# QAA

# Integrated quality and enhancement review

## Summative review

March 2010

Somerset College of Arts and Technology

SR72/2010

# 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 Somerset College of Arts and Technology carried out in March 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:

- programme teams contribute most effectively to validations and produce documentation of a high order

- the College is responsive to student needs, as exemplified by the Student One Stop service, the Student Council and the involvement of students in the annual programme monitoring process

- the annual self-evaluation documents produced by divisions are analytic, well focused and appropriately matched to the quality assurance of higher education in the College

- good practice in the divisions is now being disseminated very effectively across the College, as exemplified by the production of the Assessment Feedback Expectations and Good Practice Guide, the work of the advanced practitioners and the development of the Higher Education Community intranet site

- staff are exceptionally helpful and positive and make effective use of a range of teaching and learning methods that meet the diverse needs of students

- the range of online and paper-based information published for enquirers and applicants is well illustrated and of high quality.

## 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:

- improve the implementation of procedures in the College for ensuring a full response to external examiners' concerns

- complete its ongoing initiative designed to ensure that students on all programmes receive timely formal and informal feedback

- ensure the provision of appropriate information for students and for the wide range of employers and mentors who are involved in the management of work-based and placement learning, including the use of consistent terminology and details of approaches to learning.

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

- disseminate good practice in the production of critically focused annual programme monitoring minutes and associated action plans

- provide carefully targeted introductory information to new members of staff on the College's management of its higher education provision and the quality assurance processes underpinning academic standards.

# 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 Somerset College of Arts and Technology (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 Edexcel, Thames Valley University and the University of Plymouth. The review was carried out by Ms Helen Corkill, Mr Bob Millington, Mr Dan Morgan (reviewers) and Mr Robert Jones (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 partner institutions, 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 for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, subject and award benchmark statements, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and programme specifications.

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

4    The College is a medium-sized further and higher education college located in Taunton, the county town of Somerset. Its pleasant modern campus is within walking distance of the town centre. Student accommodation is provided in halls of residence on the outskirts of Taunton. The College dates its origins back to the art school founded in the wake of the 1851 Great Exhibition. Since 1989, the College has been in a fruitful partnership with the University of Plymouth, which is the awarding body for nearly all of its higher education qualifications. The College is organised into the following subject divisions: Technology; Arts and Design; Social and Professional Studies; Service Industries; and Construction, while the initial teacher training programmes are managed by the Academic Standards Unit. Higher education programmes are offered in all six curriculum areas. There are currently 981 higher education students at the College, comprising 736 full-time equivalents. The College's further education provision comprises 4,293 students. Its vision is that every learner will excel and develop their talents and potential for employment, independence and life.

5    The higher education awards at the College funded by HEFCE are listed below, followed by the number of full-time equivalent students.

## University of Plymouth

### Division of Arts and Design

- BA (Hons) Graphic Design (top-up) (32)

- FdA Graphic Design (58)

- BA (Hons) Fine Art (top-up) (31)

- FdA Fine Art (37)

- BA (Hons) Interior Textiles

- BA (Hons) Surface Design

- BA (Hons) Interior Textiles and Surface Design  (155)

- BA (Hons) Fashion

- BA (Hons) Fashion Textiles

- FdA Interior Spatial Design (12)
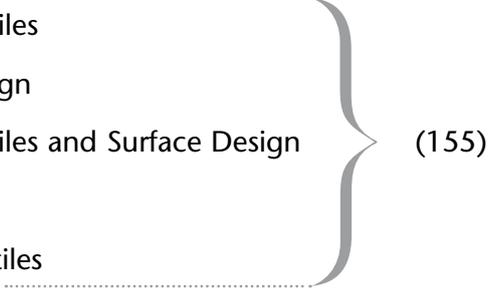
**Division of Service Industries**

- FdA Media Make Up (72)

- FdA and HNC Business with Management (22.5)

- FdSc and HNC Sport and Exercise Rehabilitation (16)

- FdA and HNC Sports Management and Development (17)

**Division of Technology**

- FdSc and HNC Computing (15)

- FdSc and HNC Engineering (Design and Manufacture) (19.5)

- FdSc and HND Engineering (Electronic Systems) (3.5)

- FdSc and HNC Multimedia and Internet Technologies (13.3)

- FdSc Enterprise in Computer Games Technology (28)

- FdEng and HNC Engineering (Automotive) (37)

- FdSc Transport Planning and Engineering (3)

**Division of Social and Professional Studies**

- FdA Early Childhood Studies (59)

- BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies (top-up) (23)

- FdA Health and Social Care Studies (34.5)

- BSc (Hons) Health and Social Care Management (top-up) (9.5)

- FdSc Applied Psychology (21)

**Academic Standards Unit**

- Certificate in Education (CertEd) (7.8)

- Professional Graduate CertEd Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) (12.3)

### Edexcel

**Division of Construction**

- HNC Civil Engineering (12.5)

- HNC Construction (22)

**Division of Service Industries in partnership with Wiltshire and Somerset College of Arts and Technology's Partnership (Armed Forces)**

- HNC Management (36.3)

### Thames Valley University

**Division of Technology**

- FdSc Computer Systems Management (10).

## Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

6 The College has developed a very close relationship with the University of Plymouth, and it is one of the oldest partner colleges. The higher education provision of the College has been almost exclusively validated by the University since 1989. The College also delivers some Edexcel programmes and a Foundation Degree validated by Thames Valley University in 2008.

## Recent developments in higher education at the College

7 In 2008, the newly appointed Principal restructured the College executive and senior management team. This resulted in the appointment of a Vice-Principal (Curriculum and Quality) responsible for the oversight of quality and standards for both further and higher education. This is a development fully in line with the College policy of creating internal pathways designed to foster the progression of further education students to higher education qualifications. In parallel, major changes in the management structure of divisions were made and a new Directorate of Enterprise was established. The College adopted a more centralised approach to coordinating the consistency of its higher education processes, underpinned by the appointment of a Higher Education Development Manager and the establishment of two higher education committees.

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

8 Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team and produced a statement based on the input from student representatives from all the divisions in the College. It was succinct and evaluative. During the review, the team held a productive meeting with representative students.

# 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?

9    Arrangements for managing higher education standards within the College are in keeping with the regulatory frameworks of the awarding bodies and the responsibilities set out in associated partnership agreements. The Vice-Principal (Curriculum and Quality) has executive responsibility for the strategic management of the provision and for ensuring that the policies and procedures of the awarding bodies are implemented. Other key roles are the Academic Registrar and Standards Manager, responsible for overseeing the quality assurance arrangements, and the Higher Education Development Manager, who coordinates activities at an operational level. On a day-to-day basis the programmes have traditionally been managed with a high level of autonomy in a divisional structure through the work of heads of division, curriculum area managers and programme leaders.

10   The College's self-evaluation makes clear the strengths of its divisional structure and the strong vocational ethos that has developed at subject level over the course of time. However, it also states that the College is adopting a more centralised approach to programme management, coordinating its systems and processes to ensure consistency, and auditing the standards and quality of the provision on a cross-college basis. This approach has been accompanied by the establishment of two new committees exclusively concerned with the higher education provision. The Strategy Implementation and Development Group, chaired by the Vice-Principal, provides strategic direction for the College's higher education and oversees the delivery of its Higher Education Strategic Plan. The Higher Education Operational Group, chaired by the Higher Education Development Manager, reports on operational issues to the strategic group, implements its recommendations and disseminates good practice. Staff confirmed the effectiveness of the Operational Group as a means of sharing good practice in maintaining academic standards across subject boundaries. The membership of the two committees is appropriate; there are clear reporting lines and they conduct business effectively.

11   In the context of the productive partnership that the College has developed with the University of Plymouth, articulated through its Colleges' Faculty, the University of Plymouth Colleges network, the College's management and committee structure provides a coherent framework for the management of its higher education that meets the requirements of the awarding bodies. Arrangements and responsibilities are fully understood by staff.

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

12   The Academic Infrastructure has become fully integrated into the College's working practices through the extensive involvement of programme teams and managers in validation. The University of Plymouth's validation procedures require the College to exercise significant responsibilities, especially through the management of initial planning proposals and participation in joint approval events. The preparation of validation documentation requires programme teams to use University templates that prompt attention to the relevant sections of the Academic Infrastructure. They are fully supported by their divisions, by the Higher Education Development Manager and by the Academic

Registrar. Programme teams contribute effectively to validations and produce documentation of a high order. The relevant sections of the Academic Infrastructure are being addressed, for instance, in the very full involvement of employers to support the approval of a new Foundation Degree, which aligns clearly with the advice in the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*.

13   The programme specifications drawn from different divisions (including the one prepared for the HNC Engineering programme) make appropriate use of relevant subject benchmark statements, the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*, and the FHEQ. Tutors are clearly familiar with the Academic Infrastructure and their knowledge continues to be updated by staff development events in the College. Further explanatory information and the *Code of practice* have also been posted on the recently developed Higher Education Community site on the College's intranet for easy access and further reflection.

**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?**

14   External examiners appointed by the awarding bodies report back on the academic standards of the programmes. They all confirm appropriate standards of assessment and student achievement. On the programmes validated by the University of Plymouth, quality assurance processes include a written response to the examiner's comments and the following up of identified actions in the annual programme monitoring cycle. Progress with actions in the divisions is monitored centrally by the Academic Registrar, with reference to a useful overview document initiated by the University of Plymouth Colleges network that summarises the external examiners' concerns. The College has adopted a similar procedure to monitor the responses on the HNC programmes validated by Edexcel. The team examined the way external examiners' reports were addressed by programme teams. It found a number of responses where the chief concerns and the proposed actions were clearly identified. However, the team also found a number of other responses across the divisions where the actions to be taken were not clear and some where significant examiners' concerns appear to have been overlooked or inadequately addressed.

15   All the College's higher education provision is subject to annual programme monitoring. Central to this process for the programmes validated by the University of Plymouth is an annual programme monitoring meeting, attended by programme team members and student representatives. The meetings include set agenda items requiring analysis of performance data, response to external examiners' concerns and consideration of the views of tutors and students on the management of the programme. The team noted some very effective sets of minutes produced from the annual planning meeting, especially from the Division of Social and Professional Studies. However, in about half the programmes the robustness of programme monitoring activities was weakened either by poor attendance of members at the monitoring meeting or the lack of adequate critical focus on the business in hand. The team considers that there is a need to disseminate good practice in the management of the meetings and in the production of critically focused minutes and associated action plans.

16   An important feature of the annual programme monitoring process in the College is the production of evidence and notes from team meetings that inform the University of Plymouth Colleges network Joint Board of Studies and, in turn, feed into the faculty's annual programme monitoring report. In parallel to this, each division produces a self-assessment report that draws on the information and data from the annual programme

monitoring process and the deliberations of the Joint Board of Studies. The self-assessment reports play a central part in the College's own internal self-assessment process and inform the production of its self-evaluation of the whole of its higher education provision, which is presented, by the Vice-Principal, to the Curriculum and Quality Committee of its Board of Corporation The annual self-assessment reports produced by divisions are analytic and well focused, and well matched to the quality assurance of higher education in the College.

17  Following the recent Developmental engagement in assessment, the College has developed its responses through group meetings overseen by the Higher Education Development Manager and reported back to the two higher education committees. The updated action plan provides evidence that good progress has been made against the conclusions of the Developmental engagement report in the relatively short time that has elapsed between the two reviews. A notable feature is the way in which good practice in assessment in the divisions has been identified and incorporated in the Assessment Feedback Expectations and Good Practice Guide and so drawn to the attention of all involved in delivering higher education in the College.

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

18  The College staff training and development policy includes a strong commitment to continuing professional development as an investment in staff, as exemplified in the aims and objectives of its recently revised Higher Education Strategy. As part of its new workforce development plan, higher education-themed events have now been included in the regular programme of staff development days and some of these have focused on academic standards. There are extensive opportunities for both professional and scholarly development through the University's Higher Education Learning Partnerships Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning programme, including a range of seminar and workshop events. The University of Plymouth Colleges network also regularly provides events in the College, some of which have been jointly organized and presented with the College. Staff development events on higher education are well attended.

19  New staff receive a careful induction, as well as the opportunity to work with an experienced mentor. For staff new to higher education the induction includes reference to assessment standards and the special quality assurance processes that underpin them. A very wide range of documents is available for them to consult to support them in their new role via the College's and the University's intranet sites. The team considers that, given the sheer volume of this information, it would be desirable for the College to provide new members of staff with carefully targeted introductory information regarding its management of the higher education provision and the quality assurance processes underpinning 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?**

20  The responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities and the consequent quality assurance processes reflect those for managing academic standards as described in paragraphs 9 to 11. There is a particular role for the recently created higher education committees and there is clear evidence that these groups have engaged with the quality of 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?**

21  The processes by which the College assures itself that it is fulfilling its obligations to its awarding bodies are described in paragraphs 14 to 16. Programme teams produce annual programme monitoring reports that fully address learning opportunities. External examiners' reports comment upon the learning opportunities, often very favourably.

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

22  As described in paragraphs 12 and 13, programmes are aligned with the Academic Infrastructure at the time of validation. The arrangements continue to be checked during the College's internal and external reviews. Following discussion of the Academic Infrastructure at a recent Operational Group meeting, student service team managers reported back that their provision aligned with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*. The team concludes that appropriate reference is being made to the Academic Infrastructure and that it informs the management of the quality of learning opportunities.

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

23  The College is currently working on a new Higher Education Learning and Teaching Strategy. It is in the form of a first working draft that is informed by the updated College Higher Education Strategy. It is designed to reflect the themes of vocational focus, working with employers offsite and making greater use of blended learning. It is focused on the concept of learner-centeredness and innovations in curriculum design and assessment, supported by new technologies.

24  Students the team met gave considerable praise to the staff, commenting particularly on their professional knowledge, industrial contacts, and their ability to teach and encourage learning. There is a broad consensus among students that the level of support is of a very high standard and that lecturers consistently go out of their way to provide additional support. Particular praise was given by part-time students to their tutors, who provide support outside their contractual time. External examiners regularly comment favourably upon the professionalism and dedication of programme teams. Despite student perceptions of problems in the staffing levels of some programmes, the professional diligence of staff continues to maintain and enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

25  Staff and students report that a range of teaching and learning methods are deployed that meet the diverse needs of students and the subjects being studied. These range from traditional lectures through to problem-based learning involving live briefs from industry.

There is a focus upon the links between theory and practice, with special reference to industrial applications, in keeping with the explicitly vocational purpose of the programmes and the preparation of independent learners. A number of external examiner reports comment favourably upon this feature of learning. For example, 'The nature of application to the real world of industry is a particular strength. Students have the opportunity to provide relevant and appropriate solutions to real problems. This develops excellent employability skills and provides students with an insight into the requirements of employers'.

26  The College emphasises the importance of employer engagement and there is evidence of significant integration with industry, ranging from site visits and guest lectures from industry experts to work placements. Staff reported that the current economic condition has made the interaction with industry more challenging and more creative uses are being made of work-related learning. However, the College acknowledges the need to continue to develop different approaches to work-based learning within Foundation Degrees. They should ensure that opportunities to identify and negotiate the intended learning outcomes of specific work-based activities are firmly embedded and that students are given the frameworks and models through which they can engage with reflective practice, in line with the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*.

27  The College's higher education assessment policy has been amended in response to the Developmental engagement. From this is derived the guidance booklet for staff, Assessment Feedback Expectations and Good Practice Guide. This document is clear, based upon good practice and attractively presented. It includes clear instruction on the feedback process on student work and identifies the importance of the concept of 'feeding forward'. This is designed to help students improve subsequent work and, in response to the Development engagement, stipulates the expectation that the 'maximum turnaround time for providing feedback is normally four working weeks'. There is evidence on one programme that students have been waiting well beyond this timescale. It was explained that staff illness and difficulties in providing cover were the cause of this deviation from policy and that satisfactory arrangements are now in place. On the same programme, the arrangement for the retrieval of work was in a very constrained period of time. This particular issue has now been resolved. Despite these instances, the majority of students interviewed and the student written submission reported that feedback, timing and the retrieval of work was not an issue and in most instances they received their work back well within the four week period. This represents a significant improvement since the Developmental engagement.

28  There is evidence of formative assessment in a number of modules, although it is acknowledged by the College that further work needs to be undertaken in the areas of both formative and summative feedback. Students endorse the benefits of interim guidance on assignments. This guidance is given differently by staff, with some related programmes in particular being very precise in limiting the stage in an assignment when they are prepared to give feedback. There is a danger that the precise interpretation of guidelines for these programmes is inhibiting the performance of students. In the limited cases cited in paragraphs 27 and 28, the team's concerns refer to the timely receipt of both formal and informal feedback.

29  Currently there are two advanced practitioners and it is planned for there to be one in each division. Their role is to develop and share good practice and to mentor less experienced staff. They have been instrumental in supporting the lesson observation initiative and ensuring that this is a supportive process. Staff involved in lesson observations commented favourably upon their supportive nature and identified a number of useful outcomes that had enhanced their teaching.

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

30   An effective tutorial system is in place that supports the learning needs of students with timetabled tutor sessions available on a weekly basis. All students are allocated a personal tutor and they reported that the largely open door arrangement offered by the staff was supportive of their needs. External examiners also expressed support for the level of care taken with students, particularly those with less conventional academic backgrounds, and the progress they had made. Students commented very favourably upon the Student One Stop service, which has Matrix accreditation. This service is centrally located and offers an accessible and inviting facility that provides advice and guidance on a range of issues, including finance, careers, personal issues and accommodation. In addition, the learning support team provides help for students with specific learning needs, such as dyslexia, physical disability or hearing impairment. Study skills support is also available through the learning resource centre, where students can access friendly and knowledgeable advice on a one-to-one basis.

31   The recently established learning resource centre forum is a welcome initiative as a means for students to influence access to resources at a time when they have expressed reservations about the changes to the provision. The provision of the Lead Senior Tutor is an additional support for students, with close attention paid to hearing and responding to the student voice. There is a Student Council that meets regularly and is attended by senior staff of the College. An action plan has been produced, 'You said, we did', that charts the progress of significant items.

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

32   Provision is made within all teaching staff contracts for professional development on at least 12 days a year. Some development takes the form of cross-college centrally organised events, but it can also be initiated by staff in the course of their appraisal. A particular focus for staff development has been the creative use of sustainability principles, which has resulted in some impressive outcomes, including changes to module content. Additionally, the Higher Education Operational Group is cited as a forum for good practice where staff can 'talk the same HE language'.

**How does the College ensure the sufficiency and accessibility of the learning resources the students need to achieve the intended learning outcomes for their programmes?**

33   There is an annual business development process that identifies and allocates resources based upon the plans of each division. These plans are presented to the Vice-Principal (Curriculum and Quality) and discussed by the senior management team. As part of the validation process, all the relevant staff curricula vitae are scrutinised and any additional space, facility or equipment resource requirements are highlighted. In deciding upon the allocation and evaluating the effectiveness of the resource base to support student learning, use is made of the various College-based quality assurance processes, including module feedback forms, annual programme monitoring reports and student generated feedback, including the Student Council. The College has recently partly centralised its learning resource centre to create an HE Study Centre. This includes a recently enlarged quiet study area and a range of PCs and Apple Mac machines. This change from the previous division-based system initially generated some negative feedback from students, but the College has responded to student concerns about access to the resources. Students commented that the improved environment of the HE Study Centre and the development of the Learning

Resources Centre forum will help them to overcome issues associated with access to resources. Students have expressed concerns over the lack of wi-fi provision in certain areas of the College. This is due to technical difficulties that the College staff are addressing.

**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?**

34  The College publishes a range of information for applicants. The user-friendly College website provides the most current information for students applying for higher education programmes. Written to a consistent template, the individual programme information is easily searchable, comprehensive and well illustrated. There are useful linking sections on the website for general advice about taking a degree and links through to the University of Plymouth. There are also well-produced and colourful paper sources of information for applicants, including an attractive, well-illustrated and informative higher education prospectus. A dedicated and helpful prospectus is available for part-time programmes, the majority of which are either higher education or professional programmes, and there is a useful mini fold-out prospectus intended primarily for UCAS applicants.

35  The higher education prospectus and the website are supported by a set of individual programme leaflets. Derived from the website materials, these leaflets provide a full range of information for applicants. In order to ensure consistency, programme information on the website is now the definitive source of applicant information.

36  The College produces a range of documents and materials for current students. All students are provided with a programme handbook at the start of their programme. Students confirmed that programme handbooks are available in paper-based format if required and, in addition, handbooks are posted onto the relevant programme section of the virtual learning environment. Most students found the programme handbooks clear and helpful and appreciated the comprehensive nature of the documents. In response to the Developmental engagement, the College is encouraging the development of module handbooks across the whole provision, while recognising that programme teams may wish to present such information in different formats. Students said that, when available, module handbooks are very useful but expressed a preference for paper-based copies.

37  The College is committed to expanding the range and use of its learning technologies and hosts a developing virtual learning environment. While the virtual learning environment is largely a document store at present, work is now underway to enhance it. Most programmes and students make use of the virtual learning environment and view it as a useful information and management tool. Students in areas such as computing also make use of more interactive functions for teaching and learning purposes, such as receiving audio-recorded feedback. The College has strategy groups for e-Learning and Integrated Learning Technologies to develop further the uses of technology-enhanced learning, and staffing is in place to assist tutors with the creation of subject-based resources for the virtual learning environment.

38  Students on programmes linked to the University of Plymouth confirmed that they make good use of the University's portal. An e-portfolio tool linked to the portal has been

provided by the University from September 2009 and is being trialled by one division. The use of the tool to date provoked a mixed reaction from students on different programmes. The University of Plymouth Colleges network produces a Blended Learning Newsletter, which is well received by the College staff.

39  The College has established an innovative dedicated intranet space, the higher education community site, to foster the sharing of information, ideas and good practice. The site contains a developing repository of materials on identified good practice drawn from the higher education sector, together with useful internal good practice guides. It is used by a wide range of staff connected to higher education, for example by careers and marketing as well as academic staff. Staff are enthusiastic about the site and consider it a very good way to obtain information. The site is also used interactively to facilitate discussion of higher education matters.

40  The College appreciates the need for clear information and guidance to be supplied to students, employers and mentors about workplace-based activities, as outlined in the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. While employer/mentor information sources are available for the majority of relevant programmes, some students are unaware of the existence of documentation for their particular programme. There is inconsistency in the information provided for employers and mentors, including a confusing proliferation of terminology used to describe workplace-related activities. Most of the information provided relates to roles and narrowly defined responsibilities rather than to the construction of learning processes and how employers can contribute to these.

**What arrangements does the College have in place to assure the accuracy and completeness of information the College has responsibility for publishing? How does the College know that these arrangements are effective?**

41  The College and its awarding bodies recognise the need to monitor the reliability of public information and have clear procedures to ensure regular reviews of relevant documentation and electronic information sources. The information available to students and other stakeholders is produced in accordance with partnership agreements between the college and its validating universities, and reflects the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

42  Information on the performance of students is collected from a variety of sources. Published data about programmes and students is assured for accuracy in accordance with the requirements of university partners through annual monitoring processes and examination boards. The College's own monitoring processes help to ensure the accuracy of data as an ongoing process through the year.

43  In response to the Developmental engagement, the College has recently reviewed its systems for checking the accuracy of all paper-based and electronic public information. Under the revised systems, responsibility for checking the accuracy of the prospectuses passes from the curriculum area managers through to final sign-off by the Vice-Principal (Curriculum and Quality) or the Director of Student Services and Marketing. Prior to prospectus sign-off, an external proofreader scrutinises the documents and the marketing department liaises with the University of Plymouth Colleges network for approval and comment. Responsibility for the accuracy of information on the College website lies with the Director of Student Services and Marketing. The Vice-Principal (Curriculum and Quality) oversees the management and review of material placed on the virtual learning environment by module leaders.

44  The College has developed formal procedures for ensuring the completeness of information given to all higher education students. The recent University of Plymouth Colleges network programme handbook template has been adopted for all Foundation Degrees and has also been adapted for Edexcel programmes. A range of practice is evident in the handbooks for the third-year programmes and for the franchised provision. A College template has been devised for the development of module handbooks, allowing for consistent information to be presented in flexible formats.

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

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

45  The Developmental engagement in assessment took place in April 2009. There were three lines of enquiry: the extent to which the College's quality assurance processes ensure that appropriate academic standards are maintained; the extent to which the quality of assessment feedback to students contributes to learning opportunities; and the extent to which the information available to students accurately informs them about assessment.

46  The Developmental engagement team identified a number of areas of good practice. There is a productive partnership with the University of Plymouth; comprehensive quality assurance procedures are in place; the engagement of programme teams with employers is encouraged; and there have been some innovative developments in assessment. The best examples of assessment are varied and linked with clear developmental feedback, and there are many employer-related assessment activities. There is an attractive higher education prospectus and examples of clear and comprehensive assessment documentation.

47  The team also made a number of recommendations. It considered that the College should develop further its formal assessment strategy; facilitate the sharing of good practice on a college-wide basis; ensure the inclusion of formative assessment across all programmes; and ensure the accuracy and completeness of information for students. The College might benefit from standardising the format and timing of feedback to students and improving the information about work-based learning and the use of the virtual learning environment.

## D  Foundation Degrees

48  The College offers a wide and growing range of Foundation Degrees. It strongly believes that they form an integral part of the curriculum pathways that enable progression from further to higher education studies in vocational areas. It is identifying new vocational routes and meeting the needs of higher-level apprenticeships, employees and those currently under-represented. The team confirms the care taken to support the approval of new Foundation Degrees, including the very full involvement of employers, which aligns clearly with the advice in the *Foundation degree qualification benchmar*k.

49  The College plans to develop more flexible, part-time and work-based provision to meet the needs of employers and employees and integrate blended learning in the delivery methodology, particularly associated with health and social care, design and technology. It is currently developing new Foundation Degrees in Leadership and Management and End of Years Care to meet identified needs.

50  The Foundation Degrees offered by the College cover the following subjects: Graphic Design, Fine Art, Interior Spatial Design, Media Make Up, Business with Management, Sport and Exercise Rehabilitation, Sports Management and Development, Computing, Computer Systems Management, Engineering (Design and Manufacture), Engineering (Electronic Systems), Engineering (Automotive), Multimedia and Internet Technologies, Enterprise in Computer Games Technology, Transport Planning and Engineering, Early Childhood Studies, Health and Social Care Studies, and Applied Psychology. This provision is closely integrated with the other higher education programmes by means of a common quality assurance process and the areas of good practice and recommendations apply equally to the Foundation Degrees. However, the following recommendation applied to Foundation Degrees especially.

The College is **advised** to take action to:

●  ensure the provision of appropriate information for students and for the wide range of employers and mentors who are involved in the management of work-based and placement learning, including the use of consistent terminology and details of approaches to learning (paragraph 40).

## E  Conclusions and summary of judgements

51  The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Somerset College of Arts and Technology'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, Thames Valley University and the University of Plymouth.

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

●  programme teams contribute most effectively to validations and produce documentation of a high order (paragraph 12)

●  the College is responsive to student needs, as exemplified by the Student One Stop service, the Student Council and the involvement of students in the annual programme monitoring process (paragraphs 15, 30, 31)

●  the annual self-evaluation documents produced by divisions are analytic, well focused and appropriately matched to the quality assurance of higher education in the College (paragraph 16)

●  good practice in the divisions is now being disseminated very effectively across the College, as exemplified by the production of the Assessment Feedback Expectations and Good Practice Guide, the work of the advanced practitioners and the development of the Higher Education Community intranet site (paragraphs 17, 27, 29, 39)

●  staff are exceptionally helpful and positive and make effective use of a range of teaching and learning methods that meet the diverse needs of students (paragraphs 24, 25)

●  the range of online and paper-based information published for enquirers and applicants is well illustrated and of high quality (paragraphs 34, 35).

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

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

- improve the implementation of procedures in the College for ensuring a full response to external examiners' concerns (paragraph 14)

- complete its ongoing initiative designed to ensure that students on all programmes receive timely formal and informal feedback (paragraphs 27, 28)

- ensure the provision of appropriate information for students and for the wide range of employers and mentors who are involved in the management of work-based and placement learning, including the use of consistent terminology and details of approaches to learning (paragraph 40).

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

- disseminate good practice in the production of critically focused annual programme monitoring minutes and associated action plans (paragraph 15)

- provide carefully targeted introductory information to new members of staff on the College's management of its higher education provision and the quality assurance processes underpinning academic standards (paragraph 19).

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

56  Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, and other documentary evidence and from its meetings with staff and students, the team concludes that 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.

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

**Somerset College of Arts and Technology action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010**

| 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: | | | | | | |
| • programme teams contribute most effectively to validations and produce documentation of a high order (paragraph 12) | Share good practice examples of documentation | June 2010 | HE Development Manager / Academic Registrar and Standards Manager/ | Production of robust comprehensive documents | HE Strategy Group / Academic Board | Approval Committee feedback |
| | Train and support team members to familiarise them with the validation requirements | July 2010 | | | | |
| | Ensure that programme teams adopt good practice | September 2010 onwards | Heads of Division | | | HE Strategy Group feedback |

**Somerset College of Arts and Technology action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010**

| Good practice | Action to be taken | Target date | Action by | Success indicators | Reported to | Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • the annual self-evaluation documents produced by divisions are analytic, well focused and appropriately matched to the quality assurance of higher education in the College (paragraph 16) | Further develop institutional responses to student needs via the Directorate of Student Services and Marketing and student involvement in the relevant committees and teams<br><br>Ensure full involvement of student representatives in the course team operations, including Annual Programme Monitoring | 2010-11 | Director of Student Services and Marketing / Lead Tutor<br><br>Curriculum Area Managers /HE Programme Leaders | Positive feedback by students through formal surveys and informal mechanisms | HE Operational Group / HE Strategy Group / Curriculum and Quality Committee ( Board of the Corporation)<br><br>HE Student Council and the Student Union | Annual report / contributions to the College's Self-Evaluation process |
| • good practice in the divisions is now being disseminated very effectively across the college, as exemplified by the production of the Assessment Feedback Expectations and Good Practice Guide, the work of the advanced practitioners and the development of the Higher Education Community intranet site (paragraphs 17, 27, 29, 39) | Ensure that analytic self-evaluation documents are produced and aligned with the HE Academic Infrastructure | October 2010<br><br>Review annually | Vice-Principal (Curriculum and Quality ) / Divisional Managers<br><br>Academic Registrar and Standards Manager | Suitable self-evaluation processes and documentation used by all divisions | HE Strategy Group | HE Strategy Group/ Curriculum and Quality Committee |

| Somerset College of Arts and Technology action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010 | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Good practice | Action to be taken | Target date | Action by | Success indicators | Reported to | Evaluation |
| • staff are exceptionally helpful and positive and make effective use of a range of teaching and learning methods that meet the diverse needs of students (paragraphs 24, 25) | Plan further sharing of good practice sessions.<br><br>Run good practice sessions as part of the workforce development programme.<br><br>Promote the use of the on-line HE Community site and guidance documentation | May 2010<br><br>2010-11<br><br>2010-11 | HE Development Manager / Advanced Practitioners | Positive feedback from the training and development sessions<br><br>Good use of and positive feedback about the HE Community site<br><br>Positive feedback on the guidance and support materials | HE Operational Group / HE Strategy Group | Evaluation of feedback provided |
| • the College is responsive to student needs, as exemplified by the Student One Stop service, the Student Council and the involvement of students in the annual programme monitoring process (paragraphs 15, 30, 31) | Encourage and support staff to adopt effective range of teaching and learning methods through:<br>- Advanced Practitioners, sharing good practice and supporting colleagues<br>- the workforce development programme<br>- the HE Community site | 2010-11 | Vice-Principal (Curriculum and Quality) | Innovative teaching and learning approaches adopted | HE Operational Group / HE Strategy Group / Curriculum and Quality Committee ( Board of the Corporation) | Annual report on teaching and learning / self-evaluation documents |

**Somerset College of Arts and Technology action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010**

| Good practice | Action to be taken | Target date | Action by | Success indicators | Reported to | Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Disseminate and promote the HE Teaching and Learning Strategy | September 2010 | | Positive student feedback about teaching and learning | | |
| | Further develop and evaluate the use of lesson observations and peer reviews to identify good practice for sharing | Termly | | Effective identification and sharing of good practice | | |
| • the range of online and paper-based information published for enquirers and applicants is well illustrated and of high quality (paragraphs 34, 35). | Evaluate the applicability and effectiveness of the materials in the prospectus and on the website | December 2010 | Director of Student Services / Marketing Manager | Positive feedback from stakeholders through formal surveys and informal mechanisms | HE Strategy Group | Review report on initial advice and guidance / contributions to the College's Self-Evaluation process |
| | Produce and disseminate high quality comprehensive guidance materials | April 2011 | | | HE Student Council | |

**Somerset College of Arts and Technology action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010**

| Advisable | Action to be taken | Target date | Action by | Success indicators | Reported to | Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The team agreed a number of areas where the College should be **advised** to take action: | | | | | | |
| • improve the implementation of procedures in the College for ensuring a full response to external examiners' concerns (paragraph 14) | Identify good practice and share this with team members<br><br>Monitor communications between course teams and External Examiners | September 2010<br><br>November 2010 | Academic Registrar and Standards Manager / Higher Education Development Manager<br><br>Curriculum Area Managers / Heads of Divisions | Appropriate detailed SMART actions to recommendations made by External Examiners<br><br>Positive feedback from External Examiners | Joint Board of Studies / HE Strategy Group | Audit of responses to External Examiners |
| • complete its ongoing initiative designed to ensure that students on all programmes receive timely formal and informal feedback (paragraphs 27, 28) | Review the expectations and good practice guide with teams | October 2010 | HE Development Manager / | All staff are familiar with and are adopting the principles and requirements in the expectations and good practice guide and related procedures | HE Operational Group/ HE Strategy Group/ Joint Board of Studies/ Curriculum and Quality Committee (Board of the Corporation) | Full staff awareness of the expectations and good practice guide and procedures |

**Somerset College of Arts and Technology action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010**

| Advisable | Action to be taken | Target date | Action by | Success indicators | Reported to | Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Monitor assessments | October 2010 | Programme Leaders | Positive student and staff feedback about assessment practices | HE Strategy Group | Positive module feedback on assessment practices<br>Positive student and staff views about assessment practices |
| | Obtain feedback from students and staff team members | Termly | Curriculum Area Managers | Assessment practices are reported on appropriately | | Effective contributions to the College's Self-Evaluation process |
| | Evaluate the feedback obtained. | Termly | Academic Registrar and Standards Manager | | | |
| | Review self-evaluation reports to ensure that assessment practices are fully reported on | December 2010 | | | | |

**Somerset College of Arts and Technology action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010**

| Advisable | Action to be taken | Target date | Action by | Success indicators | Reported to | Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • ensure the provision of appropriate information for students and for the wide range of employers and mentors who are involved in the management of work-based and placement learning, including the use of consistent terminology and details of approaches to learning (paragraph 40). | Identify good practice with key stakeholders and share this with team members | September 2010 | Higher Education Development Manager | Appropriate information identified collated and disseminated | HE Operational Group / HE Strategy Group | Audit of work-based learning documentation |
| | Produce an expectations and good practice guide | October 2010 | | | | |
| | Review and update documentation to ensure that it is adopting good practice | November 2010 | Curriculum Area Managers / Heads of Divisions | Positive feedback from key stakeholders | | Feedback from key stakeholders |
| | Audit samples of documentation to ensure compliance | December 2010 | Academic Registrar and Standards Manager / Higher Education Development Manager | | | |
| | Obtain feedback from key stakeholders on the applicability of information | February 2011 | | | | |

**Somerset College of Arts and Technology action plan relating to the Summative review: March 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 **desired** to take action: | | | | | | |
| • disseminate good practice in the production of critically focused annual programme monitoring minutes and associated action plans (paragraph 15) | Identify and share good practice | October 2010 | Academic Registrar & Standards Manager/ Higher Education Development Manager | Good practice demonstrated by all programmes | Joint Board of Studies/ HE Strategy Group | Feedback from the Joint Board of Studies |
| | Obtain feedback from members at the Joint Board of Studies | December 2010 | | | | |
| • provide carefully targeted introductory information to new members of staff on the College's management of its higher education provision and the quality assurance processes underpinning academic standards (paragraph 19). | Incorporate relevant information into divisional staff induction programme | September 2010 onwards | Head of Division/ Curriculum Area Manager | Relevant information available to new members of staff | HE Strategy Group | Feedback about the introductory materials by stakeholders |
| | Write an introductory guide and procedures for new Higher Education staff | April 2011 | HE Development Manager | | | |
| | Evaluate feedback from new team members and their mentors | Following induction | Curriculum Area Manager | | | |