



Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

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

Good practice

The team has identified the following good practice for dissemination:

- the College's wide range of highly productive interactions with its awarding bodies are exemplified by the initiatives of the Information and Communication Technology programme team in ensuring that college students' interests were taken fully into account during discussions about articulation with university awards
- the rigorous college assessment arrangements articulate well with the *Code of practice* and benefit from the effective involvement of employers and collaborative arrangements with awarding bodies
- clear and robust college strategies and extensive engagement of employers ensure the effective integration of work-based and work-related learning into all Foundation Degrees
- the College's extensive and responsive arrangements for the support of students, which include the highly flexible 'Springboard' support programme that is specifically tailored to the needs of higher education students
- the comprehensive arrangements for staff development are strategically planned and clearly support the quality of learning opportunities.

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:

- strengthen the implementation of its procedures for checking marketing materials to ensure that essential core information is clearly identified and more rigorously monitored.

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

- make more effective use of the substantial monitoring data already being generated to support a cross-college approach to managing the standards and quality of its higher education provision
- make more explicit and systematic use of the various elements of the Academic Infrastructure as reference points in its Higher Education Strategy and more widely in the delivery and monitoring of the provision

- continue to work with its awarding bodies to provide differentiated information in external examiners' and annual programme reports for those awards that are offered across a number of college partners
- review the terms of reference, membership and agendas of its various higher education groups, to support the growth of a more deliberative higher education academic community.

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 West Cheshire 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 the University of Chester and Staffordshire University. The review was carried out by Prof Gillian Grant, Ms Patricia Millner and Mr Lawrie Walker (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 the main 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 engagements in assessment and employer involvement. A summary of findings from the Developmental engagements is provided in section C of this report. The review also considered the College's use of the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers, with reference to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, subject and award benchmark statements, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and programme specifications.

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

4 West Cheshire College is the largest provider of vocational programmes in the area. It offers a range of full and part-time courses from entry to degree level. The College has two main campuses, at Ellesmere Port and Chester. It recognises the importance of higher education in relation to its mission of providing 'access to opportunity' and closing the skills gap within the local area. Many employers have identified gaps in employees' vocational and additional skills. The higher education strategy is based on two key principles: widening participation and meeting the skills needs of the region. There are, across the geographical area, concentrations of low levels of numeracy and literacy skills.

5 For 2010-11, the College has about 10,500 students overall. This includes 260 HEFCE-funded students, or just over 150 full-time equivalents. The programmes are taught by a total of 32 academic staff, who work across further and higher education. The academic provision is organised within 14 curriculum areas. The most recent Ofsted inspection, in April 2010, reported that the College is good, with outstanding capacity to improve.

6 The list of current higher education awards funded by HEFCE, with the relevant awarding bodies and full-time equivalent numbers in parentheses, is as follows:

University of Chester

- FdSc Information and Communication Technology (Computer Science) (47.5)
- FdSc Information and Communication Technology (Games Development) (25)
- FdSc Fitness and Health (10)
- FdA Teaching Assistance (3.5)
- FdA Early Years Practice (15.5)

- FdA Accounting with Management (6)
- FdA Managing Services for Children and Young People (1)
- CertEd Teaching in the Learning and Skills Sector (26)

Staffordshire University

- FdSc Mechanical Technology (15)*
- FdSc Electrical and Electronic Technology (15)*
- FdSc Manufacturing Technology (not operating 2010-11)

* Combined recruitment of 15 FTE

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

7 West Cheshire College has formal agreements with two awarding bodies for its higher education programmes. These are the University of Chester, with whom it has had Associate College status since 2007, and Staffordshire University. The agreement documents are clear and detailed in defining the respective responsibilities of the College and its awarding body. In broad terms, the College's responsibilities cover the delivery and assessment of the awards in line with the terms of the agreements and the relevant university regulations. The College is also responsible for providing appropriate quality assurance systems, learning resources and support services. The agreements include the delegation of responsibilities between the institutions for the production and approval of public information. The self-evaluation confirms that the College seeks to develop policies, principles and management procedures that augment those of the awarding bodies.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

8 The number of higher education students at the College has remained stable, at around 150 full-time equivalents, over the past four years. This stability followed a two-year period of 100 per cent growth between 2006 and 2008. In response to current uncertainties over funding and student numbers, the College is intending to launch a suite of self-financing HND awards in September 2011. A major capital project has allowed the redevelopment of both campuses. The final phase of the building work will be completed in September 2011, with the opening of new accommodation at Ellesmore Port, which includes a dedicated higher education centre.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

9 Students on the higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. The submission was developed from a focus group, at which student representatives from the Foundation Degrees shared the views of students on their courses. The Higher Education Coordinator acted as a facilitator for the students. The written submission is structured around a series of prompt questions, relating to public information, resources, support, assessment, teaching and the contribution of employers. It provided the team with a useful and concise overview of the provision. It also informed the topics that were explored during the review, some of which were followed up in an informative meeting with students during the visit. The meeting included student representatives who had contributed to the submission.

B Evaluation of the management of HEFCE-funded higher education

Core theme 1: Academic standards

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

10 The College's arrangements for the management of higher education standards and quality are clear, effective and appropriate for the size of provision, with well-defined roles for senior staff and operational groups. The Higher Education Strategy Group is the most senior forum with specific responsibility for higher education and its remit includes planning and monitoring, marketing, student support, staff development and quality arrangements as devolved from the awarding bodies. The group has a small core membership of four senior managers plus representatives of the awarding bodies, and is chaired by the Vice Principal (Curriculum Development). A Higher Education Coordinator, who has 25 per cent of their time for the role, oversees the day-to-day operation of higher education and reports to the Vice Principal. At subject level, programme leaders are responsible for managing the delivery and standards of the higher education awards and report to curriculum area assistant managers for learning.

11 In addition to the representation of awarding bodies on its Higher Education Strategy Group, the College has strong management links with both awarding bodies, particularly the University of Chester. The Vice Principal (Curriculum Development) and the Higher Education Coordinator attend partnership subcommittee meetings and senior strategy meetings at the University. A representative of the University is also a member of the Standards Committee of the College Board, which monitors the higher education provision overall. University link tutors have an important role and are effective in supporting college teaching teams in the management of the higher education programmes. The relationship between College programme teams and link tutors is close and consistently productive, providing a conduit for addressing any issues relating to academic standards, as well as updating and sharing practice within individual awards.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

12 Awarding body procedures ensure that programme specifications are in place prior to validation, and that reference has been made to the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, subject benchmark statements, where appropriate, and FHEQ level descriptors. Advice and guidance on the use of the Academic Infrastructure in relation to programme delivery, assessment and quality assurance is also readily available from the Higher Education Coordinator and university link tutors. The evidence from external examiners and awarding body reviews indicates that academic standards are appropriate and take due account of the Academic Infrastructure as a set of reference points.

13 The College has rigorous and thorough assessment arrangements in place that articulate well with the Academic Infrastructure. The arrangements ensure that the assessment of work-based learning involves employers and is subject to the same rigorous tiers of oversight as the assessment of academic work. They are also well supported by the awarding bodies. This support is exemplified by the effective cross-membership of committees and the close working with university link tutors described in paragraph 11. The assessment arrangements clearly meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* and *Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*,

as well as the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. The team confirms this good practice, which was reported in the Developmental engagements and has now been extended to the Certificate of Education. Equivalent arrangements have also been introduced for the newer awards of Staffordshire University.

14 The College's use and embedding of the Academic Infrastructure is aided by the dialogue it has with the awarding bodies, particularly the University of Chester. This includes staff attendance at the University's Partner Information Day. The programme team for Information and Communication Technology has shown recently how the College is able to take the initiative in its relationship with the University. It worked collaboratively to revise a university proposal for aligning the Foundation Degree curriculum with that of the final year of the honours degree at the University. The outcome has ensured that college students retain a clear progression route, while also maintaining the integrity of their Foundation Degree as an award in its own right. This is an example of good practice that reflects the expectations of the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* and shows how the College is able to operate as an equal partner with its awarding bodies.

15 The College is using the Academic Infrastructure extensively to underpin academic standards and staff are well informed about its different elements. However, the engagement is often through mechanisms provided by the awarding bodies. It is desirable therefore that staff consider how they might make more direct and explicit use of the Academic Infrastructure to aid the management of their responsibilities for the provision. To this end, it would be helpful to ensure that there are clear references to the Academic Infrastructure introduced into the College's revised and updated Higher Education Strategy. There are no such references in the current edition of the strategy.

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 All programme teams produce an annual self-assessment report, which incorporates performance data, an analysis of student feedback, external examiners' comments and an action plan of matters from the previous year. These programme reports are incorporated into the overall subject area self-assessment report and, subsequently, the university annual partnership report and the overall College self-assessment report. At present, the College's annual self-assessment report does not separate out the higher education provision. In accordance with the partnership agreements, each university carries out a periodic review of its partnership provision. The most recent of these confirm that the College is fulfilling its obligations to the awarding bodies for ensuring academic standards. They also provide evidence that the collaborative arrangements with both universities are strong and mutually supportive.

17 The reporting arrangements for the academic programmes are thorough and effective. However, the College has no formal mechanism to consider the range of monitoring reports as a whole and their implications for academic standards and quality across its higher education provision generally. It is desirable that such a mechanism be established, preferably involving a wider range of teaching staff in considering the substantial range of monitoring data that is already being generated for the College's management of standards and quality.

18 The reports of external examiners are a key factor in helping the College to fulfil its obligations for ensuring the academic standards expected by its awarding bodies. They are carefully considered as part of the quality assurance process. In some cases, a generic report is produced for a single award that is delivered by more than one college.

The awarding bodies and the College recognise that this can create difficulties in those reports where there is no differentiated comment on individual colleges. It is desirable that the College continues to liaise with its awarding bodies to make such differentiation possible for all awards.

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

19 The College has produced a staff development programme in partnership with the University of Chester that is specifically for staff teaching the higher education programmes. The College recognises the importance of scholarly activity, which it interprets as the completion of higher degrees, research, the enhancement of subject specialism and professional updating. As a result of the Associate College status, college staff can benefit from a 50 per cent fee remission for pursuing higher degrees at the University. Five members of staff have commenced or completed the PG Certificate/MA in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. There is a small, but growing, collaboration in shared scholarly activity. The general arrangements for staff development are as described in paragraph 33.

20 The College has responded systematically to the outcomes of the Developmental engagements. Clear action planning has ensured that all areas of good practice and recommendation have been, or are being, thoroughly addressed in respect of academic standards.

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

Core theme 2: Quality of learning opportunities

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

21 The general responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities are those described in paragraphs 10 and 11 for academic standards.

22 The quality of learning opportunities is considered in a number of key college groups, including the Senior Management Team, the Higher Education Strategy Group, meetings of the higher education programme leaders and the Higher Education Teachers Group. All staff are invited to the Higher Education Teachers Group, which is useful for discussing operational matters. However, in light of the College's commitment to create a stronger higher education academic community, it is desirable to build on existing thorough management procedures by creating a more collective and deliberative forum with staff and student representation from across the provision. One or more of the existing groups could assume such a role, by extending their terms of reference and membership.

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

23 The quality assurance arrangements described in paragraphs 16 to 18 are also used by the College to ensure the appropriateness of learning opportunities.

24 The College has a rich variety of mechanisms for maintaining an effective dialogue with its awarding bodies about the learning opportunities that are offered to students. These include strategy and business planning meetings, operational meetings, annual reviews, partnership days and staff membership of university committees. Regular interactions take place at programme level, including cross-partner programme meetings, link tutor discussions, reciprocal staff visits, shared teaching observations and student visits.

25 Management information, including student performance data, is being widely used as part of the College's monitoring of the programmes. It includes information on the onward progression of students, teaching observation results, student and employer surveys, and a staff development overview. The various data and reports tend to be dealt with effectively but separately at management level, although they are not formally discussed within any wider academic forum.

26 The scrutiny of college and awarding body reports, as well as discussion with representatives of the awarding bodies, confirms that the College is meeting its reporting requirements in respect of the quality of learning opportunities and its partnership agreements.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

27 The College engages appropriately with the Academic Infrastructure, as described in paragraphs 12 to 15, in relation to the management of learning opportunities. The College has effective arrangements in place for the support of students, on campus and during periods of work-based and placement learning, in line with the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 8: Career education, information, advice and guidance* and *Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. There is scope to consider the more explicit consideration of other sections of the code, for example *Section 3: Disabled students* and *Section 10: Admissions to higher education*, in the development and evaluation of learning opportunities.

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

28 The College has a range of effective mechanisms for assuring itself about the quality of teaching and learning, including well-considered arrangements for the observation of teaching. It operates the University of Chester peer observation system, through which teachers share issues and best practice. This is supplemented by a formal college scheme, in which staff are assessed using a set of standards that are specific to higher education. The observations lead to improvement action plans that are monitored by the college Quality Team and contribute to an annual overview report.

29 Student views on their teaching and learning are collected, reviewed and acted upon systematically by the College. A range of methods is used, including student representation on committees, module feedback forms, annual programme questionnaires and student surveys. The College has introduced a valuable training event for student

representatives, but acknowledges that its promotion may have led to some part-time representatives missing out on the initiative.

30 The College's vocational mission is evident in the clear and robust strategies for promoting work-based and work-related learning. These are well integrated features of all Foundation Degrees, helped by the extensive engagement of employers in programme design and delivery, and characterised by a carefully designed common work-based learning module. Employability skills are clearly recognised in the College's Higher Education Strategy and embedded in all programmes. Well-qualified mentors contribute to the effective delivery of learning in the workplace. Overall, the approach to work-based and work-related learning is an area of good practice that was recognised in the Developmental engagement in employer involvement. The opinions of employers are systematically gathered by the Quality Team, but these relate to both further and higher education. The College recognises that it would be useful to differentiate employer views about higher education awards.

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

31 The College has a range of policies and processes that inform and underpin its provision of pastoral and academic support. These include the provision of additional support and specialist expertise to help students with disabilities, learning difficulties, behaviour problems and mental health issues. Student entitlement to personal and academic support is clearly documented in programme handbooks and on the virtual learning environment. Central services, including well-qualified higher education advisers, provide applicants and enrolled students with clear information, advice and guidance. Central services staff engage regularly with their academic colleagues at programme team meetings, while student support is addressed as a standard item in annual programme monitoring reports. The central service teams also produce their own annual monitoring reports, drawing on student feedback.

32 The College's responsiveness to the support needs of students is reflected in the extensive and flexible 'Springboard' programme, which is designed specifically to meet the needs of higher education students. The programme is designed as an integrated network of specialist support staff, learning materials, personal tutorials and workshops. It offers individually tailored programmes of academic support. The 'Springboard' programme is, along with the College's extensive provision of student support generally, an area of good practice.

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

33 The College has a comprehensive and fully costed staff development plan, which includes an extensive range of opportunities focused specifically on the needs of higher education staff. The impact of staff development and training is systematically evaluated by the Higher Education Strategy Group and forms a clear strand of partnership monitoring in the annual strategic review meetings with the awarding bodies. The staff development programme is enhanced by activities provided by the awarding bodies, some of which support awareness and use of the Academic Infrastructure. These include attendance at conferences and seminars, membership of professional bodies and the activities of the College's internal Higher Education Teachers' Day. An aim of staff development is for all higher education teachers to achieve Standard Descriptor Two of the UK Professional Development Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education. Staff who are new to teaching at higher education level undertake an induction programme and are

supported by an experienced mentor. The arrangements for staff development are comprehensive and strategically planned, and constitute good practice.

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

34 All academic staff teaching on the higher education programmes are approved by the relevant awarding body. The curriculum vitae of staff show them to be well qualified and suitably experienced for their roles. Many staff have higher degrees or professional or industrial experience that is directly relevant to their area of teaching.

35 The adequacy of physical resources is checked by the awarding body as part of the programme approval process. Subsequently, resources, including library materials, are agreed by the College in consultation with curriculum assistant managers and programme leaders. Learning resources are specifically considered in collaborative annual programme monitoring reports. The reports confirm the feedback from students that resources are good. Students appreciate the wide range of electronic materials that are available on and off campus through the virtual learning environments of the College and awarding bodies.

36 The College is nearing the completion of a major new capital building programme. A modern teaching environment has been created at Chester, with high quality facilities for engineering and information and communication technology programmes. A new building will open at Ellesmere Port in September 2011, which incorporates a dedicated higher education centre. The College has been responsive to the views of staff and students in designing the learning environments and facilities for both new buildings.

37 The updated college action plans for the Developmental engagements confirm that all areas of good practice and recommendation have been or are being thoroughly addressed in respect of the quality of learning opportunities.

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?

38 The College publishes its overall strategic plan and higher education strategy, from which it is clear that the role of higher education is carefully considered in relation to the College's vocational mission. The partnership agreements with both awarding bodies provide clear guidance on the delegation of responsibilities to the College for the production and approval of public information, including marketing and promotional materials. In each case, the College is responsible for the published information, subject to the materials being approved by the awarding body. The range of published information includes a college prospectus, a higher education prospectus, course information leaflets and publicity releases. In addition, various policy and strategy documents, handbooks and information sheets are produced for staff and students. The College also maintains an attractive and

user-friendly website, which includes a dedicated area for higher education study and where all publications can be accessed.

39 A new higher education prospectus, called Access and Higher Education Learning Opportunities, has been produced for 2011-12 and is a direct response to a recommendation from the Developmental engagement in assessment. It is a high quality publication that provides a concise summary of all higher education awards in hard copy and electronically. The college web pages for each programme contain more detailed and regularly updated course information. Where programme leaflets are needed in hard copy, they are printed from the web pages to ensure that they are up to date.

40 All students are provided with comprehensive handbooks, which they judge to be useful and accurate. The full programme specifications are published on the College's virtual learning environment. Detailed university procedures and regulations are signposted by a link to the relevant university website. The University of Chester provides a standard structure and core content for programme handbooks, allowing the College to customise the documents with local information such as the contact details of tutors. The College has agreed with the awarding body to use the same format for Staffordshire University awards, thus promoting consistency across the whole provision. Students are provided with the programme handbooks in hard copy and are encouraged to use the virtual learning environment to access the electronic version for the live links and detailed module descriptors.

41 Useful information sheets are produced to explain to full-time and part-time students the financial support available to them. The Springboard brochure gives clear information on the flexible support that is available to higher education students for the development of academic skills, career planning and professional development.

**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?**

42 The College has introduced an explicit, detailed, multi-staged procedure for checking and signing off each publication, whether produced electronically or in hard copy. This requires the Vice Principal (Curriculum Development) to sign off the factual content and the Assistant Manager for Marketing to approve the accuracy of the design and branding. After approval by the relevant awarding body, the Assistant Manager for Marketing signs off the final proof as being approved for publication. The thorough and well-documented procedure incorporates a clear version control mechanism for leaflets. While the approval procedure should ensure accuracy and completeness, the review revealed the absence of awarding body information in the course leaflets published on the college website and in the Springboard brochure. These omissions have been promptly remedied, but it is advisable that the College strengthens the implementation of its procedures for approving marketing materials to ensure that essential core information is clearly identified and more rigorously monitored.

43 All programme handbooks are initially developed by the programme teams in collaboration with the partner awarding body, who must approve them prior to publication. This procedure works well to ensure accuracy and consistency. The College produces its employer and mentor handbooks and agreements to a standard template. The Higher Education Coordinator has responsibility for approving the documents in collaboration with programme leaders. This clear procedure has been introduced in response to a recommendation from the Developmental engagement in employer involvement. The Higher Education Strategy Group has overall responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of

public information that is the responsibility of the College, including mentor and student handbooks.

44 Members of the marketing team meet regularly with student focus groups to evaluate the effectiveness of the publications used by students, including the prospectus, course leaflets and handbooks. These are also discussed in programme teams with student representatives.

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

C Summary of findings from the Developmental engagement in assessment

45 The Developmental engagement in assessment was undertaken in June 2008. It focused on three lines of enquiry, which were agreed with the College in advance. The lines of enquiry reflect a broad range of assessment issues and allowed the team to explore the three IQER core themes. They were as follows:

Line of enquiry 1: The effectiveness of feedback in promoting student learning and facilitating improvement.

Line of enquiry 2: The involvement of employers in formative and summative assessment.

Line of enquiry 3: The articulation of assessment with subject benchmark statements and the promotion of national occupational standards.

46 The Developmental engagement report identifies a range of good practice across all three core themes. This includes well-defined assessment arrangements that articulate with the Academic Infrastructure, as well as the College's rigorous procedures for anonymous and second marking. A Continuing Professional Development module allows work-based learning to be integrated throughout the Information and Communication Technology programme, while students are able to achieve occupational qualifications as part of their programmes. The virtual learning environment is used to give prompt assessment feedback to some workplace students and high quality academic support is provided through the College 'Springboard' programme. The report also notes the effective arrangements for the continuing professional development of staff.

47 The report contains a number of recommendations for improving the provision, including the advisability of ensuring that pre-course publicity provides sufficiently detailed information for prospective students. It also identifies a range of desirable improvements. These include the need to strengthen the use of academic referencing and to make employer contributions to the assessment of work-based assignments more systematic. The report points to the value of employer-driven core modules in Foundation Degrees. It recommends more detailed assessment feedback to students on the pass/fail borderline and the need to consider, with its awarding body partner, the potential for extending college access to the university's virtual learning environment. Other desirable recommendations focus on improving the content and consistency of programme and module handbooks.

Summary of findings from the Developmental engagement in employer involvement

48 The Developmental engagement in employer involvement was undertaken in June 2009. It focused on three lines of enquiry, which were agreed with the College in advance. The lines of enquiry reflect a broad range of issues and allowed the team to explore the three IQER Core themes. They were as follows:

Line of enquiry 1: How are employers involved in the design, development, delivery, assessment and review of Foundation Degree programmes?

Line of enquiry 2: To what extent is work-based and placement learning integrated into programmes and balanced with academic learning?

Line of enquiry 3: How does the College ensure that information, advice and guidance to learners and employers is accurate and up to date and that student support is appropriate?

49 The Developmental engagement report confirms a substantial amount of good practice, including the College's strategic commitment to, and wide range of, employer involvement, the effective integration of work-based and placement learning within academic programmes, and robust assessment arrangements that support academic standards. It also draws attention to the arrangements for ensuring effective workplace mentoring, the work of the Higher Education Teachers Group in promoting good practice, and the high level of student support, which includes the flexible 'Springboard' programme.

50 The report also makes a number of recommendations for improving the provision, including the advisable need to introduce an explicit approval procedure for key employer documents. It notes the desirability of sharing good practice more systematically, introducing a continuing professional development strategy specifically for the delivery of work-based and placement learning, and improving the information published in programme handbooks.

D Foundation Degrees

51 The College's portfolio of 10 Foundation Degrees accounts for well over 80 per cent of its higher education provision. A strategic employer engagement plan is in place for the development of the qualifications based around the Training Quality Standard. The plan reflects the specialist vocational nature of the College and the non-traditional nature of many of the learners recruited to the programmes. The University of Chester is the awarding body partner for seven established Foundation Degrees, covering the following areas: accounting and management; early years practice; fitness and health; information and communication technology; managing services for children and young people; and teaching assistance. A suite of three Foundation Degrees in technology has more recently been introduced with Staffordshire University, although the award in manufacturing technology did not recruit in 2010-11. One additional University of Chester award, in hospitality management, is planned for 2011-12. In response to uncertainties over future funding and student numbers, the College is developing a new range of commercial, self-funding HND awards. These will be launched in September 2011 and are intended to run alongside the Foundation Degrees.

52 The areas of good practice and recommendations relating to Foundation Degrees are common to the whole provision. They are listed in the main conclusions, paragraphs 53 to 57.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

53 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in West Cheshire 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, the University of Chester and Staffordshire University.

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

- the College's wide range of highly productive interactions with its awarding bodies are exemplified by the initiatives of the Information and Communication Technology programme team in ensuring that college students' interests were taken fully into account during discussions about articulation with university awards (paragraphs 11, 14, 16, 24)
- the rigorous college assessment arrangements articulate well with the *Code of practice* and benefit from the effective involvement of employers and collaborative arrangements with awarding bodies (paragraphs 11, 13, 24)
- clear and robust college strategies and extensive engagement of employers ensure the effective integration of work-based and work-related learning into all Foundation Degrees (paragraph 30)
- the College's extensive and responsive arrangements for the support of students, which include the highly flexible 'Springboard' support programme that is specifically tailored to the needs of higher education students (paragraphs 31, 32)
- the comprehensive arrangements for staff development are strategically planned and clearly support the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 33).

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

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

- strengthen the implementation of its procedures for checking marketing materials to ensure that essential core information is clearly identified and more rigorously monitored (paragraph 42).

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

- make more effective use of the substantial monitoring data already being generated to support a cross-college approach to managing the standards and quality of its higher education provision (paragraphs 16, 17, 25)
- make more explicit and systematic use of the various elements of the Academic Infrastructure as reference points in its Higher Education Strategy and more widely in the delivery and monitoring of the provision (paragraphs 15, 27)
- continue to work with its awarding bodies to provide differentiated information in external examiners' and annual programme reports for those awards that are offered across a number of college partners (paragraph 18)
- review the terms of reference, membership and agendas of its various higher education groups, to support the growth of a more deliberative higher education academic community (paragraphs 22, 25, 29).

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.

West Cheshire College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College's wide range of highly productive interactions with its awarding bodies are exemplified by the initiatives of the Information and Communication Technology ensuring that college students' interests were taken fully into account during discussions about articulation with university awards (paragraphs 11, 14, 16, 24) 	<p>All student representatives to be involved in course reviews and development activities- this will extend the influence of student involvement from day-to-day course matters into the planning and development of programmes</p> <p>The College will make provision for student representatives to meet external examiners</p>	July 2012	Programme leaders	Student feedback - the Student Survey question 'the College listens to my views' - above national benchmark for HE in FE students - this will demonstrate a high level of involvement	HE Coordinator	HE in FE Student Feedback Report to be evaluated by the HE Strategy Group

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the rigorous college assessment arrangements articulate well with the <i>Code of practice</i> and benefit from the effective involvement of employers and collaborative arrangements with awarding bodies (paragraphs 11, 13, 24) 	Employer handbooks and employer/mentor guidelines clearly identify the role of employers in the assessment of each programme	July 2012	Programme leaders and HE Coordinator	Sign off of all employer handbooks for 2012-13 to ensure standards are met	HE Strategy Group	HE Coordinator Report (including reference to the relevant elements of the Academic Infrastructure - <i>Code of practice, Section 9</i>) evaluated by the HE Strategy Group Summer term 2012
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clear and robust college strategies and extensive engagement of employers ensure the effective integration of work-based and work-related learning into all Foundation Degrees (paragraph 30) 	Review of course handbooks to ensure a synergy with the key principles of teaching, learning and assessment in relation to work-based and work-related learning embedded into the HE Strategy	July 2012	Programme leaders and HE Coordinator	Sign off of course handbooks for 2012-13 to ensure standards are met	HE Strategy Group	HE Coordinator Report (including reference to the relevant elements of the Academic Infrastructure - <i>Code of practice, Sections 7 and 9</i>) evaluated by the HE Strategy Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College's extensive and 	Review the 'Springboard	December 2011	Learning Resource	Student feedback on 'Springboard' -	HE Strategy Group	Report on the Review of the

responsive arrangements for the support of students, which include the highly flexible 'Springboard' support programme that is specifically tailored to the needs of higher education students (paragraphs 31, 32)	Programme' with 2011-12 student representatives to incorporate student priorities		Services Manager	incorporated within annual student survey to demonstrate the effectiveness of the programme		Springboard Programme (including reference to the relevant elements of the Academic Infrastructure - <i>Code of practice, Section 7</i>) by the Learning Resource Services Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the comprehensive arrangements for staff development are strategically planned and clearly support the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 33). 	Establish a staff development plan for HE Teachers in FE	October 2011	Vice Principal Curriculum and HE Coordinator	HE staff participate in appropriate staff development (as logged by the Training and Development Section Leader)	HE Strategy Group	Report on the effectiveness of staff development (including reference to the relevant elements of the Academic Infrastructure - section 7) to the HE Strategy Group by the HE Coordinator
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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strengthen the 	Review procedures for	December	Assistant	Sign off process	HE Strategy	Assistant Manager

implementation of its procedures for checking marketing materials to ensure that essential core information is clearly identified and more rigorously monitored (paragraph 42).	checking the accuracy, currency and completeness of all public information, including web-based and other marketing materials and publications	2011	Manager Marketing with the programme leaders and the HE Coordinator	for public information demonstrates that standards are met	Group	Marketing report evaluated by the HE Strategy Group
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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> make more effective use of the substantial monitoring data already being generated to support a cross-college approach to managing the standards and quality of its higher education provision (paragraphs 16, 17, 25) 	<p>The HE Strategy Group programme and set agendas to monitor all aspects of the quality of each programme in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Academic Infrastructure student and employer information public information approaches to teaching, learning and assessment 	October 2011	Vice Principal Curriculum and Vice Principal Quality and Performance	Minuted reviews of each HE programme against the key quality aspects which demonstrate that standards are met	Report to the University of Chester Operational Group and the Partnership Review group of the University of Staffordshire	The Annual Institutional Reports for each partner higher education institution summarise the impact of the new monitoring processes

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student feedback • External examiner feedback • Employer involvement • Retention, success and progression • Annual monitoring reports including the implementation of action plans 					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make more explicit and systematic use of the various elements of the Academic Infrastructure as reference points in its Higher Education Strategy and more widely in the delivery and monitoring of the provision (paragraphs 15, 27) 	See above and review arrangements for supporting disabled students (section 3), career education (section 8) and admissions (section 10) against the Academic Infrastructure and ensure these arrangements are incorporated in the revised HE Strategy 2012-2015	July 2012	Assistant Manager Specialist Student Support Section Leader IAG Vice Principal Curriculum	Minuted reviews of each HE programme and specialist activities against the key quality aspects which demonstrate that standards are met	HE Strategy Group	Reviews evaluated by the HE Strategy Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continue to work with its awarding bodies to provide differentiated information in external 	The College will take responsibility for the differentiation of information and incorporate into the quality review process	July 2012	Programme leaders and the HE Coordinator	Minuted reviews of each HE programme against the key quality aspects which	HE Strategy Group	The Annual Institutional Reports for each partner higher education institution

examiners' and annual programme reports for those awards that are offered across a number of college partners (paragraph 18)	detailed above			demonstrate that standards are met		summarises the impact of the new monitoring processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review the terms of reference, membership and agendas of its various higher education groups, to support the growth of a more deliberative higher education academic community (paragraphs 22, 25, 29). 	The terms of reference and membership of the higher education groups will be reviewed as a result of this action plan	October 2011	Vice Principal Curriculum and Vice Principal Quality and Performance	Reviewed terms of reference and membership reflect the proposed monitoring activity and support a wider membership that is representative of the higher education community in the College	The HE Teachers Group Report to the University of Chester Operational Group and the Partnership Review Group of the University of Staffordshire	The Annual Institutional Reports for each partner higher education institution summarises the impact of the new monitoring processes and represent the higher education community in the College

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