QAA

Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

October 2009

Newcastle College

SR45/2009

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 Newcastle College carried out in October 2009

As a result of its investigations, the Summative review team (the team) considers that there can be **confidence** in Newcastle College's (the College) 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 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 taken a strategic approach to the management and administration of its higher education, exemplified by the Higher Education Directorate, with agreed higher education procedures being effectively implemented by staff at all levels

- there is a range of rigorous internal monitoring procedures, including peer review, continuation audit and annual planning days, which are used effectively to identify and disseminate good practice and promote consistency

- there are extensive moderation processes in place within the College to ensure the rigour of student assessment

- there is a focused and comprehensive approach to staff development, including an extensive programme of development events and active College support for research and scholarly activity; together these contribute to ensuring that the teaching staff profile is well matched to the needs and expectations of higher education

- the College has a productive relationship with employers who are extensively involved in the higher education provision and help to ensure that the programmes are fit for purpose and reflect the needs of industry in the region

- the College has effectively adapted its established further education procedures to ensure their effectiveness for the higher education provision, notably in relation to teaching observations and student support

- the College has engaged in a coherent and systematic approach to the development of electronically published information; this has resulted in well-designed websites and a dynamic College virtual learning environment with a dedicated higher education area.

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:

- build on existing effective local practices by agreeing a college-wide standard for the management of student work placements

- enhance current arrangements further by introducing a standard College system for formally agreeing and signing off published information documents.

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 Newcastle College (the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the College discharges its responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes which the College delivers on behalf of Edexcel, Kingston University, Leeds Metropolitan University, the University of Central Lancashire, the University of Newcastle, the University of Northumbria, the University of Sunderland and the University of Wales. The review was carried out by Mrs Catherine Fairhurst, Mr Bob Millington and Mrs Sally Powell (reviewers), and Mr David Lewis (coordinator). Ms Penny Blackie attended as Coordinator for the College visit in place of Mr David Lewis.

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, 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 'Group' is a large national provider of education, skills and training. It comprises Newcastle College, located in Newcastle upon Tyne, Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College in West Lancashire, and the Intraining Group Limited. The merger of the two colleges took place in 2007. The management of the College is overseen by an executive team. Each of the colleges is a division of the Newcastle College Group and has a divisional head with the title of college principal.

5   The College has a long tradition of offering higher education and is now the largest further education sector provider of higher education nationally. In 2009-10 the College has about 40,000 students enrolled, including nearly 3,000 HEFCE-funded higher education students, with all but 92 based at the College. About 1,800, or some 62 per cent, are full-time. Of more than 150 staff who teach on higher education programmes, the majority teach across higher and further education. The higher education awards are offered in eight major pathways, seven of which are subject groupings: applied science; art and design; business and care; construction, automotive and land-based studies; the lifestyle academy; the performance academy; and teacher education. The eighth pathway comprises the provision at Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College.

6   The higher education awards that are funded, directly or indirectly, by HEFCE are listed as follows with their awarding bodies and recruited students for 2009-10.

	Students Full-time	Part-time	Total

Edexcel

Construction automotive and land-based studies

HNC Civil Engineering Studies	0	64	64
HNC Construction	0	33	33
HND Civil Engineering	0	16	16

Kingston University

Applied science

Foundation Degree (FdEng) Aircraft Engineering	55	0	55

Leeds Metropolitan University

Applied science

BSc (Hons) Management of Engineering Technologies (Completion Award)	0	18	18
BSc (Hons) Applied Computing (Completion Award)	7	0	7
BSc (Hons) Electrical and Electronic Engineering (Completion Award)	1	0	1
FdSc Analytical Chemistry	0	16	16
FdSc Applied Scientific and Investigative Methods	5	0	5
FdSc Computer Forensics	16	2	18
FdSc Computing	20	3	23
FdSc Computing for Games and Interactive Media	14	0	14
FdSc Electrical/Electronic Engineering	6	54	60
FdSc Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Support	0	5	5
FdSc Laboratory Technician Skills	0	6	6
FdSc Mechanical/Manufacturing Engineering	20	59	79
FdSc Multi Skill Engineering	4	26	30
FdSc Network and Security Technologies	6	13	19
FdSc Process Engineering	1	0	1
FdSc Renewable Energy Technologies	8	3	11
FdSc Sub Sea Engineering	4	17	21
FdSc Web Development and Management	13	0	13
MSc Computing	*	*	*

Art and design

BA (Hons) Creative Practice (Completion Award)	84	6	90
BA (Hons) Design Management (Completion Award)	3	0	3
FdA Animation	43	0	43
FdA Commercial Photographic Practice	64	39	103
FdA Contemporary Ceramic Practice	11	14	25
FdA Creative Advertising	18	2	20
FdA Editorial and News Media Design	2	0	2
FdA Fashion	60	0	60
FdA Fine Art	48	0	48
FdA Fine Art Practice	0	39	39
FdA Graphic Design	46	0	46
FdA Interior Architecture	47	0	47
FdA Textile and Surface Design	25	0	25
FdA Textiles	31	0	31
FdSc Web Design	11	0	11

Business and care

BA (Hons) Business Management (Completion Award)	16	19	35
FdA Administration in the NHS	0	39	39
FdA Business Management	108	52	160
FdA Human Resource Management	0	22	22
FdA Leadership and Management	0	43	43
MA International Business	-	-	-
MA Management	-	-	-
BA (Hons) Children and Young Persons (Completion Award)	0	8	8
BA (Hons) Public Service Management (Completion Award)	21	0	21
BA (Hons) Social Care (Completion Award)	12	0	12
FdA Administration in the NHS	0	17	17
FdA Children and Young Persons	76	49	125
FdA Community and Public Services	37	8	45
FdA Management in Adult Care Settings	0	11	11
FdA Social Care	26	28	54

Construction automotive and land-based studies

FdSc Management of Construction Technologies	3	13	16

Lifestyle academy

BA (Hons) Hospitality and Culinary Management (Completion Award)	0	17	17
BA (Hons) Sport Management and Development (Completion Award)	5	3	8
BA (Hons) Travel and Tourism Management (Completion Award)	11	0	11
BA (Hons) Airline and Airport Management (Completion Award)	0	12	12
BSc (Hons) Applied Health and Exercise Science (Completion Award)	15	2	17
BSc (Hons) Applied Sports Coaching Science (Completion Award)	22	0	22
BSc (Hons) Sports Therapy (Completion Award)	15	0	15
BSc (Hons) Professional Practice Complementary Therapies (Completion Award)	5	0	5
FdA Airport and Airline Management	2	23	25
FdA Applied Sport Management and Development	18	3	21
FdA Beauty Therapy and Spa Management	11	3	14
FdA Culinary and Patisserie Arts	2	0	2
FdA Hospitality Management	19	5	24
FdSc Applied Health and Exercise Science	18	0	18
FdSc Applied Sports Coaching	31	0	31
FdSc Coaching for Participation and Sports Performance	36	0	36
FdSc Community Based Exercise	0	1	1
FdSc Complementary Therapies	15	13	28
FdSc Physical Activity and Health Promotion	5	0	5
FdSc Sports Training and Rehabilitation	45	2	47

Performance academy

BA (Hons) Contemporary Dance (Completion Award)	9	0	9
BA (Hons) Contemporary Acting (Completion Award)	29	0	29
BA (Hons) Contemporary Directing (Completion Award)	8	0	8
BA (Hons) Events Management (Completion Award)	12	0	12
BA (Hons) Music Enterprise (Completion Award)	28	0	28
BA (Hons) Television and Media Practice (Completion Award)	12	0	12
FdA Acting	52	0	52
FdA Contemporary Dance	48	0	48
FdA Creative and Cultural Industries	-	-	-
FdA Events Management	38	0	38

FdA Live Music and Theatre Production	33	0	33
FdA Musical Theatre	61	0	61
FdA Television and Media Practice	32	0	32

Teacher education

BA (Hons) Lifelong Learning and Professional Development	0	6	6
Certificate of Education Teaching in Lifelong Learning Sector	0	250	250
MA Lifelong Learning and Professional Development	0	3	3

Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College

FdA Children and Young Persons	0	8	8
FdSc Business Information Systems	*	*	*
FdSc ICT Support	12	0	12
FdSc Sport Training and Rehabilitation	10	0	10

University of Newcastle upon Tyne

Performance academy

FdA Music Production	77	0	77
FdA Popular Music	59	0	59

University of Central Lancashire

Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College

Certificate in Education	0	57	57

University of Sunderland

Applied science

BSc (Hons) Clinical Physiology	0	17	17

Performance academy

BMus (Hons) Jazz, Popular and Commercial Music	4	0	45

University of Wales

Business and care

MBA	*	*	*

Note: columns marked with * indicate that the student numbers for 2009-10 are not yet known.

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

7   The Newcastle College Group has formal partnership agreements with seven awarding bodies for its higher education programmes. All of the agreements are current and in place. The arrangements, including the responsibilities of the College, vary according to each partnership. To promote consistency across the wide spread of higher education provision, the College has established its own overarching higher education mechanisms and procedures. The partnership with Leeds Metropolitan University, which accounts for just over 85 per cent of the provision through the Higher Education Scheme, gives the College significant delegated responsibility. This responsibility includes the implementation of some areas of the University's regulatory framework through College procedures. The agreements with the University of Newcastle and the University of Sunderland give the College responsibility for the design, delivery, assessment and reporting of the programmes. For those with Edexcel, the University of Central Lancashire, University of Wales and Kingston University, the College's responsibilities are limited to delivery, assessment and reporting. The partnership with Kingston University is new for 2009-10, while that with the University of Northumbria has now ceased recruiting. The partnership with the University of Central Lancashire was established with Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College prior to the merger in 2007.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

8   The higher education provision has grown by 40 per cent to nearly 3,000 students over the past three years, mainly through the development of Foundation Degrees with its principal awarding body, Leeds Metropolitan University. The growth in higher education has been accompanied by the development of a distinct management and reporting structure specifically for higher education, including a directorate, academic board and a framework of policies. The merger with Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College resulted in the addition of a small amount of higher education comprising education programmes and Foundation Degrees. The College has recently made the decision to reconfigure its academic pathways. This involves the creation of separate pathways of business and enterprise, and health and community services, from the existing pathway in business and care. The College has made an application for Foundation Degree Awarding Powers and the scrutiny of this is being undertaken by QAA during 2009 and 2010.

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 team. This written submission offered a range of well-focused student reflections and was used extensively by the team over the period of the review. While the submission represented a good range of student views, the timetable for its development prevented contribution from some student groups. The submission was produced by the College Higher Education Project Facilitator, drawing on the outcomes of a student focus group at the College and a questionnaire given to students at Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College. In addition, students and recent graduates made useful contributions to the review in meetings with the team 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 takes a robust, strategic approach to the management of its substantial higher education provision, evident in the establishment of a dedicated Higher Education Directorate. The Directorate has overarching management responsibility for all of the higher education provision and is accountable to the College executive team and corporation. To strengthen and streamline decision-making processes in the context of the recently expanded provision, a separate Higher Education Academic Board was set up in 2008. The Board has two subcommittees, one for quality and standards and the other for learning, teaching and assessment. A higher education task group, with wide representation, has been set up within each college. The work of these groups focuses on specific topics and is contributing to the development of common systems and the sharing of good practice. Taken together, the elements of the structure offer a coherent and comprehensive framework for the management of the higher education provision.

11 Higher education management roles are clearly articulated, including key functions within the Directorate, which include the Director of Higher Education, Head of Higher Education Curriculum, Higher Education Quality Manager and the Higher Education Academic Registrar. Staff have a clear understanding of the directorate functions, as well as the various higher education procedures and structures. Many aspects of the day-to-day management of programmes are devolved to pathway and award leaders, and to pathway committees. Operations at the pathway level are effectively coordinated from the directorate. Academic pathway staff also benefit from good administrative support within their schools.

12 The scrutiny of committee minutes confirms that the various higher education committees are progressing business effectively. There are clear reporting lines between committees to facilitate the communication of information throughout the system.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

13 The Academic Infrastructure has been systematically and successfully embedded within College procedures, as claimed in the self-evaluation. Validation procedures require the production of programme specifications and that reference be made to subject benchmark statements, the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark statement* where appropriate, and FHEQ-level descriptors. The College has undertaken a systematic mapping exercise to check the provision against the precepts of relevant sections of the *Code of practice*. Key precepts from the *Code of practice* have been integrated within College operational documents, such as the assessment policy and the standard agenda for examination boards. Routine use is made of the *Code of practice* to enhance programmes and their currency. For example, the work-based module that is common to all Foundation Degrees was promptly updated following publication of the revised *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* in 2007.

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 While the regulatory frameworks of each awarding body determine academic standards, the College has recently developed its own comprehensive quality framework for higher education, including quality assurance procedures. The framework has been designed to accommodate the requirements of all the awarding bodies, as well as the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure, within a clear academic structure and single overarching set of procedures. The procedures are contained within the higher education quality reference manual, which includes an explicit higher education assessment policy, annual internal monitoring and review procedures, and an ongoing programme of staff development, all designed to ensure and enhance academic standards. The electronically published higher education staff handbook provides a coherent overview of the quality assurance procedures. Although still undergoing development, these core documents are already making a valuable contribution to the consistent and rigorous approach to academic standards.

15 Representatives of awarding bodies confirmed that the College is meeting its responsibilities in respect of the partnership agreements and that appropriate academic standards are being safeguarded. These views support the outcomes of recent reviews by awarding bodies, such as the University of Sunderland quinquennial review in 2007 and the Leeds Metropolitan University revalidation and re-recognition review in 2009. The Leeds Metropolitan University review re-approved the provision without conditions while recognising a range of good practice.

16 The College has extensive delegated responsibilities for course approval on the higher education scheme validated by Leeds Metropolitan University. The records of programme approval events indicate that they are conducted rigorously and consistently, with due regard for *Code of practice* expectations in respect of external inputs.

17 The College produces annual review reports for its awarding bodies, covering pathways and programmes. Those sampled during the review offered evidence of a self-critical approach with well-focused action plans. In addition to the requirements of the awarding bodies, the College has introduced a range of internal monitoring procedures to enhance the quality mechanisms and the provision. These include an exhaustive peer review of the whole provision, continuation audit and annual planning days, which focus on different aspects of the provision. The additional procedures are used to identify and disseminate good practice and promote consistency.

18 External examiner reports supplied for the review are consistent in confirming that the standards and quality of the provision are sound and student achievement is at an appropriate level. The examiners also report effective College procedures including well-organised examination committees. The use of common agendas for the boards, and of chief examiners to overview the scheme on the Leeds Metropolitan University awards, helps ensure consistency across the provision. The College has robust procedures for receiving and responding to external examiner reports. For example, the College organised a comprehensive response following the reporting of concerns in 2007-08 about the over-marking of level 6 work on some BA completion awards. The College actions included a staff development event on the marking of dissertations led by an outside consultant and the redrafting of the relevant assessment criteria.

19   The Developmental engagement in assessment reported the appropriateness of assessment standards and practices. The team is able to confirm that the good practice in respect of thorough moderation processes applies across the range of higher education provision and awarding bodies. The processes contributing to the good practice include internal programme level and interdisciplinary moderation, and a college-wide consistency panel. The recommendations from the Developmental engagement have been rigorously addressed and documented.

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

20   The College has a comprehensive and structured approach to higher education staff development which supports the achievement of academic standards. The participation by staff in a wide range of internal and external development events is extensive and has included sessions on a range of assessment related activities, as reported in the Developmental engagement. Staff recognise the value of these professional development opportunities, in particular the bringing together of different academic disciplines to network and share good practice.

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

Core theme 2: Quality of learning opportunities

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

21   The general responsibilities and arrangements for managing and reporting on the quality of learning opportunities are those described for academic standards in paragraphs 10 and 11. They are comprehensive, clearly defined in the higher education staff handbook and are understood and implemented by academic and administrative staff. The performance of student cohorts is routinely monitored and reported on within the College's annual planning and review processes. Trends and any issues are drawn out and reviewed in the annual reviews produced for the awarding bodies.

22   The management of learning opportunities is fully integrated into the College's annual planning days and the subsequent annual review. The reviews are comprehensive and include consideration of student achievement and progression, student feedback, learning and teaching, and resources, including the virtual learning environment. They result in the routine identification of good practice and the production of action plans.

23   The College gives careful attention to regional economic strategies and engagement with employers, in line with the expectations of the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark statement*. It has close relationships with employers who are extensively involved in the development and delivery of programmes to ensure they are fit for purpose and fulfil the needs of industry in the region. Employers provide placements, projects and practical skills training, as well as making contributions as visiting lecturers. In a meeting with the team, graduates endorsed the strong vocational focus of the programmes, as well as the employer engagement.

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

24 The general arrangements through which the College ensures it is fulfilling its obligations to its awarding bodies are clear and effective, as described in paragraphs 14 to 18. Learning opportunities, including resources, are systematically considered as part of programme approval and review events.

25 An important aid to ensuring the quality of learning opportunities, as well as academic standards, is the well-organised administrative support provided at college, school and pathway levels. There is a higher education administrator within each school. The administrators meet regularly as a group and also liaise directly with administrators at the awarding bodies. This encourages consistency of practice within the College, as well as helping to ensure that the requirements of awarding bodies are up to date and met.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

26 The team confirms the claim in the self-evaluation that staff are engaging extensively with the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure in order to underpin the delivery and monitoring of learning opportunities across the programmes. The design and approval of programmes take account of the FHEQ, relevant sections of the *Code of practice* and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, as does routine monitoring and periodic review.

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

27 The College has an effective set of arrangements in place to assure itself about the quality of teaching and learning. The teaching observation process is well matched to the needs and expectations of higher education. It has been purpose-designed by building on the well established and robust further education scheme, and introducing elements such as peer review and coaching.

28 Work experience, including placements, is an important part of students' learning, particularly on the Foundation Degrees. The College has clear arrangements for work placements with good supporting documentation including placement handbooks. While the arrangements are effective, there is the potential for variable quality as a consequence of differing interpretations between academic schools. It is desirable that the College considers building on the existing practices by introducing a common standard for the management of work placements.

29 There is a variety of interrelated mechanisms, both formal and informal, through which students are able to feed back on the quality of their learning opportunities, including teaching and learning. Formally structured feedback is elicited through a number of focused internal surveys, as well as the National Student Survey. Student feedback is analysed, evaluated and considered at various levels, including by the Higher Education Academic Board. Feedback from the National Student Survey indicates a high level of satisfaction among students with the quality of their teaching.

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

30   The Developmental engagement in assessment reported that high levels of personal and academic support are available to students. The support arrangements have been developed from those established for further education to ensure they reflect better the needs of higher education students. They include support for independent learning and dissertation writing, as well as library tutorials. The support arrangements are built around the tutorial system, which incorporates named personal tutors and a clear entitlement for full-time students. Tutorial records are monitored to provide evidence of effectiveness and inform school tutorial plans. The arrangements for part-time students are less prescribed. However, students confirmed in discussion that their needs are met and indicated that communication with staff through the virtual learning environment was convenient and useful.

31   The College has a clear and successful institutional commitment to widening participation, with student support arrangements that reflect this. It has a range of central learning, financial and pastoral support services. Higher education students with additional learning needs have access to good support. The College Student Services have been awarded the Matrix standard, the national quality standard for information, advice and guidance. Each term Learner Support Services hold learner forums for students with learning difficulties or disabilities to discuss their experiences and needs.

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

32   The College has a focused and comprehensive approach to staff development that has included a wide range of continuing professional development activities to support its higher education provision. These activities have systematically addressed academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, including the Academic Infrastructure. During 2009-10, some 30 staff received funding for professional updating, including a significant number of part-time staff. Staff development opportunities have been further extended recently by the introduction of an annual higher education conference.

33   The team confirms the College's claimed commitment to actively support individual research and scholarly activity. This, together with the extensive continuing professional development, contributes to ensuring that the teaching staff profile is well matched to the needs and expectations of higher education. Over 30 per cent of staff have a postgraduate qualification including 16 per cent at master's level, and 4 per cent with doctorate qualifications. One member of staff was included in the University of Sunderland submission for the most recent Research Assessment Exercise.

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

34   The College has made a major financial investment in the development of high quality accommodation and other physical learning resources to support the vocational orientation of the Foundation Degree programmes. The management of resources involves each school and support service in rigorous and well understood annual and three-yearly business planning cycles. The physical learning environment supports the College's commitment to widening access to higher education, with good access and learning aids for students with a range of disabilities.

35 Library and related learning resources are of high quality with a robust system for the allocation of books. There is a dedicated higher education area in the College library which has benefitted from substantial investment in electronic resources for higher education students. The provision is supported by an e-librarian. This is part of a systematic development of electronic resources, including the comprehensive and improving virtual learning environments. The Information Learning Resources team regularly audit web use and hardware is replaced on a rolling basis every four years.

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?

36 The College is responsible for publishing a wide range of public information, much of it to guide staff and students involved in the higher education provision. Most published information is in hard copy and electronic forms, and includes a higher education prospectus, programme specifications, course leaflets and appropriate policy and procedure documents. A full list of the information published for students is maintained. The College is listed with the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service and has recently completed its widening participation strategic assessment for publication on the HEFCE website. The College has undertaken a detailed mapping exercise to ensure that published information reflects the precepts of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*.

37 The College sets out to support the entire 'student journey' by providing students with accurate and complete published information about their studies. To this end, it has engaged in a coherent and systematic development of its electronically published information. This has resulted in informative and user-friendly websites for both colleges and a well-considered virtual learning environment. The latter is regularly updated to ensure currency and includes an area specifically for higher education, with sections for students and staff. It also provides a useful alphabetical listing of policies and procedures. The prospectuses and outline course information available on the website are enhanced by more detailed information concerning assessment and regulations on the virtual learning environment. Together, these sources ensure that students have access to a wide range of relevant information about the College and their awards. They also offer clear information about the function of awarding bodies and progression opportunities.

38 Students are provided with a generic handbook that contains information about relevant College policies, learning support and welfare provision. This is supplemented at induction by programme information specific to the award for which they are registered. An extensive range of guidance documents is available in the staff area of the virtual learning environment. It includes the Staff Higher Education Handbook, the Quality Reference Manual, the Higher Education Strategy, the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Strategy, and the Higher Education Assessment Strategy.

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?

39 Responsibilities for public information reflect the various partnership agreements with awarding bodies. The accuracy and completeness of course information is initially considered during the approvals process and, where appropriate, at annual review. As part of the enhancement of its websites, the College has introduced a system of routine currency audits to ensure the accuracy of information.

40 The College has substantial delegated responsibilities for published information, reflecting its well-established relationships with partner awarding bodies. Senior staff and higher education groups, including directors of schools, the Higher Education Academic Board, the Higher Education Directorate and the Higher Education Task Groups, may variously take overarching responsibility for assuring the quality of published information. Higher education managers take responsibility at curriculum level. The higher education administrators also contribute to ensuring consistency, helped by their cross-school meetings and their links with counterparts within the awarding body institutions. While the various arrangements are working satisfactorily, it would be desirable to enhance them further by introducing a single college-wide system for formally agreeing and signing off published documents.

41 For the Leeds Metropolitan University higher education scheme, individual pathway materials are sampled periodically for accuracy and completeness. In the case of other higher education partners, links are primarily at curriculum level and the monitoring and approval of information is undertaken by nominated representatives on a case-by-case basis. Higher education managers take responsibility at curriculum level for published information.

42 Admissions staff follow clearly defined procedures for checking the Universities and Colleges Admission Service entry profiles and ensuring compatibility between College and awarding body entries. The procedures reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*.

43 Continuous improvement of published information takes place through a variety of internal and external consultation processes. As part of its preparation for IQER and Foundation Degree Awarding Powers, the College undertook its own extensive peer review of the higher education provision in 2007. This led to enhancements to the quality and consistency of published information, including an electronic template for key publications and the substantial upgrading of websites.

44 Student feedback on the quality of published information is routinely sought through the College's internal surveys and through the National Student Survey. The findings are considered by the Higher Education Task Group and feed directly into the quality cycle. The student written submission included a positive endorsement of the College websites and the higher education prospectuses. The submission indicated that the needs of mature students might be addressed better in publicity materials, while some students would appreciate more detailed information, including module details. The College has responded promptly by addressing these suggestions in the most recent edition of the prospectus.

The team considers that reliance can be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information 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 October 2008. It covered all of the higher education provision apart from that provided at Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College with which Newcastle College had recently merged. The engagement activities gave priority to the awards of Leeds Metropolitan University within the Higher Education Scheme; these accounted for some 90 per cent of the provision, or over 2,300 students. Three lines of enquiry were agreed with the College and ensured that all IQER core themes could be addressed. These took the form of the following questions: How do moderation processes help the College assure itself as to the standards of its higher education provision? How well is feedback relating to assessment utilised to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes? How well does the College assure itself of the accuracy and completeness of the information provided to students about assessment?

46 The Developmental engagement team identified an extensive range of good practice across all three Core themes. An overarching feature is the clearly focused and strategic approach taken by the College to the management of its higher education. This takes appropriate account of the requirements of its awarding bodies and the Academic Infrastructure. A college-wide peer review process has served as a catalyst for enhancement, including the overarching Higher Education Assessment Policy. Thorough moderation and feedback procedures are in place, supported by effective staff development and College tutorial arrangements. Staff and students have access to a wide range of published guidance on assessment policies and procedures produced in a variety of formats to meet different student needs. Some specific subject-related good practice was also identified. This included the guide to internal moderation produced in music and performing arts, and the innovative use of the virtual learning environment on some programmes to provide course information and post-prompt generic feedback to students.

47 The Developmental engagement team also made a small number of desirable recommendations with a view to enhancing the provision. It identified the need for the generic assessment criteria to be explained better so as to increase student awareness of requirements and aid the focus of moderation. In addition, the team judged it desirable to promote more consistency in written assessment feedback, and ensure that students have a clear timescale for the return of assessed work and feedback.

D Foundation Degrees

48 The College has a long history of offering Foundation Degrees which began with a single Foundation Degree in multimedia design in 2001. Some 35 further awards, across all curriculum areas, were developed between 2002 and 2005 during a period of collaboration with the University of Northumbria. In 2005 the College established its Higher Education Scheme in conjunction with Leeds Metropolitan University. The College currently offers 52 Foundation Degrees, two of which are validated by the University of Newcastle and one by Kingston University. The latter, in aircraft engineering, is a recent innovative development involving co-funding with industry. The remainder are all part of Leeds Metropolitan University validated Higher Education Scheme, including the three at Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College. Full and part-time modes of study are available. In June 2009, the assessment began of the College Group's application for Foundation Degree Awarding Powers, which is supported by Leeds Metropolitan University. The College, through its well-developed links with local and regional employer networks, intends to

continue its expansion of the Foundation Degree portfolio in line with HEFCE priorities and its own business and academic planning priorities.

49 The College's mission is to provide higher education that makes a significant contribution to the higher level skills agenda through professional and work-related programmes. The Foundation Degree portfolio is demand driven, student-centred and delivered in the mode required by the individual learner/employer. The College has recognised the challenges of the changing higher education environment, including the effects of the economic recession on planned growth using co-funding initiatives and employer engagement. The College is, however, firmly committed to developing approaches to work-related and work-based learning in its further provision. It has produced a comprehensive Widening Participation Strategy that reflects its work in creating progression routes and its active links with Aim Higher.

50 Foundation Degrees are the principal focus of the College's current higher education provision. The College is a major provider of Foundation Degrees and has well-developed systems for the creation, approval, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of its provision. This is undertaken with minimal necessary oversight from partner awarding bodies. The areas of good practice and recommendations identified during the Summative review are common to the whole provision. They are listed in the main conclusions, paragraphs 51 to 56.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

51 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in the College's management of its responsibilities for academic standards and for the quality of learning opportunities of the awards 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, Kingston University, Leeds Metropolitan University, the University of Central Lancashire, the University of Newcastle, the University of Northumbria, the University of Sunderland and the University of Wales.

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

- the strategic approach taken by the College to the management and administration of its higher education, exemplified by the Higher Education Directorate, and the effective implementation of agreed procedures by staff at all levels (paragraphs 10; 11; 21; 25)

- a range of rigorous internal College monitoring procedures, including peer review, continuation audit and annual planning days, which are used effectively to identify and disseminate good practice and promote consistency (paragraphs 14; 17; 22; 24)

- the extensive moderation processes that help to ensure the rigour of student assessment (paragraph 19)

- the focused and comprehensive approach to staff development, including an extensive programme of development events and active College support for research and scholarly activity; together these contribute to ensuring that the teaching staff profile is well matched to the needs and expectations of higher education (paragraphs 20; 32; 33)

- the productive relationship with employers who are extensively involved in the higher education provision and help to ensure that the programmes are fit for purpose and reflect the needs of industry in the region (paragraph 23)

- the highly effective adaptation of established further education procedures to ensure their effectiveness for the higher education provision, for example in relation to teaching observations and student support (paragraphs 27; 30; 31)

- the coherent and systematic development of electronically published information; this has resulted in well-designed websites and a dynamic College virtual learning environment with a dedicated higher education area (paragraphs 35; 37; 38).

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

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

- to build on existing effective local practices by agreeing a college-wide standard for the management of student work placements (paragraph 28)

- to enhance current arrangements further by introducing a standard College system for formally agreeing and signing off published information documents (paragraph 40).

54 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 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.

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 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.

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, in the context of this Summative review, reliance **can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Newcastle College action plan relating to the Summative review: October 2009

Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
In the course of the Summative review the team identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
● the strategic approach taken by the College to the management and administration of its higher education, exemplified by the Higher Education Directorate, and the effective implementation of agreed procedures by staff at all levels (paragraphs 10; 11; 21; 25)	Continue to review, reflect and discuss management and administration of higher education as part of the Foundation Degree Awarding Power process. Maintain effective communication with Higher Education community across the	Sept 2010	HE Directorate	Achievement of Foundation Degree Awarding Powers. Embedded systems, processes and procedure across the provision.	Corporation	Through site visits and scrutiny of FDAP process. Reports following monitoring and audits against base line standard processes and procedures.

Newcastle College action plan relating to the Summative review: October 2009						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
	institution via HE Task Group and related committees.					
• a range of rigorous internal College monitoring procedures, including peer review, continuation audit and annual planning days, which are used effectively to identify and disseminate good practice and promote consistency (paragraphs 14; 17; 22; 24)	Review and further develop HE Staff Handbook and HE Quality Reference Manual as a result of audit process and feedback by staff across the institution.	April 2011	HE Quality and Standards	Consistency implementation of HE Quality Manual and related procedures.	HE Quality and Standards Committee	Reports following planned audit schedule.
• the extensive moderation processes that help to ensure the rigour of student assessment (paragraph 19)	Promote cross institutional marking process both within and across divisions to ensure parity and consistency of standards.	July 2010	Schools/ Divisions	Positive external examiners reports. Outcome from Consistency Panel.	HE Academic Board/HE Quality and Standards Committee	Annual Planning and Annual Review process

Newcastle College action plan relating to the Summative review: October 2009						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
• the focused and comprehensive approach to staff development including an extensive programme of development events and active College support for research and scholarly activity; together these contribute to ensuring that the teaching staff profile is well matched to the needs and expectations of higher education (paragraphs 20; 32; 33)	Three year strategic plan to be created which includes mentoring support for newly developed programmes and staff. Further develop support for scholarly activity through the establishment of a Research and Scholarly Activity (RSA) committee, sub committee of Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee.	July 2010	HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee	A detailed programme of staff development with high staff attendance levels. Establishing a process and system for recording and disseminating scholarly activities.	HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee	Feedback and analysis from staff following training events. HE Conference to disseminate and share RSA activities.

Newcastle College action plan relating to the Summative review: October 2009						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
● the productive relationship with employers who are extensively involved in the higher education provision and help to ensure that the programmes are fit for purpose and reflect the needs of industry in the region (paragraph 23)	Highlight, showcase and share good practice. Further develop mechanisms within each pathway to record and evaluate employer input.	July 2010	Schools/ Divisions	High level of student satisfaction and student feedback via HE Learner forum and work based projects.	HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee	Through review and evaluation as part of School/Division and Group Curriculum Review, Annual Planning and Annual Review Processes.
● the highly effective adaptation of established further education procedures to ensure their effectiveness for the higher education provision, for example in relation to teaching observations and student support (paragraphs 27; 30; 31)	Further develop methodology for HE teaching observations with reference to benchmarks within the sector.	Sept 2010	HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee	External observers' reports which identify good or better levels of teaching and learning. High levels student satisfaction via College and National Student Survey.	Quality Review	Reports and related action plans.

Newcastle College action plan relating to the Summative review: October 2009

Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
• the coherent and systematic development of electronically published information; this has resulted in well-designed websites and a dynamic College virtual learning environment with a dedicated higher education area (paragraphs 35; 37; 38).	Annual ILT Audit of Blackboard course sites to monitor compliance of base line requirements. Highlight and share best practice.	May 2010	HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee	High levels of compliance and value added content reported as part of audit. Positive feedback from student survey.	HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee/ Divisional SMT	Report, analysis and related action plans.

Newcastle College action plan relating to the Summative review: October 2009

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:						
● to build upon existing effective local practices by agreeing a college-wide standard for the management of student work placements (paragraph 28)	Establish Task and Finish Group through HE Task Group to review Group practice to identify areas for development and improvement. School/Divisions to develop objectives and agree a common standard for the management of student placements. Pilot HE Work based Learning Database for	Sept 2010	Schools/ Divisions/HE Registrar	Consistent implementation of agreed process.	HE Quality and Standards Committee	Planned audit activity. Evaluation report following pilot of data base.

Newcastle College action plan relating to the Summative review: October 2009

Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
	managing student placements.					
• to enhance current arrangements further by introducing a standard College system for formally agreeing and signing off published information documents (paragraph 40).	Investigate the practicality of producing formal protocols for signing off published information at all levels across the institution.	July 2010	HE Task Group	Accurate and reliable public information.	HE Quality and Standards Committee	Planned annual audits at school/division and cross institution levels.