller campus located within central and South Birmingham. The College achieved a grade two 'good' at the last Ofsted inspection in 2010 with a high proportion of contributory grade ones, including outstanding for leadership and management. The College was awarded Beacon College status for quality in December 2010 by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service.

5   Core business provides a wide range of education for students from access programmes, through a range of further and higher education programmes to postgraduate level. In the academic year 2011-12 the College has approximately 16,000 students enrolled on all programmes. Of this total, there are 420 (311 full-time equivalent (FTE)) students studying for a higher education qualification. Management of the curriculum is devolved to six curriculum divisions, four of which have programmes funded by HEFCE:

- Business, Finance, ICT and Trade Union Education
- Construction
- Creative Studies
- Health & Social Care, Public Services, and Travel and Tourism.

6   The College offers higher education programmes in both part-time and full-time mode in partnership with two awarding bodies:

Birmingham City University (enrolments for 2011-12)

- HND/C Business and Management (78/33 FTEs)
- Foundation Degree Information, Communication Technology (24.5 FTEs)
- HND Popular Music Practice (53 FTEs)
- HND Media Communications and Production (22 FTEs)
- HNC Building Services Engineering (16.5 FTEs)
- HNC Construction (16.5 FTEs)
- Foundation Degree Early Years (67 FTEs)

University of Wolverhampton (enrolments for 2011-12

- Foundation Degree Integrated Services & Young People (7 FTEs)

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

7   The partnership with Birmingham City University has existed since 1994 and the University is the main higher education partner. There is an Academic Agreement dated 2001 with the then University of Central England (now the Birmingham City University). There is a current Memorandum of Cooperation with the University of Wolverhampton. Following a realignment of provision by the University, this partnership will cease at the end of the academic year 2011-12.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

8   HEFCE-funded provision has reduced for the academic year 2011-12 following the withdrawal of the University of Wolverhampton partnership in 2010. The College recently submitted a successful student numbers bid to HEFCE which will result in an increase in its higher education numbers. It plans to offer higher national diplomas in Performing Arts, Beauty Therapy, Public Services, and a broader range of specialisms on business programmes.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

9   Students completed a short questionnaire as a basis for the student written submission. This was written by second-year higher national diploma Business and Management students, with support from the Higher Education Manager and Assistant Director of Higher Education Business. Students met with the coordinator at the preparatory meeting and with the review team during the review visit. The representative sample of students met during the visit gave the team useful information which either confirmed other evidence or prompted further discussions with staff from the College.

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's responsibilities for higher education are specified in the awarding body partnership agreements. There is a Memorandum of Cooperation with the University of Wolverhampton for the provision that is now in its final year. The Academic Agreement dated 2001 with the then University of Central England (now the Birmingham City University) had not been updated by the time of the review visit. An Operations Manual for collaborative programmes with Birmingham City University is in place which is designed to form a schedule to the governing Academic Agreement. This schedule, plus the strong day-to-day partnership, effectively assures that staff of both institutions are operating effectively. A retired University Pro Vice Chancellor is the Chair of the College Corporation Board and the University Link Tutor supports programme teams in the delivery and assurance of academic standards.

11   Arrangements for the management of higher education are effective, well understood by all staff and operate successfully to assure the quality of academic standards. The Higher Education Strategy 2011-14 articulates strategic aims and objectives, including relationships with the universities and other external networks. The College Vice Principal has overall responsibility for the strategic development of higher education. The Higher Education Manager has a coordinating cross-college role. Heads of Division are responsible for the management of delivery standards and the quality of higher education programmes. Course Directors are appointed for each area of higher education and are responsible for the oversight of programmes and undertaking the operational activities, including liaison with the relevant University through Link Tutors.

12   The College committee structure is clearly articulated, with definitive roles and responsibilities. For example, higher education quality and standards are reported on a monthly basis at the Senior Management Team meetings. The Academic Board meets regularly to discuss various aspects of the provision. There are currently four sequential sub-meetings in which the Vice Principal and Higher Education Manager consider individual divisional annual monitoring reports. This arrangement provides an effective review mechanism at the divisional level, but it does not enable cross-disciplinary consideration or the sharing of practice across higher education programmes.

13   The College recognises the need to review the Academic Board structure and terms of reference to improve its support for the further development and expansion of the higher education portfolio. Cross-college meetings, chaired by the Higher Education Manager, have recently been reintroduced and there is an annual activity plan for these meetings. The College's intention is to hold alternating meetings for either higher education managers or all teaching staff. This forum will enhance opportunities to develop a distinctive identity for cross-disciplinary higher education within the College. It is desirable that the College extends the remit of the operation of the Academic Board to include creating a forum in which all higher education programmes can be considered on a cross-discipline and holistic basis.

14   Programme leaders produce an annual report, using the appropriate university template. This is agreed at the departmental Boards of Studies and received by the appropriate university boards. Staff attend annual meetings at both of the university partners

in which academic standards are discussed. Key findings from annual reports are presented to the senior management team through a summary report and the action points are tracked by the Higher Education Manager.

15   The most comprehensive and effective examples of this process are in HND Popular Music Practice and the Foundation Degree in Early Years. These examples demonstrate excellent levels of evaluation of standards and recording and sharing of good practice. They effectively use underpinning evidence drawn from the National Student Survey, Boards of Studies, external examiner reports and students' views. The management of the Annual Course Review process for the Foundation Degree in Early Years and the HND in Popular Music Practice makes a substantial contribution to the management of academic standards.

16   The College has made considerable progress on all aspects of the action plan produced as a result of the Developmental engagement. The plan has now evolved as part of a wider Higher Education Development Plan and this provides a focused agenda for all staff and includes items raised through the annual monitoring process. Progress against this plan is informally discussed at weekly meetings between the Higher Education Manager and the Vice Principal and these discussions are summarised at senior management meetings. However, the team could not find evidence that the Higher Education Development Plan is embedded in or monitored through the formal committee structure. It is advisable that the effectiveness of the Higher Education Development Plan is enhanced by implementing a process of college-wide annual revision and formal monitoring through the College committee structure**.**

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

17   Awarding body documentation for the approval and quality assurance of programmes ensures appropriate referencing to key areas of the Academic Infrastructure; in particular the *Code of practice*, subject benchmark statements, and the FHEQ. Staff demonstrated effective engagement with all aspects of the Academic Infrastructure and provided appropriate examples of its application.

18   Definitive documents are in place for all programmes which express the aims, learning outcomes and assessment approaches, and are clearly mapped to relevant areas of the Academic Infrastructure. The validation process for the HND Popular Music Practice demonstrates critical evaluation and attention to programme design and assessment strategies, in accordance with the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* and *Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review.*

How does the College assure itself that it is fulfilling its obligations to ensure that the standards of higher education provision meet the requirements of validating partners and awarding bodies?

19   There is a well established, strong partnership with Birmingham City University evident at all levels. College staff, supported by University Link Tutors, are closely involved in all aspects of programme development and management, including developing modules and assessments and taking part in validation activities. Staff attend regular joint meetings between the College and the University that contribute effectively to the maintenance of academic standards. Tutors from the University attend the college Boards of Studies. In the case of the HND Business and Management programme, a Scheme board operates, which includes another college and the University. The excellent links which have been built and sustained with Birmingham City University have brought significant benefits in the assurance of quality and the enhancement of academic standards.

20   Approaches to assessment ensure that marking, moderation and internal verification processes required by the partner universities are robust and effective. For example, all staff attend standardisation days hosted by the relevant university and there is a strong process of internal moderation. Students are provided with clear assignment briefs linked to appropriate learning outcomes and grading criteria. Feedback sheets provide helpful commentaries on areas of strength and opportunities for development. Examination boards for programmes where there is no equivalent at the University are chaired by the Higher Education Manager, and are attended by the relevant University Link Tutor and an officer from the Academic Registry of the University.

21   External examiners are appointed by the relevant university in consultation with the College. They are normally in attendance at examination boards. External examiner reports are received at the programme level and confirm the achievement of academic standards. Responses to external examiner reports, drafted by the Higher Education Manager, are discussed fully by relevant College staff who then draft response comments. These are then collated by the University into a formal response to each examiner. At a strategic level, coordinated consideration of external examiner reports now takes place at the college Senior Management Team through a summary paper produced by the Higher Education Manager.

22   Birmingham City University provides effective underpinning performance data against the benchmarks set by its senate for inclusion in the individual annual reports. The depth and vigour with which this data is used occurs to varying extents within programmes and the College has not analysed this management information holistically since 2009. It is desirable that the College ensures that the formal review of student performance data is extended to all programmes and evaluated consistently across disciplines to foster an integrated and holistic view of higher education provision.

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

23   The College has made considerable progress in implementing the recommendation from the Developmental engagement regarding enhancing College processes for staff development. A more strategic approach towards the planning and recording of staff development activities has been introduced and priorities for each year are now agreed at Senior Management Team meetings. Staff development needs are identified at divisional level and during the individual staff appraisal process. These needs are evaluated against strategic objectives by the Quality Director before presentation to the Senior Management Team. Four dedicated staff training days take place each year and allow staff to gather as a community of higher education practitioners to discuss issues of cross-college importance such as the use of plagiarism detection software, assessment practice and academic writing.

24   Staff development also takes place through attendance at university and other external training events and professional updating. Professional reflection and learning takes place through staff attendance at moderation and programme assessment boards which reinforces their engagement with academic standards.

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?

25   College responsibilities for the management of the quality of the academic standards are discussed in paragraphs 10 to 16. In addition, College responsibilities for the management of the quality of the learning opportunities for the provision are specified in policies and practices related to teaching and assessment, student admissions, induction procedures, student support, resources, and work-related learning opportunities.

26   The College has a comprehensive Higher Education Strategy that identifies staff roles and responsibilities. It is embedded in college procedures and processes at all levels. This is well understood by all staff and recognised by students.

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

27   Birmingham City University procedures require the College to have a Board of Studies for each programme. The meetings are chaired by a member of College staff and membership includes student representatives. The boards are accountable to the University at Faculty Board level and are primarily responsible for oversight of the management of each programme. For example, annual monitoring reports are agreed by Boards of Studies before submission to other College committees and for approval by the University.

28   As outlined in paragraph 7, the partnership between the College and the University of Wolverhampton will finish at the end of the academic year 2011-12. The remaining students on the Foundation Degree in Integrated Services and Young People are being appropriately supported by the College and the University. Processes are in place to ensure the continuing quality of the management of learning opportunities and the students reported that they were content with these processes.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

29   College engagement with the Academic Infrastructure has been discussed previously in paragraphs 17 and 18. The provision is also broadly aligned with the precepts of the *Code of practice* in areas allied to learning opportunities such as work-based learning and assessment feedback. For example, progress on the action plan for the Developmental engagement shows that the College has taken appropriate steps to ensure that assessment feedback contributes more consistently to learning opportunities and understanding of expectations according to the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*.

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

30   Student and external examiner comments show that the currency of provision and the quality of teaching and learning is high. The Teaching and Learning Policy has clearly articulated aims and responsibilities aligned with the College's mission and its Equal Opportunities Policy. The use of the Teaching and Learning Policy is overseen by the Vice Principal, assisted by the Higher Education Manager, and is implemented effectively in all programmes.

31   There is an appropriate formal teaching and learning observation scheme for staff teaching on higher education programmes. Additionally, some staff take part in an effective and informal peer observation system that is useful in developing a shared approach to the dissemination of effective practice. However, not all staff take part in this and the system will only be genuinely cross-disciplinary in nature when more fully developed. It is desirable that the College extends the use of peer observation of teaching practice to all staff so that an effective cross-discipline process of dissemination and sharing of good practice can be imbued as part of a community of higher education**.**

32   Student views are effectively collected and used across the provision. For example, student representatives on Boards of Studies are consulted on the quality of teaching. There is also an open Principal's question time and informal discussions take place through tutor surveys such as module evaluations. Students also take part in the National Student Survey. Outcomes of these processes result in actions which are included in annual monitoring reports, agreed at Boards of Studies and monitored by the Higher Education Manager. The extent to which the student voice is captured across the College and used as an effective source of quality enhancement and assurance makes a substantial contribution to the quality of learning opportunities.

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

33   The College supports students in a variety of ways. For example, it provides a formal induction programme for all students which includes both College and University information. An evaluation of induction, prepared as part of the student written submission process, states that satisfaction is generally high but identifies possible action points. The College has responded to this by determining appropriate actions in its Higher Education Development Plan, including a review of induction provision for progressing students.

34   Additional learning support needs for students are identified by an online diagnostic survey. Staff from the College's Student Services unit organise a suitable response. Additionally, the HND in Popular Music Practice, HND Media Production and Communications, HNC Building Services Management, and HNC Construction programmes conduct subject-specific assessments at interview to determine abilities and learning needs. Students confirm that this additional support is effective.

35   Students receive excellent support from staff to all students, particularly in study skills development, including timetabled study skills sessions. The recent provision of a study skills site on the virtual learning environment, with links to further materials on the Birmingham City University website is one example of this. Students confirmed that these materials are comprehensive and helpful.

36   Students report timely and excellent quality of feedback on assessment that aids their learning. Plagiarism software has been introduced recently and students and staff report that this is beginning to enhance learning in academic writing. The College provides excellent support in all programmes for the student learning experience in all areas and particularly in study skills development and assessment feedback.

37   Student retention rates are high for most programmes. Evaluative monitoring of retention and achievement rates is thorough down to module level and is routinely reported on in Boards of Studies and annual programme reviews. Progression, retention and curriculum delivery issues in the HND Media, Communication and Production programme during the 2010-11 academic year were picked up by the student voice process and through annual monitoring. Appropriate action has been taken.

38   Students have access to effective work-based learning opportunities. For example, the design of the Foundation Degree in Early Years ensures a close integration of theory and practice and learning in both workplace and College environments. Relationships with a variety of employers are very strong and contribute substantially to the quality of the learning opportunities provided.

39   These interactions expose students to commercial environments. For example, HND Popular Music Practice students have been able to work with a large record management company. Also, for the Foundation Degree in Early Years programme, work-based learning is supported by appropriately trained and well engaged mentors. Additionally, students on the HNC Construction and HNC Building Services Engineering work with large construction projects. Similarly, students on the HNC/D in Business Management programme benefit from the College's well established relationship with the Prince's Trust. The engagement of employers with staff teaching on the HND in Business Management, HNC Construction and HNC Building Services Management programmes provides excellent real-world commercial learning environments for students.

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

40   Arrangements for staff development are described in paragraphs 23 and 24. The College has developed a set of protocols for staff to encourage them to maintain their knowledge of relevant professional and industry standard practice. New staff are well supported through mentors who shadow their teaching and engage in internal verification and moderation of their assessments. The quality of student learning opportunities is considerably enhanced through staff development activities.

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?

41   The College has effective procedures in place for identifying and allocating resources in support of learning opportunities. The College also identifies annual priorities for capital expenditure based partly on bids from curriculum managers. Staff and students confirm that resources to support learning opportunities are excellent. For example, HND Popular Music Practice students report that their dedicated resources, particularly the music production and performance equipment, is of industry standard.

42   Staff teaching on the HND in Popular Music Practice employ software to allow students to annotate and self-evaluate their performances and other assessments online. This innovative practice also enables staff to contribute to formative assessment and moderate performance practice in a more effective way than by conventional written assignment. The provision of an innovative learning environment for students on the HND in Popular Music Practice programme contributes substantially to the quality of the learning opportunities.

43   Students value the range of electronic resources they have access to, including the virtual learning environment. The College has well founded minimum standards and expectations for use of the virtual learning environment. Most programmes exceed these expectations, for example by using it for the electronic submission of students' work and the use of online portfolios in the Foundation Degree in Early Years programme.

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?

44   The College is responsible for publishing a range of higher education information. This includes paper-based College prospectuses and general publicity information, specific programme-based information, and substantial online information. There is also an effective guide provided for industry-based mentors on the Foundation Degree in Early Years. This contains appropriate information about placement-based learning, roles, mentor support, and contact details.

45   The main College prospectus has only limited coverage of higher education opportunities. There is a basic outline of higher education qualifications but no specific programme titles or information about where further details can be found. This information is supplemented by a new Higher Education Guide and there is an International Prospectus for the 2011-12 academic year which provides further details of higher education programmes. These additional publications provide a worthwhile addition to the public information portfolio.

46   Programme handbooks are produced in paper and online formats. These use a standardised University template which requires a comprehensive list of information to be provided. While handbooks are accurate and relevant and in general appreciated by students, there is a lot of information and some students, particularly those with dyslexia, find it hard to locate important information. Handbooks are supplemented at induction through an effective standardised Powerpoint presentation which appears on the virtual learning environment and which highlights the most important points from the student handbooks. It is desirable for the College to ensure that information in programme handbooks is made clearer, more accessible and user-friendly for all students.

47   The College self-evaluation claims that individual programme leaflets are available on the College website and also available as hard copies. However, at the time of the review visit, the team was initially unable to find such leaflets and was informed that they had been recently withdrawn by the Higher Education Manager for updating. Paper copies were provided on request. These provide some information about various teaching and learning Issues, but have no details of assessment, for example.

48   The College is also responsible for publishing a comprehensive range of information on the virtual learning environment, which is regularly accessed by students. There is an appropriate range of student handbooks approved through the programme validation process and updated annually on the virtual learning environment. Paper versions are also provided on the Foundation Degree in Early Years and memory sticks are provided for HNC Construction and HNC Building Services Management students. This effective use of the online environment for communication is also supported by the use of a text message service for communicating important information.

49   Examples of the effective interactive use of the virtual learning environment include the use of an online notice board process on HND Business Management, the use of

animated photographs, videos, and user guides on the HND Popular Music Practice, and links to academic articles and e-journals on the HND/C Business and Management programmes. There is also an effective online forum in use on the Foundation Degree in Early Years. The use of the College virtual learning environment, particularly by staff teaching on the HND in Popular Music Practice, to provide relevant and current programme information to students makes an effective contribution to the College's public information.

50   The College has developed an interim website as merger plans with another college are pending. Courses are listed within subject areas and in the higher education section which has a prominent position of the website. Information about entry, funding and accommodation is also provided. Course titles are linked to programme specifications in the higher education section, but not in the subject section.

51   The College has a new marketing strategy under development. This includes a revised approach to both paper-based and online information. Staff and students have been consulted in the design of the new website which has been partially developed with infrastructure, architecture and navigation now in place. Senior staff are aware of the need to enhance information for prospective students and to take account of key information set requirements. The approach to paper-based publications now focuses on providing information for specific markets through individual publications that direct prospective students towards the website for more detailed information.

52   The College's new approach is addressing shortfalls in the public information set, in both paper-based and web-based publicity and information. The team was assured in discussions with key staff that gaps are adequately supplemented by a process of discussion between students and College staff. However, gaps remain and these need to be addressed as soon as possible. The College is advised to ensure that current work to develop the strategy is vigorously pursued with a view to providing more comprehensive, effective and useful public information as soon as possible.

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?

53   The College's public website is managed by marketing and programme teams. Final approval of both paper-based and online information lies with the Marketing Manager subject to curriculum checks by programme managers. Final approval of the College prospectus and related publications lies with the Vice Principal following checks by programme teams and marketing staff. Partner universities approve relevant published material for accuracy and completeness prior to publication.

54   A checklist with minimum content is used to ensure consistency of websites for students. Standard documentation is used where possible such as programme calendars and induction presentations to ensure completeness 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

55   The Developmental engagement in assessment took place in April 2011. The lines of enquiry covered a range of issues associated with the assessment of students and were:

Line of enquiry 1: To what extent does annual monitoring and assessment practice in programmes ensure academic standards are maintained?

Line of enquiry 2: How does the College ensure the quality, appropriateness and timely feedback to students?

Line of enquiry 3: To what extent is information on assessment provided to students accurate and complete?

56   The review team for the Developmental engagement recorded a number of areas of good practice. These included the effective and thorough nature of the management of the assessment process for higher education programmes through the College's annual monitoring process and action planning and the rigorous manner in which staff engage with this process; the excellent links with Birmingham City University; the effective use of a variety of methods of continual formative assessment feedback in all higher education programmes; and the collaboration between the staff on the HNC/D in Business and Management and the Prince's Trust. Additionally, good practice was noted in the use of personal development planning for students on the Foundation Degree in Early Years programme; the engagement of College staff teaching on the Foundation Degree in Early Years research projects; and the effective pre-entry and induction processes and student handbooks. Finally, the way in which assignment sheets are used to clarify information on the assessment expectations and intentions for students; the comprehensive, up to date and user-friendly nature of information on assessment disseminated through the virtual learning environment; and the way in which students engage with this were also noted as good practice.

57   The team noted a number of advisable recommendations for the College to consider through their action planning process subsequent to the review. These included the need to ensure that the existing model of student support and communication regarding the assessment process is enhanced with respect to students on the Foundation Degree in Integrated Services and Young People, and the need to develop consistency of guidance and assessment feedback practice on academic referencing and more general literacy considerations.

58   The team also noted a number of desirable recommendations for the College to consider. These included: to formalise the arrangements for staff development in support of assessment good practice sharing and dissemination; to continue to build on existing effective practice of developing and distributing public information on assessment in the form of programme specifications and make such guidance more specific and helpful to students; and to continue the development and redesign of the College website, particularly with respect to the availability of and access to public information on assessment and to achieve this for the benefit of higher education students as soon as possible.

D Foundation Degrees

59 The College offers three Foundation Degrees. Two of these, the Foundation Degree Information, Communication Technology and the Foundation Degree Early Years, are offered under validation from Birmingham City University. There is also a Foundation Degree in Integrated Services & Young People offered under validation from the University of Wolverhampton. This programme, however, is in the last year of operation before the collaborative partnership ceases - only a small number of third-year part-time students were enrolled in the 2011-12 academic year.

60 During the course of the review, the team identified the following areas of **good practice** in Foundation Degrees for dissemination:

- the management of the Annual Course Review process for the Foundation Degree in Early Years provides an excellent platform for effective evaluation of academic standards (paragraph 15)
- the way in which the excellent links that have been built and sustained with Birmingham City University for all programmes contributes significantly to all aspects of higher education standards management and the quality of learning opportunities for the Foundation Degree programmes in Information, Communication and Technology and Early Years (paragraph 19)
- the student voice is captured across the College and used as an effective source of quality enhancement and assurance for all Foundation Degree programmes (paragraph 32)
- the excellent support in all Foundation Degree programmes for the student learning experience in all areas and particularly in study skills development and assessment feedback contributes significantly to the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 36).

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

62 The areas of Foundation Degrees where the College is advised to take action or where it would be desirable for it to take action are the same as all higher education provision as outlined in paragraphs 67 and 68.

63 Finally with regard to Foundation Degrees, the conclusions reached by the team regarding the College's management of its academic standards and the quality of its learning opportunities are the same as for all higher education provision as outlined in paragraphs 69 to 71. This also extends to the reliance on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about its Foundation Degrees.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

64 The team has identified a number of features of good practice in South Birmingham 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, Birmingham City University and the University of Wolverhampton.

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

- the management of the Annual Course Review process for the Foundation Degree in Early Years and the HND in Popular Music Practice provides an excellent platform for effective evaluation of academic standards (paragraph 15)
- the way in which the excellent links that have been built and sustained with Birmingham City University for all programmes contributes significantly to all aspects of higher education standards management and the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 19)
- the student voice is captured across the College and is used as an effective source of quality enhancement and assurance (paragraph 32)
- the excellent support in all programmes for the student learning experience in all areas and particularly in study skills development and assessment feedback contributes significantly to the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 36)
- the engagement of staff teaching on the HND/C in Business Management, HNC Construction and HNC Building Services Engineering programmes with employers provides real-world commercial learning environments (paragraph 39)
- the way in which the provision of an innovative learning environment for students on the HND in Popular Music Practice allows for effective assessment of non-written evaluation and reflection skills (paragraph 42)
- the use of the College virtual learning environment particularly by staff teaching on the HND in Popular Music Practice provides relevant and current programme information to students (paragraph 48).

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

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

- ensure that the effectiveness of the Higher Education Development Plan is enhanced by including college-wide annual revision and formal monitoring through the committee structure (paragraph 16)
- ensure that current work to develop the marketing strategy is vigorously pursued with a view to providing more comprehensive, effective and useful public information as soon as possible (paragraph 52).

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

- extend the remit of the Academic Board to include creating a forum in which all higher education programmes can be considered on a cross-disciplinary basis (paragraph 13)
- ensure that the formal review of student performance data is extended to all programmes and evaluated consistently across disciplines to foster an integrated view of higher education provision (paragraph 22)
- extend the use of peer observation of teaching practice to all staff so as to enable an effective cross-disciplinary process of dissemination and sharing of good practice (paragraph 31)
- ensure that information in programme handbooks is made clearer, more accessible and user-friendly for all students (paragraph 46).

69   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.

70   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.

71   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.

South Birmingham College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 2012						
Good practice	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
In the course of the Summative review the team identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
• the management of the Annual Course Review process for the Foundation Degree in Early Years and the HND in Popular Music Practice provides an excellent platform for effective evaluation of academic standards (paragraph 15)	Ensure comprehensive completion of all annual monitoring reports	September 2012	Course Directors	Comprehensive annual monitoring reports produced for all programmes	Higher Education Manager, Academic Board	Annual Monitoring Reports reported to Academic Board and inform the College's Higher Education Development Plan
• the excellent links which have been built and sustained with Birmingham City University for all programmes contributes	Maintain the links with Birmingham City University through regular meetings and communication to ensure sustained relationship which ensures academic	Ongoing	Principal, Senior Management Team, Higher Education Manager, Curriculum Managers	Continued relationship

Academic standards are maintained

Positive student | Senior Management Team | Evaluated through the following documents: External Examiner Reports, National Student Survey, internal student |

significantly to all aspects of higher education standards management and the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 19)	standards and quality of learning opportunities which benefit students			learning experience		surveys, student data such as retention and achievements rates, Annual Monitoring Reports
• the student voice is captured across the College and used as an effective source of quality enhancement and assurance (paragraph 32)	Continue to provide a range of student voice opportunities Continue to encourage completion of National Student Survey and support students from all programmes to complete programme level surveys	Ongoing	Higher Education Manager; Curriculum teams	Students engage in a range of student voice activities which lead to improvements in the student learning experience	Academic Board Senior Management Team	Evidenced in comprehensive Annual Monitoring Reports and Boards of Studies minutes Engagement rates of students with student voice activities
• the excellent support in all programmes for the student learning experience in all areas and particularly in study skills development and assessment feedback contributes significantly to the quality of	Continue with existing support mechanisms to support the student learning experience and to further develop study skills resources	September 2012; ongoing	Curriculum Teams Higher Education Manager	Students engage with timetabled student support Academic writing standards are at an appropriate level Additional study support materials developed		Student engagement rates with timetabled support External examiner reports to confirm academic standards Appropriate feedback provided to students which helps them improve

learning opportunities (paragraph 36)						
• the engagement of staff teaching on the HND in Business Management, HNC Construction and HNC Building Services Management programmes with employers to provide real-world commercial learning environments (paragraph 39)	Share good practice with other curriculum divisions seeking further industry partners	September 2012	Curriculum Teams	Expansion in employer involvement in curriculum design/assessment	Higher Education Manager	Assessment records
• the way in which the provision of an innovative learning environment for students on the HND in Popular Music Practice allows for effective assessment of non-written evaluation and reflection skills (paragraph 42)	Share good practice with curriculum divisions Extend the use of non-written evaluation and reflection skills in assessment practices	July 2013	Curriculum Teams	Extended use of non-written assessment practices	Higher Education Manager	Assessment records Student feedback

• the use of the College virtual learning environment particularly by staff teaching on the HND in Popular Music Practice to provide relevant and current programme information to students (paragraph 48)	Share good practice between curriculum divisions Expand on the minimum requirements for course moodle sites	Ongoing	Curriculum Teams	All programmes to have enhanced information on their moodle sites to support the student learning experience	Higher Education Manager	Information on moodle sites Student feedback
Advisable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The team considers that it is **advisable** for the College to:						
• ensure that the effectiveness of the Higher Education Development Plan is enhanced by including college-wide annual revision and formal monitoring through the committee structure (paragraph 16)	Develop the role of Academic Board to include formal monitoring of higher education development plan Plan formal reviews of higher education development plan in the Senior Management Team Meeting Calendar Include annual revision	October 2012 June 2012 July 2012	Vice Principal & Higher Education Manager Senior Management Team Higher Education	Academic Board terms of reference to be further developed Higher education plan formally reviewed Included in quality	Senior Management Team Senior Management Team Vice Principal	Terms of reference developed Minutes of meetings Updated higher education

	of the higher education development plan in the higher education quality cycle		Manager	cycle		development plan
• ensure that current work to develop the marketing strategy is vigorously pursued with a view to providing more comprehensive, effective and useful public information as soon as possible (paragraph 52)	Ensure timely completion of new College website Provide enhanced information to students on the College website Design and produce a higher education-specific prospectus	September 2012 October 2012 November 2012	Head of Marketing Higher Education Manager and Curriculum teams Head of Marketing and Higher Education Manager	New website with comprehensive information for students New higher education prospectus with comprehensive course and student support information	Vice Principal Vice Principal Vice Principal	Student feedback Internal audit report
Desirable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The team considers that it is **desirable** for the College to:						
• extend the remit of the operation of the Academic Board to include creating a forum in which all higher education programmes can be considered on a cross-discipline basis (paragraph	Develop the terms of reference for Academic Board to include cross-discipline review	October 2012	Vice Principal; Higher Education Manager	Academic Board terms of reference to be further developed	Senior Management Team	Terms of reference developed Minutes of meetings

• ensure that the formal review of student performance data is extended to all programmes and evaluated across disciplines to foster an integrated view of higher education provision (paragraph 22)	Re-instate whole College response for performance data	November 2012	Higher Education Manager	Formal response produced for performance data	Senior Management Team and University partners	Formal reports and action plan/s
• extend the use of peer observation of teaching practice to all staff so as to enable effective cross-discipline process of dissemination and sharing of good practice (paragraph 31)	Share good practice from pilot peer observation process Introduce peer observations for all higher education curriculum divisions	June 2012 July 2013	Curriculum Managers	Peer observations embedded in College observation processes	Higher Education Manager Curriculum Directors	Staff evaluations of the impact on the student learning experience of the peer observation process
• ensure that information in programme handbooks is made clearer, more accessible and user friendly for all students (paragraph 46)	Adopt the new University handbook template (April 2012) for all programmes	September 2012	Curriculum Teams	New handbooks produced and available for students	Higher Education Manager	Student feedback