



# **Integrated quality and enhancement review**

**Summative review**

**Accrington and Rossendale College**

**March 2012**

**SR 049/12**

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2012

ISBN 978 1 84979 566 1

All QAA's publications are available on our website [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://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 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 Accrington and Rossendale College carried out in March 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 extensive use of the Academic Infrastructure to underpin the delivery of higher education in the College
- the focus on student self-reflection promoted by the integration of personal development planning, and frequent tutorial support, is highly beneficial to student learning
- the documentation developed by the Foundation Degree in Early Years effectively supports work-placement.

### Recommendations

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

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

- clarify management roles and responsibilities to ensure that academic standards are maintained
- develop a more central committee mechanism to ensure the effective oversight of annual monitoring reports
- develop a more formal and centralised system to respond to external examiners' reports and provide effective oversight of the actions advised
- develop a comprehensive procedure to monitor targets and success rates and use them effectively to inform College review processes
- widen the membership of its management and committee structures, to ensure that all stakeholders, including students and employers, systematically inform the quality of learning opportunities
- review the complaints and grievance policy and procedures to ensure their effective implementation and dissemination.

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

- review the dissemination of its strategy and policy documents to support higher education more effectively

- consider how its staff development process can better maintain a differentiated approach to higher education to further enhance the standard of teaching and learning
- improve the consistency of documentation across all programmes, to ensure that students have access to relevant higher education information
- review its processes for monitoring and checking documents to ensure the consistent accuracy of information produced for students.

## 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 Accrington and Rossendale 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, Liverpool John Moores University, and Bolton University, the University of Central Lancashire, the University of Huddersfield and Lancaster University. The review was carried out by Dr Glenn Barr, Mr Mark Langley, Mrs Trudy Stiles (reviewers) and Dr Margaret Johnson (coordinator).

2 The Summative review team (the team) conducted the review in agreement with the College and in accordance with *The handbook for Integrated quality and enhancement review* (the handbook), published by QAA. Evidence in support of the Summative review included documentation supplied by the College and awarding bodies, meetings with staff, students, employers and partner institutions, and reports of reviews by QAA and from inspections by Ofsted. A summary of findings from the Developmental engagement is provided in Section C of this report. The review also considered the College's use of the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers, with reference to the *Code of practice*, subject and award benchmark statements, the FHEQ, and programme specifications.

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

4 Accrington and Rossendale College was established as a tertiary college in 1975 and has offered higher education since 1992. The College is located in Pennine Lancashire within the districts of Hyndburn, Rossendale and the Ribble Valley which have high levels of deprivation and one of the lowest levels of prosperity in Britain. The College is situated on one main site and enrolled 7,288 students in 2011. There are 479 higher education students, representing 392.7 full-time equivalents, of whom 334 are directly funded by HEFCE. Almost all of the provision is offered in both part-time and full-time modes of study, and is delivered by 16.7 full-time equivalent staff.

5 There is a wide spread of specialist vocational higher education including a National Certificate in Construction, Foundation Degrees in Alcohol and Substance Misuse, Mental Health Work, Health and Social Care, Early Years Childhood Studies, Software Engineering, Physical Activity and Sport, Music and Digital Radio Production, Theatre and Film Studies and Motor Engineering, degrees in Health and Applied Social Studies, Early Years Childhood Studies, and Film and Digital Media, and post compulsory education studies.

### Higher education provision at the College

6 The higher education programmes at the College funded by HEFCE are listed below, by awarding body, and with full-time equivalent (FTE) student numbers in brackets.

#### Edexcel

- HNC Construction (part-time) (15)
- HND Construction (part-time) (4.5)
- HNC Automotive Engineering (part-time) (5.5)

### **Bolton University**

- FdA Health and Social Care (full-time/part-time) (22)
- FdA Early Years - Childhood Studies (full-time/part-time) (16)
- BA (Hons) Early Years - Childhood Studies (top-up, full-time/part-time) (10)

### **Lancaster University**

- FdA Alcohol and Substance Misuse Work (full-time/part-time) (7)
- FdA Mental Health Work (full-time/part-time) (7)
- FdA Physical Activity and Sport (full-time/part-time) (14)
- FdEng Software Engineering (full-time/part-time) (10)
- FdA Digital Radio Production (full-time/part-time) (4)
- HNC Construction (part-time) (13.5)

### **Liverpool John Moores University**

- BA (Hons) Health and Applied Social Studies (full-time/part-time) (60)
- BA Hons Film and Digital Media (full-time/part-time) (19)
- FdA Mental Health Work (full-time/part-time) (24)
- FdA Alcohol and Substance Misuse Work (full-time/part-time) (16)

### **University of Central Lancashire**

- FdA Music Production (full-time/part-time) (31)
- FdA Theatre and Performance (full-time/part-time) (17)
- FdA Sports Coaching (full-time/part-time) (17)
- FdSc Sport and Exercise Science (full-time/part-time) (14)
- FdSc Computing - Software Engineering (full-time/part-time) (16)

### **University of Huddersfield**

- Certificate in Education/ Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (part-time) (34)
- FdA Learning Support (part-time) (6.7)
- BA (Hons) Education and Professional Development (part-time) (9.5)

## **Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies**

7 Partnership agreements commit the College to manage academic standards following awarding body policies and procedures. The University of Huddersfield and Bolton University offer franchised provision and provide programme specifications and assessments with shared responsibility for moderation of assessed work and second marking. The College is responsible for first marking and feedback to students. Curriculum and assessment development, second marking and moderation of assessed work is a shared responsibility between the College and the University of Central Lancashire. Agreements with all other awarding bodies place responsibility with the College for the development of the curriculum, the setting of assessments, and first marking.

## **Recent developments in higher education at the College**

8 The College has increased its higher education student numbers by aligning the curricula to vocationally specialist areas and to employer need. There has been particularly strong growth in part-time provision and in continuing professional development. The changes are being carried out within the context of national policy changes which have also prompted a significant change in the College's partnership arrangements. There are new partnership agreements with Bolton University and Edexcel, and the existing agreement with the Lancaster University will cease when current students complete their studies. Validation arrangements for BA (Hons) Health and Applied Social Studies with Liverpool John Moores University will also cease when current students complete their studies. To enhance the student experience further there are plans to open a dedicated higher education floor from September 2012.

## **Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission**

9 Students studying on higher education programmes at the College attended the preparatory meeting and were invited to present a submission to the team. Six students prepared the student written submission collated from a student survey across the range of programmes. Students were asked their opinions on academic expectations, opportunities to take part in the management of higher education programmes and their experience as learners. They also commented on the quality of the learning resources and other facilities available to them, the information the College publishes about itself, and the information produced by the College in relation to academic performance. The submission was helpful to the reviewers who found that the conclusions reported were consistent with those expressed by students in the student meeting during the visit. The students were complimentary about their higher education experience at the College and in particular about the availability of the staff and the support provided to enable them to succeed.

## **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 A clear and comprehensive Higher Education and Skills Strategy contextualises the work of the College, both locally and nationally. The vision articulated in the strategy is founded on the establishment of a coherent structure for quality enhancement and for curriculum and staff development.

11 The awarding bodies hold ultimate responsibility for standards but the team are concerned that College processes for the oversight of academic standards lack clarity. For example, the Dean of Higher Education is nominally responsible for higher education within the College, but as Chair of the Board of Study, the Vice Principal, Curriculum is the senior manager who signs off higher education issues. The job descriptions for these posts do not distinguish between strategic and operational responsibilities. It is advisable that the respective roles and responsibilities for managing academic standards within the College are clarified.

12 The College has a robust process of annual monitoring and review at programme level and issues are addressed with action plans. The process, supported by staff development, has been implemented since the Developmental engagement to enhance continuous improvement by encouraging reflection on programmes following their evaluation by staff and students. Monitoring reports are sent to awarding bodies. The College committee system provides appropriate deliberative opportunities for assuring standards with the involvement of students and employers. However, meetings of the Higher Education Board of Study and Higher Education Quality, Teaching and Learning Committee do not show detailed consideration of Annual Monitoring Reports. The overall monitoring of action plans and identification of good practice is not undertaken and misses an opportunity to ensure effective oversight of programmes. The Lancaster University Collaborative Provision Teaching Committee provides an excellent opportunity for the College to discuss and review the annual monitoring reports, and to identify common themes and good practice across programmes and institutions. It is advisable that the College develop a more central committee mechanism to ensure the effective oversight of annual monitoring reports.

13 There are clear records of second marking for all programmes that indicate the sample size and process for agreeing marks. The procedure ensures that students are confident that assessment is fair, consistent and transparent. Students report that these processes are applied consistently across the College which further confirms the findings of the Developmental engagement. Effective record keeping at programme level ensures that assessment documentation relating to internal moderation, external examiners and students informs the process of improvement. The College has comprehensive procedures to ensure that plagiarism is minimised. Students submit assignments in electronic and paper copy that allows them to check their own work with a detection software system. Staff briefings, plagiarism warnings in handbooks, and declarations by students on completed work reinforce the process.

### **What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?**

14 The reference points of the Academic Infrastructure are well understood by staff and are used effectively to support the provision. The College ensures engagement with the Academic Infrastructure relevant to academic standards in its own right, and with assistance from the awarding bodies' policies and procedures to guide its development of new curriculum areas. Internal validation panels consider external reference points before submission for awarding body validation in accordance with the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. The Developmental engagement and external examiners confirm that assessments are set in accordance with the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*, and are at the appropriate level in line with the FHEQ. Appeals processes are joint responsibilities between the College and the awarding bodies, with the exception of the Bolton University whose process applies from the outset. Appeals processes are clear, if infrequently invoked, and are consistent with the *Code of practice, Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters*. College documentation for staff makes frequent reference to the Academic Infrastructure. A good example is the 2011 staff development programme which was planned around sections of the *Code of practice*. The use of the Academic Infrastructure to underpin the delivery of higher education in the College is identified as an example of good practice.

**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 Partnership agreements commit the College to manage academic standards in line with awarding body policies and procedures. The University of Huddersfield and Bolton University provide programme specifications and assessments with shared responsibility for moderation of assessed work and second marking. The College is responsible for first marking and feedback to students. Curriculum and assessment development, second marking and moderation of assessed work is a shared responsibility between the College and the University of Central Lancashire. Agreements with all other awarding bodies place responsibility for developing the curriculum, setting assessments and first marking with the College. Strong links between the College and awarding bodies ensure that the various and complex responsibilities are implemented effectively.

16 All awarding bodies appoint external examiners for higher education programmes. The University of Huddersfield, Bolton University and the University of Central Lancashire take responsibility for responding to external examiners' reports and for monitoring the action plans which arise. The College is responsible for the responses to and monitoring of programmes validated by the Lancaster University and Liverpool John Moores University. Programme leaders respond to external examiners' reports directly, but in different ways and the responses are not coordinated centrally in the College. For example the external examiner for FdEng Software Engineering requested a more formal response to his report in future, although the programme is due to finish when the current students complete their studies. Most external examiners confirm that actions have been addressed satisfactorily. The Vice Principal Curriculum, the Vice Principal Quality and Standards, the Dean of Higher Education, and all programme leaders consider external examiner reports and subsequently a summary is presented to the Higher Education Board of Study. Responses to external examiners' reports, monitoring of resultant actions, and sharing of good practice does not take place formally within the College. It is advisable that the College develops a more formal and centralised system to respond to external examiner reports to provide effective oversight of the actions advised and to monitor progress made in addressing them.

17 The College uses retention, achievement and success rates to measure the health of programmes. Some success rates are particularly low, for example, the BA (Hons) English at 20 per cent, FdA Physical Activity and Sport at 33 per cent, FdA Music Production at 35 per cent, and the Foundation Degrees in Mental Health Work and Motor Engineering at 54 per cent and 59 per cent respectively. However, the College review process at the Higher Education Board of Study reported generally high achievement rates, noting only FdA Music Production and FdA Physical Activity and Sport as areas of concern. The College does not set targets at programme level for success rates on higher education programmes or monitor the achievement of these through the committee system. The College is advised to develop a comprehensive procedure to monitor targets and success rates at programme level, and to use them effectively to inform College review processes.

18 Strong links with employers enable the College to identify and maintain soundly based work-related standards. Employers who met with the team confirmed that graduates from FdA Alcohol and Substance Misuse, FdA Early Years, FdA Health and Social Care and the BA (Hons) Film and Digital Media have the appropriate academic standards for the employment market.

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

19 The College has effective arrangements for staff development and scholarly activity to ensure that staff are well prepared and appropriately qualified to deliver the relevant academic standards. Staff new to higher education teaching are inducted to the regulations of the awarding body and on making assessment decisions at the appropriate level of the FHEQ. The arrangements are well articulated in the policy for staff development and scholarly activity, and the higher education staff handbook provides clear and comprehensive guidance in support of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Support is provided for staff who wish to attend conferences, undertake scholarly activity and pursue higher qualifications.

20 Higher education staff development needs are identified by individuals and managers during annual appraisal, and much of the scholarly activity relates to subject delivery and updating to promote the currency and expertise of teaching staff. A higher education lead lecturer and advanced practitioner provide practical support and guidance for staff. The opportunity for staff to study for higher qualifications is particularly effective for maintaining currency. Student comments in support of the currency, depth and breadth of knowledge of their teachers confirm the positive impact of staff scholarly activity.

**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 Responsibility for managing the quality of learning opportunities are as described in paragraphs 10 to 13, and require the College to share or have sole responsibility for the quality of learning opportunities it provides.

22 Management and oversight of higher education learning opportunities in the College is undertaken by four committees. The Higher Education Board of Study meets twice a year, chaired by the Vice Principal, Curriculum. The Quality, Teaching and Learning Committee monitors standards and quality in three meetings a year, chaired by the Vice Principal, Quality and Standards. The Dean of Higher Education chairs the Higher Education Development Committee three times a year to discuss cross-college strategic and developmental issues, and chairs the Higher Education Programme Leaders' Forum four times a year to discuss operational issues. The latter feeds into the development and quality committees, although the committee structure chart does not reflect the reality of this practice. Greater clarity would improve the process to ensure that all stakeholders inform the operational, developmental and quality management of higher education in the College.

23 Students and employers are members of the Higher Education Board of Study, and contribute to the assurance of the quality of learning opportunities. Responses to minutes from the Higher Education Student Council feature on the agendas of the Board of Studies and the Higher Education Programme Leaders' Forum, but are not acknowledged formally in

other senior committees. Student opinions vary about their involvement in management processes and the College's responsiveness to any issues they raise. For example, an issue about illegible handwritten feedback, raised at the time of the Development engagement, remains unresolved. The Board of Studies includes an employer representative, but none of the other committees, notably the Higher Education Development Committee, feature any formal employer input. Employers are very pleased with the dialogue they have with the College, but describe it as largely informal and would welcome a more formal role. It is advisable that the College widens the membership of its management and committee structures, to ensure that all stakeholders, including students and employers, systematically inform 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?**

24 The regulations of each university include periodic review processes and shared responsibility for annual programme monitoring and review. Universities provide annual visits, link tutor relationships, and some require the College to respond to external examiner comments, statistical data and student feedback. Following the Developmental engagement, the College has improved the timeliness and quality of annual reviews but the resulting process has yet to embed itself fully. The Higher Education Officer receives copies of all completed university annual reviews and collates these into the College's Annual Review Document. The College responds formally to this document through the Higher Education Board of Studies but, as identified in paragraph 12, this process needs to be more rigorous to ensure effective monitoring.

25 The College strategy documents clearly outline the College's commitment to providing appropriate learning opportunities. The well constructed Learning and Teaching Strategy 2010-13 responds to the awarding bodies' regulations and adopts a mature and considered approach to teaching and learning. Staff identify the way the strategy informs their teaching. Similarly, the Work-Based and Work-Related Learning Policy indicates a considered approach to teaching in a work environment, and employers confirm that the process of informal discussion with staff and engagement with students is effective. Following the Developmental engagement, a College task force is midway through developing its employer engagement strategy, and this work is having a positive impact on sharing good practice. Recently reviewed policies demonstrate a clear institutional approach to ensuring the quality of learning opportunities. As the College applies and embeds consistently its approach to all higher education policies, learning opportunities will be more assured.

### **What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?**

26 Staff handbooks provide clear guidance on the purposes of assessment in accordance with the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*. Implementation of the handbook's guidelines ensures that assessment aligns with the appropriate level of the FHEQ. Student handbooks include programme specifications as an appendix following the templates of the relevant awarding institutions, and map intended learning outcomes against subject and qualification benchmark statements. College policies reflect the spirit of the *Code of practice*, and the Work-Based and Work-Related Learning Policy aligns with the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. The Higher Education E-Learning Policy is less thorough, but overall the College embeds the Academic Infrastructure into its higher education management processes effectively.

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

27 College strategies focusing on teaching and learning reflect the awarding bodies' requirements and have an average duration of three years. Those with a more recent publication date, such as the Admissions Policy, are of a better quality. The Higher Education Staff Handbook does not include the individual policies, but they are in the staff area of the College's virtual learning environment. Students receive summaries of some policies in their handbooks, but this is not consistent across all programmes. A higher education student area features the key College policies, but some of the strategies are missing. It is desirable that the College reviews the dissemination of its strategy and policy documents to support its provision of higher education more effectively.

28 Staff profiles indicate that 26 per cent of staff hold a higher degree, 92 per cent have a first degree, 84 per cent have a teaching qualification, and a further 8 per cent are currently studying for a postgraduate certificate in education. In addition to the processes outlined in paragraphs 19 and 20, Higher Education Programme Leaders ensure the maintenance and enhancement of teaching and learning for all staff through the peer review and appraisal system. This takes into account the results from teaching observations, departmental issues raised through the higher education committees and individual self-appraisals by staff. The Higher Education Programme Leaders' Forum considers the effectiveness of teaching and learning, drawing on the annual staff appraisal and programme review processes, and reports to the Higher Education Quality, Teaching and Learning Committee. Subsequently, the Board of Studies identifies best practice in assessment which an annual higher education staff development programme disseminates. Staff are enthusiastic about the staff development programme. The students' perception of teaching at the College is that it meets or exceeds expectations, but as indicated in paragraph 17 success rates on some programmes are low, mainly due to withdrawal rather than failure.

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

29 The College mission is 'to raise access, aspiration and achievement' and 'to offer equal opportunities to all'. As a reflection of the local demographic, the College recruits, on average, 50 per cent of its students from a widening participation background. This requires the College to provide responsive and effective support mechanisms. Accordingly, the College operates a differentiated higher education support system. An external quality body recently endorsed the College's support services.

30 The personal tutorial system integrates with a college-wide approach to personal development planning which the College identifies clearly in the relevant policy document. Students regard very highly the support that is provided for them. In particular, staff and students concur that the focus on student self-reflection promoted by the integration of personal development planning, and frequent tutorial support, is highly beneficial to their learning. The process facilitates student self-reflection and is identified as good practice. Students expressed satisfaction with the College's support systems, which are clearly effective.

31 The College's Complaints and Grievance Procedure refers students to their handbooks for the specific complaints and grievance procedures of the relevant awarding body. Although all programme handbooks include information on appeals, only those for Liverpool John Moores University and the Bolton University include complaints or grievance sections. The college-wide complaints and grievance procedure does not reflect the differing demands of the awarding bodies. Although students can access the grievance procedure online, in reality they describe the complaints process as informal and they are unclear about

how to make a formal complaint or raise a grievance. The way in which handbooks from the different universities define the process compounds the confusion. The College is advised to review its complaints and grievance policy and procedures in line with the *Code of practice, Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters*, to ensure its effective implementation and dissemination.

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

32 The College's Staff Development Policy aims to enhance the personal development and professional standing of staff. The awarding universities have differing approaches to staff development, ranging from fee reductions for College staff studying for higher degrees, to inviting College staff to participate in university staff development activities. Staff partake in development and scholarly activity to update their knowledge, and students confirm the currency of teaching they receive. The College encourages staff participation in conferences run by the awarding bodies and engagement with the Higher Education Academy. Only one member of staff is currently a fellow of the Academy and other staff recognise this as an area for development. The College gives staff remission from teaching time for scholarly activity, although it is reducing the current rate.

33 The College's committee structure monitors the Higher Education Staff Development Programme and the observation of learning and teaching scheme has a higher education focus. However, the observation form provided does not clearly identify how research and academic engagement informs teaching delivery, and grades staff using an Ofsted model. Some research activity and support for staff to take higher degrees underpins the standard of teaching and learning in the College, but only 26 per cent of staff hold a higher degree. It is desirable that the College considers how its staff development process can better maintain a differentiated approach to higher education to further enhance the standard of teaching and learning.

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

34 The College's Process for Resource Allocation in Higher Education flowchart illustrates the clear and iterative process by which staff can identify and bid for new resources. Programme and module leaders review resources continually and identify these through the annual monitoring process and committee structure. However, one student highlighted the need for improvements to the range of equipment available in order to complete assessment tasks, and others commented on the need for faster repairs to damaged equipment and quicker updating of some software. Overall, the team found that students were positive about classroom resources. The College also responds to student feedback gathered as part of the annual monitoring processes, and has recently agreed to create a dedicated higher education floor. This aims to improve the current higher education student common room, office and mobile laptop bank with more specific higher education resources and study areas, as requested in student feedback.

35 The College regards its virtual learning environment as a powerful learning tool and one of its chief resources. The College selected its provider after an extensive trial period during which College staff rated several different processes and students commented favourably. The College Learning Resource Centre is a college-wide resource but it has distinct higher education study areas, academic journals and books. Learning Resource Centre staff work closely with colleagues at validating universities to ensure the sufficiency and currency of materials. Students praise the staff and are enthusiastic about the recent

introduction of e-books. The site is compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act and students state that the available learning resources enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes of their programmes.

**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 The College publishes a dedicated Higher Education prospectus annually, colour-coded by curriculum area. It is available electronically and in hard copy, and provides a useful introduction to the College and each higher education award. The Higher Education prospectus and student handbooks are written by the College and are approved by the awarding body. Prospective students may also request the prospectus in different formats and languages to accommodate a range of disabilities and cultures. The virtual learning environment can also be accessed from smart phones and tablets. Students find the website useful for obtaining initial information.

37 The College's website higher education section provides links to course leaflets. These basic course leaflets give entry requirements, list module titles, the number of days in College or length of study, and a statement with variable information regarding further study at home and work-based learning, as relevant. Some give suggestions for progression and career opportunities. There is also financial information, with a link to fees and to the national financial forum, 'The Student Room'.

38 At induction students are provided with a single handbook that is variously called the student handbook, the undergraduate handbook or the course handbook, which reflects the requirements of the awarding body. Students receive paper copies of these and can also access them on the virtual learning environment along with other documentation. A Task Group was formed after the Developmental engagement to promote the development and sharing of standard documents across higher education. However, this has not yet fully achieved its aim and it is desirable that the College continues to improve the consistency of documentation across all programmes, to ensure that students have access to relevant higher education information.

39 Module handbooks map clearly the intended learning outcomes to assessment tasks and students regard them as informative and helpful, reflecting the course content accurately. Employers consider that the mentor handbooks are helpful. The FdA Early Years tutors have developed a Mentor Handbook and Information for Work Settings that includes a student progress review form and reflective account for the student to complete. Instead of adapting the mentor handbook the Foundation Degrees in Music Production and Film and Digital Media have sections on the virtual learning environment with forms to complete relating to their one-day placements. The documentation developed for the FdA Early Years to support work-placement was identified in the Developmental engagement as an example of good practice and should be more widely disseminated.

**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?**

40 The franchise and partnership agreements set out the processes by which the accuracy and completeness of information is assured. All publicity and marketing literature prepared by the College must conform to awarding body brand guidance and must represent accurately the status of the programmes offered. Programme and module specifications are either produced by the awarding bodies or written by the College and authorised through the validation process.

41 The College has a clear process for the publication of higher education programme information and for the release of information to the press. Marketing manages the publication processes. Programme leaders are responsible for compiling or amending documents relating to their programme, and hence for the accuracy and completeness of the information. Both the link tutor, on behalf of the awarding body, and the Dean of Higher Education, for the College, approve all documents before publication. The latter is responsible for the final signing off of College publications. However, the team noted some inaccuracies in grammar and spelling in some documents, and considers it to be desirable that the College reviews its processes of monitoring and checking of documents to ensure the consistent accuracy of information produced for students. College policy ensures that press releases, advertisements and information leaflets go through marketing to ensure accurate branding on all publications.

42 The E-Learning Coordinator is responsible for checking all material on the College website before it is uploaded and for carrying out a six-monthly audit. Amendments result in immediate uploading of new information to the virtual learning environment. The E-Learning Coordinator verifies all links, and students go to programme leaders if there are problems. The higher education prospectus has a disclaimer stating that definitive documents are available on the website.

43 The College obtains feedback on the accessibility of the virtual learning environment and all other resources from students, through module evaluations and questionnaires, and from employers who are consulted at programme level as part of the workplace learning discussions. Both are positive about the information available to them. Employers agree that where handbooks are provided they are useful and that the College is receptive to requests to provide additional information. Students reported that they receive timely and adequate information relating to their timetables, assessments, lectures and work placements.

**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**

44 The Developmental engagement in assessment took place in April 2011. Three lines of enquiry were agreed with the College and ensured that all IQER core themes could be addressed. These line of enquiry were as follows.

**Line of enquiry 1:** How does the College specify and ensure that assessment tasks and the marking of student work effectively assess the intended learning outcomes of all modules?

**Line of enquiry 2:** How does the College ensure that the quality and timeliness of written feedback on assessment enables students to identify the standard they have achieved and provides constructive information to help them improve future performance?

**Line of enquiry 3:** Is the assessment information provided for students accurate and complete, and is it communicated effectively to all higher education students?

45 The Developmental engagement team identified some good practice in the clear mapping of intended learning outcomes and assessment tasks in module handbooks, and the opportunity afforded to HNC Construction students to feed back comments on the assessment feedback sheet to enhance personal reflection and academic development. The innovative audio-feedback system on assessed work on the Foundation Degree in Physical Activity and Sport was also highlighted as good practice to increase access, flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of individual learners. Similarly the effective electronic hand-in and feedback procedures developed by the Foundation Degrees in Physical Activity and Sport and Software Engineering provide timely feedback for students and a useful monitoring process to ensure consistency of practice. A Higher Education Staff Handbook provided for new staff ensures clear, accurate guidance, and the structure of the virtual learning environment provides clear information on assessment to all students.

46 The Developmental engagement team also made some advisable recommendations focused on the clarity of procedures for second marking, the alignment of feedback to intended learning outcomes, and the timely return of feedback to students.

47 There were also a number of desirable recommendations with a view to enhancing the provision. The College was advised to provide all students with detailed contextualised criteria to guide them in the achievement of intended learning outcomes, and to ensure that the quality of feedback is consistently constructive to enable students to develop and improve future performance. The team also recommended the development of effective information and training for employers and mentors to enable them to become more involved in assessments, and to ensure that constructive feedback is related to the placement.

## **D Foundation Degrees**

48 The College currently offers 16 Foundation Degrees validated by five universities: Bolton University, University Central Lancashire, University of Huddersfield, Lancaster University, and Liverpool John Moores University. The College enrolled 221.7 full-time equivalent higher education students to its Foundation Degrees in 2011. The College Higher Education Strategy has as one of its aims the further development of its Foundation Degree provision to facilitate the College aspiration of supporting local people in the regeneration of their communities. It is planned to achieve this in 2012 by means of a successful bid to HEFCE for additional student numbers achieved through the Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network and the Skills Funding Agency.

49 The areas of good practice and recommendations identified during the Summative review are common to the whole provision. They are listed in the main conclusions, in paragraphs 50 to 57.

## E Conclusions and summary of judgements

50 The team has identified a number of features of good practice in the 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: Edexcel, Liverpool John Moores University, Bolton University, University of Central Lancashire, University of Huddersfield, and Lancaster University.

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

- the extensive use of the Academic Infrastructure to underpin the delivery of higher education in the College (paragraphs 14 and 26)
- the focus on student self-reflection promoted by the integration of personal development planning, and frequent tutorial support, is highly beneficial to student learning (paragraph 30)
- the documentation developed for the Foundation Degree in Early Years effectively supports work-placement (paragraph 39).

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

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

- clarify management roles and responsibilities to ensure that academic standards are maintained (paragraph 11)
- develop a more central committee mechanism to ensure the effective oversight of annual monitoring reports (paragraphs 12 and 24)
- develop a more formal and centralised system to respond to external examiners' reports and provide effective oversight of the actions advised (paragraph 16)
- develop a comprehensive procedure to monitor targets and success rates and use them effectively to inform College review processes (paragraph 17)
- widen the membership of its management and committee structures, to ensure that all stakeholders, including students and employers, consistently inform the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 23)
- review the complaints and grievance policy and procedures to ensure their effective implementation and dissemination (paragraph 31).

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

- review the dissemination of its strategy and policy documents to support higher education more effectively (paragraph 27)
- consider how its staff development process can better maintain a differentiated approach to higher education to further enhance the standard of teaching and learning (paragraph 33)
- improve the consistency of documentation across all programmes, to ensure that students have access to relevant higher education information (paragraph 38)
- review its processes for monitoring and checking documents to ensure the consistent accuracy of information produced for students (paragraph 41).

55 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 agreements for the management of the standards of the awards of its awarding bodies.

56 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 agreements for the management of the quality of learning opportunities to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

57 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.

Accrington and Rossendale College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 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 <b>good practice</b> that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the extensive use of the Academic Infrastructure to underpin the delivery of higher education in the College (paragraphs 14 and 26)</li> </ul>	<p>Review and re-align all documentation to reflect the UK Quality Code</p> <p>Continue to deliver higher education staff development with a strong alignment to the Quality Code</p>	November 2012	<p>Academic Support Officer</p> <p>Higher Education Advanced Practitioner</p> <p>Higher education Programme Leaders</p>	External feedback from validation events, annual review and monitoring processes	<p>Dean of Higher Education</p> <p>Higher Education Quality, Teaching and Learning Committee</p>	<p>Annual Programme Review Process</p> <p>Report to Higher Education Board of Study</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the focus on student self-reflection promoted by the integration of personal development planning, and frequent tutorial support, is highly beneficial to student learning (paragraph 30)</li> </ul>	<p>Maintain system for tutorial support and personal development planning</p> <p>Extend academic peer mentoring scheme across one other area of higher education delivery</p> <p>Provide appropriate training for higher</p>	<p>July 2013</p> <p>September 2012</p>	<p>Higher education Programme Leaders</p> <p>Higher Education Advanced Practitioner</p>	<p>Improve retention by 2 per cent across all higher education</p> <p>Module and course feedback from students</p> <p>Delivery of one higher education</p>	<p>Dean of Higher Education</p> <p>Higher Education Quality, Teaching and Learning Committee</p>	<p>Annual Programme Review Process</p> <p>Report to Higher Education Board of Study</p>

	education staff			staff development session		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the documentation developed by the Foundation Degree Early Years effectively supports work-placement (paragraph 39).</li> </ul>	<p>Repeat higher education staff development session on sharing good practice in this area</p> <p>Establish use of adapted documentation in at least one other area</p>	<p>July 2013</p> <p>September 2012</p>	<p>Higher education Programme Area Lead</p> <p>Higher Education Advanced Practitioner</p> <p>Higher education Programme Leaders</p>	<p>Module Evaluation</p> <p>Evidence available of system in place in at least one other area</p>	<p>Higher Education Quality, Teaching and Learning Committee</p>	<p>Higher education Annual programme review process</p> <p>Higher education Student Focus Groups</p>
<b>Advisable</b>	<b>Action to be taken</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Success indicators</b>	<b>Reported to</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
The team considers that it is <b>advisable</b> for the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>clarify management roles and responsibilities to ensure that academic standards are maintained (paragraph 11)</li> </ul>	<p>Reinstate the Dean of Higher Education as chair for the Higher Education Board of Study</p> <p>Review and clarify job descriptions for the Dean of Higher Education and the Vice Principal Curriculum</p>	<p>September 2012</p>	<p>Deputy Principal</p>	<p>Clarification of roles</p>	<p>Senior Management Team</p>	<p>Individual staff appraisal and review</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop a more central committee mechanism to</li> </ul>	<p>Review organisation chart for higher education</p>	<p>January 2013</p>	<p>Dean of Higher Education</p>	<p>Higher education Programme Leaders annual</p>	<p>Higher Education Quality, Teaching and Learning</p>	<p>Report to Higher Education Board of Study</p>

<p>ensure the effective oversight of annual monitoring reports (paragraphs 12 and 24)</p>	<p>management structure</p> <p>Reinstate detailed discussion of each programme at Higher Education Quality, Teaching and Learning Committee</p> <p>Establish format for higher education Programme Leaders to report to the Higher Education Quality, Teaching and Learning Committee</p> <p>Continue to provide summary report to Higher Education Board of Study</p> <p>Establish and utilise central tracking system for tracking and monitoring actions across higher education</p>		<p>Deputy Principal</p> <p>Higher education Programme Leaders Forum</p>	<p>monitoring reports</p> <p>Central Higher Education Action Plan</p> <p>External examiner reports</p>	<p>Committee</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop a more formal and centralised mechanism to respond to external</li> </ul>	<p>Provide an annual formal response to all external examiners on validated programmes</p> <p>Continue to track and</p>	<p>September 2013</p>	<p>Dean of Higher Education</p> <p>Higher education Programme Leaders</p>	<p>External examiner reports</p> <p>Report of higher education performance</p>	<p>Higher Education Quality, Teaching and Learning Committee</p>	<p>Report to Higher Education Board of Study</p> <p>Higher education Annual</p>

examiners' reports and provide effective oversight of the actions advised (paragraph 16)	monitor actions at programme level  Provide central summary report of actions			indicators		programme review process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop a comprehensive procedure to monitor targets and success rates and use them effectively to inform College review processes (paragraph 17)</li> </ul>	<p>Establish biannual reporting of pro-achieve higher education data</p> <p>Continue tracking and monitoring through Higher Education Board of Study and Planning for Excellence</p> <p>Add targets for higher education success rates to existing higher education performance indicators</p>	December 2012	<p>Head of Management Information Systems</p> <p>Dean of Higher Education</p>	Outcome of performance monitoring reports	Higher Education Quality, Teaching and Learning Committee	<p>Higher education Annual programme review process</p> <p>Report to Higher Education Board of Study and the Senior Management Team</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>widen the membership of its management and committee structures, to ensure that all stakeholders, including students and employers, systematically</li> </ul>	<p>Review organisation chart of higher education committees</p> <p>Review terms of reference and membership of all committees</p> <p>Establish student engagement working</p>	September 2012	<p>Dean of Higher Education</p> <p>Deputy Principal</p> <p>Higher education Senior Lecturer</p>	<p>Higher education students perception of College survey</p> <p>Update and disseminate terms of reference for all higher education committees</p>	<p>Higher Education Quality, Teaching and Learning Committee</p> <p>All higher education Committees</p>	<p>Report to Higher Education Board of Study</p> <p>Higher Education Student focus groups</p> <p>Employer Feedback</p>

inform the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 23)	group Explore opportunities to maximise employer feedback and involvement in committee work		Higher education Programme Area Lead	Feedback from Student Engagement Working Group  Effective mechanism for employer feedback established	Higher education Programme Leaders Forum  Higher Education Development Committee	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>review the complaints and grievance policy and procedures to ensure their effective implementation and dissemination (paragraph 31).</li> </ul>	<p>Sample audit of complaints and grievance procedures for all areas</p> <p>Raise awareness amongst staff and students</p> <p>Continue to monitor, in the higher education annual summary report, all complaints and grievances received</p>	<p>October 2012</p> <p>November 2012</p>	<p>Dean of Higher Education</p> <p>Academic Support Officer</p> <p>Higher Education Advanced Practitioner</p>	<p>Module feedback from students</p> <p>Higher education students perception of College survey</p>	Higher Education Quality, Teaching and Learning Committee	<p>Higher Education Annual Programme Review process</p> <p>Higher Education Board of Study</p>
<b>Desirable</b>	<b>Action to be taken</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Success indicators</b>	<b>Reported to</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
The team considers that it is <b>desirable</b> for the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>review the dissemination of its strategy and policy documents</li> </ul>	Sample audits of higher education student and staff areas on virtual leaning	September 2012	Academic Support Officer	<p>Outcomes of audits</p> <p>Higher education</p>	Higher Education Quality, Teaching & Learning Committee	Report to Higher Education Board of Study

to more effectively support higher education (paragraph 27)	environments Check and upload strategy and policy documentation for wider dissemination			students perception of College survey		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consider how its staff development process can better maintain a differentiated approach to higher education to further enhance the standard of teaching and learning (paragraph 33)</li> </ul>	<p>Align the higher education observation format to the UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (2011)</p> <p>Continue to encourage recognition and membership of the Higher Education Academy</p> <p>Encourage and support staff to undertake scholarly activity</p> <p>Maintain higher education Peer Review System</p>	October 2012	<p>Higher Education Advanced Practitioner</p> <p>Dean of Higher Education</p> <p>Director of Human Resource</p>	<p>Higher education students perception of college survey</p> <p>Feedback from staff appraisal system</p>	Higher Education Quality, Teaching and Learning Committee	Report to Higher Education Board of Study
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improve the consistency of documentation across programmes, to</li> </ul>	Continue to standardise documentation across all validated programmes	September 2012	<p>Academic Support Officer</p> <p>Higher Education Advanced</p>	Disseminate updated templates for all documentation	<p>Dean of Higher Education</p> <p>Higher Education Quality, Teaching</p>	<p>Report to Higher Education Board of Study</p> <p>Higher education</p>

<p>ensure that students have access to relevant higher education information (paragraph 38)</p>	<p>Review and audit all documentation across programmes ensuring consistency and access for students</p>		<p>Practitioner Higher education Programme Leaders</p>	<p>Outcome of virtual learning environment audits Higher education students perception of College survey</p>	<p>and Learning Committee</p>	<p>Student Focus Groups</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>review its processes for monitoring and checking documents to ensure the consistent accuracy of information produced for students (paragraph 41).</li> </ul>	<p>Review the Higher education Programme Leader role description</p> <p>Carry out a higher education Programme Leader staff development session</p> <p>Sample audit of undergraduate and module handbooks on virtual learning environments</p>	<p>September 2012</p>	<p>Dean of Higher Education Academic Support Officer Higher Education Advanced Practitioner</p>	<p>Outcome of virtual learning environment audits</p> <p>Disseminate updated Higher Education Staff Handbook</p> <p>Feedback from External Examiners and Link Tutors</p> <p>Higher education students perception of college survey</p> <p>Evaluation of higher education staff development activity</p>	<p>Higher Education Quality, Teaching and Learning Committee</p>	<p>Report to Higher Education Board of Study</p> <p>External Examiner Summary</p> <p>Higher education Staff Appraisal</p>

**RG 917 06/12**

**The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education**

Southgate House  
Southgate Street  
Gloucester  
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000  
Fax 01452 557070  
Email [comms@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:comms@qaa.ac.uk)  
Web [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)