



Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

Northumberland College

May 2012

SR 058/12

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ISBN 978 1 84979 631 6

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

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 (FHEQ)*, which includes descriptions of different higher education qualifications
- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*
- 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 Northumberland College carried out in May 2012

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 variety of assessment methods and the flexibility designed into assessments allow students from a wide range of backgrounds to demonstrate achievement
- student interaction with the virtual learning environment enhances learning.

Recommendations

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

- give due consideration to demonstrating how it articulates and assures its management responsibilities for higher education
- produce programme specifications, in line with QAA guidance, for all Higher National programmes, and make them available to all stakeholders
- align policies more closely to the Academic Infrastructure and provide mapping to confirm this.

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

- provide policies and guidance for checking the accuracy and completeness of information in programme handbooks across the full range of media.

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 Northumberland College (the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the College discharges its responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes which the College delivers on behalf of Edexcel, Northumbria University and the University of Sunderland. The review was carried out by Mr Gary Hargreaves, Professor Robert Moreton, Mrs Daphne Rowlands (reviewers) and Mr Peter Clarke (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 its awarding bodies, meetings with staff, students, employers and partner institutions, and reports of reviews by QAA. 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*, subject and award benchmark statements, the FHEQ and programme specifications.

3 In order to help 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 Northumberland College is the only general further education college in Northumberland. The county is primarily rural and has the lowest population density in England. Almost a half of the population of Northumberland live in the South East of the county; an area of relatively high social deprivation. The College delivers programmes at eight centres, with higher education provision at its main campus in Ashington in the South East of the county, at Kirkley Hall near Ponteland, which specialises in land-based programmes, and at Berwick-upon-Tweed. It provides further education courses to school leavers and adults in a wide range of subjects at all of its sites. The College mission is 'To be an exceptional college serving the educational and training needs of the people and businesses of Northumberland and beyond.' The College had been operating with an interim principal for almost two years at the time of the review. This, coupled with discussions with another college about a possible merger, has put any possible management changes on hold. The College is advertising to fill the principal post.

5 The College offers higher education programmes leading to awards from the University of Sunderland, Northumbria University and Edexcel. It has some 3,500 further education students, being 2,550 full-time equivalents. It has 211 higher education students, being 180 full-time equivalents.

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

6 The College has had a strategic partnership with Northumbria University since 2002. The programmes involved were developed by the College and validated by the university. The College has significant delegated responsibilities for these programmes, within the parameters set at validation and subject to approval by external moderators and examiners. The College also has significant devolved responsibility on Edexcel programmes.

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The College has had a partnership arrangement with the University of Sunderland offering courses through a franchise agreement since June 1992, and as a strategic partner since February 2005. Except in the case of the Foundation Degree Arboriculture, the College has limited devolved responsibility.

7 The College offers the following programmes listed by awarding body. The full-time equivalent numbers for each programme are indicated in parentheses.

Edexcel

- HNC Diploma in General Engineering (10.5)
- HNC Computing (5.5)
- HNC Hospitality Management (13.5)
- HND Hospitality Management (2)
- HND Animal Management (9)
- HNC Animal Management (19)
- HND Equine Management (5)

Northumbria University

- FD Early Years Practice (Birth to Five) (39)
- FD Teaching Assistants (22)

University of Sunderland

- FD Applied Arts (3)
- FD Counselling (14)
- FD Arboriculture (3)
- Diploma in Post-Compulsory Education and Training (PGCE) (21)

Recent developments in higher education at the College

8 During 2010-11 the University of Sunderland withdrew from its partnership with the College, as the College was in negotiations to merge with another provider. As a result, no first-year students were recruited to the relevant programmes in September 2012. Now that the merger is no longer going ahead, the College is in discussions to re-establish the relationship with the University of Sunderland. The redrafting of a range of College policies and procedures was put on hold while the merger talks went ahead. This process had restarted at the time of the visit, with many policies being at early draft stage or in discussion.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

9 Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the team. This was submitted alongside the College's self-evaluation. It was produced by collating the outcomes of class discussions, questionnaire surveys and focus groups. It provided a useful evaluation of key issues which informed the agenda for the visit. Reviewers also held meetings with groups of students during the visit, and they proved helpful.

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 Arrangements for managing higher education are effective. For the directly funded programmes validated by Northumbria University, annual monitoring and moderation are the main mechanisms for ensuring that standards are maintained. As part of the Northumbria University's re-validation cycle, the Foundation Degree programmes are currently going through the re-validation process, which was delayed by the intended merger. Although the University of Sunderland has withdrawn from its partnership with the College, it continues to support the programmes as laid out in its Collaborative Procedures Handbook. An agreement with Edexcel exists for approval of higher national programmes. The agreements detail the requirements the College must fulfil to maintain standards. Both university partnership documents clearly articulate the responsibilities of each party. The College is responsible for the recruitment of students, administrative support and the provision of suitable resources including appropriately qualified staff.

11 Communication between the universities and the College is good. The relevant faculty heads within the College are the main point of contact with Northumbria University, while a member of the university staff is designated to monitor partner college activities. College staff confirm that Northumbria University is very supportive of their students. The College nominates specialist staff for each area of study to act as the main link for University of Sunderland programmes. There are also links between the franchised programme leader at the University of Sunderland and Head of Faculty at the College.

12 Overall responsibility for the management and coordination of higher education in the College rests with the Director of Curriculum. The Director of Quality and Standards is responsible for maintaining the College's quality processes and procedures and the Higher Education Coordinator is responsible for higher education at an operational level. The Director of Quality and Standards together with the Director of Curriculum, both of whom are members of the Senior Management Team, report to the Interim Principal. Governors are kept informed through a series of reports on higher education presented to the Standards Committee. However, there is some lack of clarity regarding the detailed management structures as they relate to higher education. For example, the organisation chart presented in the self-evaluation document does not clearly demonstrate how higher education is managed and does not reflect the pivotal role of the Higher Education Coordinator. An additional chart, supplied subsequently, showed the reporting lines, with Course Team Leaders reporting to the Director of Curriculum through the Higher Education Coordinator. As the College develops its management structure it is considered advisable that the College gives due consideration to demonstrating how it articulates and assures its management responsibilities for higher education.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

13 Validation documents give due consideration to the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*. The College has a self-assessment process for all programmes in which the relevant sections of the *Code of practice* are used as guidelines. All course teams produce a self-evaluation document which ensures the currency of the assessments and any staff

development needs. Programme specifications provided by the universities articulate outcomes aligned to benchmark statements. The HND Equine Studies provides a programme specification showing aims, outcomes and underpinning knowledge in line with the Academic Infrastructure. Other Higher National programmes make detailed unit specifications available to students, but do not provide overarching programme specifications. It is advisable that the College produces programme specifications, in line with QAA guidance, for all Higher National programmes, and make them available to all stakeholders.

14 Following the Developmental engagement, the College has raised awareness of the Academic Infrastructure among staff. The Higher Education forum has been used as a mechanism for disseminating information and the Higher Education Coordinator has had a central role in ensuring that staff are kept informed. While the College's assessment policy takes due regard of the Academic Infrastructure, there is no mechanism for the mapping of College policies to ensure alignment. The College is in the process of re-writing all of its policies. The team consider it advisable that, as the College rewrites its policies, it aligns them more closely to the Academic Infrastructure and provides mapping to confirm this.

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

15 All programmes are validated, reviewed and revalidated in line with awarding body guidelines. The College has good relationships with its awarding universities and regular communication between them helps to support standards. Employers have been involved in the preparations for revalidation of Northumbria University Foundation Degrees, for example an employer sits on the steering committee for the revalidation of the Early Years programme. Employers confirm that programme content is appropriate and relevant to the workplace. Quality processes are implemented through a series of meetings and quality events and effective utilisation of the recently appointed Learning and Teaching Coordinator. External examiner reports confirm that standards are appropriate.

16 The College monitors its programmes effectively through its rigorous quality processes, which ensure that standards are maintained. A Review Handbook clearly describes the processes that higher education programmes should follow in order to maintain standards. Each programme completes a self-assessment review which takes into account progression data, student performance and strengths and weaknesses as elicited from student feedback and external examiner reports. An action plan outlines measures to be taken and these are aggregated into a faculty quality improvement plan. This is monitored quarterly by the Director of Quality and Standards to ensure that actions have been completed. The higher education actions are combined into a Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan which is monitored by the Director of Quality and Standards and through the Higher Education Quality Board, a subgroup of the Quality and Standards Committee. There is an additional collaborative report produced for each university. A similar monitoring process operates for Edexcel programmes. A report is compiled of all the monitoring reports for Higher National programmes and a tracking sheet is used to ensure that all actions are appropriately addressed.

17 The College has effective systems of internal moderation and verification. An internal verification system for Higher National programmes is used to monitor standards and ensure consistency. For Northumbria University programmes, samples of work are internally moderated with some also subject to moderation at the university. They are then subject to scrutiny by external examiners. The Developmental engagement identified as good practice the variety of assessment tasks and the flexibility built into their

design. This has subsequently been confirmed by external examiners. The team considers that the variety of assessment methods and the flexibility designed into assessments, which allow students from a wide range of backgrounds to demonstrate achievement, represent good practice.

18 Feedback on assignments is generally provided in good time, and often within two weeks, although some students reported longer timescales. Students confirm that they are generally satisfied with the assessment process. External examiner reports confirm that academic standards are being met.

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

19 Arrangements for staff development are clear and effective. A Professional Development Centre, which provides a base for all professional and learning activities, is being developed at the main campus. The College has a newly formed Quality Team which has a remit for organising the annual staff development week. The College effectively supports the achievement of academic standards through its staff development process. A staff development policy outlines the way in which the College identifies staff training needs which are informed by its appraisal process. This policy is in the process of being re-approved and will form part of the Corporate Handbook available to all staff. Annual departmental development plans include identification of staff development needs which are aggregated following appraisals between staff and their line managers. Training requests are submitted to the Continuous Professional Development Panel for consideration against College priorities. Examples of staff development have included obtaining higher qualifications and attendance at conferences; for example, staff teaching on equine programmes attended a conference in Germany to update their professional competence.

20 The College provides an annual programme of staff development for all teaching staff. In addition, distinct higher education professional learning activities are provided in-house and through the use of external specialists. Attendance at these events and other scholarly activities are recorded in professional learning logs and help to maintain academic standards. There are also a number of discrete staff development opportunities provided by the awarding universities, including a programme of Academic Development opportunities which are offered to College staff.

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 Arrangements for the delegation of responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities are the same as those for academic standards outlined in paragraphs 10 to 12. The College has a clear understanding of its responsibilities for the quality of learning opportunities in four areas: staff development, learning and teaching, the learning environment, and the student experience. The Director of Quality and Standards has overall responsibility within the College for maintaining the quality of learning opportunities.

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

22 The universities retain responsibility for ensuring that the quality of learning opportunities offered within the College enables the students to achieve the required academic standards for their awards. This is reviewed and monitored annually by the universities and the College. In addition, College staff meet with university staff regularly throughout the year to discuss operational issues. Higher education programmes at the College are subject to monitoring and review on an annual basis. The responsibilities for admissions and recruitment lie with the College, in line with respective university requirements.

23 The College has addressed several issues in response to recommendations arising from the Developmental engagement in assessment. Students are now better informed about grading criteria, assessment methodology and feedback arrangements. Clarification has been provided to ensure that all staff take due note of the Academic Infrastructure and achieve greater consistency in the quality of written feedback provided to students, while College staff have worked with University of Sunderland staff to ensure that art and design students receive written feedback.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

24 The Academic Infrastructure is referenced in the self-evaluation document citing the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* in relation to the quality of learning opportunities and the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*. The College's continuing professional development programme includes sessions on the Academic Infrastructure. In meetings with the team, College staff were able to articulate its relevance as part of the course development process.

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

25 Staff have a clear understanding of the College's teaching and learning strategies. The College maintains oversight of the quality of teaching and learning through its annual monitoring and review processes with significant emphasis on staff development and teaching observation. The College has developed a learning and teaching observation system for all College staff. An external consultancy conducted the initial observations in 2011-12 in order to establish a baseline for the quality of learning and teaching across the College. All staff involved in higher education programmes were observed but not necessarily teaching a higher education session. The exercise will be repeated in 2012-13. The criteria used for teaching observations are those for further education provision. However, staff are aware of the need to interpret the criteria carefully when observing higher education classes.

26 The College is committed to ensuring all teaching staff are embedding higher order thinking strategies and activities in their programmes of study. It has recently appointed a number of Learning and Teaching Advocates to support improvements in departments across the College. The Advocates report to the newly established Learning and Teaching Coordinator. Students, encouraged by staff, make very good use of the virtual learning environment. Such use includes the creation of discussion groups and virtual tutorials, which are particularly valuable for part-time students. Student interaction with the virtual learning

environment, which enhances their learning, represents good practice. In meetings with the team, students expressed very positive views on the quality of teaching and learning.

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

27 The College is responsible for providing pastoral support and personal tutoring to students. All students have a personal tutor, although the description of the role varies by course. Each student has scheduled meetings with tutors. Some variability in this provision was noted by students in meetings with the team and in the written submission. However, students and staff acknowledged that tutorials are arranged if requested. External examiner reports generally note good staff-student interaction and good levels of student satisfaction with their learning experience.

28 The student voice is well represented in the College. Each course has a student representative who attends course management meetings on a monthly basis. Heads of Faculty also meet with student representatives once a term. There is a cross-college Student Parliament which meets monthly and has higher education representation. Students on all programmes reported that contact with staff is easy to establish both by email and in person. The student views about their support at the College are generally positive. The College is responsive to student views; for example, students at Kirkley Hall noted that following student representation additional heating had been provided in classrooms.

29 The College closely analyses its retention data. Each Course Team Leader produces a report on individual student withdrawals and completes a student progression document indicating the subsequent destinations of the students.

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

30 Arrangements for staff development are outlined in paragraphs 19 and 20. These are augmented by input from external consultants to enhance the development of staff in areas of teaching and learning. A post of Learning and Teaching Coordinator was introduced in 2011. The post carries with it the requirement to raise the standards of learning and teaching and thereby improve the student experience. Learning and Teaching Advocates from across the College work from the Professional Development Centre under the guidance of the Learning and Teaching Coordinator.

31 There is an effective process for the induction of new staff, during which they receive corporate information, information about the staff development process and input on standards and quality. The latter is delivered by the Learning and Teaching Coordinator. All new staff are assigned a mentor with whom they meet weekly.

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?

32 Learning Resource Centres are based on two sites; Kirkley Hall and Ashington. The majority of higher education students are based at Ashington and Kirkley Hall, and the Ashington Learning Resource Centre services the Berwick students. The Ashington campus has an area of teaching accommodation dedicated to higher education, including a higher education study centre, which provides drop-in study facilities for the exclusive use of higher education students. The learning resource centre provides access to a wide range of resources including study skills material, research facilities, e-journals, and e-books. In addition, the universities provide students with access to their libraries and virtual learning

environments. Students confirmed that resources enable them to fulfil the requirements of their learning and that they make full use of College and university resources.

33 Learning resources are subject to regular monitoring processes including annual course monitoring and scrutiny by external examiners. Resourcing for the higher education provision has been constrained for the past two years, partly as a result of financial restrictions imposed in anticipation of a College merger. Engineering facilities and information technology in general are cited as poor by the students although the engineering external examiner considers them to be adequate. Students on teacher education programmes indicated that textbooks in the learning resource centre are often outdated and engineering students felt that some textbooks are not appropriate to their needs. Overall, however, students acknowledge that learning resources meet their needs. External examiners for Edexcel programmes generally reported that the resources are adequate in engineering, hospitality and photography; whereas the external examiner for animal management highlighted the College's zoo as a very valuable resource.

34 The College acknowledges shortcomings in the general information technology provision and is developing plans to upgrade these resources significantly. Since the Developmental engagement, the College has begun to work with an external company to provide a new information technology infrastructure. At the time of the visit, onsite access to general information technology services was still patchy, with significant variation in accessibility in different parts of the main site. However, students commented favourably on the virtual learning environment, with part-time students especially reporting very positively on the access it provides to learning resources and its role as an essential tool to their learning.

35 Because of the dispersed nature of the population in Northumberland, the College recognises the importance of outreach centres in its mission to widen participation, while acknowledging the additional costs they incur. Information technology and communication plays a crucial role in facilitating the widest possible access to resources for all students. The College places emphasis on the provision of electronic learning resources such as e-books and e-journals as the most efficient, effective and fair way of distributing limited resources. In addition, resources are also shared among the wider student population, for example through the loaning of laptop computers. The University of Sunderland provides funds for widening participation and this is ring-fenced by the College, and requires a report on how the funds have been distributed by the College.

The team concludes that it has confidence in the College's management of its responsibilities for the quality of the learning opportunities as required by the awarding bodies to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Core theme 3: Public information

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

36 College responsibilities are clearly laid out in partnership agreements and are understood by staff. The College is responsible for publishing a range of information and advice for potential and current students, employers and the wider public. Responsibilities are laid down by the awarding bodies' memoranda, outlining the checks and requirements to be applied to the published materials the College provides. The universities, as part of their partnership agreements, require the College to operate within their guidelines for published

information including marketing materials. Published information is checked during regular visits by the universities and by external examiners for Edexcel.

37 Information is made available in a range of appropriate media. The College produces programme leaflets and a dedicated higher education prospectus both online and in hard copy. The College website and the virtual learning environment are also repositories for information for potential and current students and College staff. The higher education-specific information includes general guidance on higher education, fees, case studies, and links to videos of student views. Students find this information to be helpful and accessible. The College also publishes information for employers including mentor handbooks. A range of policies and procedures are provided for staff through the staff intranet including staff mentor handbooks.

**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?**

38 Prospectus content is produced at programme level to a consistent template. Programme leaders check the content for accuracy, and then it is signed off by the Head of Faculty and final checks are made by the marketing department. Course leaflets are generated from the prospectus, ensuring consistency and accuracy, and are available online and in hard copy.

39 The College provides programme handbooks for all its higher education provision although reviewers noted that there is variation in the consistency in the information provided and its accessibility. For example, HNC General Engineering provides full and comprehensive programme information content in lieu of handbooks, but no programme specifications. HNC Photography has programme handbooks but again with no programme specification. HND Equine provides the online programme information in lieu of handbooks and now provides a programme specification in response to an external examiner's report. Although there are clear procedures for checking the College prospectus, the reviewers could find no such procedures for checking handbooks on the virtual learning environment and the College website. The team consider it desirable that the College provides policies and guidance for checking the accuracy and completeness of information in programme handbooks across the full range of media.

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

40 The Developmental engagement in assessment took place in May 2011. The lines of enquiry were as follows.

Line of enquiry 1: How do the variety and appropriateness of assessment methods test the achievement of learning outcomes?

Line of enquiry 2: What is the quality of feedback to learners on formative and summative assessment and how is this considered and managed within the College?

Line of enquiry 3: What overall guidance and information do learners receive in support of assessment?

41 During the Developmental engagement the reviewers identified several areas of good practice. The variety of assessment methods and the flexibility designed into assessments enable students from a diversity of backgrounds to perform to the best of their abilities. The virtual learning environment is used effectively on teacher education and early years programmes to meet the needs of a geographically dispersed student population and to provide good support to students. The use of electronic communications to deliver programmes ensures that all students, regardless of circumstances, receive the same high quality of delivery and assessment support.

42 The reviewers also made some recommendations. They considered it advisable that the College should ensure that staff take due note of the Academic Infrastructure and achieve greater consistency in the provision of assessment feedback to students, and work with the University of Sunderland to find ways of providing all students with written feedback. They also considered it advisable that the College proceed speedily with plans to improve and update its website, and that the College ensures that students are provided with more consistent information regarding grading criteria, assessment methodology and feedback arrangements. The reviewers considered it desirable that the College ensures that all students are provided with consistent and sufficient information about their programmes.

D Foundation Degrees

43 The College offers a Foundation Degree in Early Years Practice and a Foundation Degree for Teaching Assistants validated by Northumbria University. These programmes were developed by the College which has significant autonomy in their operation. This provision is going through revalidation in 2011-12. The College also offers Foundation Degrees in Applied Arts, Counselling, Training and Work-Based Learning, and Arboriculture franchised from the University of Sunderland. During 2010-11 the University of Sunderland withdrew from its partnership with the College. As a result, no first-year students were recruited to these programmes in September 2012. The College is in discussions with the university about re-establishing the partnership.

44 The programmes reflect the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. Employers are appropriately involved in such areas as mentoring, providing projects and placements, and feeding back to students and the College on the students' progress in the workplace. Employers are represented on the steering group for the revalidation of the Northumbria University programmes. The features of good practice and recommendations listed in the following section relate equally to the Foundation Degree provision, except for the advisable recommendation relating to the provision of programme specifications.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

45 The team has identified a number of features of good practice in Northumberland 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, Northumbria University, the University of Sunderland and Edexcel.

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

- the variety of assessment methods and the flexibility designed into assessments allow students from a wide range of backgrounds to demonstrate achievement (paragraph 17)
- student interaction with the virtual learning environment enhances learning (paragraphs 26 and 34).

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

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

- give due consideration to demonstrating how it articulates and assures its management responsibilities for higher education (paragraph 12)
- produce programme specifications, in line with QAA guidance, for all Higher National programmes, and make them available to all stakeholders (paragraphs 13)
- align policies more closely to the Academic Infrastructure and provide mapping to confirm this (paragraph 14).

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

- provide policies and guidance for checking the accuracy and completeness of information in programme handbooks across the full range of media (paragraph 39).

50 Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, 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.

51 Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, 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.

52 Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, 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.

Northumberland College action plan relating to the Summative review: May 2012						
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 variety of assessment methods and the flexibility designed into assessments allow students from a wide range of backgrounds to demonstrate achievement (paragraph 17) 	<p>Share this good practice across higher education provision within the College</p> <p>Learning and Teaching Coordinator and Higher Education Manager/Coordinator to review all assessments with course team leaders to ensure flexibility</p>	<p>October 2012</p> <p>Regular ongoing reviews</p>	Learning and Teaching Coordinator and Higher Education Manager	<p>A wide variety of assessment methods used effectively across the higher education provision within the College</p> <p>High level of learner satisfaction with assessment methods utilised as part of their provision</p>	Higher Education Forum	<p>Annual Programme Reviews</p> <p>Annual self-assessment</p> <p>Direct feedback from students</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> student interaction with the virtual learning environment enhances learning (paragraphs 26 	<p>Share this good practice across higher education provision within the College</p> <p>Learning and Teaching Coordinator to work with Higher Education</p>	<p>October 2012</p> <p>Regular ongoing reviews</p>	Learning and Teaching Coordinator and Higher Education Manager	All higher education programme to have an effective virtual learning environment which is valued by students	Higher Education Forum	<p>Annual Programme Reviews</p> <p>Annual self-assessment</p> <p>Direct feedback from students</p>

and 34).	Teaching Teams to further develop their virtual learning environments to enhance learning for all					
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"> give due consideration to demonstrating how it articulates and assures its management responsibilities for higher education (paragraph 12) 	Executive team to propose a permanent solution to the management responsibilities of higher education within the College and reflect this decision in appointment of a Higher Education Coordinator	August 2012	Executive Team	Appointment of appropriate person with specific responsibility for the management of higher education in the College, clearly identified within the management structure	Principal	<p>College management structure</p> <p>Higher Education Manager/Coordinator job description</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> produce programme specifications, in line with QAA guidance, for all Higher National programmes, and make them available to all stakeholders (paragraphs 13) 	Review of programme specifications for all Higher National programmes to ensure there are produced in line with QAA guidance	September 2012	Course Team Leaders of all Higher National programmes, coordinated by the Edexcel Quality Nominee	All Higher National programmes have programme specifications which adhere to QAA guidance	Higher Education Forum	<p>Higher National Annual Programme Reviews</p> <p>Higher National annual self-assessments</p> <p>Direct feedback from Higher National stakeholders</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> align policies more closely to the Academic Infrastructure and provide mapping to confirm this (paragraph 14). 	During the update of policies for the corporate manual 2012-13 map relevant policies to the Quality Code	September 2012 With annual reviews	Higher Education Manager	Appropriate policies mapped against the Quality Code	Director of Quality & Standards	Policy documentation within the 2012-13 Corporate Manual
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"> provide policies and guidance for checking the accuracy and completeness of information in programme handbooks across the full range of media (paragraph 39). 	Guidance document to be produced make clear the process of checking accuracy and completeness of information in programme handbooks	August 2012 With annual reviews	Higher Education Manager Director of Quality & Standards	Policy and guidance in place to be included within the corporate manual 2012-13	Higher Education Forum	Guidance documentation to be included within the 2012-13 Corporate Manual

RG 976 08/12

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