



Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College

June 2010

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Preface

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

Purpose of IQER

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

The IQER process

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

Developmental engagement

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

The main elements of a Developmental engagement are:

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

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

Summative review

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

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

Evidence

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

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

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

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, 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 Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College carried out in June 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 College has been responsive to local educational and employment needs in establishing its higher education provision
- the investment by the College in the appointment of a Higher Education Personal Tutor has added value to the student experience, and the role underpins and supports the higher education provision
- the engagement between the College and Staffordshire University, as exemplified by the relationship between the University Link Tutor and Programme Area Manager and the College course leader, is fully collaborative and proactive
- the College recognises the importance of seeking students' views, and the use of posters is an effective means of feeding back to students
- the quality of the marketing and publicity material provided to students when selecting a course enables them to make an informed choice by making clear the expectations and demands that will be made of them.

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 **desirable** for the College to:

- consider further the implications of the *Code of practice* in developing appropriate policies, processes and procedures
- consider establishing a specific framework for higher education quality assurance and enhancement which is fully documented to demonstrate that higher education quality issues are fully addressed by the College
- give further consideration to supporting staff in meeting the expectations of the FHEQ as the College implements level 6 teaching
- consider reviewing the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy in order to articulate a specific higher education focus to support the management of continuing high-quality learning opportunities in the higher education provision
- consider how it might involve employers in contributing more formally to the operation and development of the work-based element of the courses, possibly by establishing an employers' forum

- review the Continuing Professional Development Strategy in order to provide staff development appropriate to higher education, which should include scholarly activity
- consider developing the virtual learning environment and its use in order to facilitate an interactive and student-centred approach to learning.

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 Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College (the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the College discharges its responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes which the College delivers in partnership with Leeds Metropolitan University and Staffordshire University. The review was carried out by Ms Maggie Carroll and Dr Robert Wilkinson (reviewers) and Dr Daniel Lamont (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, employers and partner institutions. 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 FD programmes delivered at the College.

4 Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College is a designated sixth form college which caters for students from 17 feeder schools and out-of-area schools, offering over 1,800 places for studying levels 1 to 3 on academic and vocational programmes. The College introduced part-time adult learning opportunities for post-19 learners in 2000. In the academic year 2008-09, the College enrolled over 1,020 adult learners on programmes from entry level to level 5. The current number of higher education students in 2009-10 is 156, all of whom are part-time.

5 In September 2009, the College's post-19 provision was retitled as 'Higher Education and Skills'. This move away from the title 'Lifelong Learning' was felt to be more reflective of the aspirations of the provision and the increasing changing balance of work within the post-19 sector, particularly from September 2010.

6 The College works in partnership with Leeds Metropolitan University and Staffordshire University to provide courses in education and early years. A Foundation Degree for Teaching Assistants was offered on a franchise basis, with college staff delivering the teaching. This has been replaced by a Foundation Degree in Education (Teaching Assistants). The last cohort from the Foundation Degree for Teaching Assistants will graduate in the summer of 2010. The College provides a 'learning location' for the BA (Hons) Education and the Foundation Degree in Young Children's Learning and Development, but does not contribute to either the teaching or the assessment. The College provides a range of support services for these learners, who are taught by staff appointed by Leeds Metropolitan University. There are 93.4 full-time equivalent students (FTEs) for the two Foundation Degrees and 8 FTEs for the BA (Hons) Education.

Validated by Leeds Metropolitan University

- FD in Young Children's Learning and Development

Validated by Staffordshire University

- FD in Education (Teaching Assistants)
- BA (Hons) Education - top up for FD in Education graduates

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

7 The College has formal partnership agreements with both of its awarding bodies. While the terms of the agreements vary in detail to reflect the nature of each, all are up to date, with the responsibilities of both partners clearly defined. There are clear mechanisms in place for maintaining a rigorous oversight of the provision. In particular, there is a very strong partnership between the College and Staffordshire University, which is exemplified by the provision of documentation by the University to support the partnership, the College's active participation in the Staffordshire University Regional Federation (SURF) and the arrangement of relevant staff training events.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

8 The College has been developing its portfolio of higher education programmes over the past few years. The College is in the process of terminating its agreement with Leeds Metropolitan University and is no longer recruiting students to the University's programmes. In future the College will work with a single partner university for HEFCE-funded provision. From September 2010, in addition to the courses listed above, in partnership with the Staffordshire University, the College will be offering the following new programmes: Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Studies; BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies, Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector. From September 2011, the College will also offer a Foundation Degree in Public Services. The College has formed a partnership with the 'best practice' organisation to offer students on the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies the option to work towards achieving Early Years Professional Status alongside their BA studies. This will provide a progression route for Foundation Degree graduates.

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 asked the students to consider their experience at the College and gave them guidance in doing this. The student response was collated and typed by the College. In addition, the team met with a representative group of students. The submission identified a number of issues that were useful to the team, and which were discussed in the meetings with students during the visit.

B Evaluation of the management of HEFCE-funded higher education

Core theme 1: Academic standards

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

10 The College's higher education provision has been purposely developed in consultation with its higher education partners to respond to local opportunities and needs. The College has characterised its higher education provision as 'on the doorstep' since it recognises historically low levels of educational aspiration within Tameside and students' reluctance to travel outside the borough. Thus the College has worked closely with local stakeholders such as Tameside Borough Council to identify the most appropriate higher education programmes and the target student population. In order to secure academic standards, the College has put in place processes for managing its higher education within the framework laid down by its partner institutions and it keeps these under constant review.

11 The College Principal is highly committed to the development of higher education, the governors are very supportive, and it was clear to the team that the College takes pride in its provision and is developing a strategic view. The Director of Higher Education and Skills has overall responsibility for the post-19 curriculum, which includes all aspects of the strategic development and operational management of the higher education provision. For programmes validated by Staffordshire University, each programme is led by a course leader, who reports to the Director of Higher Education and Skills, and a course team, which consists of the course leader and all the course tutors. The course team meets at least twice a term. The College is currently implementing a new management structure where two area heads are responsible for a number of course areas and report to the Director of Higher Education and Skills. Student representatives from the College and participating institutions take part in a conference at the University twice a year to facilitate student input into management and development of the award.

12 The Higher Education Development Group, which is chaired by the Higher Education Personal Tutor, plays a key strategic role in the initiation and development of the higher education curriculum. In addition, the Director of Higher Education and Skills sits on the Cross-College Quality Group, which is chaired by the Deputy Principal and meets fortnightly to consider issues relating to the standards and quality of all courses, including those associated with the higher education provision. The Student Tracking Operational Group, chaired by the Director of Higher Education and Skills, also monitors student admissions, retention and the financial viability of courses. The quality and standards of the higher education provision are monitored annually by the preparation of an annual Self Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan by the course leaders. This is informed by the results of lesson observations, external examiners' reports and the results of student surveys and focus groups. The Self Assessment Report is then discussed with the Senior Leadership Team and an external panel member, at a validation meeting, prior to agreement and approval of the Quality Improvement Plan. Implementation of this is monitored at a mid-year review with the Deputy Principal. The internal annual review cycle is effective in developing and enhancing the standards of the College's higher education provision. The team concludes that the College has in place appropriate mechanisms for managing higher education and monitoring standards but that as the provision expands these will need to be kept under review.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

13 The College's higher education provision is offered under partnership arrangements with its validating bodies, who are responsible for ensuring that their processes and procedures take into account the Academic Infrastructure and *Code of practice*. The College staff are fully aware of and engage with the Academic Infrastructure through participation in processes and procedures such as validation events, moderation meetings and assessment boards.

14 Following a Developmental engagement recommendation to formalise use of the Academic Infrastructure and consider the implications of the *Code of practice*, one of the responsibilities of the newly appointed Higher Education Personal Tutor is to review and update the College's policies and procedures to ensure that higher education is fully embedded. The College has raised awareness of the Academic Infrastructure through staff development events and staff continuing professional development activities. However, as the College expands and assumes greater responsibility for its higher education provision it would be desirable for it to consider further the implications of the *Code of practice* in developing appropriate policies, processes and procedures.

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?

15 The overall responsibility for academic standards rests with the awarding bodies. The roles and responsibilities of each institution are clearly defined in the Memorandum of Cooperation and Service Level Agreement. Staffordshire University is now the College's main higher education partner and the operation of the partnership, together with plans for future developments are reviewed annually at the Annual Strategic Review Meeting with the University. As a consequence the College is now developing a Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector and a Foundation Degree in Public Services.

16 Leeds Metropolitan University is responsible for the academic standards of the Foundation Degree in Young Children's Learning and Development, and the roles and responsibilities of partners are clearly defined in the Memorandum of Collaboration. The programme is delivered by staff from the University, with the College providing teaching accommodation, access to learning resources and both pastoral and learning support. Following an essential recommendation arising from the Developmental engagement, a new agreement has been put into place that clearly defines the responsibility of each institution and enables the College to continue to support students. The Higher Education Personal Tutor now liaises with the University and provides support and guidance for students. The Foundation Degree in Young Children's Learning and Development is reviewed annually and a member of the College staff participates in the annual review meeting. Although the relationship with the University has been strengthened, the relationship has been terminated by mutual agreement.

17 Ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of Staffordshire University programmes rests with the Staffordshire University Academic Board and its subcommittee, the Quality Development Committee, which is responsible for validation events and the monitoring of annual review reports. Responsibility for operational management of the programmes rests with the Staffordshire University Business School, which delegates authority to the College. For all franchised Foundation Degree programmes, the University provides the academic framework and assessment framework and the College provides all the teaching, learning and assessment facilities, and the student support services. The BA (Hons) Education is currently delivered by the University, but the College is negotiating to deliver half of the teaching during the 2010-11 academic session.

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18 The College liaises with the University through the University Link Tutor and the Programme Area Manager, who provides initial development and annual monitoring support for the collaboration. This link is highly effective in facilitating delivery of the programme and is valued by both staff and students. The course leader from the College attends the Leadership and Management meetings at the University three times a year. These meetings are attended by all participating colleges offering the award and provide an open forum for discussion of quality and development of awards in partnership with the University. The University is currently encouraging colleges to become more autonomous and helping them to develop a higher education ethos.

19 The College is advised by Staffordshire University about the minimum qualifications and experience expected of staff teaching on its programmes and staff curricula vitae must be approved by the Dean of the Faculty of Business and Law, and ultimately by the University Development Committee. All course and module handbooks, teaching and assessment materials are provided by the University, and course handbooks provide details of university policies relating to mitigating circumstances, academic appeals and academic misconduct in addition to assessments criteria. Students stated that they were clear about what is expected of them and how their assessments will be graded.

20 College staff participate in module introduction meetings run by Staffordshire University for all participating institutions eight times a year. These meetings provide a forum for discussion of the module objectives, mode of delivery and assessment strategy. After each module has been delivered, staff attend module standardisation meetings prior to assessment marking. Moderation reports confirm that the standard and quality of assessment and feedback provided by the College are appropriate and consistent. The College proactively engages in these events alongside other participating institutions. This ensures that staff are well supported and promotes a detailed, rigorous and consistent culture of assessment that ensures a high level of consistency.

21 All Staffordshire University awards are subjected to rigorous annual monitoring, evaluation and periodic review processes. The annual course monitoring reports are usually prepared by the College in October-November, after students have completed the academic year and external examiners' reports have been received by the University Quality Improvement Service. These reports are sent to the Director of Higher Education and Skills within 10 working days of receipt. The annual course monitoring report, together with the agreed action plan, the Link Tutor's report and the external examiners' reports are considered at a meeting of the Faculty Monitoring Committee which is attended by the College's course leader. The external examiner for the Foundation Degree in Education (Teaching Assistants) confirms that assessment is fair and consistent and that the standards demonstrated by students are comparable with those of students on similar courses at other institutions. Any quality issues raised by the external examiner or through annual course monitoring are discussed informally with the course team and actions arising are monitored by the Student Tracking Operational Group or Cross-College Quality Group. As the provision expands, the College may wish to consider establishing a specific framework for higher education quality assurance and enhancement which is fully documented in order to demonstrate that higher education quality issues are fully addressed by the College.

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

22 College staff are contractually obliged to undertake staff development, which is coordinated and managed by the Continuing Professional Development Manager. The internal staff development programme is informed by the outcomes of lesson observations and self-assessment reports. Staff can apply for funding to attend external events by submitting an application, which must be approved by their line manager. Having attended the event, staff are expected to disseminate the information internally. To facilitate this, the College operates Teaching and Learning Sets where four departments meet to share and

discuss the results of staff development activities. Staff commented that applications for staff development are rarely refused.

23 Staffordshire University provides a clear framework of meetings and development events to ensure the maintenance of academic standards. These are well supported by College staff and enable them to engage with the broader Staffordshire University Regional Federation. Availability of these events is communicated by email to course leaders. The proactive participation of staff in module introduction and standardisation meetings, board meetings and staff development opportunities ensures the maintenance of high and consistent academic standards. The University has recently offered College staff the opportunity to enrol on an MA Education programme. This has been well received, with 17 College staff taking up the offer in 2009-10, including two of the three staff members who are currently involved in teaching in higher education courses. This provides an excellent opportunity for staff to engage in intellectual debate and consider the theoretical framework within which their working practices operate. Participating staff confirmed that the knowledge gained from this was extremely useful and had informed their teaching. The team agrees that this is a valuable development.

24 The Director of Higher Education and Skills participates in the Greater Manchester Higher Education in Further Education Consortium, which meets three times a year to provide an opportunity for institutions to discuss issues pertinent to collaborative work, including academic standards. This provides a useful forum for networking with colleagues from other institutions and sharing good practice. At present, the College's arrangements for continuing professional development are effective but, as it implements level 6 teaching, further consideration will need to be given to supporting staff in meeting the expectations of the FHEQ.

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

Core theme 2: Quality of learning opportunities

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

25 The responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities and the consequent processes reflect those for managing academic standards as described in paragraphs 10-12. Teaching staff are clear about their responsibilities in these processes, and how an issue focusing on teaching and learning would be addressed through them. The Cross-College Quality Group oversees the operation of the partnership.

26 The commitment to developing high-quality higher education provision at the College is reflected in an emerging higher education culture. The College Principal is driving forward positive initiatives to support this, which include new appointments to lead and manage higher education teaching and learning initiatives, and the formation of a Higher Education Development Group which is responsible for developing curriculum initiatives and facilitating ongoing strategic thinking.

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

27 The partnership agreements with both awarding bodies detail particular expectations of the College in terms of staffing, general resource provision, annual monitoring and staff development. As noted in paragraphs 11-21 the strong partnership with Staffordshire University is enabling College staff increasingly to take responsibility for managing the quality of learning opportunities through the College's active participation in the opportunities for liaison provided by the University. The Higher Education Personal Tutor plays a major part in supporting and facilitating liaison with the partner institutions (see paragraph 14). The College's investment in this post will facilitate future developments as well as supporting the current provision. The Cross-College Quality Group oversees and reviews the operation of the partnerships with higher education institutions. The team found that this was an effective arrangement. Scrutiny of evidence confirms that these processes enable the College to ensure that not only are the learning opportunities appropriate but that they are of a high standard which enables the students to progress academically and intellectually.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

28 The course handbooks articulate the defining characteristics of Foundation Degrees and how these relate to the particular learning needs of students. The Inclusive Learning Manager, reporting to the Assistant Principal, in conjunction with the Additional Learner Support Team, provides effective support for students with disabilities. Work-based learning is securely embedded in all the provision, and personal development planning is situated within a structured framework throughout.

29 The precepts of the *Code of practice* on work-based learning are fully embedded in all the courses. Students reported that their learning is shaped and enhanced through the work-based tasks and assessments, which clearly link theory with practice. Module handbooks set out the opportunities for learning in the workplace clearly and students are required to keep samples of their responses to the tasks in their professional development portfolios. The handbooks show how these tasks will augment students' learning and also provide a record of their continuing professional development.

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

30 The College provides teaching for the programmes validated by Staffordshire University and provides support, facilities and accommodation for the Leeds Metropolitan University programme. It has recently updated its generic Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy, which sets out to provide an enriching learning experience for students, the fostering of a culture which encourages all staff to aspire to outstanding teaching and learning, and the implementation of staff development to support quality improvement and reflective practice. This is monitored by such means as the College Self Assessment Reports, the Quality Improvement Plan, the lesson observation programme, student feedback, and review of assessment data. However, the team concludes that the College should consider reviewing the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy in order to articulate a specific higher education focus to support the management of continuing high-quality learning opportunities in the higher education provision. This would provide key points of reference for staff, students and other stakeholders in situating the particular experience of its higher education students within relevant sections of the *Code of practice*.

31 The College has a Lesson Observation Policy detailing a rigorous programme of ungraded and graded lesson observations. Its stated aim is to guarantee that all students receive the highest quality education in the best environment that can be provided throughout their time at the College. The policy strives to raise and maintain high standards of teaching and learning through giving and receiving feedback on teaching and learning, setting targets with colleagues to build on strengths and address areas for improvement, and identifying and transferring good practice.

32 All staff are observed formally at least once a year by a trained observer. The observations are thorough and offer effective feedback to staff. The observations are centrally stored and then collated by the Curriculum Director with a responsibility for teaching and learning, who uses the outcomes to inform the Performance Management Review where each year staff discuss their progress with their line manager and agree targets for further development. The Director of Higher Education and Skills will take action, as appropriate, with staff in the course teams to facilitate more immediate development. Evidence from the lesson observations show all sessions achieved the highest grading, and external examiners have commented on the improvement in students' grades. This indicates that the policy is effectively achieving its aims. However, in relation to the emerging higher education culture in the provision, the College might wish to consider how it can usefully capture the development of graduate-level skills and knowledge within the observation process.

33 Excellent quality in teaching and learning contributes to the success of the students on the higher education courses. Students confirmed the high quality of the teaching and the expertise of the staff. They appreciate the way their learning relates to their own practice and enhances it. They reported that, through the range of approaches to learning and teaching, they have become confident, knowledgeable and independent professionals who have been challenged academically throughout their courses.

34 Students commented enthusiastically on the accessibility of all staff and how they value the prompt responses to their questions and concerns. There is appropriate follow-up action. For example, students raised a concern about progression opportunities on completing the Foundation Degree in Education (Teaching Assistants). The matter was investigated and addressed promptly by the College and Staffordshire University. Students on the Staffordshire University courses also reported that tutors are encouraging, and give detailed and effective feedback on their work which enables them to progress. Tutorials are helpful in developing their learning. End-of-module evaluations, carried out by the University, confirm high levels of student satisfaction with the quality of academic guidance and feedback.

35 The Learner Involvement Strategy (2008), monitored and updated by the Assistant Principal (Student Services), reflects the College's desire to capture students' views as part of its continuous drive to improve the quality of the student experience. The importance placed on the value of the student voice in the College ensures that all staff and students have responsibility for the strategy's success. Its three-strand approach - individual needs and involvement, collective involvement, and creating a culture of involvement - provides a critical framework for improvement. The strategy makes explicit its responsibility to adult learners and there is clear and informative feedback to them through the newsletter, notice board and individual staff as appropriate. Additionally, in this current year, higher education students on the Foundation Degree in Education (Teaching Assistants) were asked for commentary on their programmes. The College responded with its 'What you said/Our response' feedback strategy, which reflects the strength of the commitment to closing the loop and valuing the student voice in promoting a high-quality educational experience. The shared belief in the importance of students' views and the effective means of feeding back to students by means of posters constitute good practice.

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36 All students on the Foundation Degree in Education (Teaching Assistants) are expected to work in schools for a minimum of 10 hours each week. In the workplace, students are allocated a work-based mentor, who is briefed by both the University and College at a mentor training event and issued with a mentors' handbook which details their roles and responsibilities. The University provides an induction for work-based mentors and a bespoke area in its virtual learning environment. Strong interactive links with employers support the quality of learning opportunities on the courses. All students must take part in work experience during their courses, and, as most are employed, effective employer support is well managed and secured through workplace visits and invitations to employers to attend events at the College.

37 Mentor selection and subsequent work with students is facilitated by employers. Given the significance of the role of employers, the College may wish to consider how it might involve employers in contributing more formally to the operation and development of the work-based element of the courses, possibly by establishing an employers' forum.

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

38 Academic and personal support for students is well managed and comprehensive. The team identified three strands: academic tutoring through the module tutors and by Learning Resource Centre staff, additional learning support coordinated by the Inclusive Learning Manager, and personal tutoring now offered by the Higher Education Personal Tutor. The College achieved the Matrix standard in 2008 in recognition of the quality of information, advice and guidance given specifically to adult learners. The College provides specific induction (including a newly devised Higher Education Induction Pack) for higher education students, which helps them to gain maximum benefit from their learning opportunities.

39 Academic tutoring is an entitlement for all students and clearly identified in the course handbooks. The role includes recording all meetings with students to monitor progress, conducting at least one tutorial each term and other meetings as deemed necessary. The record of meetings to discuss the progress of the higher education students is transferring to an online system which will facilitate this record keeping and improve access to the records by designated tutors. This will enhance the current paper-based system. In addition to this formal requirement, tutors give regular support before each taught session begins, and have frequent email contact with the students. Students reported that staff members are always available for discussion of their work and that this enables them to make effective progress.

40 All students on the Foundation Degrees complete a Professional Development Portfolio as an ongoing commitment to their own reflection and learning. This form of personal development planning is embedded in the course as a whole and is an assessed element of two modules at levels 4 and 5. The portfolio reflects the good practice recommended by QAA for personal development planning in all degree courses. The assessment of this portfolio enables tutors to identify students' needs.

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

41 The College has a concise generic continuing professional development strategy which ensures a planned and logical approach to individual and college-wide development. It sets out to ensure that staff have access to high-quality, meaningful and effective staff development which meets their needs and the needs of the College. Through this, staff are enhancing their knowledge, skills and understanding.

42 Staff development is managed by the Continuing Professional Development Manager, who also holds the budget for all staff development activity. As noted in paragraph 22, the Manager identifies development needs arising from the lesson observations and incorporates this into the staff development planning cycle. The staff development programme is developed from information contained in Self Assessment Reports, Quality Improvement Plans and from individual staff requests. A detailed annual report is produced of all staff development undertaken. For example, members of staff have recently been enabled to update their knowledge and application of safeguarding legislation, and one tutor developed work on experiential learning through activity provided through the Higher Education Academy.

43 The team noted that the current Continuing Professional Development Strategy is generic and does not fully take account of the College's higher education provision. Given this development, which includes planned shared teaching at level 6, it will be necessary to review the strategy in order to provide staff development appropriate to higher education, which should include 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?

44 Provision of resources is ensured at the point of validation of the university awards as identified in the partnership agreements. Thereafter, resources are allocated through a college-wide process arising from the annual planning cycle, which is informed by local, regional and national priorities. The higher education course teams identify resource needs, directing these via the course managers to the Director of Higher Education and Skills, who is the budget holder for higher education resources.

45 The College has a good range of facilities to support the higher education programmes, and from September 2010 this will include a dedicated higher education teaching room. The classrooms designated for the higher education courses are well appointed and have informative student-led displays, often of learning undertaken in the workplace. The Learning Resource Centre is well stocked and supports the higher education programmes effectively. This includes extended opening hours on two evenings each week, which will be further extended, with qualified or experienced members of staff on hand to advise students. This is welcomed by the students.

46 The services that contribute further to the quality of learning opportunities include information skills sessions to assist students in accessing the online resources provided by the universities and one-to-one research sessions. These are much valued by the students, who identified the development of research skills as an important part of their academic progression. The Learning Resource Centre also provides a range of support guides, which have proved invaluable to some students new to higher education, for example the well-received, clear and helpful referencing guide. The Learning Resource Centre Manager is the designated link for higher education students and as such is available in person and via email to respond to enquiries and requests to meet the flexible requirements of part-time students.

47 Students are able to access online resources at the partner institutions. They are supported well in this respect by the Learning Resource Centre Team, which offers class-based and one-to-one support. Students especially value the help they receive in accessing online publications to support their independent enquiries. Students may take out cameras, voice recorders and laptops on loan in order support their learning.

48 There are two virtual learning environments which students use extensively, offered and managed by the higher education institutions. These are uploaded in advance and provide all the learning materials for tutors' use. Students can access the material either from the College or from home and report that they find this straightforward and useful. They welcome the fact that all the course information they need is accurate and clear on the system. The virtual learning environments are currently mainly a repository for course materials and guidance from the partner institutions. In addition, College tutors are able to have work uploaded onto the systems where appropriate. Staffordshire University and the College staff are currently re-evaluating earlier trials for using the system more interactively. The team welcomed this since, as the higher education provision develops to include level 6 teaching, the College should consider developing the virtual learning environment further to facilitate an interactive and student-centred approach to learning.

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?

49 Under the terms of the partnership agreements the College has responsibility for publishing information relating to recruitment and marketing of its higher education provision. This is achieved through a series of open evenings, newsletters, brochures, leaflets and advertisements in the local press, including local authority payslips. The College has been congratulated by Staffordshire University on the quality of its marketing and publicity material, which has been used as exemplar material within the network. All information is available in hard copy and via the College's website and the course leaflets are concise, accurate and informative. Students from both Staffordshire University and Leeds Metropolitan University stated that information provided at open evenings and taster sessions was very informative and gave them a good insight into the course material that they would be studying. The high quality of the marketing and publicity material provided to students when selecting a course enables them to make an informed choice by making clear the expectations and demands that will be made of them.

50 The College is also responsible for publishing information relating to learning resources and learner support services. The Learning Resources Centre publishes an excellent guide to Harvard referencing, which is clear and concise. Students confirmed that they were fully aware of what was expected of them. Student Services publishes a range of leaflets on learner information and student counselling, which are student orientated and made available during induction.

51 All course handbooks, module handbooks and assessment briefs are produced by the respective universities. However, the College is able to make additions where necessary to provide the local context. The College has responsibility for disseminating this material and ensuring that students understand all documentation relating to their studies. This is achieved with a high degree of success, with students stating that the course handbooks were useful documents that contained all the relevant information, including the assessment criteria. Course and module information is also available via the universities' virtual learning environments. Students are introduced to the virtual learning environments during induction and make regular use of them during their studies.

52 The College website underwent redevelopment in December 2008 and was relaunched in January 2009. It is up to date, accurate and informative, and provides an excellent introduction to the College and its higher education provision. The home page provides a specific link to the Higher Education and Skills Centre, which also enables students to download the latest prospectus and newsletters. Within this section there is a specific button for higher education courses, with links to individual course areas providing relevant, up-to-date information for prospective students. The website also provides details of College facilities and services and enables instant communication through a Twitter feed. Information on the College website is maintained and updated by the Website Developer, who is in close contact with the College's Information Officer to ensure that all material is up to date, accurate and complete.

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

53 The College Information Officer has overall responsibility for the publication of all marketing material. However, the Higher Education Personal Tutor, in conjunction with relevant course team members, also plays a significant role in the production of marketing and promotional materials relating to the College's higher education provision, and the arrangement of marketing and recruitment events. All marketing and promotional material must be approved by the relevant university prior to use.

54 The team concluded that the College, in conjunction with its university partners, has thorough systems in place for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of published information.

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

C Summary of findings from the Developmental engagement in assessment

55 The Developmental engagement in assessment took place in March 2009. The review included one institutional nominee. The lines of inquiry agreed with the College took the form of the following topics: the College's management of its partnerships to support assessment of students to enable them to reach an appropriate level of achievement; the College's support for individual learners to enable them to achieve; and the College's contribution to information, advice and guidance to improve students' opportunities for success. The scope of the Developmental engagement encompassed two Foundation Degrees (validated by Leeds Metropolitan University and Staffordshire University), and a BA (Hons) Education top-up degree for Foundation Degree students.

56 The Developmental engagement team identified several elements of good practice. There is active participation by the College in robust procedures to ensure consistency of module delivery and assessment across the Foundation Degree in Education network. The College liaises effectively with Staffordshire University in the development and improvement of the assessment process. The College's management of Foundation Degree in Education (Teaching Assistants) students in the workplace facilitates the integration of work-based activities into the assessment process. There is comprehensive provision of student support, which enables students to achieve and to undertake assessment effectively, and, in connection with this, the College intends to appoint a dedicated higher education support tutor. The College has a College Information Officer and produces published material to

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support adult students. The quality of information provided to potential higher education students is high and there are comprehensive arrangements for its dissemination.

57 The team's report considered that it was essential for the College to identify its precise roles and responsibilities with regard to its partnership agreement with Leeds Metropolitan University in order to enable it to manage effectively and carry out its obligations in respect of the maintenance of academic quality and the enhancement of the student experience. The team felt that it would be desirable to formalise the use of the Academic Infrastructure and consider the implications of the *Code of practice* for the College with regard to its internal processes and higher education developments. It would also be desirable to ensure that students are fully aware of the policy and procedures for moderation, return and feedback of formative assessment and to provide a specific higher education induction pack to new Foundation Degree students as part of the ongoing developments and improvements to the induction process.

D Foundation Degrees

58 The College currently offers three Foundation Degree programmes, which take close account of the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* published by QAA. Strengths include close relationships with employers, high-quality student support and the incorporation of skills development in programmes. Foundation Degrees provide enhancement opportunities for students to extend work-based learning and see the relevance of linking this to theory. All the Foundation Degrees draw on and complement the students' skills from their current employment. In total, 156 students are enrolled on the programmes.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

59 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form 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, Leeds Metropolitan University and Staffordshire University.

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

- the College has been responsive to local educational and employment needs in establishing its higher education provision (paragraph 10)
- the investment by the College in the appointment of a Higher Education Personal Tutor has added value to the student experience, and the role underpins and supports the higher education provision (paragraphs 14, 27 and 38)
- the engagement between the College and Staffordshire University, as exemplified by the relationship between the University Link Tutor and Programme Area Manager and the College course leader, is fully collaborative and proactive (paragraphs 18 and 20)
- the College recognises the importance of seeking students' views, and the use of posters is an effective means of feeding back to students (paragraph 35)
- the quality of the marketing and publicity material provided to students when selecting a course enables them to make an informed choice by making clear the expectations and demands that will be made of them (paragraph 49).

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

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

- consider further the implications of the *Code of practice* in developing appropriate policies, processes and procedures (paragraph 14)
- consider establishing a specific framework for higher education quality assurance and enhancement which is fully documented to demonstrate that higher education quality issues are fully addressed by the College (paragraph 21)
- give further consideration to supporting staff in meeting the expectations of the FHEQ as the College implements level 6 teaching (paragraph 24)
- consider reviewing the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy in order to articulate a specific higher education focus to support the management of continuing high-quality learning opportunities in the higher education provision (paragraph 30)
- consider how it might involve employers in contributing more formally to the operation and development of the work-based element of the courses, possibly by establishing an employers' forum (paragraph 37)
- review the Continuing Professional Development strategy in order to provide staff development appropriate to higher education, which should include scholarly activity (paragraph 43)
- consider developing the virtual learning environment and its use in order to facilitate an interactive and student-centred approach to learning (paragraph 48).

63 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.

64 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.

65 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.

| Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 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: | | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College has been responsive to local educational and employment needs in establishing its higher education provision (paragraph 10) | <p>Review contact with stakeholders (mainly schools, nurseries and local authority) and develop new contacts to support future developments</p> <p>Invite employer membership of Higher Education (HE) Development Group</p> <p>Visit School Workforce Development Team; increase to twice yearly visit</p> | <p>Review and update termly</p> <p>Invite employer member to term 2 meeting</p> <p>Visit to School Workforce Team by December 2010</p> | <p>Review of contacts; heads of area with information, advice and guidance/ marketing staff</p> <p>Invitation from head of area</p> <p>Visit to School Workforce Team by head of area</p> | Continued healthy uptake of present courses and viable groups for new courses | Director and Senior Leadership Team (SLT), HE Development Group | Through cycle of monthly line management meetings, monthly team meetings, at the HE Development Group, through employer surveys and through mid-year and end-year review linked with Self Assessment Report (SAR) Quality Cycle |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the investment by the College in the appointment of a Higher Education Personal Tutor has added value to the student experience, and the role underpins and supports the higher education provision (paragraphs 14, 27, 38) | <p>Two new heads of area to hold role of HE Personal Tutor to expand support offered</p> <p>All students to be informed who their personal tutor is for 2010-11</p> <p>Record tutorials on Pro-Monitor</p> | December/ April/July | Heads of area | <p>All students will report feeling supported and well guided on programme</p> <p>Pro-Monitor will reflect guidance and support offered</p> | Director of HE and Skills | Through cycle of mid-year and end-year Quality Cycle SAR and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the engagement between the College and Staffordshire University, as exemplified by the relationship between the University Link Tutor and Programme Area Manager and the College course leader, is fully collaborative and proactive (paragraphs 18, 20) | <p>Newly appointed heads of area to maintain good links with University staff and attend Leadership and Management meetings and team meetings for Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Studies, Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector and Foundation Degree in Education (Teaching Assistants)</p> <p>Heads of area to ensure all appropriate staff attend required University meetings eg module introduction</p> | Follow University calendar | Heads of area | Effective relationship will ensure smooth module delivery resulting in positive feedback from evaluation, students and University | <p>Director of HE and Skills</p> <p>University partners</p> | Through cycle of monthly line management meetings, monthly team meetings |

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| | and standardisation | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College recognises the importance of seeking students' views, and the use of posters is an effective means of feeding back to students (paragraph 35) | <p>Update notice board for HE</p> <p>Consolidate use of Staffordshire online (or paper) end-of-module evaluation. Issue and respond to cross-college surveys in line with College cycle</p> <p>Issue 'What you said/Our response' regularly</p> | <p>At module end</p> <p>And in line with College cycle</p> | <p>Heads of area and module tutors</p> | <p>Regular feedback to and from students and responses implemented and communicated through notice board and newsletter</p> | <p>Director</p> <p>Deputy Principal (Chair of Quality Group)</p> <p>HE Development Group</p> | <p>Through cycle of mid-year and end-year Quality Cycle SAR and QIP</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the quality of the marketing and publicity material provided to students when selecting a course enables them to make an informed choice by making clear the expectations and demands that will be made of them (paragraph 49). | <p>Ensure all current programme documentation contains accurate information about the programme aims and learning outcomes</p> <p>Ensure all students receive copies of updated information</p> <p>Institute periodic checking and sign-off to ensure all documentation is updated accurately</p> <p>Follow University protocol on checking of marketing information</p> | <p>Each time material is updated</p> | <p>Director</p> <p>Heads of area</p> <p>Information Officer and Marketing Officer</p> | <p>All programme documentation contains accurate information</p> | <p>Director</p> <p>HE Development Group</p> | <p>Through cycle of mid-year and end-year Quality Cycle SAR and QIP specifically SAR and QIP for marketing</p> |

| Desirable | Action to be taken | Target date | Action by | Success indicators | Reported to | Evaluation |
|---|---|-------------|--|--|------------------|--|
| The team agreed the following areas where it would be desirable to take action: | | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider further the implications of the <i>Code of practice</i> in developing appropriate policies, processes and procedures (paragraph 14) | Heads of area to lead on updating and training staff involved in HE on <i>Code of practice</i> | May 2011 | Heads of area | All HE staff more aware of relevance of <i>Code of practice</i> | Director | Through cycle of mid-year and end-year Quality Cycle SAR and QIP |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider establishing a higher education-specific framework for quality assurance and enhancement which is fully documented to demonstrate that higher education quality issues are fully addressed by the college (paragraph 21) | Quality Group to consider how the college Quality Cycle can be adapted to ensure a HE-specific framework. To begin with: SAR/QIP, lesson observations and surveys and/or learner experience sessions | May 2011 | Director of HE and Skills Quality Group | A visible HE Quality Cycle including lesson observations, surveys, SAR and QIP | Deputy Principal | Through cycle of mid-year and end-year Quality Cycle SAR and QIP |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • give further consideration to supporting staff in meeting the expectations of the FHEQ as the College implements level 6 teaching (paragraph 24) | <p>Offer continuing professional development (CPD) and opportunities to enable and support level 6 teaching</p> <p>Offer flexible timetabling to accommodate scholarly activity</p> <p>Proposal to be taken to SLT to review weighting of HE teaching</p> | <p>July 2011</p> <p>January 2011</p> | <p>CPD Manager</p> <p>Director</p> <p>Director</p> | <p>Appropriate standards of teaching on level 6</p> <p>Appropriate timetabling of staff teaching HE</p> | <p>Director and Deputy Principal</p> | <p>CPD evaluation lesson observation outcomes, Quality Group analysis, HEI reports and through cycle of mid-year and end-year Quality Cycle SAR and QIP</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consider reviewing the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy in order to articulate a specific higher education focus to support the management of continuing high-quality learning opportunities in the higher education provision (paragraph 30) | <p>Suggestion to be discussed at first HE Development Group</p> | <p>January 2011</p> | <p>Head of Directorate</p> | <p>Possible success criteria – change to existing policy, a new policy or adoption of a university policy - TBC</p> | <p>SLT</p> | <p>Through cycle of mid-year and end-year Quality Cycle SAR and QIP</p> |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider how it might involve employers in contributing more formally to the operation and development of the work-based element of the courses, possibly by establishing an employers' forum (paragraph 37) | <p>Invite employer representatives to HE Development Group</p> | <p>December 2010</p> | <p>HE Development Group chair</p> | <p>Representatives from employers on HE Development Group</p> | <p>Director and Quality Group</p> | <p>Through cycle of mid-year and end-year Quality Cycle SAR and QIP</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> review the Continuing Professional Development strategy in order to provide a framework for specific higher education staff development which would include provision for scholarly activity (paragraph 43) | <p>To review CPD offer to include support for level 5 and level 6 teaching and learning</p> <p>(Also as stated earlier - SLT to consider weighting of HE teaching to allow for scholarly activity)</p> | <p>July 2011</p> | <p>Director CPD Manager</p> | <p>Updated CPD offer</p> | <p>SLT</p> | <p>Annual CPD records</p> |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> review the Continuing Professional Development Strategy in order to provide staff development appropriate to higher education, which should include scholarly activity (paragraph 43) | See above | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider developing the virtual learning environment (VLE) and its use in order to facilitate an interactive and student-centred approach to learning (paragraph 48). | College staff to contribute to University Blackboard site for relevant modules/programmes and create college-specific areas within the University VLE - Blackboard (Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Studies in first instance) | January 2011 | Heads of area | College-specific materials and activities on University VLE for programmes where this is possible | Director | Through cycle of mid-year and end-year Quality Cycle SAR and QIP |

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