North West Regional College

Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review,
Northern Ireland: Summative Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

February 2013

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, Northern Ireland (IQER NI).

Purpose of IQER NI

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 NI 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 NI focuses on three core themes: academic standards, quality of learning opportunities and public information.

The IQER NI process

IQER NI is a peer review process. It is divided into two complementary stages: Developmental Engagement and Summative Review. In accordance with the published method, all Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)-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 student submission by the student body
- a preparatory meeting between the college and the IQER NI coordinator several weeks before the Developmental Engagement visit
- the Developmental Engagement visit, which normally lasts 2.5 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 DEL-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 NI coordinator and QAA reviewers. They do not include nominees.

Evidence

In order to obtain evidence for the review, IQER NI review 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 NI review teams' expectations of colleges are guided by a nationally agreed set of reference points, known as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. This is published by QAA and consists of three main parts:

- Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards
- Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality
- Part C: Information about higher education provision

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 NI

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 NI. Progress against these action plans is monitored by QAA in conjunction with DEL and/or the college's awarding bodies 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 North West Regional College carried out in February 2013

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 extent and depth of the College's engagement with the Quality Code (paragraphs 12, 13 and 24)
- the positive impact of curriculum projects enhancing the student experience across the provision (paragraph 20)
- the well-considered procedures to increase the amount and sophistication of the content available to students on the virtual learning environment (paragraph 32)
- the depth and scope of the engagement with employers (paragraph 33).

Recommendations

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

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

- improve the guidance provided to students in course handbooks (paragraph 39).

A   Introduction and context

1   This report presents the findings of the Summative Review of higher education funded by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) conducted at North West Regional 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 that the College delivers on behalf of Accounting Technicians Ireland; City & Guilds; The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development; Edexcel; Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR); The Queen's University of Belfast; and the University of Ulster. The review was carried out by Professor Paul Brunt, Dr Heather Barrett-Mold, Mr Alan Serplus, Miss Elizabeth Shackels and Mr Colin Stanfield (reviewers) and Dr Peter Steer (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, Northern Ireland* (the handbook), published by QAA. Evidence in support of the Summative Review included documentation supplied by the College and awarding bodies, meetings with staff, students, employers, and 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 UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code*)*, developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers.

3   In order to assist DEL in gaining information to assist with the assessment of the impact of Foundation Degree (FD) awards, section D of this report summarises details of the FD programmes delivered at the College.

4   North West Regional College was established in August 2007 following the merger of the North West Institute of Further and Higher Education and Limavady College of Further and Higher Education. It has campuses in Londonderry, Limavady and Strabane. The College's mission statement indicates that it seeks to 'promote quality teaching and learning in a supportive and safe environment.' The College aims to 'respond flexibly to the educational and training needs of its communities - anticipating, identifying and satisfying their needs in an efficient and effective manner.' Total College enrolments in the academic year 2012-13 to date total 4,625 full-time and 14,163 part-time students. The full-time higher education provision is currently constrained by the Maximum Student Number (MaSN) cap at 635 places. In the academic year 2012-13 there are 652 full-time and 740 part-time higher education enrolments, representing 904 full-time equivalents. In 2011-12 there were 655 full-time and 973 part-time students, making 933 full-time equivalents. In terms of the College block grant funding, higher education enrolments equate to 18 per cent of the College budget.

5   The College is organised into eight academic schools: Business Services and General Education; Craft Services; Early Years, Children and Young People; Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy; Health and Social Care; Hospitality, Tourism and Sport; Media, Multimedia and the Arts; and Science and Technology. Within each school there are curriculum managers, some of whom have a defined higher education brief, while others look after higher and further education within their vocational specialism. The College has no plans to rationalise this position as each school has autonomy to deploy their curriculum managers to meet the needs of their school effectively. The Head of Higher Education and Training Programmes works on a cross-college basis with heads of school to support the higher education provision and develop and implement consistency of procedures and

practices. The higher education provision offered by the College is as follows, listed beneath the awarding partners and with student numbers in brackets:

Accounting Technicians Ireland (part-time courses)

- Level 5 Diploma for Accounting Technicians (37)

City & Guilds (part-time courses)

- Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Children's Care, Learning & Development (Advanced Practice and Management Strands) (15)
- Level 5 Diploma in Leadership Health and Social Care (15)
- NVQ Level 4 Diploma in Management Practice and Advanced Techniques in the Hair and Beauty Sector (21)

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (part-time courses)

- Level 7 Advanced Diploma in Human Resource Management/Development (7)

Edexcel - (full-time courses)

- Level 5 HNC/HND Construction and the Built Environment (24)
- Level 4/5 HNC/HND Creative Media Production (Journalism) (30)
- Level 4/5 HNC/HND Creative Media Production (Moving Image) (38)
- Level 4 HNC Health & Social Care (41)
- Level 4/5 HNC/HND Interactive Media (36)
- Level 5 HNC/HND Music (44)
- Level 4/5 HNC/HND Performing Arts (30)
- Level 5 HNC/HND Sport (Health, Fitness & Exercise) (38)
- Level 5 HND Advanced Practice in Work with Children and Families (Education) (74)
- Level 5 HND Business (35)
- Level 5 HND Computing & Systems Development (44)
- Level 5 HND Construction and the Built Environment (Civil Engineering) (20)
- Level 5 HND Electrical & Electronic Engineering (15)
- Level 5 HND Fine Art (32)
- Level 5 HND Fashion and Textiles (26)
- Level 5 HND Health & Social Care (32)
- Level 5 HND Mechanical Engineering (24)

Edexcel - (part-time courses)

- Level 5 HNC in Advanced Practice in work with Children and Families (Education) or (Management) (98)
- Level 4 HNC Beauty Therapy Management (33)
- Level 4 HNC in Business (18)
- Level 4 HNC Computing and Business Systems (21)
- Level 4 HNC Construction and the Built Environment (8)
- Level 4 HNC Construction and the Built Environment (Civil Engineering) (4)
- Level 4 HNC Electrical and Electronic Engineering (14)
- Level 4 HNC Fine Art (6)
- Level 4 HNC Health and Social Care (99)
- Level 4 HNC Mechanical Engineering (12)

- Level 4 HNC Sport (Health, Fitness & Exercise) (28)
- Level 5 HND in Advanced Practice in work with Children and Families (Education) (20)

Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (full-time courses)

- Level 4 Certificate in Administration (Business Professional) (5)
- Level 4 Diploma in Administration (Business Professional) (8)

The Queen's University of Belfast (part-time course)

- FD Early Childhood Studies (3)

University of Ulster (full-time courses)

- FD Hospitality and Tourism Management (15)
- FD Science, Computing & Software Development (23)
- FD Travel and Tourism Management (22)

University of Ulster (part-time courses)

- Level 5 Associate Bachelor Degree in Fine/Applied Art (16)
- Level 4 Certificate in Counselling Studies (63)
- FD Applied and Medical Science (13)
- FD Counselling (86)
- FD Hospitality and Tourism Management (19)
- FD Science, Computing and Software Development (28)
- FD Travel and Tourism Management (20)

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

6   The College has responsibility for recruitment and admissions and also for the provision of appropriate resources, teaching and student support. The setting of summative assessments is undertaken by the College for awards from City & Guilds, Edexcel and The Queen's University of Belfast. On its awards, the University of Ulster shares the responsibility for summative assessment with the College. For other awards, summative assessments are set by the awarding organisation. The College undertakes the marking, internal moderation and feedback to students for all the awards except the Level 5 Diploma for Accounting Technicians. All the awarding bodies and organisations except Accounting Technicians Ireland and OCR use periodic review to oversee their awards. The universities, City & Guilds and Edexcel appoint external examiners who report on the College provision. The other awarding organisations also oversee completed summative assessments. Accounting Technicians Ireland takes responsibility for all aspects of summative assessment on their awards.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

7   The College has emphasised science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects in the distribution of its MaSN. The new Foyle Building on the Derry/ Londonderry site became fully operational in September 2011 providing accommodation for performing arts, music and drama in modern facilities, including a new 140-seat theatre and recording studios. Since the Developmental Engagement the College has started the delivery of a small amount of higher education at Strabane.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

8   Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative Review team and did so in November 2012. The student written submission is comprehensive. It was developed through a total of seven student meetings on the College's three sites at Derry/Londonderry, Limavady and Strabane. It was facilitated by two College staff supported by a graduate intern. The meetings included full-time and part-time higher education students, of various ages, across several different curriculum areas. The contributions from each meeting were collated by the College facilitators. A group of six students on the Derry/Londonderry campus compiled the final student written statement. Students met the coordinator at the preparatory meeting and the team during the review. Their involvement was helpful for the team and provided an insight into a number of topics, including the provision of resources and learning and teaching.

Evaluation of the management of DEL-funded higher education

Core theme 1: Academic standards

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

9   The College has an effective management structure. It works in close partnership with its awarding bodies and organisations, employers and other stakeholders to ensure the College provision meets its strategic priorities. A senior management team of four directors is responsible to the Principal for the strategic development, effectiveness, quality and standards of the College's higher education. They delegate some responsibilities to heads of school and curriculum managers who also ensure that provision is aligned to the College mission and Northern Ireland Higher Education Strategy. The Director of Curriculum has overall responsibility for higher education and the management of academic standards. He is supported by the Head of Higher Education and Training Programmes. The heads of school are supported by curriculum managers for the management of standards at an operational level. The senior management team meets heads of school and curriculum managers annually to discuss statistical outcomes and progress against key performance indicators, including success rates. Exceptionally, where indicators suggest a particular problem, further meetings provide the opportunity to explore issues, make recommendations and monitor progress.

10   The committees with responsibilities for higher education provide an effective oversight of academic standards. They have clear terms of reference and responsibilities which are suitably discharged. The Academic Board oversees curriculum and new course development. Acting as a subcommittee, the Academic Standards Sub-Committee has responsibility for academic standards and disseminating good practice, considering the outcomes of periodic reviews and external examiner reports. Higher education forums at school and college level monitor standards and promote the dissemination of good practice, partly through the sharing of minutes.

11   Student participation in decision-making is developing adequately. Student representatives are suitably involved at course level in staff-student consultative committees and the higher education forums. Student involvement at college-level is less extensive.

The self-evaluation acknowledged the benefit of greater student involvement on college-level committees. Students indicated that they believe their views are considered appropriately.

What account is taken of the Quality Code?

12   The College makes detailed use of the guidance in the Quality Code. The Director of Curriculum and Head of Higher Education and Training Programmes are proactive in monitoring developments in the Quality Code. They take an overarching role in relating the descriptors in the Quality Code to the College's provision. This includes a comprehensive mapping exercise of College provision against new elements of the Quality Code as they are released. College staff at all levels are well informed about the Quality Code as a result of College dissemination activities and use it extensively. The University of Ulster provides extensive staff development opportunities informed by the Quality Code.

13   College staff make effective use of the *Foundation Degree benchmark statement* to inform course development and delivery. Courses exhibit a rich and detailed engagement with this benchmark statement. For example, the course team for the new FD Drugs and Alcohol, due to start after the review, have undertaken extensive employer and service user engagement over a two-year period to inform course content and structure.

14   The College has responded effectively to recommendations of the Developmental Engagement. There are now programme specifications contextualised to each Edexcel course.

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   The College properly undertakes its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards. These responsibilities are fully specified in partnership agreements with the awarding bodies and organisations. College staff at all levels have a clear understanding of their responsibilities in relation to academic standards. They work closely with the awarding bodies and organisations to ensure the currency of this understanding. Relationships with awarding bodies and organisations are strong and productive. For example, College staff lead partnership networks for FD Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Management and FD Applied and Medical Science. Such activities enhance the College's capacity to maintain academic standards and disseminate good practice.

16   The College has a well-developed and embedded quality cycle involving several structures and processes. Annual self-evaluation reports at course level reflect suitably on standards with the help of examiner reports, student feedback, team meetings, internal moderation outcomes and statistical indicators. These inform reporting and planning at school and college level and ultimately the College Quality Improvement Plan. Each course has a periodic review every three years. Periodic reviews enable course teams to plan for the longer term with the help of an internal panel that includes external representation. College committees provide an appropriate oversight of these quality procedures, assisted by a quality management database that logs and tracks action points.

17   The College gives effective consideration to the reports from external examiners and verifiers. These reports confirm that academic standards are being maintained. Where required, the College responds in a timely and effective manner. Actions in response to external examiner and verifier reports are tracked to completion on the quality management database. An evaluative annual statement on external reports, requirements and actions is submitted to the College's Academic Standards Sub-Committee.

The College gives the student body opportunities to see and to comment on these reports as part of its student engagement strategy.

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

18   The College has appropriate procedures for the oversight of staff development. It has a detailed and coordinated staff development policy that reflects its strategic objectives. There are clear procedures for staff development with all activities recorded and evaluated. The Director of Workforce Development and Administration has overall responsibility for staff development. She is a member of the Academic Standards Sub-Committee, which provides an opportunity for the consideration of staff development in the context of other discussions about higher education. The Workforce Development team collate, analyse and review, on a six weekly basis, all management reports, specifically identifying staff training needs.

19   The procedures for identifying staff development needs are appropriate. The College has a comprehensive and effective induction for all new staff. This provides an opportunity to discuss training needs. The College uses an appraisal system, which includes input from teaching observations, to identify staff development needs. Training is provided for both appraisers and staff undergoing the process. The College also identifies staff development requirements through the cycle of quality procedures considered in paragraph 16. There are also strategic priorities which include staff development for the virtual learning environment.

20   Staff development activities provide suitable support for the delivery of the curriculum. Staff are undertaking a variety of development activities, including enrolment on higher degrees, working in industry for short periods and benefitting from the training provided by the awarding bodies and organisations. The College has made extensive and highly effective use of curriculum projects to enhance the provision. Employers and students confirmed that the curriculum projects have been of direct benefit to them. In the current academic year, there are 57 projects spread across the provision with a total budget of over £200,000. These projects are clearly linked to the world of work and provide a significant enhancement of the curriculum. For example, a member of the HNC/D in Sport (Health, Fitness & Exercise) course team undertook a short secondment to a professional football club, resulting in the use of industry standards for personal fitness testing within the curriculum. Another college-wide project is developing the use of social media for improving access to learning and marketing materials. The positive impact of curriculum projects that enhance the student experience across the provision is **good practice**.

21   The College has responded appropriately to the outcomes of the Developmental Engagement. More staff have enrolled on the City & Guilds Training and Assessment Quality Assurance Award for internal moderators, which provides training on assessment and feedback; 68 per cent of staff have now achieved the award. The College has used the Higher Education Conference as an opportunity to share good practice, and to inform staff about policy developments in higher education and the availability of new technologies.

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?

22   The processes and procedures considered in paragraphs 9 to 11 are also relevant to managing the quality of learning opportunities and are equally effective. The College is responsible for all aspects of the quality of learning opportunities, as is clearly stated in the partnership agreements.

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   College arrangements for fulfilling its obligations to its awarding bodies are described in paragraphs 15 to 17.

What account is taken of the Quality Code?

24   The College has aligned its policies and procedures with guidance in the Quality Code concerning the management of the quality of learning opportunities. It uses the procedures described in paragraph 12. For example, the College has mapped its teaching and learning against *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* of the Quality Code and aligned its provision of careers information, advice and guidance to *Chapter B4: Student support, learning resources and careers education, information, advice and guidance*. Students have been productively engaged in this process, advising on their specific needs, and in response to this the College has provided enhanced guidance on progression to further higher education study. Based also on the analysis in paragraphs 12 and 13, the extent and depth of the College's engagement with the Quality Code is **good practice**.

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

25   The College has appropriate policies and procedures for the oversight of learning and teaching. It has a teaching and learning strategy that informs both its further and higher education provision. Teaching and learning developments are identified by the College through its committee structures and the resultant actions are monitored effectively using the College Quality Improvement Plan. The partner universities oversee the student teaching and learning experience for their awards. There is a teaching observation scheme with the results being discussed at individual staff appraisals. The College has an appropriate policy for recruiting staff based on the Education and Training Inspectorate requirements.

26   Course teams use a range of appropriate measures to monitor and enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Team meetings are used to discuss issues and course-level quality improvement plans. For example, on HND Advanced Practice in Work with Children and Families, cross-site meetings are used to standardise documentation, share resources and identify lead module tutors. Annual self-evaluation reports bring together evidence about the quality of teaching and learning from a number of sources, which course teams use to evaluate and modify delivery. Students reported that guest speakers and links with external practitioners considerably enhance their learning experience. Staff provide feedback on assessments that is helpful to students for understanding mistakes and improving performance. Feedback is provided in a structured and helpful way linked to the intended

learning outcomes. Overwhelmingly, staff provide students with their feedback within the College target of 15 working days.

27   Student views are effectively collected and are acted upon. The College is proactive in encouraging student views. It gets feedback from students using a wide range of appropriate methods, including staff-student consultative meetings, higher education forums, module evaluations and student surveys of all higher education students. Students find staff approachable and helpful as well as enthusiastic and effective when delivering their subject material. Students stated that staff are responsive to the feedback they provide and act upon it. For example, students on the NVQ Level 4 Diploma in Management Practice and Advanced Techniques in the Hair and Beauty Sector were provided with additional e-learning resources as a result of their feedback.

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

28   The College has developed a comprehensive and coordinated approach to the delivery of student support. All support is available on an equal basis to both full-time and part-time students. Course inductions provide students with information on an appropriate range of topics, including College policies, course information and career guidance and advice. They are also an opportunity to identify individual students who have specialised learning support needs. Students have access to a personal tutor on a regular, planned basis. Personal tutors monitor academic progress and also provide guidance and support on a range of professional and personal issues. Tutors are readily available outside timetable sessions. Students have access to a proper range of specialised support run centrally by the College, which is available on all three sites, including counselling, financial advice and learner support. Students and employers stated that there is a high level of support from College staff for students on work placements.

29   The College effectively evaluates the support it gives to students. It uses staff-student consultative meetings, higher education forums and student surveys to obtain student opinions in a variety of ways that complement each other. Student feedback is discussed at both college and course level; for example, to make sure there is equality of support across all sites. Students stated that the support they receive is readily available and helpful.

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

30   Arrangements for staff development are described in paragraphs 18 to 21.

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?

31   The College has effective resource planning arrangements. The senior management team decide priorities based on the bids for resources from heads of school. This process is suitably informed by the quality assurance and enhancement procedures considered in paragraphs 10, 11,16 and 17 and deliberations at the Academic Standards Sub-Committee. Provision of written learning materials in hard copy and electronically provides suitable support for the delivery of the curriculum. The College has a policy of ordering the same books for various libraries where a course is taught at more than one site. The quantity and scope of the information technology resources are appropriate for the provision. Students stated that the resources available to them provide valuable support for their learning and that the College responds positively to their feedback on resource issues.

They reported that the new specialist facilities in the Foyle Building are of a very high standard.

32   The virtual learning environment provides both a wide range of information about its courses and useful teaching materials. Students reported that they find the virtual learning environment very valuable, particularly when working off-site. The College has made the increased and more sophisticated use of the virtual learning environment a college-wide priority. Unit and course sites are graded for content, detail, volume and structure. All course sites must have course information and some teaching materials. As they progress from this basic level they can attain bronze, silver or gold status. The assessment is undertaken independently by the Principal Lecturer in Technology Enhanced Learning and Support and his team. Engagement in this development by staff is encouraged by targets set by heads of school and for the Principal Lecturer in Technology Enhanced Learning and Support. This developmental activity is further encouraged through school-specific awards and competitions. Fifteen awards of bronze, silver or gold have been made so far, sometimes for whole courses. A considerable number of courses have nearly achieved bronze status, having recently undertaken extensive development work. The well-considered procedures to increase the amount and sophistication of the content available to students on the virtual learning environment is **good practice**.

33   The College has effective processes for engaging with employers. Employers commended the depth and scope of the College's involvement with them. This includes a strong commitment to developing an employment-ready workforce which employers report is achieved across the provision. Staff secondment to industry on a regular basis supports these developments. Employers emphasised the College is very responsive to their views when reported through the employer forums run by schools or directly to staff. Employers stated that many of the College's facilities are modern and appropriate for training a modern workforce. There is strong partnership relationship with a wide range of employers, with some of them benefitting from the use of College facilities. The College has access to valuable work placements facilitated by its high level of engagement with local employers. The depth and scope of the engagement with employers is **good practice**.

> **The team concludes that it has confidence in the College's management of its responsibilities for the quality of the learning opportunities, as required by the awarding 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 Department for Education and Learning-funded higher education?

34   The responsibility for providing public information is clearly stated in the partnership agreements. The amount and scope of information provided by the College varies between the awarding bodies and organisations. For example, for Edexcel courses almost all information is provided by the College while the universities and Accounting Technicians Ireland supply much of the information for students.

35   The website provides valuable information for students. It is the main source of information for prospective students. It is comprehensive and easy to navigate and includes key information documents such as prospectuses, the strategic plan, awarding bodies information and some policies. For Foundation Degrees this information is supplemented by DEL and University of Ulster web pages to which the College has contributed.

The website includes course information such as content, modules of study, and entry requirements. Website information is available in large print and Braille. The College website holds the definitive version of documents and is updated frequently.

36   The College provides a suitable range of course information for students and employers. There is a college-level handbook which includes guidance on student finance, learning support and careers progression. Course handbooks and handbooks on work-based learning for employers and students are available in hard copy. Employers reported that the information they receive is very helpful and is appropriate for their differing needs. They stated that they are able to influence changes to the documentation provided to them through the employer forums and directly with course staff. Student handbooks and other course-level material are available on the virtual learning environment which the students find valuable. The College makes extensive use of social media to inform and communicate with students and employers.

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?

37   The publication of information for prospective students is checked rigorously. There is a College publications production policy to ensure the accuracy and completeness of this information. This policy is utilised for each publication project, and includes a production schedule. When the project is complete this checklist is then signed, filed and referred to when planning begins for the next edition. The Marketing and Public Relations team manages the storage, delivery, distribution and allocation of all College promotional publications. The final version of any publicity material is the responsibility of the Head of Marketing following an exchange of information between the relevant curriculum manager and head of school. In the case of the higher education institutions, the material has to be agreed with the university prior to being sent to the Marketing and Public Relations team for publication. The Marketing and Public Relations team regularly seeks feedback on the effectiveness of prospective College information through surveys and focus group activities with both prospective and enrolled students.

38   The oversight of the use of social media is effective. The College has an acceptable user policy and offers training through an e-safety course on the virtual learning environment. The College uses software to monitor its social media sites for inappropriate use.

39   The amount of guidance provided by some student handbooks is insufficient. Course handbooks are reviewed at the beginning of each academic year in line with the recommendations of the Developmental Engagement. There are College guidelines on the minimum requirements for the content of a course handbook in the form of a checklist. The checklist covers a suitable range of topics for inclusion in all course handbooks. It is used to audit the content of course handbooks with ultimate responsibility lying with heads of school. In a few cases, the audit of the handbook has been undertaken by the author while College policy is for it to be undertaken independently. The checklist is sometimes used to check the presence or absence of any mention of a topic rather than to make a qualitative judgement as to the value of the material. For example, several handbooks have little detail on the avoidance of plagiarism even though this is on the checklist. Moreover, in some handbooks there is no clear signposting to College policies on plagiarism. However, guidance on how to avoid plagiarism is provided in a number other places, including at induction, and the formative use of anti-plagiarism software is in place. It is **advisable** to improve the guidance provided to students in course handbooks.

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

C   Summary of findings from the Developmental Engagement in assessment

40   The Developmental Engagement in assessment took place in May 2011. It addressed the following lines of enquiry agreed with the College:

- How does the College use the internal moderation process to improve and develop assessment practice?
- How does the College provide appropriate and timely feedback to students on assessed work to support their learning and future development?
- To what extent does the College ensure that the assessment information given to students is accurate and complete; and how effectively is this information communicated to students?

41   The areas of good practice identified during the Developmental Engagement were the effective staff training to support the moderation of assessments; the effective moderation process on HND Interactive Media; the valuable feedback given to students on their examination performance on FD Travel and Tourism Management; the extensive use of new technologies to enhance the effectiveness of feedback to students on their work; the timely provision of feedback on student work; and the extensive and useful assessment information available on the virtual learning environment for HNC Sport students.

42   The Developmental Engagement indicated that it was advisable to provide programme specifications for Edexcel awards that are contextualised for the delivery at the College; and ensure that all course handbooks meet College guidelines on content. It also found that it was desirable to develop the mechanisms for reporting and evaluating the provision as a whole; improve the dissemination of effective practice by the Higher Education Forums and Academic Standards Committee; and to adopt consistent terminology on the virtual learning environment across the provision.

D   Foundation Degrees

43   The College has six part-time and three full-time Foundation Degrees. All are awards of the University of Ulster except the FD Early Childhood Studies which is a Queen's University of Belfast course. In the academic year 2012-13 there are 166 part-time and 60 full-time enrolments. In 2011-12 there were 69 part-time and 78 full-time enrolments.

44   The College manages its Foundation Degrees in an effective manner as part of a rigorous and detailed oversight of all of its provision. Both university partners provide access to some resources for students and extensive support for staff.

45   All the team's findings and conclusions are relevant to the Foundation Degrees.

E   Conclusions and summary of judgements

46   The Summative Review team has identified a number of features of good practice in North West Regional College 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 and organisations. This was based upon discussion with staff and students and scrutiny of evidence provided by the College and its awarding partners: Accounting Technicians Ireland; City & Guilds; The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development; Edexcel; Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations; The Queen's University of Belfast; and the University of Ulster.

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

- the extent and depth of the College's engagement with the Quality Code (paragraphs 12, 13 and 24)
- the positive impact of curriculum projects enhancing the student experience across the provision (paragraph 20)
- the well-considered procedures to increase the amount and sophistication of the content available to students on the virtual learning environment (paragraph 32)
- the depth and scope of the engagement with employers (paragraph 33).

48   The team also makes a recommendation for consideration by the College and its awarding partners.

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

- improve the guidance provided to students in course handbooks (paragraph 39).

50   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 and organisations.

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

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

North West Regional College action plan relating to the Summative Review February 2013						
Good practice	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
In the course of the Summative Review the ream identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
• the extent and depth of the College's engagement with the Quality Code (paragraphs 12, 13 and 24)	Cross-reference higher education activity to the quality code as new chapters become available at academic school and support function level to ensure dissemination and ownership	December 2013	Academic Standards Committee	Team members delivering higher education informed about the Quality Code Relevant documents referencing the Quality Code	Academic Board	Evidence base in each academic school/ appropriate support department involved in higher education
• the positive impact of curriculum projects enhancing the student experience across the provision (paragraph 20)	Seek applications on an annual basis for relevant curriculum projects subject to available funding	October 2013	Director of Curriculum	Increased number of high quality applications Value added curriculum	Senior Management Team	Projects completed successfully and integrated into the curriculum
• the well-considered procedures to	Publish examples of best practice in virtual learning experience for	June 2014	Head of Technology Enhanced	Virtual learning experience presence for all	Director of Learner Services	Virtual learning experience targets met

increase the amount and sophistication of the content available to students on the virtual learning environment (paragraph 32)	higher education courses Have higher education programmes, virtual learning experience presence at minimum silver grade		Learning & Support	higher education programmes at silver by target date		
• the depth and scope of the engagement with employers (paragraph 33).	Formally document employer engagement through a customer relationship management system	October 2013	Business Support Centre	Customer relationship management system in place and current	Director of Curriculum	Staff formally document employer engagement and share with colleagues
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:						
• improve the guidance provided to students in course handbooks (paragraph 39).	Establish guidelines for the content of course handbooks with sample narrative on key sections	June 2013	Head of Higher Education	Course handbooks adhere to guidelines	Director of Curriculum	Positive student surveys, focus group responses on course handbook information Course handbook audits

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education