Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

Norton Radstock College

March 2011

SR 45/2010

Preface

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

Purpose of IQER

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

The IQER process

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

Developmental engagement

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

The main elements of a Developmental engagement are:

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

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

Summative review

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

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

Evidence

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

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

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

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

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

Outcomes of IQER

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

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

management of the standards and/or quality of the awards made by one awarding body to be different from those made by another.

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

Executive summary

The Summative review of Norton Radstock College carried out in March 2011

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 agreement, for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding body. The team also considers that there can be **confidence** in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreement, for the quality of learning opportunities it offers. The team considers that reliance **can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Good practice

The team has identified the following good practice for dissemination:

- the clarity of the procedures in the Code of Practice for Higher Education document reflects an institutional determination to provide sound strategic and operational management of higher education
- the electronic survey and the resulting identification of special learner support needs for carers reflects an impressive concern for providing support where it is most needed
- the College staff support for teaching and learning to secure appropriate academic standards at Foundation Degree level prepares students well for their progression to honours degree programmes at the University
- the considerable efforts of the College to provide individual learner help, advice and resources support the relatively small number of higher education students at the College
- the high quality of the handbook for the Foundation Degree in Education Studies for Teaching Assistants enables students to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and what they can expect from the College.

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:

- clarify its strategies, procedures and management structures for higher education, including effective oversight of all quality review processes, and articulate these with those of the University to ensure greater cohesion between strategic and operational systems
- ensure that the Higher Education Development Group monitors and reviews the implementation of the Code of Practice for Higher Education to embed more effectively the formal processes by which the College maintains academic standards, including the oversight of the annual reporting cycle and associated reports

- take action to enhance its website so that prospective students have ready access to additional programme information
- establish a rigorous checking system to assure the accuracy and completeness of all its published information that complements the University's requirements.

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

- provide further staff training to strengthen the understanding of how to communicate to students the extent of their achievement of learning outcomes in assessment feedback
- include submission dates on the assessment schedules for all modules
- ensure that all handbooks provide comprehensive information about progression routes, which would help students make decisions about their longer-term goals.

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 Norton Radstock 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 Bath Spa University. The review was carried out by Dr Elizabeth Briggs and Mr Mark Langley (reviewers) and Mr Alan Nisbett (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 body, meetings with staff, students, employers and the partner institution, 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 (FD) awards, section D of this report summarises details of the FD programmes delivered at the College.

4   Norton Radstock College is a general further education college with its main site in a semi-rural location 10 miles south west of Bath, on the borders of Mendip and North Somerset. The College has a number of satellite centres serving the local towns of Midsomer Norton and Radstock, but also one in Keynsham - a small town 13 miles to the north west which the College has served since 1947 - and an adult learning centre at Peasedown St John. The area is characterised by a predominance of small and medium-sized enterprises. The College is the main provider of vocational training in north-east Somerset. There are approximately 500 full-time 16-18 year-old students and over 3,000 adult enrolments each year. Currently, the College has about 800 Train to Gain students and 100 apprentices undertaking work-based learning.

5   The majority of enrolments are on courses at levels 1 and 2. Some 64 per cent of students are female, a gender imbalance which is most pronounced on part-time courses. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is very small (but growing) and exceeds the local population count of 0.5 per cent. The College employs over 300 staff, of whom about 50 per cent are part-time.

6   At the time of the review, the following higher education programmes were offered by the College on behalf of Bath Spa University:

- Foundation Degree in Education Studies for Teaching Assistants
- Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care Management
- Foundation Degree in Management and Management Systems.

Partnership agreements with the awarding body

7   The higher education provision at the College has recently gone through a period of change. In the past, awards were offered from three universities: the University of the West of England, the University of Bath and Bath Spa University. However, all current higher education programmes are validated by Bath Spa University (the University), with which there has been a longstanding partnership, starting originally with teacher training programmes and growing through the addition of Foundation Degrees. The College is part of the University's Wessex Partnership, formed by the University in 1997 as a coordinated approach to collaborative provision.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

8   Higher education at the College is run within the framework of a formal partnership arrangement with the University, the Memorandum of Cooperation. This sets out what is expected of each partner and identifies the responsibilities of both the University and the College. It makes reference to the University's academic quality and standards committees, which oversee such partnership work and approve the reviews undertaken of each programme. The arrangements for quality assurance are set out by the Academic Office of the University in a document about collaborative provision, available through the website. Recent changes in funding have had an impact on the potential for the College to increase its higher education provision as hoped, and this is reflected in the revised Higher Education Strategy submitted to HEFCE in January 2010. The University was unable to allocate sufficient places for the anticipated students in 2009-10 and the College had to forgo recruitment to the FD in Further Education Management, and this programme is now closed.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

9   Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. Focus groups met to discuss the provision and a summation of views was facilitated by the College and presented to the team. This, and the meeting held during the visit with students, provided the team with a clear view of the student experience.

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 University's Academic Office website contains clear and comprehensive policies and procedures that clarify the College's responsibilities as a collaborative partner. The Memorandum of Cooperation with the College states that the University has 'responsibility for ensuring that academic standards are maintained' which 'cannot be delegated.' The University's Head of Quality Management confirms that the University renews the Memorandum when there are significant changes to operational procedures. The current version dates to August 2010 and was issued by the University's Academic Office, which now manages the validation process.

11   The College's three-year Higher Education Strategy, which expires in 2012, aims to increase provision in line with regional and employer demands, to improve the process of higher education review and to develop resources and staff. The capping of student numbers restricts growth, but, following a Developmental engagement recommendation, the College began to devise a Code of Practice for Higher Education Assessment, later developing this into a comprehensive Code of Practice for Higher Education, which senior managers approved in March 2011. The clarity of the procedures in this document is good practice as it reflects an institutional determination to provide sound strategic and operational management of higher education.

12   The College's Board of Governors draws on a wide and appropriate skills set. To inform its higher education provision, one College governor is a senior manager from Bath Spa University. The College initiated this informal arrangement as its chief strategic link with the University. Emerging College strategies for managing higher education need to be articulated more closely with changes to the University's management of its collaborative provision. The College's named point of administrative liaison is the Personal Assistant to the Academic Director, yet the University would send a new Memorandum of Cooperation directly to the College Principal. Strategic responsibility for higher education within the College rests with the Principal and the Academic Director, who has delegated operational responsibility to the Senior Manager for Standards. A supplementary higher education addition to the job description for the senior manager's post has not yet been rationalised or evaluated. The Senior Manager for Standards communicates with the University's Head of Quality Management on issues of quality assurance and the verification of published information. The team considers it advisable for the College to clarify its strategies, procedures and management structures for higher education, including effective oversight of all quality review processes, and to articulate these with those of the University to ensure greater cohesion between strategic and operational systems.

13   Given the small student cohorts, College subject links also act as module tutors and communicate with a corresponding University subject link. College and University school links oversee this relationship through informal communication; University visits to the College and attendance by College staff at University subject boards maintain levels of formal communication. Staff are largely positive about the level of support, even though there is some variation between programmes.

14   In 2008, the College established the Higher Education Development Group as a forum for discussion to improve its management and development of higher education. This has raised the profile of higher education within the College. As its chair, the Senior Manager for Standards reports the Group's findings to the Academic Board, which the College's senior managers all attend. The Senior Manager for Standards also reports formally on higher education at Senior Management Team meetings and, when appropriate, the Principal reports to the Board of Governors on such matters. Academic Board and Senior Management Team minutes attest to the growing effectiveness of the College's reporting processes. However, the Higher Education Development Group is at an early stage of its implementation. The team considers it advisable for the Higher Education Development Group to monitor and review the implementation of the Code of Practice for Higher Education to embed more effectively the formal processes by which the College maintains academic standards, including the oversight of the annual reporting cycle and associated reports.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

15   University validation and approval processes ensure that the Academic Infrastructure is embedded in each programme. Programme specifications, integrated within programme handbooks, refer to appropriate subject benchmark statements and the

Foundation Degree qualification benchmark. University school and subject links internally verify assignment briefs; therefore, programme documentation demonstrates consistency between programme learning outcomes and the FHEQ. University Periodic Reviews, and in 2009 a one-off Undergraduate Modular Delivery Review, ensure that handbooks and College procedures align with the Academic Infrastructure, specifically the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. The College and University thoroughly embed the Academic Infrastructure into all programme documentation. In meetings with the team, staff were clear and positive about the Academic Infrastructure.

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

16   The Memorandum of Cooperation states that the University 'is accountable, through both internal and external quality regimes, for the standard of its awards.' University-appointed external examiners highlight key areas for improvement and dissemination, which annual programme reports record and take action on accordingly. The Senior Manager for Standards and the Higher Education Development Group monitor progress through a tracking system. At programme level, course teams respond to feedback from external examiners to the University Subject Link Tutor. Programme handbooks explain the proportion of work assessed by the external examiner. Feedback from external examiners is positive and confirms that the College maintains academic standards comparable with similar institutions.

17   The University expects collaborative partners to provide opportunities for students to participate in feedback activities. The College gathers feedback from induction and end-of-course questionnaires and students give feedback to their tutors during course meetings and to University staff during occasional visits. Student representatives participate in the College's Student Forum, review panel meetings and the University Student Council. Students confirm that the College gathers feedback and responds in a timely manner.

18   The University reviews the College through a recently revised periodic review process. A programme in one College school has just been through this process, and another is due shortly, to fit in with the University's subject-by-subject cycle of periodic reviews.

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

19   Within the context of a small college, the commitment to staff development in terms of continuing professional development, professional updating and scholarly activity is comparatively high. The College uses its staff appraisal system to identify and process any developmental needs and, where any proposed activity supports its higher education portfolio, the College endeavours to provide financial assistance. Heads of school confirm that the College has enabled them to undertake professional updating and scholarly activity. However, staff training records for higher education lecturers feature few activities specific to higher education. The College's staff development policy supports the achievement of appropriate academic standards, but higher education staff training activities could enhance this further.

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

Core theme 2: Quality of learning opportunities

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

20   The management structures and reporting mechanisms described in paragraphs 10-12 also apply to the management of the quality of learning opportunities in the College. The review team confirms that the lines of delegated management responsibility and reporting arrangements are increasingly effective in ensuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities at the College.

21   The College's self-evaluation notes the outcomes of the Developmental engagement on assessment and the confidence of staff that assessment practice is good. The College has developed its resulting action plan to build on good practice identified and to address a number of issues raised by the Developmental engagement report. The team was able to track progress through the most recent (March 2011) update to the Higher Education Development Group, which shows that almost all actions have been addressed, and in meetings during the visit.

22   Course coordinators and programme staff have implemented a more explicit pro forma for assessment feedback to students, so that the written feedback makes clearer links to the achievement of intended learning outcomes. The College intends to monitor the effectiveness of the feedback to students and to incorporate the information in annual programme review reports. The student written submission includes comments that the quality of feedback on assignments is helpful, and this was confirmed in the meeting with students. However, the action plan update notes that there was 'still some confusion in the minds of some staff between specific assignment task criteria, generic criteria and the learning outcomes linked to assignments', although considerable recent progress has been made to ensure better alignment on the feedback pro forma. There is evidence in the student written submission that this remains a problem in some areas. Second-year FD Health and Social Care Management students commented that 'assignments are marked in a slightly contradictory manner to the marking criteria'. First-year students on this programme commented that 'marking criteria are available; however, some (staff) have not referred to it as a tool'. However, at the student meeting, the review team learnt that comments in their written submission are no longer valid because assessment feedback has improved considerably since the last academic year. The review team believes that, although there have been improvements, it is desirable for there to be some further staff training to strengthen the understanding of how to communicate to students the extent of their achievement of learning outcomes in assessment feedback.

23   The College was advised in the Developmental engagement report on assessment that it should take action to establish common approaches and clear criteria for the allocation of marks to individuals undertaking group work. Progress has been made in association with the University to ensure that standard approaches to group work assessment marking criteria are implemented. While, as part of its developing Code of Practice, the College has introduced the requirement that annual assessment schedules should be produced and reviewed at the start of each year, the student written submission noted evidence that students wanted 'more publicised' deadlines. Discussions with students have confirmed that the College's aim of spreading the assessment load through the academic year to enhance student learning opportunities has generally been achieved, and students acknowledged that some end-of-module pressures are inevitable. However, students told the team that they would like to see the assessment calendar in the student handbook include actual submission dates in addition to the week numbers. The team considers that the inclusion of dates on the assessment schedules for all modules is desirable, and would remove any

possible misunderstanding concerning submission dates. Although the student written submission raised some concerns that work was not always marked and returned in a timely manner, students who met the team were pleased to report that, this year, return of work is within the three-week deadline.

24   The College Code of Practice for Higher Education, which has been approved by the Academic Board, aims to bring a more coherent structure to the management of assessment, with appropriate referencing to University assessment policies and procedures. Part of its development includes an evaluation of the balance between summative and formative assessment, and the use of different types of assessment. Overall, the review team concurs with the findings of the Developmental engagement report that the College provides a comprehensive range of assessment tasks, many of which are set and moderated in close collaboration with University subject link colleagues.

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

25   The College assures itself that it meets its obligations to the University to ensure that students receive appropriate learning opportunities through the College Academic Board. Strong College links with the University underpin programme delivery, monitoring and review, and these take account of student feedback through representation on programme committees and student module evaluations. External examiners are appointed by the University according to their procedures. Their reports provide the College and the University with feedback on the appropriateness of learning opportunities. College staff provided the review team with a clear account of the processes for incorporating external examiner feedback into annual programme monitoring and the requirements for responding to feedback.

26   University subject link tutors play an important quality assurance role in their close working relationships with, and support for, the Foundation Degree programme teams. The programme review process contributes to the maintenance of appropriate learning opportunities and involves comprehensive student feedback on the quality of their learning experiences.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

27   The opportunity to undertake work-based or placement learning is an important aspect of the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* and is clearly articulated in the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning.* The College has provided some excellent opportunities for students to benefit from work-based and work-related learning, with strong support from local employers and stakeholders. Such placements, which enable students to link theoretical knowledge to real work experience, make a beneficial and valued contribution to employability skills. Students receive a work-based learning handbook, and are mentored during the placement. Assessment of work-based learning is based on a written assignment, and a presentation which employers are encouraged to attend.

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

28   The College Principal oversees the teaching observation system, with heads of school undertaking three specific learning observations and two further themed observations each month. Themed observations are used to assess the quality of the use of information technology or to monitor punctuality and attendance. The College currently does not

distinguish between higher and further education observations, but intends to assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning on the FD programmes is maintained and enhanced through increased observations. The team heard that sharing good practice in teaching is facilitated by discussion in a wider forum, where the FD is delivered by several partner colleges, as is the case with the FD in Education Studies for Teaching Assistants. The self-evaluation notes that the College intends to develop a specific higher education teaching and learning strategy to support improvements and enhancements.

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

29   The team found that students have a wide range of support services at the College and have access to the services provided at the University. Students consider that their tutors offer good pastoral support and academic guidance, with an initial induction at the start of their courses and the opportunity to visit the University. Part of the induction process is focused on access to learning resources both at the College and the University. Staff attempt to assess at an early stage the support needs of students, for example those who require specialist support for conditions such as dyslexia. The team heard about an innovative electronic survey, the Big College Health Check, which revealed an unexpectedly high number of students who are carers. The College has been proactive in ensuring that such students are appropriately supported. The team recognises both the electronic survey and the resulting identification of special learner support needs for carers as good practice.

30   Students receive personal tutorial sessions, which are scheduled within their programmes. The recent Ofsted inspection (March 2010) graded student support as 'good'. Students who met the team confirmed that they feel well supported by friendly and accessible staff. The College has monitored the success of students who have progressed to articulated honours routes at the University. Of the 13 students progressing from FD awards in 2009 there were three first-class honours graduates and 10 receiving upper second-class awards. The team confirms good practice in College staff support for teaching and learning to secure appropriate academic standards at FD levels, which prepares students well for their progression to honours degree programmes at the University.

31   The team heard about the College's proactive use of Curriculum Inspector to generate reports on student progress three times a year, supplementing the personal monitoring of individual academic progress by their tutors. Students hold three meetings a year of the Student Forum, run by the three student governors, which provide opportunities for them to raise issues for discussion with the College.

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

32   College staff are encouraged to attend University higher education staff development events offered to Wessex Partnership tutors. These include sessions on assessing learning, e-learning, mentoring in higher education, the use of Minerva for assessment and feedback, and a specific training event on the Academic Infrastructure. There is also an annual induction day for new tutors at the start of the academic year. The self-evaluation states that the College has not assessed the training needs of tutors who deliver its higher education programmes. Staff who met the team value the staff development programme, but feel that they could benefit from a more personal development plan.

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

33   The adequacy of College learning resources and facilities for its higher education provision are subject to a detailed assessment by the University as part of its validation of each FD programme. The College has a budget which provides for the purchase of additional books and other learning resources for higher education students on an annual basis. Students confirmed that College learning resources are appropriate and meet their requirements and that they are also able to make use of University resources if necessary. Students had expressed the view that they require a dedicated quiet study area solely for higher education students. The College Learning Resource Centre staff confirmed that they post information daily on rooms identified for this purpose, and students have welcomed this satisfactory and timely solution. The team noted the higher education learning and teaching resources located in an adult learning centre at Peasedown. This comprises good-quality teaching rooms and on-site information technology facilities and provides dedicated higher education space that is much valued by students. The team judges that the considerable efforts of the College to provide individual learner help, advice and resources to support the relatively small number of College higher education students is good practice.

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 body, to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Core theme 3: Public information

What information is the College responsible for publishing about its HEFCE-funded higher education?

34   Students who met the review team expressed satisfaction that programme handbooks contain programme specifications, together with statements of intended learning outcomes, assessment information and grading criteria. Module guides have clear and detailed information on assignments and how specific learning outcomes are achieved. Handbooks contain references to regulatory and procedural matters such as the University assessment regulations, including plagiarism and unfair practice, and complaints and appeals processes. Information in the programme handbooks is consistent and comprehensive, and includes guidance on the University regulatory framework for each award. Students who met the team commented that they are satisfied with the usefulness of their handbooks, which give clear and detailed guidance about the expectations of the College for each of the FD awards. The team noted, for example, the high quality of the handbook for the FD in Education Studies for Teaching Assistants, which is an example of good practice. Programme handbooks are also available online, and contain statements about progression following the completion of the College awards. It would be helpful for students if programme handbooks included further details of the articulated honours modules at the University, as is the case in the FD Management and Management Systems. The team considers it desirable for all handbooks to provide this additional progression route information, which would assist students in making decisions about their longer-term goals. The University website provides good-quality information about the College awards, in some cases with additional audio visual and social media sites. The review team concurs with the College that it is advisable to take action to enhance its website so that prospective students have ready access to additional programme information in future.

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?

35   The College's Code of Practice for Higher Education maps out a basic checking process and states that the 'College will seek to standardise the quality of course information provided to students in conjunction with the University.' However, the College states that it 'currently has no central system for checking the accuracy of course information leaflets or handbooks prior to submission to the University.'

36   Programme and module handbooks are accurate, because College tutors use University templates to prepare them, and the University school links approve handbooks prior to printing and distribution. For the FD in Education Studies for Teaching Assistants, which the University validates at several institutions, it produces all handbooks centrally and the College makes only a few additions. Higher education programmes at the College use either the internal or University virtual learning environment. Students commented positively about the content of these sites, although there is no evidence that the College requires a minimum content for each course or module.

37   The recently reissued Memorandum of Cooperation devolved the production and printing of all publicity materials to the College. For the first time, the College is producing a higher education booklet. It is awaiting approval from the University's Head of Marketing and Head of Quality Management before it can go to print. However, the team was able to establish by examining in proof form that the documentation is clear, accurate and reflects information on the College and University websites. Heads of school enter publicity text into a computerised course file, which the College Head of Marketing checks and re-styles if necessary. University school links approve this text, although the University website uses a different version.

38   The arrangements the College has in place to ensure the accuracy and completeness of published information do not currently balance College and University systems, nor have they run through a full cycle since the issue of the revised Memorandum of Cooperation: it is not possible to measure their effectiveness. The team considers it advisable for the College to implement a rigorous checking system to assure the accuracy and completeness of all its published information that complements the University's requirements.

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

39   The Development engagement in assessment took place in February 2010. The lines of enquiry were:

Line of enquiry 1: How consistently do the arrangements for assessment and moderation in the College meet the requirements of the Academic Infrastructure?

Line of enquiry 2: Are the range, design, sequencing and overall loading of assessments appropriate to enable learners to show they are meeting the stated outcomes of the programme?

Line of enquiry 3: To what degree is the published information about assessments accurate, accessible to learners and helpful in explaining the overall requirements of the programme and of each particular assessment task?

40   The team concluded that there were a number of features of good practice in the College's management of assessment. These included: the procedures for second marking, which were robust and embedded within the College; the effective use of workplace mentors that supports the link between theory and practice and a good understanding of work-based standards for the FD in Education Studies for Teaching Assistants students; the excellent website resource available to Initial Teacher Education students that provides them with comprehensive information and guidance regarding assessments; and the use of the College virtual learning environment for the communication of course materials and assessments, and the course handbook on the FD in Management and Management Systems, promotes effective understanding of assessment, as does that for Initial Teacher Education.

41   The team also judged that it would be advisable for the College to take action in the following areas: ensure that the written feedback given to students also covers the degree to which they have achieved the learning outcomes associated with assessment tasks; establish common approaches and clear criteria for the allocation of marks to individuals undertaking group work assessments; review the annual schedules of assessments in the light of concerns about inappropriate or unnecessary clustering of deadlines; agree with the University the approach taken in the production of course information across the range of provision to avoid the possibility of different messages being conveyed to potential students; and eradicate the inconsistencies between different programme handbooks in the guidance given to students, for example on grading bands and criteria.

42   The Developmental engagement team also reported that it would be desirable for the College to develop a code of practice for higher education assessment; with support from the University, implement staff development on the Academic Infrastructure; and consider a more consistent approach to the use of the virtual learning environment in assessment across different curriculum areas.

D   Foundation Degrees

43   As noted in paragraph 8, changes in the funding of higher education have had an impact on the potential for the College to grow its higher education provision as hoped, and this is reflected in the revised Higher Education Strategy submitted to HEFCE in January 2010. The University was unable to allocate sufficient places for the anticipated number of students in 2009-10, which meant that the College had to forgo recruitment to a new year one group for the FD in Further Education Management, and this programme is now closed.

44   In 2010-11, therefore, there are only three active Foundation Degrees running, two with relatively small numbers. These are the FD in Education Studies for Teaching Assistants, FD in Health and Social Care Management, and FD in Management and Management Systems. All three programmes are now operating to a 'long/thin' module delivery pattern - introduced in 2009-10 as part of the University's Undergraduate Modular Delivery review. The FD in Health and Social Care Management is now delivered at the College's learning centre in Peasedown St John.

45   As the College does not now offer any higher education provision other than the Foundation Degrees noted in paragraph 44, all the good practice and recommendations in section E apply to these programmes.

E   Conclusions and summary of judgements

46   The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Norton Radstock 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 body. This was based upon discussion with staff and students and scrutiny of evidence provided by the College and its awarding body, Bath Spa University.

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

- the clarity of the procedures in the Code of Practice for Higher Education document reflects an institutional determination to provide sound strategic and operational management of higher education (paragraph 11)
- the electronic survey and the resulting identification of special learner support needs for carers reflects an impressive concern for providing support where it is most needed (paragraph 29)
- the College staff support for teaching and learning to secure appropriate academic standards at Foundation Degree level prepares students well for their progression to honours degree programmes at the University (paragraph 30)
- the considerable efforts of the College to provide individual learner help, advice and resources to support the relatively small number of higher education students at the College (paragraph 33)
- the high quality of the handbook for the Foundation Degree in Education Studies for Teaching Assistants enables students to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and what they can expect from the College (paragraph 34).

48   The team also makes some recommendations for consideration by the College and its awarding body.

49   The team considers that it is **advisable** for the College to:

- clarify its strategies, procedures and management structures for higher education, including effective oversight of all quality review processes, and articulate these with those of the University to ensure greater cohesion between strategic and operational systems (paragraph 12)
- ensure that the Higher Education Development Group monitors and reviews the implementation of the Code of Practice for Higher Education to embed more effectively the formal processes by which the College maintains academic standards, including the oversight of the annual reporting cycle and associated reports (paragraph 14)
- take action to enhance its website so that prospective students have ready access to additional programme information (paragraph 34)
- establish a rigorous checking system to assure the accuracy and completeness of all its published information that complements the University's requirements (paragraph 38).

50 The team considers that it is **desirable** for the College to:

- provide further staff training to strengthen the understanding of how to communicate to students the extent of their achievement of learning outcomes in assessment feedback (paragraph 22)
- include submission dates on the assessment schedules for all modules (paragraph 23)
- ensure that all handbooks provide comprehensive information about progression routes, which would help students make decisions about their longer-term goals (paragraph 34).

51 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 body.

52 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.

53 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.

Norton Radstock College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2011						
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 clarity of the procedures in the Code of Practice for Higher Education document reflects an institutional determination to provide sound strategic and operational management of higher education (paragraph 11)	The Code of Practice will be fully implemented over the coming months and its effectiveness reviewed after the first year of operation Any additions and/or amendments will be considered in readiness for this review	Feb 2012	Higher Education Coordinator	Implementation of the actions achieves expected improvements in provision, standardisation, communication and compliance	Academic Board and Senior Management Team	A review of the effectiveness of the Code of Practice will report in Feb 2012
• the electronic survey and the resulting identification of special learner support needs for carers reflects an impressive concern for providing support where it is	The College will continue to gather and respond to learner feedback, and develop the mechanisms for ensuring all higher education students continue to receive the support they need	Feb 2012	Higher Education Development Group	The outcomes of further surveys of higher education students will be used to develop and improve the service of providing support	Academic Board	Analysis of student end-of-course surveys will be analysed to show levels of satisfaction with support provided

most needed (paragraph 29)						
• the College staff support for teaching and learning to secure appropriate academic standards at Foundation Degree level prepares students well for their progression to honours degree programmes at the University (paragraph 30)	A continued emphasis on improving teaching and learning in the College will help identify specific features of higher education teaching that have a positive impact on the smooth transition of students to honours degree programmes This may also contribute to refinements to the observation system to better identify the particular characteristics of good teaching at higher education level	July 2012	Heads of school	Good grades from observations of higher education taught sessions Positive feedback from learners Good achievement of students at the University on their programmes	Academic Board and Senior Management Team	To be reviewed as part of the evaluation of the College Lesson Observation Scheme
• the considerable efforts of the College to provide individual learner help, advice and resources to support the relatively small number of higher education students at the College	The ongoing needs of higher education students will continue to be considered as part of the development of College learning environments, resources and services	Oct 2012	Senior Manager for Student Services	By the target date a new structure for Student Services will be fully operational in recently refurbished buildings	Senior Management Team	The effectiveness of student support for higher education students will be evaluated during the 2011-12 year

(paragraph 33)						
• the high quality of the handbook for the Foundation Degree in Education Studies for Teaching Assistants enables students to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and what they can expect from the College (paragraph 34).	As a requirement of the Code of Practice all handbooks are being reviewed A small working party has been set up by the Higher Education Development Group to undertake this task, and share good practice across the programme teams	July 2011	The Higher Education Development Group	The quality of handbooks on other programmes is enhanced	Academic Board	Appropriate changes will be approved by the University Feedback will be sought from students regarding the clarity of handbooks
Advisable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The team considers that it is **advisable** for the College to:						
• clarify its strategies, procedures and management structures for higher education, including effective oversight of all quality review processes, and articulate these with those of the University to ensure greater	The College's higher education strategy is due to be reviewed by Jan 2012 In preparation for this a review of the strategic level relationship with the University will be undertaken and, in partnership with them, appropriate changes made to the	Jan 2012	Principal, Academic Director, Higher Education Coordinator and University representatives	A more coherent and effective partnership between the two organisations evidenced by good cohesion between strategic and operational systems	Academic Board and Senior Management Team	Senior staff in each organisation will evaluate the impact of any changes

cohesion between strategic and operational systems (paragraph 12)	articulation of College and University systems In the autumn, the College is due to be welcoming a new governor who is a senior member of University staff					
• ensure that the Higher Education Development Group monitors and reviews the implementation of the Code of Practice for Higher Education to embed more effectively the formal processes by which the College maintains academic standards, including the oversight of the annual reporting cycle and associated reports (paragraph 14)	The Code of Practice specifies how the outcomes from annual reporting and external moderation will be monitored Actions from reports will be collated centrally and followed up to ensure effective completion	Dec 2011	Higher Education Coordinator	All annual reports are submitted to the University on time and improvement actions logged onto the College's 'Covalent' system All actions from external examiner reports are also recorded and progress with them tracked	Academic Board and Senior Management Team	A review of the effectiveness of the Code of Practice will report in Feb 2012, and include an evaluation of how well this was achieved in the autumn of 2011
• take action to enhance its website so that	The College will continue to develop its promotion of higher	Dec 2011	Higher Education Coordinator, Website	An enhanced user-friendly and informative higher	Academic Board and Senior Management	Additions to the website will be checked by the

prospective students have ready access to additional programme information (paragraph 34)	education programmes through its website and achieve this by providing more detailed information on many aspects of the programmes offered		Developer and Marketing Manager	education section of the College website giving full and accurate information to prospective students	Team	University for accuracy Students will be asked to provide feedback on the information made available to them
• establish a rigorous checking system to assure the accuracy and completeness of all its published information that complements the University's requirements (paragraph 38).	The Higher Education Development Group working group will consider this aspect of the College's systems and document the key elements of the procedure This will be checked by the University to ensure it complies	July 2011	Higher Education Coordinator	The system for checking accuracy is clear and effectively implemented	Academic Board	The procedure will be evaluated by the University, and handbooks are also checked and approved by them prior to publication
Desirable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The team considers that it is **desirable** for the College to:						
• provide further staff training to strengthen the understanding of how to communicate to students the extent of their achievement of learning outcomes	The Higher Education Development Group will discuss this issue at its July meeting and identify any specific areas of training that will help address this, and determine what assistance might be sought from the	July 2011	Higher Education Development Group	All teaching staff demonstrating effective communication to the students of their achievement of learning outcomes	Senior Management Team	Staff will be asked to evaluate the effectiveness of any training provided

in assessment feedback (paragraph 22)	University if appropriate					
• include submission dates on the assessment schedules for all modules (paragraph 23)	In preparation for 2011-12 submission, dates will be added to the assessment schedules The Higher Education Development Group will consider a standard format for assessment schedules	Oct 2011	Programme leaders	All assessment schedules include submission dates	Academic Board and Senior Management Team	Completion of this will be checked when assessment schedules are reviewed at the start of the year
• ensure that all handbooks provide comprehensive information about progression routes, which would help students make decisions about their longer-term goals (paragraph 34).	Programme teams will ensure that this information is included when they review the programme handbooks for 2011-12	July 2011	Programme leaders	All handbooks include comprehensive information on progression routes	Academic Board and Senior Management Team	The working group set up by the Higher Education Development Group will check that information about progression routes is included in the handbooks when these are checked