



**QAA**

## **Integrated quality and enhancement review**

**Summative review**

January 2010

Riverside College Halton

SR57/2010

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2010

ISBN 978 1 84979 098 7

All QAA's publications are available on our website [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

## **Preface**

The mission of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continual improvement in the management of the quality of higher education.

As part of this mission, QAA undertakes reviews of higher education provision delivered in further education colleges. This process is known as Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER).

## **Purpose of IQER**

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

## **The IQER process**

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

## **Developmental engagement**

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

The main elements of a Developmental engagement are:

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

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

## Summative review

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

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

## Evidence

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

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

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

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, which includes descriptions of different higher education qualifications
- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- *Guidelines for preparing programme specifications*, which are descriptions of what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study
- award benchmark statements, which describe the generic characteristics of an award, for example Foundation Degrees.

In addition, Developmental engagement teams gather evidence by focusing on particular aspects of the theme under review. These are known as 'lines of enquiry'.

## Outcomes of IQER

Each Developmental engagement and Summative review results in a written report:

- Developmental engagement reports set out good practice and recommendations and implications for the college and its awarding bodies, but do not contain judgements. Recommendations will be at one of three levels - **essential**, **advisable** and **desirable**. To promote an open and collegial approach to Developmental engagements, the reports are not published.
- Summative review reports identify good practice and contain judgements about whether the college is discharging its responsibilities effectively against core themes one and two above. The judgements are **confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence**. There is no judgement for the third core theme, instead the report will provide evaluation and a conclusion. Summative review reports are published.

Differentiated judgements can be made where a team judges a college's management of the standards and/or quality of the awards made by one awarding body to be different from those made by another.

Colleges are required to develop an action plan to address any recommendations arising from IQER. Progress against these action plans is monitored by QAA in conjunction with HEFCE and/or the college's awarding body(ies) as appropriate. The college's action plan in response to the conclusions of the Summative review will be published as part of the report.

## Executive summary

### The Summative review of Riverside College Halton carried out in January 2010

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 new senior management team and HE Academic Board have raised the profile of higher education and clarified reporting lines
- staff provide a timely and supportive response to any issues that are raised by the students
- employer engagement on engineering programmes enhances work-related learning
- students are given diagnostic assessment at interview to identify needs, highlight skills and inform the setting of personal goals
- the virtual learning environment supports learning on provision such as sports, teacher education and theatre programmes through target-setting, discussion groups and electronic portfolios
- the passport to degree-level study aids progression on vocational programmes.

### 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:

- introduce further measures to enhance understanding of the Academic Infrastructure by programme teams
- ensure consistent implementation of the policy on assessment deadlines in accordance with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 6: Assessment of students*
- take measures to ensure all handbooks provide consistent and accurate advice and guidance to students
- ensure issues involving communication with link tutors are identified promptly and can be addressed within an academic year
- introduce support for students on off-site provision that equates to the support for students on central campus locations.

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

- seek further development of work-based learning to benefit Foundation Degree students
- seek a wider sharing of good practice in the use of the virtual learning environment to support learning opportunities.

## 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 Riverside College Halton (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 on behalf of Edexcel, Edge Hill University, Liverpool John Moores University and Staffordshire University. The review was carried out by Mr Glenn Barr, Dr Elaine Crosthwaite and Mr John Holloway (reviewers) and Mr Nigel Hall (coordinator).

2 The Summative review team (the team) conducted the review in agreement with the College and in accordance with *The handbook for Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review*, (the handbook) published by QAA. Evidence in support of the Summative review included documentation supplied by the College and awarding bodies, meetings with staff, students and employers, and reports from inspections by Ofsted. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagement in assessment. A summary of findings from this Developmental engagement is provided in Section C of this report. The review also considered the College's use of the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers, with reference to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, subject and award benchmark statements, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)* and programme specifications.

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

4 The College is the largest provider of post-16 education in Halton, with learners studying on a wide range of full and part-time further education programmes, higher education programmes, work-based learning and modern apprenticeships. It was formed in 2006 by the merger of Halton College and Widnes and Runcorn Sixth Form College. The College operates on four sites: Kingsway Campus, Cronton Campus, Runcorn Campus and the Astmoor Construction Centre. The majority of higher education programmes are delivered at the Runcorn Campus. The College attracts students from the local area, and its mission is to provide opportunities that suit the needs of learners, industry and the wider community. The higher education provision evolved during the 1980s through strong links with the local chemical industry. The College has a reputation for accepting students with modest entry qualifications and supporting them to acquire the skills and knowledge to succeed in higher education. In the academic year 2009-10 approximately 2,480 full-time and 3,775 part-time students enrolled, including 94 full-time and 405 part-time higher education students, representing approximately 329 full-time equivalents. These higher education students are taught by 23 full-time and 27 part-time staff, approximately 37 full-time equivalents.

5 Management of higher education programmes is the responsibility of the HE Manager, assisted by a HE Coordinator and reporting to the Assistant Principal, Skills and Enterprise. The College works with Edexcel, Edge Hill University, Liverpool John Moores University and Staffordshire University. Most higher education programmes are based at the Runcorn Campus. The FD Sports Coaching operates at the Cronton Campus and the FD Theatre, Applied Drama and Creativity at the Kingsway Campus. The off-site Edexcel provision is



based at BAE Systems in Preston and at Train 2000 in Blackburn, and the FD Mechanical/ Manufacturing Technology at the Jaguar Motor Company in Speke. Some programmes are supported by the Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network, which was formed in 2006 by Edge Hill University and the University of Liverpool.

### Higher education provision at the College

6 In 2009-10 the College offers the following higher education programmes, which are listed below, beneath their awarding bodies:

#### Number of students in 2009-10

Edexcel	Full-time	Part-time	FTE
HNC Aerospace Engineering		70	35.5
HND Aerospace Engineering		20	15
HNC Electrical/Electronic Engineering		45	22.5
HND Electrical/Electronic Engineering		7	5.25
HNC Manufacturing Engineering		118	59
HND Manufacturing Engineering		10	7.5
HND Operations Engineering		5	3.75
HNC Plant and Processing Engineering		14	7

#### Edge Hill University

FD Accountancy	4		4
FD Business and Management	14	11	19.3
FD Integrated Practice, (Early Years and Young People)	34		34
FD Laboratory Operations and Management	0		0
FD Sports Coaching	10		10
FD Theatre, Applied Drama and Creativity	12		12

#### Liverpool John Moores University

BEng Aerospace Manufacturing Engineering	10		8
BEng Manufacturing Systems	15		12
FD Biosciences (Forensics, Biochemistry, Microbiology)	10		10
FD Business and Management	10	15	20
FD Educational Support	10		6
FD Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector	0		0
Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector	55		27.5

#### Staffordshire University

FD Mechanical/Manufacturing Technology	11		7.3
--	----	--	-----

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

7 Edexcel, Edge Hill University, Liverpool John Moores University and Staffordshire University validate the current provision. The FD programmes in biosciences, business and management and educational support that are validated by John Moores University will end in 2010. They are being replaced by the FD in Business and Management, the FD in Laboratory Operations and Management and the FD Integrated Practice validated by Edge Hill University. Where possible, future developments will focus on the partnership with Edge Hill University. For the past 10 years the College has worked with its off-site partners offering HNC and HND programmes for employees of British Aerospace, validated by Edexcel. In 2002 the BEng programme was developed to offer a progression route for these students through the partnership with Liverpool John Moores University.

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

8 The College's higher education mission statement and strategic plan are being revised in 2009-10 to emphasise the importance of higher education within the total provision. The senior management team has been strengthened through the introduction of an Assistant Principal for Skills and Enterprise, with specific responsibility for higher education programmes. In 2009 the College opened a new theatre on the Kingsway Campus to support the provision in theatre, applied drama and creativity. Similarly, training facilities at the Cronton Campus have been enhanced to support the FD in Sports Coaching.

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

9 Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. The College supported the students in preparing their submission and valuable comments were received from all programme areas. A representative group of students met with the reviewers during the Summative review visit and expanded on the comments in the written submission. They provided valuable evidence on the quality of the provision with examples of good practice and opportunities for enhancement in a number of areas.

# **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 In 2009 the College put in place a new senior management structure, with a Principal and four assistant principals, including an Assistant Principal, Skills and Enterprise, who has overall responsibility for higher education provision. An HE Manager leads higher education development and reports to the Assistant Principal, Skills and Enterprise. The HE Manager is responsible for ensuring that programmes operate within QAA and Higher Education Academy guidelines and works with a Quality Improvement Team to ensure that programmes are integrated into college-wide quality processes. This includes the administration of feedback through specific higher education student perception of course questionnaires. The HE Manager is assisted by an HE Coordinator.

11 The senior management team holds regular monitoring and quality assurance meetings to review the effectiveness of the provision against the objectives stated in the strategic plan. Discussions have led to the development of a quality assurance system for higher education as part of the College's wider review framework. This includes a new system for monitoring student complaints that enables problems to be identified promptly and addressed appropriately. Staff reported favourably on the impact of the new structure in raising the profile of higher education and clarifying reporting lines.

12 There is an HE Academic Board that was established in April 2009, following recommendations in the Developmental engagement report. The Principal chairs the Board, which is attended by curriculum directors and representatives of functional areas, such as IT services and marketing. The process promotes college-wide awareness of higher education issues. The HE Academic Board has met twice since it was established. It reports to the Quality and Standards Sub-committee of the Board of Governors, which meets once per term and monitors the effectiveness of quality systems in generating measurable gains in educational performance.

13 Curriculum managers in five discipline areas work closely with the HE Manager to ensure quality procedures are followed. Programme leaders are responsible for preparing annual reports for the respective awarding body, and these are also submitted to the HE Manager for scrutiny. Issues are then incorporated into a higher education self-evaluation report, which is considered by the HE Academic Board and reported to governors.

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

14 The Academic Infrastructure is embedded within quality assurance procedures in accordance with the requirements of the awarding bodies. These procedures include: programme validation and review; moderation and external examining; and annual monitoring and evaluation. Staff confirm that subject benchmarks are considered at validation; the external examining process provides a check to ensure that the academic standards remain consistent with the FHEQ, and the annual review process allows the College to check on compliance with relevant sections of the *Code of practice*. The HE Manager has a significant role in ensuring that account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure, and monitors implementation through the review of annual reports.

15 Staff development is designed to support the embedding of the Academic Infrastructure. This is aimed at programme leaders, who then disseminate the information at team meetings. The programme team for the FD Theatre, Applied Drama and Creativity reported on the value of the information they received. However, understanding and implementation of the Academic Infrastructure is not consistent across the provision. For example, there is a checklist for the preparation of programme handbooks that requires the inclusion of programme specifications, but this is not universally applied; work-related learning and placements are significant features on many programmes, but there is limited understanding among programme teams of work-based learning as defined under the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. The College is advised to introduce further measures to enhance understanding of the Academic Infrastructure by programme teams to support the management of standards and quality.

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

16 The College's obligations and responsibilities for managing standards on the awards that it delivers are set out in the partnership agreements of the three universities. There is an effective continuous quality improvement process for higher education, which meets the requirements of the partner universities and is integrated into the College procedures.

17 Academic standards are set, shared and understood through the internal verification of assignments and feedback from the awarding bodies on the grading of assignments. There is a clear policy on assessment, verification/moderation and standardisation. Each programme has an internal verifier/moderator and the HE Manager ensures that programmes follow the standardisation process of the relevant awarding body. For example, for the FD Sports Coaching and FD Integrated Practice there is an internal verification process prior to assessment results being forwarded to the University. Such programmes also employ a cross-partner moderation process. On the FD Theatre, Applied Drama and Creativity and the FD Biosciences the process of meeting standards is facilitated with a part of the programme being taught by the University.

18 The Edexcel-appointed external verifier is responsible for ensuring the standard of off-site provision. Verifier reports are considered on an annual basis under Edexcel's quality development and review process for both higher and further education awards.

19 There is a system for the physical and electronic submission of assignments. The submission of work is recorded, and standard assignment sheets contain a plagiarism declaration. Deadlines for the submission of assignments are clearly specified in documentation, but are not consistently applied by teaching staff. Students reported that on the FD Business and Management a deadline was extended after work had already been submitted by some of the students. The College is advised to ensure consistent implementation of the policy on assessment deadlines in accordance with the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*.

20 Programme leaders prepare an annual review report for the awarding body, in a format stipulated by the higher education partner. These contain external examiner comment and an evaluation by the link tutor. Relevant issues are referred to the HE Academic Board. Annual review reports are also formally considered through the quality procedures of the awarding body. External examiner reports are submitted directly to the awarding body and copied to the College, and the response to external examiners is informed by comment from the College. In addition, representatives of programme teams attend programme boards and boards of study at the awarding body to close the quality loop.

21 The College obtains feedback from students via a number of mechanisms: student representatives attend programme team meetings; all students have access to an electronic HE Common Room, and they complete a specific higher education questionnaire each semester. University link tutors provide a valuable source of guidance for the College and meet with students to gather additional comment. Student feedback is monitored annually at programme level and this informs the College's higher education self-evaluation report.

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

22 College arrangements are articulated in a staff development policy, which allows all staff to undergo a professional development review with their line manager to identify training and development needs. An annual staff development plan is produced and the College employs a Staff Development Officer to coordinate activities. Staff are required to attend regular staff development sessions, and attendance is closely monitored by the quality unit and HE Manager.

23 There is a staff development schedule at each of the higher education partners, and staff are encouraged to attend these events. For example, Staffordshire University runs Foundation Degree development days and Liverpool John Moores University operates a staff development programme and a partnerships forum. In response to an extraordinary audit of the FD Sports Coaching, the College and Edge Hill University are arranging staff development in assessment writing and assessing practice. College staff are also encouraged to observe teaching sessions at the University.

24 In September 2009 the College education team was reorganised and now provides college-wide training in teaching and learning practices, and bespoke training such as the use of plagiarism-detection software. A needs-driven approach is being adopted, with a greater focus on preparation for delivery at the appropriate level.

25 There is an annual lesson observation schedule for higher education that follows the College's arrangements for observation of further education programmes. The schedule ensures staff are observed teaching higher education students by a designated member of the observation team. They are supported by the advanced teaching and learning practitioner team.

**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?**

26 Responsibility for maintaining and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities is clearly articulated within the College's strategic aims documentation, and overall responsibility for the management of learning opportunities is vested in the HE Academic Board. The strategy places strong emphasis on effective teaching and learning methods; appropriate physical and human resources; providing a supportive environment for students; meeting student and employer needs; and supporting a widening participation agenda.

27 At programme level curriculum managers and programme leaders manage the process through regular team meetings that include link tutors from the awarding bodies. In turn, link tutors inform discussions at awarding body boards of study, where programme staff are also represented. Annual programme reports provide an effective instrument for reflection on the provision and for the identification of potential enhancements to learning opportunities.

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

28 Agreements between the College and its awarding bodies outline responsibilities for teaching and learning, staff development and the provision of student support and guidance. To fulfil these requirements the College uses a number of strategies that ensure appropriate learning opportunities for its students. There is a forum for the sharing of good practice and for discussion of generic higher education issues. Areas of commonality are considered and differences are resolved. This helps to achieve consistency across the provision. Staff report that these monthly meetings, to which all higher education staff are invited, provide a significant enhancement to learning opportunities. However, as not all staff are able to attend, especially part-time staff at central campus locations and both full and part-time staff who deliver off-site provision, the College should ensure effective communication of the key aspects of forum discussions to all staff.

29 There is a general student handbook that is distributed to all students at induction, and a range of programme-specific handbooks that reflect the requirements of the awarding bodies. The self-evaluation claims that handbooks are produced in accordance with a standard list of contents compiled by the HE Manager. However, many handbooks do not contain the information required by the College. Content is sometimes superficial, subject to error, and is not always user-friendly. For example, inaccuracies noted by the team include a handbook with incorrect grading lists, and another with modules that referred to a different programme. Such handbooks fail to identify the acquisition of higher education skills and convey inaccurate guidance on the support for learning opportunities. There is a College requirement that programme specifications are made available to all students, but the team noted a range of non-standard documentation for HNC/D students with no references to programme specifications. Programme handbooks that do accord with the standard contents list, such as the handbook for the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector, are informative and user-friendly. This begins with an introduction to each of the staff who teach on the programme, followed by an overview of the structure and content of the programme. There is a simple guide to academic regulations, with an appendix that includes the programme specifications. The information is valued by students, who are likely to retain and use the documentation, and the team commends this approach. The College is advised to take measures to ensure all handbooks provide consistent and accurate advice and guidance to students.

30 Attendance of student representatives at programme team meetings and feedback from the higher education questionnaires provide valuable information on the student experience. Students confirm that programme teams consider their views carefully and staff provide a timely and supportive response to any issues that are raised. For example, student comment led to more flexible timetabling on the FD Sports Coaching and FD Integrated Practice, and to the provision of new laptops for students based in Blackburn. Former science students report that the quality of learning opportunities experienced at the College compares favourably with those of partner institutions, and provides effective preparation for progression to further study.

31 In general, liaison between link tutors and programme leaders ensures effective communication between the College and its awarding bodies. However, the loss of a link tutor on the FD Sports Coaching in 2008-09 adversely influenced the assessment of some students. The University established a formal investigation into the breakdown in communication and introduced new procedures to rectify the problem. Students confirmed that the new procedures have allowed them to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

However, the College is advised to ensure issues involving communication with link tutors are identified promptly and can be addressed within an academic year.

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

32 Programme specifications for all university awards are provided using standard templates that reflect external reference points. Foundation Degrees are designed in association with employers to reflect the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, and employers participate in the validation of such programmes. Students are able to engage in the design of their work-related activities, with support from their tutors and college-trained workplace mentors. Employer engagement on engineering programmes is particularly effective in enhancing work-related learning. Good practice in engineering is being disseminated across the provision. The College plans to employ a coordinator to oversee the provision of appropriate work placements, and the team commends this development. The team concluded that it would be desirable to seek further development of work-based learning to benefit Foundation Degree students.

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

33 Students report a flexible approach to teaching and learning that is responsive to their needs. There are standard schemes of work, but staff are able to adapt their delivery to promote effective learning. The College strategy, to encourage and enable achievement by students with a wide range of abilities, is implemented through the identification of individual skills and the setting of personal targets.

34 There are a number of small groups as a result of low initial numbers or subsequent withdrawals. The College recognises this as an issue and has merged year groups for the FD Theatre, Applied Drama and Creativity to maintain sufficient classroom dynamic and opportunities for group work and performance. Some small classes remain in business and management and educational support, but students view this as an opportunity for more individual tuition.

35 The College has a project in partnership with Edge Hill University to support blended and e-learning. Supported Online Learning for Students using Technology for Information and Communication in their Education programme (SOLSTICE) is supported by a staff champion. It enhances the provision through the allocation of additional learning resources. Use of the College virtual learning environment and those of partner universities is an integral part of teaching and learning. Students are able to demonstrate the value of this.

36 The College is currently addressing the issue of plagiarism. For example, some staff have received training by university partners, and plagiarism-detection software has been purchased. Some students have also been trained to use the software and to check their assignments prior to submission. This process will spread across the provision in due course.

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

37 There is an effective on-site academic and pastoral support system. Students welcome the open-door policy in operation by staff across on-campus programmes, and confirmed that both academic and pastoral support is valued. Students are given diagnostic assessment at interview to identify needs, highlight skills and inform the setting of personal goals. Students who are already aware of their additional needs are asked to disclose these on application. They are then assessed by a specialist member of staff to ensure appropriate support is in place.

38 Students enrolling on off-site programmes are sponsored by their employer and do not have an interview or specific diagnostic assessment. They report more limited support, with drop-in academic tutorials available after the end of the working day. They are not provided with records of their tutorial, or set targets with an action plan. Support across the provision is not consistent and the College is advised to introduce support for students on off-site provision that equates to the support for students on central campus locations.

39 The College places considerable reliance on electronic provision. The virtual learning environment is used successfully to support learning on provision such as sports, teacher education and theatre programmes through target-setting, discussion groups and building an electronic portfolio. Links to the virtual learning environments of the awarding bodies allow students access to university staff, induction and other support information.

40 The HE Coordinator provides a valuable single point of information and support. This includes pre-registration advice, guidance on loan applications and bursaries, induction, and liaison with awarding bodies.

41 The College has not achieved a sufficiently high participation in the National Student Survey to generate results.

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

42 Lesson observation procedures are designed to maintain and enhance the quality of learning opportunities. Needs are identified in an annual performance review and agreed between managers and their staff. However, the team found no evidence of discussions on the value of scholarly activity in supporting the enhancement of learning opportunities. Some staff gain further qualifications through links with their higher education partner and believe this improves the quality and currency of their teaching. The College might wish to consider further staff development to support the quality of provision through encouraging scholarly activity.

**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?**

43 Awarding bodies consider the availability and appropriateness of general learning resources and specialist equipment as part of the validation process. This includes the suitability of teaching staff. Annual review identifies any developments requiring additional resources, and programme teams report on this during self-assessment. Arrangements with higher education partners include parity of access to library and learning resources for college-based students. Employers at BAE, Jaguar, and Training 2000 support student achievement using their own specialist equipment for off-site provision.

44 The College has learning resource centres at all campuses, although the focus for higher education resources is on the Runcorn Campus. Library opening hours have been extended to cater for part-time students, but FD Business and Management students still report difficulties in accessing the facilities. Edexcel students rely on local library resources and report that additional support through the virtual learning environment is yet to be implemented. They attest a need for access to a wider range of texts and e-books. The College should seek a wider sharing of good practice in use of the virtual learning environment to support learning opportunities and monitor access to resources across the provision.



45 There is a dedicated higher education building on the Runcorn Campus, with wireless facilities and an e-learning hub, which provides a focus in support of student learning. General teaching facilities are of a good standard, with electronic whiteboards in classrooms and computing rooms. Students on the FD Theatre, Applied Drama and Creativity have access to two theatres: one at Riverside and a new facility at Kingsway, although they report difficulty in accessing rehearsal space in the absence of teaching staff. In general, students confirm that they have access to sufficient resources to meet the intended learning outcomes.

**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?**

46 The College produces a significant range of materials relating to the marketing of the higher education portfolio in general, and materials specific to each programme. Materials include a higher education prospectus, adult learner guide and booklets providing key information for applicants in areas such as financial support and the teacher qualifications framework. It circulates support and guidance booklets from the awarding bodies. The standard academic regulations for each validating university are distributed to students. The information is current, accurate and available both in printed form and as electronic documentation.

47 The College is currently reviewing its portfolio, and some indirectly-funded programmes will become directly funded in the next academic year. This has resulted in a deferment of some recently validated programmes, such as the FD Accountancy. Changes to the portfolio are communicated to the College's marketing team by the HE Manager, and public information on these programmes is immediately amended. This ensures that online information remains accurate. Awarding bodies correct references to suspended provision on their website as soon as a decision is confirmed. Where a course has been publicised, but is subsequently withdrawn, applicants receive alternative offers. The College ensures that staff are available throughout the summer to ensure accurate information is available to all applicants.

48 Over the past three years the College has developed a passport to degree-level study. This helpful document is designed to aid level 3 students, specifically those on vocational programmes with low progression rates, to consider study at level 4. The passport contains information on relevant programmes available in the Greater Manchester and West Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network and guidance on applications, citing case studies of successful students. The current version is designed for full-time study routes and is available in Braille. A part-time version is under consideration, and the team noted this as an example of good practice that should be extended to all modes of study.

**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?**

49 The marketing team verifies publicity materials, which are then approved by the HE Manager and the senior management team. The approval process is formally recorded. This is the final stage of approval for Edexcel programmes. Public information for university validated programmes is also checked by the awarding body. In general, public information reviewed by the team was found to be both accurate and complete.

**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**

50 The Developmental engagement visit took place in December 2008 and focused on the assessment of students. There were three lines of enquiry:

- are the College's assessment methods made clear to learners and are checks made to ensure that they promote the appropriate academic standards? Does the College ensure that the assessment methods and processes link to evaluation and organisational quality procedures?
- how are learners guided and supported on their programmes and by the institution to provide them with inclusive learning opportunities to meet individual needs and enable academic progression to take place? Do the learning resources support assessment tasks appropriately?
- is the information regarding guidance, final awards and regulations for progression communicated effectively to staff and to learners? Can reliability be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information published by the College about assessment?

51 The team identified good practice in a number of areas. These included: the assessment, internal verification and moderation policy; the establishment of an HE Academic Board; regular monthly meetings to share good practice; standardisation of assessment tools; interviewing applicants; the use of self-assessment tools and diagnostic tests; a robust support system; employer engagement in the mentoring of students; the virtual learning environment, and effective working between programme leaders and link tutors.

52 The team also made a number of recommendations. The College was advised to ensure that the HE Academic Board, HE Manager and HE Coordinator champion the needs of higher education and encourage staff to enhance quality and standards by monitoring the implementation of procedures on assessment. The team reported that it would be desirable for the College to monitor the use of learning resources on off-site provision, provide timely guidance to all students on access to the virtual learning environment at partner institutions and provide standard, user-friendly public information in all handbooks.

## D Foundation Degrees

53 In the academic year 2009-10 the College is operating six Foundation Degrees validated by Edge Hill University, four validated by Liverpool John Moores University, and one validated by the University of Staffordshire. Programmes from Liverpool John Moores University are being phased out, and are being replaced by provision from Edge Hill University. Hence, the FD Accountancy and FD Business and Management have replaced the FD Business and Management; the FD Integrated Practice has replaced the FD Educational Support; and the FD Laboratory Operations and Management has replaced the FD Biosciences. The specialised provision from the University of Staffordshire will continue.

54 There are currently 94 full-time and 47 part-time students on Foundation Degree programmes. The provision has developed around specific subject areas to address local and regional needs. There is a clear and commendable strategy to enhance employer engagement. As noted earlier, engagement with engineering employers is particularly successful, and the College plans to deploy a coordinator for placement learning. The further development of work-based learning will benefit Foundation Degree students as a whole.

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

- the new senior management team and HE Academic Board have raised the profile of higher education and clarified reporting lines (paragraphs 10, 11, 12)
- staff provide a timely and supportive response to any issues that are raised by the students (paragraph 30)
- employer engagement on engineering programmes enhances work-related learning (paragraph 32)
- students are given diagnostic assessment at interview to identify needs, highlight skills and inform the setting of personal goals (paragraph 37)
- the virtual learning environment supports learning on provision such as sports, teacher education and theatre programmes through target-setting, discussion groups and electronic portfolios (paragraph 39)
- the passport to degree-level study aids progression on vocational programmes (paragraph 48).

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

- to introduce further measures to enhance understanding of the Academic Infrastructure by programme teams (paragraph 15)
- to ensure consistent implementation of the policy on assessment deadlines in accordance with the Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students (paragraph 19)
- to take measures to ensure all handbooks provide consistent and accurate advice and guidance to students (paragraph 29)
- to ensure issues involving communication with link tutors are identified promptly and can be addressed within an academic year (paragraph 31)

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

- to seek further development of work-based learning to benefit Foundation Degree students (paragraph 32)
- to seek a wider sharing of good practice in the use of the virtual learning environment to support learning opportunities (paragraph 44).

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

56 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Riverside 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 Edexcel, Edge Hill University, Liverpool John Moores University and Staffordshire University.

57 The team also makes some recommendations for consideration by the College and its awarding bodies. In the course of the review, the team identified the following areas of **good practice**:

- the new senior management team and HE Academic Board have raised the profile of higher education and clarified reporting lines (paragraphs 10, 11, 12)
- staff provide a timely and supportive response to any issues that are raised by the students (paragraph 30)
- employer engagement on engineering programmes enhances work-related learning (paragraph 32)
- students are given diagnostic assessment at interview to identify needs, highlight skills and inform the setting of personal goals (paragraph 37)
- the virtual learning environment supports learning on provision such as sports, teacher education and theatre programmes through target-setting, discussion groups and electronic portfolios (paragraph 39)
- the passport to degree-level study aids progression on vocational programmes (paragraph 48).

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

- to introduce further measures to enhance understanding of the Academic Infrastructure by programme teams (paragraph 15)
- to ensure consistent implementation of the policy on assessment deadlines in accordance with the Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students (paragraph 19)
- to take measures to ensure all handbooks provide consistent and accurate advice and guidance to students (paragraph 29)
- to ensure issues involving communication with link tutors are identified promptly and can be addressed within an academic year (paragraph 31)

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

- to seek further development of work-based learning to benefit Foundation Degree students (paragraph 32)
- to seek a wider sharing of good practice in the use of the virtual learning environment to support learning opportunities (paragraph 44).

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

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

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

Riverside College Halton action plan relating to the Summative review: January 2010						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation <sup>1</sup>
In the course of the Summative review the team identified the following areas of <b>good practice</b> that are worthy of wider dissemination within the college:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the new senior management team and HE Academic Board have raised the profile of higher education and clarified reporting lines (paragraphs 10, 11, 12)</li> </ul>	Three board meetings to take place annually.	July 10	HE Manager Senior Management Team	Meetings to take place: Dec 09 April 10 July 10	HE Manager	Minutes of the three board meetings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>staff provide a timely and supportive response to any issues that are raised by the students (paragraph 30)</li> </ul>	To monitor student views through: tutorials SPOC team meetings Board of Study	July 10	Programme leaders personal tutors	Improved student satisfaction and improved retention	Senior Management Team	Annual Monitoring Reviews; HE self-assessment report; minutes of meetings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>employer engagement on engineering programmes enhances work-related learning (paragraph 32)</li> </ul>	Continue to encourage mentors in the work place.	July 10	Mentors Programme Leader	Student feedback success rates	HE Manager	SPOC; Board of Study minutes;

<sup>1</sup> Please indicate how the actions will be evaluated once completed.

Riverside College Halton action plan relating to the Summative review: January 2010							
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>students are given diagnostic assessment at interview to identify needs, highlight skills and inform the setting of personal goals (paragraph 37)</li> </ul>	Ensure all HE students undergo BKSB at start of course.	July 10	BKSB assessments Action Plans	Learner satisfaction rates success rates	Programme managers/ personal tutors HE Manager	HE self-assessment report; Annual Monitoring Reviews  Tutorial records; Personal Development Plans; Action Plans	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the virtual learning environment supports learning on provision such as sports, teacher education and theatre programmes through target setting, discussion groups and electronic portfolios (paragraph 39)</li> </ul>	Continue to develop support and links to learning resources; disseminate good practice to other areas at HE meetings.	September 10	HE Manager all teaching staff	All programmes on Moodle with links to their partner HEI's virtual learning environment	HE Manager	Student feedback; virtual learning environment participation rates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the passport to degree-level study aids progression on vocational programmes (paragraph 48).</li> </ul>	Progression passports from the Lifelong Learning Network are	April 2010	Programme managers HE Coordinator (passport champion)	All first year level 3 vocational students to have been issued a	HE Coordinator Project Manager GM & WL Lifelong	Minutes of HE Strategy /Lifelong Learning Network	

Riverside College Halton action plan relating to the Summative review: January 2010						
Good Practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
	distributed to all level 3 vocational students during advisory sessions at Kingsway, Runcorn and Cronton campuses.			Progression Passport and given an advisory slot to discuss progression within the Lifelong Learning Network.	Learning Network Assistant Principal Student Support and Programme Management	meetings



Riverside College Halton action plan relating to the Summative review: January 2010						
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<p>The team agreed a number of areas where the College should be <b>advised</b> to take action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to introduce further measures to enhance understanding of the Academic Infrastructure by programme teams (paragraph 15)</li> </ul>	<p>All student handbooks to include programme specifications; new staff to attend HE induction sessions, which will be included on the staff development schedule rota.</p>	<p>October 2010</p>	<p>HE Manager</p>	<p>All staff to be aware of Academic Infrastructure including the QAA Code of Practice for work-based and placement learning, and have access to programme specifications; mandatory attendance at HE staff development sessions.</p>	<p>HE Manager College directors</p>	<p>College staff development schedule; staff development delegate sheets; student handbooks</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to ensure consistent implementation of the policy on assessment deadlines in accordance with the Code of</li> </ul>	<p>Staff development regarding university regulations and</p>	<p>October 2010</p>	<p>All staff teaching on HE programmes</p>	<p>Staff development at partner universities and internal higher</p>	<p>HE Manager</p>	<p>Staff continuing professional development records; student</p>

Riverside College Halton action plan relating to the Summative review: January 2010							
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation	
<i>practice, Section 6: Assessment of students (paragraph 19)</i>	QAA Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students			education staff development sessions		handbooks; student feedback	
● to take measures to ensure all handbooks provide consistent and accurate advice and guidance to students (paragraph 29)	All handbooks to be reviewed and audited to ensure contents are accurate and match the handbook checklist given to all programme leaders.	September 2010	Programme leaders	All handbooks to be submitted by 1 August to be reviewed for accuracy.	HE Manager	Handbook audit	
● ensure issues involving communication with link tutors are identified promptly and can be addressed within an academic year (paragraph 31)	A standing agenda item to be included on team meetings agenda regarding communication issues with link tutors.	July 2010	Programme leaders	Agenda item on Programme Team minutes which take place per semester.	College directors	Programme Team minutes	
● to introduce support for students on off-site	All students to have access	July 2010	Personal tutors	Students to access	Programme leaders	Student tutorial notes	

Riverside College Halton action plan relating to the Summative review: January 2010						
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
provision that equates to the support for students on central campus locations (paragraph 38).	to a personal tutorial and be seen at least once per semester. All students to have access to academic tutorials.			a personal tutorial at least once per semester.	curriculum managers	

Riverside College Halton action plan relating to the Summative review: January 2010						
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team agreed the following areas where it would be <b>desired</b> to take action:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to seek further development of work-based learning to benefit Foundation Degree students (paragraph 32)</li> </ul>	Identify a placement officer to support programme leaders in placing students in work placements.	October 2010	Senior Management Team	Employment of a placement officer	HE Manager	Placement Officer in place
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to seek a wider sharing of good practice in the use of the virtual learning environment to support learning opportunities (paragraph 44).</li> </ul>	Programme Leaders from Teacher Education and FD Theatre, Applied Drama and Creativity to disseminate good practice during HE meetings; Moodle training.	October 2010	HE Manager programme leaders for Teacher Education and FD Theatre, Applied Drama and Creativity E-learning Co-ordinator	All programmes to have course information on Moodle before start of the next academic year.	HE Manager	Intranet – course material on Moodle

**The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education**  
Southgate House  
Southgate Street  
Gloucester  
GL1 1UB

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

RG 580 04/10