

Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

March 2010

Reaseheath College

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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 Reaseheath College carried out in March 2010

As a result of its investigations, the Summative review team (the team) considers that there can be **confidence** in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreements, for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding bodies. The team also considers that there can be **confidence** in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreements, for the quality of learning opportunities it offers. The team considers that reliance can be placed on the accuracy and or 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:

- academic standards and quality are robustly managed through the College quality assurance and reporting procedures, including the new Higher Education Academic Board, and are underpinned by close and responsive relationships between the College and its awarding bodies
- the active and widespread engagement of employers has resulted in vocational currency in the curriculum, as well as knowledge exchange for staff and highly flexible programmes to meet specific employer needs
- assessment criteria and weightings are clearly linked to intended learning outcomes in order to assist students in their assignments
- modern commercial enterprises and facilities support the curriculum and its delivery, providing opportunities for innovative work-based learning as well as outstanding educational and professional resources for students
- a high level of student support is ensured through the extensive academic and pastoral care system and the enthusiastic engagement of staff
- the recently opened and well resourced Higher Education Centre, which is part of a major investment in estates, supplements the learning resource centre and contributes to a distinctive sense of identity for higher education students
- the information and publicity materials provided for students through the undergraduate prospectus, course handbooks and college website are of high quality, with their accuracy and consistency supported by effective coordination between the College website and those of the awarding bodies and other key partners
- the documentation and guidance on quality assurance processes are provided in a user-friendly format to College staff through the Higher Education Course Managers Handbook, the staff portal and the websites of awarding bodies.

Recommendations

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

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

- introduce an explicit overarching strategy for the mapping of transferable skills
- address the current pressures on library core texts by introducing a short loan system that is more responsive to the study needs of full-time higher education students.

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

- continue to address the remaining inconsistencies in assessment practices, including the timeliness of the return of student work
- continue to provide appropriate student support to improve the progression of students on those programmes identified annually as showing low progression rates
- proceed as soon as possible with the full and effective implementation of its virtual learning environment.

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 Reaseheath 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 the University of Chester and Harper Adams University College. The review was carried out by Dr Elizabeth Briggs, Mr Paul Chamberlain and Professor David Eastwood (reviewers), and Mr David Lewis (coordinator).

2 The Summative review team (the team) conducted the review in agreement with the College and in accordance with *The handbook for Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review* (the handbook), published by QAA. Evidence in support of the Summative review included documentation supplied by the College and awarding bodies, meetings with staff, students and partner institutions, reports of reviews by QAA and from inspections by Ofsted. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagement in assessment. A summary of findings from the 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 Reaseheath College is located within an extensive 330 hectare rural campus near to Nantwich in Cheshire. It is a specialist provider of vocational education and training in further and higher education for businesses, industries and communities that are mainly rural and land-based. It has associate college status with the University of Chester and Harper Adams University College. Reaseheath College has 7,100 students of whom some 600, or 453 full-time equivalents, are on HEFCE-funded higher education programmes. The higher education enrolments account for approximately 15 per cent of the College's income from educational programmes. Higher education is delivered alongside further education within most of the curriculum areas, namely adventure sports, agriculture, animal management, countryside, engineering, equine, food and horticulture. In its inspection of January 2010, the report for which had not been published at the time of the review visit, Ofsted has judged the further education at the College to be good overall, with some outstanding features. The higher education programmes are taught by some 50 academic staff, the large majority of whom work across further and higher education. They are supported by 20 practical instructors and technical staff.

5 The higher education awards that are funded, directly or indirectly by HEFCE, are listed below, beneath their awarding bodies and with recruited full-time student equivalent (FTE) numbers for 2009-10.

University of Chester

- BSc Animal Behaviour and Welfare full-time (24 FTE)
- BSc (Hons) Animal Management (Behaviour and Welfare/Zoo Management) top-up (14 FTE)
- FdSc Adventure Sports Management full-time (24 FTE)
- FdSc Animal Management (Behaviour and Welfare) full/part-time (73 FTE)
- FdSc Animal Management (Zoo Management) full/part-time (65 FTE)
- FdSc Food Chain Technology part-time (2.5 FTE)
- Professional Certificate Animal Management part-time (8 FTE)
- Professional Certificate Food part-time (9.5 FTE)

Harper Adams University College

- BSc (Hons) Landscape Design and Management top-up full-time (4 FTE)
- BSc (Hons) Equine Studies top-up full-time (16 FTE)
- FdSc Agriculture - Dairy Herd Management full-time (16 FTE)
- HNC Agriculture - Dairy Herd Management part-time (7 FTE)
- FdSc Agriculture - Mixed Farming full-time (11 FTE)
- HNC Agriculture - Mixed Farming part-time (4.5 FTE)
- FdSc Countryside Conservation and Recreation Management part-time (20 FTE)
- HNC Countryside Conservation and Recreation Management part-time (9.5 FTE)
- FdSc Machinery Dealership Management part-time (3 FTE)
- HNC Machinery Dealership Management part-time (11.5 FTE)
- FdSc Equine Studies full-time (16 FTE)
- HNC Equine Studies part-time (0 FTE)
- FdSc Equine Science, Complementary Therapy and Natural Horsemanship full-time (40 FTE)
- FdSc Food Industry with Management full-time (17 FTE)
- HNC Food Industry with Management part-time (17 FTE)
- FdSc Garden and Landscape Design full-time (23 FTE)
- HNC Garden and Landscape Design part-time (0 FTE)
- University College Diploma in Dairy Technology part-time (9 FTE)
- University College Diploma in Garden Design part-time (8.5 FTE)

Notes

The figures for the Professional Certificate University College Diploma awards are projected year estimates, as these programmes recruit throughout the academic year.

The University of Chester awards are all jointly taught with the University; the figures represent students who are based at the College for their studies.

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

6 The College has formal partnership agreements with two awarding bodies for its higher education programmes. These are the University of Chester and Harper Adams University College. Reaseheath is an associate college of both and manages its higher education provision according to the terms of each partnership. There is a notable difference in the agreements for the delivery of higher education awards. All awards of Harper Adams University College are taught wholly on the College campus by College staff. While this is also the case for some University of Chester awards, most involve teaching at the College and the University, by staff of both institutions. Generally, in relation to admissions, some areas of assessment, and quality assurance, the College has more devolved responsibilities from Harper Adams University College than from the University of Chester, whose programmes are subject to more direct administration and control from the awarding body.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

7 The last five years have seen a substantial increase in the overall number of higher education students, from approximately 150 to 600 in 2009-10. Features of this growth include a further concentration on FD awards and flexible provision, including professional diplomas and employer engagement awards, developed in association with related industries. A number of new top-up degrees have also been introduced in curriculum areas where partner awarding bodies cannot provide progression routes from the FDs. Three such awards have been launched in the past two years and a further two are planned. The College also plans to introduce additional FDs and professional certificates, while the 2010 revalidation of Harper Adams University College awards will result in the phasing out of the remaining HNCs. A major £20 million capital building programme is nearing completion and incorporates enhanced facilities for the higher education provision. These include new specialist resources, such as an equine facility and zoo, which will benefit higher education teaching, a separate higher education centre and student halls of residence.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

8 Students on the higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a written submission to the Summative review team. The submission was developed in two stages. The first stage involved questionnaires, sent out by the College Principal to BSc and FD course representatives, for completion by the various student cohorts. The results of the questionnaires were analysed and presented to a meeting of course representatives, led by an independent chair. The draft submission was then refined through further consultation with course representatives. The final submission provided a succinct evaluation of the provision, based around a carefully focused set of questions. It gave the team valuable insight into student opinion in advance of the visit and helped to inform the agenda that was explored during the review. Other important inputs were provided during the review visit in separate meetings with full and part-time students.

B Evaluation of the management of HEFCE-funded higher education

Core theme 1: Academic standards

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

9 The College has key strategic aims for its higher education provision that are articulated clearly in the Higher Education Strategic Plan and in the overarching College Strategic Plan. These aims are reviewed regularly with both partner awarding bodies, including matters relating to the standards and quality of the provision. The management of higher education by the College is informed by regular partnership reviews.

10 Senior staff have a clear understanding of the College's delegated responsibilities for the management, monitoring and review of the higher education programmes it delivers. The College has well-defined and effective management and reporting structures for carrying out these responsibilities in relation to academic standards. A distinctive feature of the structure is the Higher Education Academic Board, constituted in 2008, which includes representation from both awarding body partners. There is emerging evidence of the effectiveness of this Board in providing a more coherent approach to the management of higher education. For example, the Board took overall responsibility for addressing the issues identified in the 2008 Developmental engagement. This has involved oversight of a detailed action plan that goes well beyond the requirements of the Developmental engagement report.

11 The management of higher education is supported by the College's close working relationships with both awarding bodies. This is evident in the role of link tutors from the awarding institutions, who have worked with College staff to ensure greater understanding and effective use of the Academic Infrastructure.

12 The College operates a consistent and robust set of arrangements for programme validation. Formal curriculum development proposals are checked against the higher education strategy, before being submitted to the awarding body. Validation panels, which are constituted by the awarding body with input from the College, include external academic members and employer representatives.

13 The College attaches great importance to the involvement of employers in the development of its vocational programmes, notably its Foundation Degrees. This is an area of good practice, in which the College collects the views of employers and former students to inform the design and development of programmes. Such engagement has resulted in highly flexible programmes to meet specific employer needs, as well as opportunities for knowledge exchange that have provided staff with current industrial awareness. Notable examples of curriculum innovation include 'Project Eden' which operates with major dairy companies to provide progression toward a Foundation Degree level dairy qualification, and a customised short course for the national chain of 'Pets at Home' stores. An up-to-date record of all external links and contacts is maintained on a customer relations management system.

14 College arrangements for internal moderation are clearly described for staff in the Higher Education Course Managers Handbook. The improvements noted in some recent external examiners' reports, echoed in the comments of students, support the claim made in the self-evaluation that the action plan is leading to better assessment practice. Students confirmed that feedback is usually provided in a timely fashion, although in one isolated module work had yet to be returned for an assignment submitted some months previously. The self-evaluation recognises that 'some inconsistencies remain in assessment practice' and it is desirable that the College continue its efforts to ensure that these are addressed and monitored.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

15 The team is able to verify the statements in the self-evaluation about the College's strong engagement with the Academic Infrastructure. Validation documentation is scrutinised for alignment with the FHEQ. The awarding bodies ensure that the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* is followed. College arrangements for the admission of students are agreed with the partner awarding body and reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*.

16 The Developmental engagement confirmed that College assessment procedures take proper account of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*. Programme specifications incorporate assessment strategies that assist students to achieve the intended learning outcomes at module and programme levels. The appointment and responsibilities of external examiners, and arrangements for external examining align fully with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*.

17 The College provision reflects a strong alignment with the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* and the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. This is notable in its extensive and effective employer-led work-based learning and customised curriculum development.

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?

18 The College has close working relationships with its awarding bodies, underpinned by representation on key committees at both institutions and regular partnership reviews. The awarding bodies approve all external examiner appointments, and new examiners are provided with written guidance by the Higher Education Manager and the partnership coordinator. Annual updates on changes to University regulations contribute significantly to ensuring the effectiveness of examination boards, assessment and moderation, curriculum development and programme validation.

19 There are rigorous annual monitoring arrangements in place that include the routine consideration of external examiners' reports, student survey returns and the views of employers. Annual monitoring reports are scrutinised by the Higher Education Academic Board, as well as the appropriate committee of each awarding body. Procedures are in place to ensure that external examiners are informed about the actions being taken in response to their reports.

20 The College provides both awarding bodies with annual student progression and achievement data. While it has been successful in addressing low progression rates for 2007-08 within some mature student cohorts, it is desirable that the College continue and extend its efforts to improve the progression of students on all programmes where rates fall below its target of 80 per cent.

21 Assessments are designed to meet the requirements of the awarding bodies, with assessment schemes, including generic assessment criteria, being agreed in advance of their implementation. Procedures for the moderation of marked assignments and for dealing with academic misconduct are clear, and are effectively implemented. Recent external examiners' reports confirm that assessments are set at an appropriate level and comment favourably on assignment briefs and internal moderation procedures. The scrutiny of assessed student work confirms that assessment criteria and weightings are consistently linked to intended learning outcomes. This is noted and appreciated by students.

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

22 The College works closely with its awarding institutions in providing staff development to support academic standards, for example to promote effective use of the Academic Infrastructure. The awarding bodies also support the College's annual continuing professional development programme in areas that include assessment design and criteria, and programme revalidation. A recent valuable initiative has involved Harper Adams University College in supporting the use of new technology for distance learning, laboratory testing and the assessment of group work. Further evidence of staff development can be found in paragraphs 33-36.

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?

23 Overall responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities reflect those for managing academic standards, as described in paragraphs 10-12 above. The management arrangements function effectively and are well understood by staff at all levels. All programmes are delivered within designated curriculum areas, and curriculum leaders hold responsibility for the quality of programmes and new course development. Programmes are led by course managers, who are responsible for the coordination of module tutor inputs and assessment strategies.

24 Responsibility for monitoring the quality of learning opportunities operates through the Curriculum and Quality Group and the Higher Education Academic Board. This dual management structure dovetails efficiently and effectively. The Curriculum and Quality Group monitor recruitment, progression and student opinion. The Board meets each term to review student recruitment and progression, and to confirm new course proposals.

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

25 The key features of the partnerships with awarding bodies are as described for academic standards in paragraphs 18-21. There are well-defined procedures for annual and periodic review. Both awarding bodies allocate link staff to support the College in meeting their requirements and expectations for learning opportunities, including the Academic

Infrastructure. Representatives of the awarding bodies endorse the claim made in the self-evaluation, that their relationships are excellent and that the College is fully meeting its obligations.

26 The College attaches importance to student opinion in monitoring the quality of learning opportunities and academic standards. A variety of feedback instruments is used, including formal surveys, representation on College committees, a sabbatical student president and monthly meetings of higher education course representatives. Students confirm that feedback is regarded seriously and that their concerns are generally acted upon. The College is continuing its efforts to obtain the views of part-time students in a more systematic way.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

27 As confirmed in paragraphs 15-17, the College is well informed about the Academic Infrastructure and engages with it extensively. It is well supported by the awarding bodies, particularly at the time of programme approval, to ensure that it fulfils its obligations in respect of all parts of the *Code of practice*. This engagement, along with the internal higher education management and reporting structures, contributes to the College's commitment to create a clear 'higher education ethos' for its provision.

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

28 A range of mechanisms is in place through which teaching and learning are monitored and enhanced. These contribute to the rigorous annual monitoring procedures that are described in paragraph 19. The College has an annual programme of teaching observation, with the most recent set of observations showing 95 per cent of higher education sessions being graded as good or better. The College seeks to use a varied range of teaching and learning approaches to reflect the diverse profile and learning styles of its students. Where it seeks to introduce less conventional approaches, these are first approved by the awarding body. Some mature students are of the view that there is scope to strengthen further the sense of a higher education learning 'culture' in the College.

29 The development of academic and transferable skills is addressed clearly in the delivery of all higher education awards, although the approach is distinctly different between the programmes of the two awarding bodies. In light of the different approaches, it is advisable that the College introduce an explicit overarching strategy for the systematic mapping of transferable skills and their attainment.

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

30 The College provides all students with a range of formal and informal support, as part of what it describes as an 'open door culture'. The support covers academic guidance and pastoral concerns, with internal and external counselling available where needed. The College distinguishes between full-time students and part-time mature students in its approaches. Formal tutorials with course managers are timetabled for all full-time students at least once each term. The arrangements for part-time students are more flexible and are often enhanced by telephone and email communication. As stated in the self-evaluation, student support is a strength of the provision and an area of good practice. The formal support arrangements are enhanced by the commitment and enthusiasm of staff, which encourages easy access by students and the prompt and informal resolution of problems.

31 All students complete self-assessment questionnaires at enrolment and this helps to identify the need for additional learner support. Where such need is identified, individual support is readily available. Teaching staff are able to adjust teaching and assessment with the support of a member of the Learning and Skills Centre with specific higher education responsibilities.

32 Careers guidance and advice for higher education students is provided centrally and from within the programme areas. Students particularly value the advice received from course staff, which often draws upon the career insights available through the extensive and close industrial links that the College enjoys.

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

33 Staff have access to a good range of continuing professional development opportunities provided by the College and its awarding institutions. The awarding bodies have both provided valuable support on the requirements of level 6 teaching and there has been a high take-up by staff. The College's annual three-day programme of professional development is supplemented by specific events for higher education tutors. A teaching and learning coach/mentor has recently been appointed to support staff.

34 Good practice is identified at partnership staff development conferences and forums and cascaded within the College. Currently, emphasis is being given to the mentoring of staff who are new to higher education teaching, developing 'the expectations of HE in FE' and improving the quality of assessment feedback to students.

35 There is a good level of support for new staff, all of whom are expected to enrol for a teaching qualification within two years of appointment. New staff complete a formal induction programme and additional professional development needs are identified in discussions with their curriculum manager. Ongoing support from experienced staff includes mentoring by a colleague in their curriculum area.

36 A new 'Scholarly Activity Scheme' has been introduced to provide staff with opportunities for further personal academic development. It offers opportunities to study for higher level qualifications and engage in other scholarly activity. While the uptake is currently small, staff are nonetheless appreciative of the opportunities and the weekly remission afforded.

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?

37 The College has clear and effective mechanisms for the regular review of resources, in respect of staff and facilities, against current and planned student numbers. Resources are evaluated by awarding bodies as part of programme approvals and through annual monitoring and periodic reviews. The mechanisms for gathering student opinion also cover resources and access to them.

38 The provision benefits from a large and diverse range of teaching staff, including many part-time specialist practitioners, who are appropriately qualified and bring a wealth of vocational experience. Around 50 academic staff contribute to higher education teaching, as well as 20 technical and other support staff. Despite the high number and disparate backgrounds of staff, they operate within committed, cohesive and well-managed academic teams.

39 Most specialist facilities are used by higher and further education programmes, the result of a strategic approach within the College that has no discernible disadvantage for higher education. A major capital building programme is providing a new learning resource centre and dedicated higher education centre, as well as enhanced facilities for equine and animal management, and the registered zoo. All curriculum areas have attached commercial trading enterprises or associated facilities. These enterprises have provided impressive and often state-of-the-art practical resources, which reflect the College's vocational commitment and strong employment links. They also represent good practice in that they provide high quality and sometimes innovative work-based learning opportunities for students.

40 The new Higher Education Centre includes classrooms and a computer suite, together with quiet and social areas, which students believe contribute to a distinct higher education 'identity'. Students have good overall access to general learning resources, including ICT and library-based materials. However, full-time students point to some difficulties in obtaining hard copy core texts, which they attribute to a shortage of multiple copies, or problems with the arrangements for short-term loans. It is advisable that the College address this issue, perhaps by reducing the period for short-term loans, to better meet the study needs of full-time higher education students.

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?

41 The College publishes an attractive and comprehensive higher education prospectus, which provides clear information on all of its higher education programmes, including the awarding body for each. It also produces an engaging promotional compact disc which clearly differentiates the higher education programmes. Information from the prospectus is published on the College website alongside programme leaflets. The same information is used to populate the Aimhigher website for students in Cheshire schools. Higher education awards delivered at the College are also publicised in the prospectus and website of the appropriate awarding body. There are helpful links between the various websites, while the information contained on them is effectively coordinated to ensure consistency.

42 The College publishes an annual strategic plan, in which it offers a clear statement of its institutional mission, values, strategic aims and objectives, as well as a higher education strategy. From these published documents, it is clear that the role of higher education is carefully integrated within the key business functions of the College.

43 Prior to induction, students receive a college handbook and diary, produced by Student Services, and an undergraduate enrolment booklet. The College publishes course handbooks for each award, using a standard template that aligns with the one used by the relevant awarding body. The College has the flexibility to adjust the content to ensure maximum relevance for its students. The student friendly handbooks include programme specifications and course data, the student charter, course management and tutoring information, assessment regulations and guidance on mitigating circumstances. Students attested that the information they receive is accurate and sufficient.

44 Staff have ready access to a variety of printed and electronic information to support their work, which together represent good practice. Of particular note is the highly valued and well used Higher Education Course Managers Handbook. The Developmental engagement recognised the handbook as providing comprehensive and up-to-date guidance that is differentiated to reflect the partnership requirements of the two awarding bodies. Information is provided for employers through specially organised events and a range of printed publications.

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?

45 The College manages its responsibilities for public information with a clear awareness of the expectation expressed in the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, that the awarding body should exercise effective control over the accuracy of all public information about its awards. It also recognises the importance of ensuring that potential students have the best possible information about the content of courses and the value of specific qualifications.

46 The core information included in the prospectus and course handbooks is drawn directly from validation documentation to ensure accuracy; it is routinely checked through annual course monitoring and periodic reviews. Course managers are responsible for the annual updating of the programme information, while the Higher Education Marketing Officer collates and checks generic information from the awarding bodies. The overall production of the prospectus is overseen by the College Marketing Department, whose staff meet regularly, but as yet informally, with their colleagues at the University of Chester.

47 There is a clear cycle for the production of the higher education prospectus, including the approval of content, which is mirrored for course leaflets. Key roles and responsibilities are well defined within the cycle. Draft copy is submitted to the relevant awarding body for approval, before being finally signed off by the Marketing Manager and the Higher Education Manager at the College. A parallel process, overseen by the Higher Education Marketing Officer, is in place for the updating of the information provided on the College website.

48 The partnership agreements with each awarding institution include explicit procedures for agreeing the form and content of external advertising and publicity. The agreement with Harper Adams University College confirms that external advertising and publicity, including web-based materials, should be reviewed and agreed jointly at the annual partnership review. While the team found no evidence to question the overall effectiveness of this process, it is surprising that no discussion of published information was formally recorded within the minutes of the most recent annual partnership review.

49 The College recognises the importance of providing students and staff with information electronically. There is some shared use of the virtual learning environment at the University of Chester, which is valued by students. As is acknowledged in the Developmental engagement action plan, the virtual learning environment at the College is underdeveloped, particularly in relation to Harper Adams University College programmes. It is desirable to proceed as soon as possible with its full and effective implementation.

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

C Summary of findings from the Developmental engagement in assessment

50 The Developmental engagement in assessment took place in December 2008. It covered all of the higher education provided by the College. 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 does the college ensure that assessment strategies use a range of assessment methods for different subjects and learning activities to meet the individual learning styles and needs of a diverse student population? How does the college ensure assessment design and feedback are effective in developing academic skills particularly in respect to research and referencing? How does the college capture students' views and comments on assessment and to what extent does this influence modification to assessment design, scheduling and arrangements?

51 The Developmental engagement team identified two broad areas of good practice, both of which have a positive impact across the higher education provision within the College. The first of these is the serious and widespread engagement of employers in relation to assessment across all curriculum areas. The second is the high quality of information provided for students and staff, in particular the comprehensive and up-to-date Higher Education Course Managers Handbook, which is differentiated to reflect the partnership requirements of the two awarding bodies.

52 The Developmental engagement team also made a small number of recommendations with a view to enhancing the provision. It advised on the need to ensure that the quality of the assessment feedback provided to students be raised to reflect existing areas of good practice, taking account of the specific assessment criteria being developed within the College. The team also judged it desirable to establish a more systematic approach to annual assessment planning and to underpin the development of academic skills by more consistent and rigorous marking and feedback. In addition, it suggested that the College consider a more systematic approach to the monitoring and evaluation of the higher education elements of continuing professional development for staff.

D Foundation Degrees

53 Foundation Degrees provide the large majority of the higher education provision at Reaseheath College. The College has operated a general strategy of developing the awards in areas of known employer demand and by building on strengths in its own further education provision. Over some 10 years, the College has developed a range of land-based Foundation Degrees with Harper Adams University College, many operating alongside their HNC predecessor awards. There are now eight such awards, with a focus on management in the areas of agriculture, countryside, equine, food, horticulture and land-based machinery. More recently, and in parallel, the College has developed science-based Foundation Degrees with the University of Chester. Four awards have already been introduced, in animal behaviour and welfare, adventure sports and food technology. The animal behaviour programme is provided as joint provision with the University. One award, the FdSc Golf and Sports Turf Management, was withdrawn in 2009-10 due to low recruitment. The College has responded to demands from employers for more flexible delivery by offering individual or combinations of modules from the FdSc Food Chain Technology. Two further FD awards are planned, in Wildlife Conservation and Ecology, and Historic Garden Restoration and Management.

54 The College provision reflects a strong alignment with the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* and the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. It attaches great importance to the involvement of employers in the development of its awards. The College uses a variety of methods to collect the views of employers and former students to inform the design and development of the programmes. Such engagement has resulted in highly flexible programmes to meet specific employer needs. Notable examples of curricular innovation include 'Project Eden' which operates with major dairy companies to provide progression toward a Foundation Degree level dairy qualification, and a customised short course for the national 'Pets at Home' stores. The areas of good practice and recommendations relating to Foundation Degrees are common to the whole provision. They are listed in the main conclusions at paragraphs 56 to 57.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

55 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Reaseheath 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, Harper Adams University College and the University of Chester.

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

- academic standards and quality are robustly managed through the College quality assurance and reporting procedures, including the new Higher Education Academic Board, and are underpinned by close and responsive relationships between the College and its awarding bodies (paragraphs 9 to 12, 15, 18, 22, 24 to 26, 28, 34)
- the active and widespread engagement of employers has resulted in vocational currency in the curriculum, as well as knowledge exchange for staff and highly flexible programmes to meet specific employer needs (paragraph 13)
- assessment criteria and weightings are clearly linked to intended learning outcomes to assist students in their assignments (paragraph 21)
- a high level of student support is ensured through the extensive academic and pastoral care system and the enthusiastic engagement of staff (paragraphs 30 to 32)
- modern commercial enterprises and facilities support the curriculum and its delivery, providing opportunities for innovative work-based learning as well as outstanding educational and professional resources for students (paragraph 39)
- the recently opened and well resourced Higher Education Centre, which is part of a major investment in estates, supplements the learning resource centre and contributes to a distinctive sense of identity for higher education students (paragraph 40)
- the information and publicity materials provided for students through the undergraduate prospectus, course handbooks and college website are of high quality, with their accuracy and consistency supported by effective coordination between the College website and those of the awarding bodies and other key partners (paragraphs 43, 45, 48)
- the documentation and guidance on quality assurance processes are provided in a user-friendly format to College staff through the Higher Education Course Managers Handbook, the staff portal and the websites of awarding bodies (paragraph 44).

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

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

- to introduce an explicit overarching strategy for the mapping of transferable skills (paragraph 29)
- to address the current pressures on library core texts by introducing a short loan system that is more responsive to the study needs of full-time higher education students (paragraph 40).

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

- by continuing to address the remaining inconsistencies in assessment practices, including the timeliness of the return of student work (paragraph 14)
- by continuing to provide appropriate student support to improve the progression of students on those programmes identified annually as showing low progression rates (paragraph 20)
- by proceeding as soon as possible with the full and effective implementation of its virtual learning environment (paragraph 49).

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

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

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

Reaseheath College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● academic standards and quality are robustly managed through the College quality assurance and reporting procedures, including the new Higher Education Academic Board, and are underpinned by close and responsive relationships between the College and its awarding bodies (paragraphs 9 to 12, 15, 18, 22, 24 to 26, 28, 34 	<p>1 Continue to ensure that the HE Academic Board reporting arrangements monitor quality assurance with active participation of representatives from both Higher Education Institutions.</p> <p>2 Reaseheath staff to continue with active attendance and engagement with the full range of Associate College meetings to maintain strong relationships.</p>	<p>July 2011</p> <p>July 2011</p>	<p>Director of Quality, Learning and Support</p> <p>Principal/ Director of Quality, Learning and Support /HE Managers</p>	<p>Effective meetings which challenge and monitor the college quality assurance arrangements.</p> <p>Strong representation at all HEI partnership meetings/ events.</p>	<p>HE Academic Board</p> <p>HE Academic Board</p>	<p>Views sought from HE Academic Board and the Quality & Standards Committee of College Board.</p> <p>Views sought from Associate Colleges on relationships and links.</p>

Reaseheath College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the active and widespread engagement of employers has resulted in vocational currency in the curriculum, as well as knowledge exchange for staff and highly flexible programmes to meet specific employer needs (paragraph 13) 	3 Further develop the engagement of employers with programmes by reviewing current arrangements, identifying current 'best practice' and approaches used to record activities undertaken.	September 2010	HE Manager/ Course Managers	Widespread engagement with employers by all course teams.	HE Academic Board	HE Academic Board to annually review employer engagement.
	4 Introduce arrangements to formally review 'best practice' on engagement with employers with course teams by reviewing activities at an annual HE CPD event.	September 2010	HE Manager/ Course Managers	CPD event covering employer engagement occurs annually.	HE Academic Board	HE Academic Board to annually review employer engagement.
	5 Continue to develop new flexible employer-based programmes to meet specific needs.	July 2011	Course teams	Additional programmes developed in respect to specific requests from industry.	HE Academic Board	Minimum of two new programmes developed each year equating to 10 FTEs.

Reaseheath College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● assessment criteria and weightings are clearly linked to intended learning outcomes to assist students in their assignments (paragraph 21) ● a high level of student support is ensured through the extensive academic and pastoral care system and the enthusiastic engagement of staff (paragraphs 30 to 32) 	6 Continue with current practice to ensure that all assessment criteria are clearly linked to learning outcomes.	July 2011	Course teams	Moderation of assessment to identify minimal issues when reviewing assessment briefs.	HE Manager	Positive External Examiner reports on assessment briefs.
	7 Maintain current arrangements for full- and part-time students ensuring that all receive their individual tutorial entitlement.	July 2011	Course managers	Positive outcomes to student support from the NSS, internal surveys and course representatives meetings.	HE Academic Board	Improve progression rates to a minimum of 80 per cent for all programmes.
	8 Maintain current arrangements for academic and pastoral support from student services and the learning support centre.	July 2011	Student Services Manager/ Learning Skills Centre Manager	Positive outcomes to student support from the NSS, internal surveys and course representatives meetings.	HE Academic Board	Improve progression rates to a minimum of 80 per cent for all programmes.

Reaseheath College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> modern commercial enterprises and facilities support the curriculum and its delivery, providing opportunities for innovative work-based learning as well as outstanding educational and professional resources for students (paragraph 39) 	<p>9 Continue with investment in the College's commercial enterprises and facilities to ensure all students receive an outstanding learning experience.</p>	July 2011	Principal/ Director of Resources	College continues to re-invest in continually improving resources for students.	College Board	Positive comments on commercial resources from students/ employers and external bodies.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the recently opened and well resourced Higher Education Centre, which is part of a major investment in estates, supplements the learning resource centre and contributes to a distinctive sense of identity for higher education students (paragraph 40) 	<p>10 Further develop the Higher Education Centre with the introduction of additional HE classrooms and learning centres to provide additional bespoke HE facilities.</p>	November 2010	Director of Resources	Additional facilities made available to HE students in the form of three additional classrooms/ learning centres.	HE Academic Board	Additional bespoke HE facilities available to students.

Reaseheath College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the information and publicity materials provided for students through the undergraduate prospectus, course handbooks and college website are of high quality, with their accuracy and consistency supported by effective coordination between the College website and those of the awarding bodies and other key partners (paragraphs 43, 45, 48) 	<p>11 Continue to ensure close liaison between the college marketing department and HEIs in the sharing of draft HE prospectuses, course leaflets and other publicity materials.</p>	July 2011	HE Marketing Officer	Correct procedures are followed for the checking of information before the publishing of the college prospectus and updating the website.	HE Manager	Information published is 100 per cent accurate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the documentation and guidance on quality assurance processes are provided in a user-friendly format to College staff through the Higher Education Course Managers Handbook, the staff portal and the websites of awarding bodies (paragraph 44). 	<p>12 Continue with the annual updating of quality assurance information for the HE course manager's handbook.</p>	July 2011	HE Manager	Annual update completed prior to the start of each academic year.	Director of Quality, Learning and Support	HE tutors confirm quality assurance information is readily available and user-friendly.

Reaseheath College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010						
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<p>The team agreed a number of areas where the College should be advised to take action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● to introduce an explicit overarching strategy for the mapping of transferable skills (paragraph 29) 	<p>13 The College to identify and deliver a suitable strategy for the mapping of transferable skills from programmes for the two HEIs to ensure that all students engage with the full range of activities to maximise their employment prospects.</p>	September 2010	Course managers. HE Manager	High employment rates for graduating students.	HE Academic Board	Positive External Examiner reports on inclusion of transferable skills.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● to address the current pressures on library core texts by introducing a short loan system that is more responsive to the study needs of full-time higher education students (paragraph 40). 	<p>14 Learning Resources and Support Manager to meet with all course managers, to confirm short term loan arrangements, core texts for each programme and ensure multiple copies or e-book</p>	September 2010	Course managers/ Learning Resources and Support Manager	Positive comments on availability of learning materials at course representatives meetings.	HE Academic Board	Internal and NSS survey responses on learning resources to exceed the National Benchmark.

Reaseheath College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010						
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
	format are purchased where additional requirements are identified.					

Reaseheath College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010						
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<p>The team agreed the following areas where it would be desired to take action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> by continuing to address the remaining inconsistencies in assessment practices, including the timeliness of the return of student work (paragraph 14) 	<p>15 Continue with the policy for tutors to explain reasons for any delays in returning work over the set four-week return arrangement and, in such instances, consult students in establishing a revised return date.</p>	July 2011	Course teams	Positive comments on assessment arrangements from the NSS, internal meetings and course representative meetings.	HE Academic Board	Survey responses on assessment practice to exceed the National Benchmark.
	<p>16 Continue to ensure high standards with assessment practice, including the returning of work with detailed quality feedback to the student identifying what they need to do to improve.</p>	July 2011	Course teams	Positive External Examiner reports on assessment practice.	HE Academic Board	Student survey and External Examiner evaluation is positive on assessment practice across all programmes.

Reaseheath College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010						
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> by continuing to provide appropriate student support to improve the progression of students on those programmes identified annually as showing low progression rates (paragraph 20) 	<p>17 Course teams to continue to implement the full range of identified strategies to improve and support year one students to ensure successful progression into year two of their programme.</p>	November 2010	Course teams	Progression rates for all programmes exceed the College target of 80 per cent.	HE Academic Board	All programmes exceed the minimum 80 per cent progression rate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> by proceeding as soon as possible with the full and effective implementation of its virtual learning environment (paragraph 49). 	<p>18 University of Chester programmes to continue to make full use of IBIS (the University's intranet) with students.</p>	July 2011	University of Chester course teams	Active engagement of all students with IBIS.	Course team meetings	Student views at course rep meetings confirm effective use of VLE.
	<p>19 FdSc Adventure Sport programme to broaden approach to IBIS and ensure students participation</p>	September 2010	Course manager	FdSc Adventure Sports cohort actively use the VLE	HE Academic Board	Student views at course rep meetings confirm effective use of VLE.
	<p>20 Harper Adams University College programmes to develop the use of SharePoint with students.</p>	July 2011	Harper Adams University College course teams	Active engagement of all students with SharePoint.	Course team meetings	Student views at course representative meetings confirm effective use of VLE.

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

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
Email comms@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk