



Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

Blackburn College

October 2010

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Preface

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

Purpose of IQER

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

The IQER process

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

Developmental engagement

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

The main elements of a Developmental engagement are:

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

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

Summative review

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

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

Evidence

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

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

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

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

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

Outcomes of IQER

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

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

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

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

Executive summary

The Summative review of Blackburn College carried out in October 2010

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

Good practice

The team has identified the following good practice for dissemination:

- the College has robust and effective systems for programme approval to ensure that academic standards are consistently attained
- there is effective employer involvement in curriculum development to ensure programmes are vocationally relevant to the local and regional community
- curriculum development material is comprehensive and provides useful guidance for staff and employers in meeting the requirements of the Academic Infrastructure
- there is facilitative staff development for higher education staff that contributes to the maintenance of standards and enhances the quality of learning opportunities for students
- the College has a rigorous annual programme review process that is used effectively to enhance quality
- the Peer Observation Support Scheme is developmental and aids the dissemination of good practice across the higher education provision
- there is an exemplary tutorial model tailored to meet the needs of higher education students through personal development planning and pastoral care
- the College has been responsive to the views of students in the provision of combined social and study space
- the College website that is easy to navigate and which provides access to a full range of information for existing and potential students
- there is a well-designed system to provide continuous information to support the student through the application and admission process.

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 **desirable** for the College to:

- evaluate the effectiveness of the newly created staff roles and recently implemented committee structures in the management of higher education
- continue the positive initiatives to develop and extend e-learning across the higher education programmes.

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 Blackburn 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 Lancaster University and the universities of Central Lancashire, Glamorgan and Huddersfield. The review was carried out by Mr Graham Brotherton, Ms Ann Kettle, Mrs Sally Powell (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, reports of reviews by QAA and from reviews by the awarding universities. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagement in assessment. A summary of findings from this Developmental engagement is provided in Section C of this report. The review also considered the College's use of the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers, with reference to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, subject and award benchmark statements, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and programme specifications.

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

4 Blackburn College is a large further education college situated in Blackburn town centre on one main campus. The University Centre at Blackburn College moved into new purpose-built accommodation that was opened in September 2009. The College is situated within Blackburn and provides 67 per cent of the higher education provided in further education colleges in Pennine Lancashire. The borough has undergone many years of decline in its traditional industrial base and this has led to high levels of deprivation. There is a strong local focus on regeneration and an increasing emphasis on community cohesion. The mission of the College is to 'provide outstanding further and higher education and training, in order to support the wider community and drive economic regeneration'.

5 The College attracts students from a wide geographic area and provides education for over 15,000 learners. In September 2010 the College enrolled 2,830 students to higher education programmes, representing 2,406 full-time equivalent HEFCE-funded places. The higher education provision is approximately 28 per cent of the student population and of the qualifications studied at the College in 2010-11.

6 The higher education programmes at the College funded by HEFCE are listed below, under the awarding body and with the full-time equivalent students.

Lancaster University

- BA (Hons) Business Accounting (56)
- BA (Hons) Business and Human Resource Management (7)
- BA (Hons) Business Studies (53)
- BA (Hons) Criminology - post-FD top-up (5)

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- BA (Hons) Criminology - post-HN top-up (7)
- BA (Hons) Design - Contemporary Textiles (7)
- BA (Hons) Design - Graphic Communication (26)
- BA (Hons) Design - Illustration and Animation (11)
- BA (Hons) Design - Interiors (9)
- BA (Hons) Design - Moving Image (13)
- BA (Hons) Design - New Media (4)
- BA (Hons) Early Years Child Care (49)
- BA (Hons) Education Studies (69)
- BA (Hons) English and Politics (1)
- BA (Hons) English and Sociology (7)
- BA (Hons) English Language & Literary Studies (35)
- BA (Hons) Financial Services (5)
- BA (Hons) Fine Art (61)
- BA (Hons) Fire and Rescue Management (0)
- BA (Hons) Graphic Design (9)
- BA (Hons) History and English (11)
- BA (Hons) History and Politics (13)
- BA (Hons) History and Sociology (10)
- BA (Hons) Hospitality Management (8)
- BA (Hons) Housing Studies (3)
- BA (Hons) Photographic Media (14)
- BA (Hons) Public Service Management (1)
- BA (Hons) Public Service Management - Public Service (5)
- BA (Hons) Working with Children and Young People (19)
- BEng (Hons) Electrical and Electronic Engineering - one-year top-up (0)
- BEng (Hons) Electrical and Electronic Engineering - two-year top-up (0)
- BEng (Hons) Mechanical Engineering - two-year + one-year top-up (5)
- BEng (Hons) Mechatronics - one-year top-up (0)
- BEng (Hons) Mechatronics - two-year top-up (0)
- BSc (Hons) Applied Psychology - Counselling and Health (106)
- BSc (Hons) Computer Systems Engineering – one-year top-up (0)
- BSc (Hons) Computer Systems Engineering – two-year top-up (0)
- BSc (Hons) Computing - one-year top-up (6)
- BSc (Hons) Computing - two-year top-up (7)
- BSc (Hons) Information and Internet Technology - one-year top-up (0)
- BSc (Hons) Information and Internet Technology - two-year top-up (0)
- BSc (Hons) Sustainable Construction - one-year + two-year top-up (15)
- ExDip Management Studies (14)
- FdA Accounting (24)
- FdA Business (35)
- FdA Care Practice (95)
- FdA Complementary Medicine (28)
- FdA Community Policing and Justice Management (16)
- FdA Criminology and Criminal Justice (109)
- FdA Financial Services and Law (7)
- FdA Fire & Rescue Service Management (27)
- FdA Graphic Design (38)
- FdA Hospitality Management (26)
- FdA Housing Studies (18)
- FdA Interior Design with Construction (16)
- FdA Journalism (14)

- FdA Photographic Media (50)
- FdA Positive Practice with Children and Young People (37)
- FdA Public Services - Public Service management (25)
- FdA Retail Management (15)
- FdA Teaching and Learning Support - Primary (47)
- FdA Textile Design (21)
- FdA Working with Special Needs (19)
- FdA Young Children's Learning and Development (156)
- FdSc Sustainable Construction (20)
- FdSc Computing (63)
- HNC Computer Studies (8)
- HNC/D Business (33)
- HNC/D Civil Engineering (19)
- HNC/D Construction (17)
- HNC/D Electrical/Electronic Engineering (18)
- HNC/D Instrumentation and Control Engineering (2)
- HNC/D Manufacturing Engineering (28)
- HNC/D Mechanical Engineering (25)
- HNC/D Operations Engineering (15)
- HNC/D Telecommunications (40)

University of Central Lancashire

- Certificate of Education (31)
- FdA Sports Coaching (41)
- FdA Sports Development (9)
- FdA Health and Personal Training (40)
- PGCE in Education - Post Compulsory Education and Training (66)

University of Glamorgan

- HNC Legal Studies (3)
- HND Legal Studies (38)
- LLB Hons (90)
- LLB Hons part-time (32)
- LLM Master's in Law (4)

University of Huddersfield

- BA Business Studies - final cohort (5)

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

7 The College is an Associate College of Lancaster University and has further partnerships with the University of Glamorgan, the University of Central Lancashire and the University of Huddersfield. The programme validated by the University of Huddersfield is reaching its final cohort and the partnership will be concluded when students complete their studies. These partnerships have helped the College meet the needs of its local community for higher education opportunities.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

8 Two full-time posts of Associate Dean, for Learning and Teaching, and Curriculum and Standards, have been recently created to work closely with the Dean of the University Centre Blackburn College and the Vice Principal, Quality and Development. There is a refocus on learning and teaching through the Learning and Teaching Committee chaired by the Associate Dean and support systems have been enhanced with the creation of Lead Tutor roles in each school. An extension to the University Centre was completed during the summer that provides further social, study and catering facilities specifically for the higher education students based in the building.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

9 Students from the higher education provision at the College were invited to present a submission to the team. A writing group of three students volunteered to write the student written submission on behalf of the University Centre. The submission was completed solely by the student group but with the support of the Student Union Liaison Officer and the Head of Tutorial and Guidance. A combination of a specially designed student questionnaire, themed suggestion boxes and analysis of the National Student Survey was used to provide supporting evidence for the final report. The submission was helpful to the reviewers, who found that the conclusions reported were consistent with those expressed by current students in the student meeting during the visit. The students were very complimentary about their higher education experience at University Centre Blackburn College and in particular about 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 Arrangements for managing higher education are clearly set out in the formal agreements between the College and the awarding institutions. The University Centre is led by the Dean of Higher Education, who represents the Centre on the College's Senior Management Team and Academic Board. The Dean is accountable to the Vice Principal, Quality and Development, and has responsibility for the two associate deans, five heads of school, the Academic Registrar, the International Manager, the Head of e-Learning, the Aerospace and Engineering Manager and the Head of Tutorial and Guidance.

11 The curriculum is delivered in five schools, each managed by a Head of School. Following the Developmental engagement in assessment, further key appointments have been made to the management infrastructure. The Dean is supported by two associate deans, for Learning and Teaching, and Curriculum and Standards. Other recent appointments include a Head of e-Learning and an International Manager. The recent cross-centre appointments have served to further strengthen the executive team, which was identified in the Development engagement report as an area of good practice.

12 The locus of responsibility for higher education quality and standards rests with the Dean as chair of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee. This committee has

membership from all schools and meets every two months. The remit of the committee includes the monitoring and continuous review of the quality of learning opportunities, maintenance of standards and accuracy of published information. It receives reports from both the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Research, Curriculum Development and Employability Committee. The Higher Education Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee reports to the Academic Council of the University Centre. The latter then reports internally to the College Academic Board, and externally to the Collaborative Provision Teaching Committee of Lancaster University. Other partner awarding bodies have a more subject-based relationship, with quality reporting at institution level taking place directly to the relevant academic committees of the universities.

13 A dedicated University Centre Quality Unit from the College Quality Unit supports staff in the operation of quality assurance and enhancement procedures. The newly established Teaching and Learning Committee and the Research, Curriculum Development and Employability Committee report to Academic Council and the Higher Education Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee. A series of groups, with clearly defined functions, also report to these main committees.

14 The Dean, together with the two associate deans, ensures the effectiveness of the processes for programme approval, annual programme reviews and monitoring of quality of learning opportunities. They also provide an interface between the University Centre, the College and Corporation, and the partner awarding bodies. They are supported in their work by heads of school and other cross-centre managers. The attainment of academic standards is further supported by the consistently high quality of documentation.

15 The Research, Curriculum Development and Employability Committee, chaired by the Associate Dean, Curriculum and Standards, ensures that academic standards are set, maintained, monitored and enhanced in terms of curriculum planning and development. The Learning and Teaching Committee, chaired by the Associate Dean, Learning and Teaching, focuses on the effectiveness of the teaching and learning opportunities to deliver quality and academic standards.

16 Employers are also involved in setting appropriate standards through their close involvement in course development and continuing contact through the employer forum. This focus on developing vocational expertise to meet the employability needs of the local and regional community is set out in the College's Higher Education Strategy. A Research and Employability Unit has been established to further support standards in work-based learning.

17 The College has produced a University Centre Quality Handbook as a collection of policies relevant to the higher education provision. The component documents are available on the staff intranet, but therein are individually identified rather than being presented as a handbook collection. Plans to streamline and develop the online presentation of documentation and information of importance to staff through a college-wide file sharing system are underway.

18 The College is continuing to develop its management information system, which is able to provide reports on students' attendance as well as progression and achievement records. Data monitoring is a standard component of ongoing quality monitoring by programme leaders and heads of school.

19 Roles, responsibilities, and the committee structure in relation to higher education have been defined and refined since the Developmental engagement. At the time of the Summative review visit the new staff roles and structures were becoming established, although new titles had only recently been agreed. During this time of dynamic change the team took the view that it would be desirable for the College to take the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the new positions and processes involved in its higher

education provision. However, the team was able to confirm that structures and processes within the University Centre facilitate students' achievement of academic standards, by the provision of an inclusive, equitable and objective framework for the achievement of knowledge and skills.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

20 The self-evaluation states that the College recognises the importance of embedding the Academic Infrastructure within all curriculum management processes. In addition, the Higher Education Strategy lists among its objectives the need for excellence in meeting external quality criteria. In meetings with the team, staff confirmed that the Academic Infrastructure provided a major reference point in guiding their practice. The input from external examiners, course consultants from Lancaster University and employers is also a strong feature of programme development and delivery.

21 The development and delivery of programmes take appropriate account of the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements, the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* and the *Code of practice*. In addition, and in accordance with the College's drive towards employability, the provision makes proper reference to the relevant National Occupational Standards and professional and statutory body requirements. The Higher Education Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee is responsible for consideration of the *Code of practice*. The key precepts of all relevant sections of the *Code of practice* are integrated into the documentation available to support students throughout their involvement with the College. The precepts are reflected in the arrangements for admissions, student support, assessment, placements and work-based learning.

22 Curriculum development material and course approval documentation is comprehensive and provides useful guidance for staff in fulfilling the requirements of the Academic Infrastructure, as noted in paragraph 21. Programme specifications are part of the documentation required by the College for validation, and those seen by the team were detailed and included curriculum maps. The clearly expressed learning outcomes articulate appropriate levels of achievement in accordance with the FHEQ.

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?

23 The College has strong and supportive links with each of its awarding bodies. Lancaster University, with whom the College has a 'mature and robust' relationship, is regularly represented at key committee meetings of the University Centre. The College also benefits from the continuing support of the appointed link officer of the University. The links with other partner universities are similarly strong, but operate primarily at a discipline level.

24 The 2008 quinquennial review by Lancaster University confirmed the awarding body's confidence in the College's capability to take a more significant role in the development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of its higher education awards. It agreed a 'lighter touch' in the approach to quality monitoring. At the same time the new title of 'University Centre' was agreed for the new higher education accommodation at the College. The University and College have developed a shared approach to the fulfilment of local employment needs through the provision of Foundation Degrees.

25 The College participates in joint network meetings between Lancaster University and its associate colleges to facilitate benchmarking activity and mutual support amongst higher education providers. Partner awarding bodies and the College work together to

address changes, for example updating documentation as appropriate when amendments to national standards occur.

26 External examiners are appointed by the awarding body but have a clear responsibility to the College's higher education provision. External examiner reports consistently commend good practice and, in a majority of cases, comment positively on the standards attained by students. External examiner reports are summarised by the University Centre Quality Team and are used to inform the quality management and enhancement work of the relevant committees. The College is in the process of developing academic regulations and practices in collaboration with the awarding body to increase the standardisation of assessment across the higher education provision.

27 Procedures for student complaints and appeals, detailing both College and awarding body requirements, are clearly set out in course handbooks and are available on the College website.

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

28 The College has a proactive approach to higher education staff development, which includes a cycle of activity to analyse training needs and evaluate teaching annually. Academic standards are enhanced by staff participation in a range of internal and external development events. These are commonly attended and supported by the partner institutions and provide for the sharing of good practice and the further development of standards. For example, themed groups have been organised, in conjunction with Lancaster University, on aspects of the Academic Infrastructure, including assessment. A professional development policy is implemented to ensure at least 30 hours of continuing professional development are built into the teaching load of staff. The team considers that the facilitative staff development policy of the College is an example of good practice.

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?

29 The responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities and the consequent quality assurance processes reflect those for managing academic standards as described in paragraphs 10 to 13. The College ensures that these responsibilities are appropriately discharged and that learning opportunities are effectively managed.

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

30 The processes by which the College assures itself that it is fulfilling its obligations to its awarding bodies are described in paragraphs 15 to 17. Annual programme reviews consider the effectiveness of learning opportunities. Recently the University Centre has developed internal quality assurance procedures independently and with the encouragement

of the awarding bodies. The self-evaluation states, and the team can confirm, that all programmes are subject to a rigorous annual programme review process. This involves programme leaders, heads of school, peer and management auditors. The reviews consider action plans from the previous year's review, statistical data, feedback from staff, student and employer feedback, and external examiner reports. Following approval by Academic Council, reports are forwarded to the awarding bodies. A strategic overview, identifying key strengths and weaknesses, is produced annually and forwarded to Lancaster University as the major higher education partner. A list of areas of good practice is also compiled each year.

31 The analysis of annual programme reviews for 2008-09 and 2009-10 provides confirmation that the presentation of data on student completion and achievement is an area of constant review and development, as claimed in the self-evaluation. Following concerns in the annual overview for 2009-10, statistical data is now produced centrally for checking by course leaders. During the visit, staff confirmed improvements in the accuracy, accessibility and use of data. As described in paragraph 18, monthly management monitoring of data on attendance, retention and achievement has been introduced.

32 As claimed in the self-evaluation, the strategic emphasis on widening access and employability has been embedded in the curriculum through the development of Foundation Degrees. This has been achieved with the cooperation of Lancaster University, and by ensuring that the whole higher education curriculum responds to both academic and vocational requirements. An Employer Engagement and Employability Strategy has been developed and is kept under regular review. The team can confirm the effectiveness of the 'clear and well-established process for employer engagement in Foundation Degrees' noted in the report of the Developmental engagement.

33 The College continues to involve employers across an increasing range of programmes. Following the Developmental engagement, a Work-based Learning Unit has been established within the newly established Research and Employability Unit. At the time of the visit, a work-based learning policy was going through the final approval processes.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

34 As described in paragraph 22, programmes are aligned with the Academic Infrastructure at the time of their development and the principles set out in the programme documentation are confirmed at validation with the awarding body. Staff development is provided on aspects of the Academic Infrastructure and the managers ensure that all staff take into consideration the relevant elements of the Academic Infrastructure in the operation of the quality assurance processes. The team can confirm that the Academic Infrastructure has a significant role in ensuring that practice within the University Centre is fit for purpose in terms of both standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

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

35 The University Centre Blackburn College has a Learning and Teaching Strategy that aims to ensure that the quality of learning and teaching opportunities align with the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure and meets the requirements of each academic award. There is a centre-wide commitment to ensuring excellence in learning and teaching that enables students to achieve the required standards and learning outcomes. There are opportunities for staff to develop both academically and vocationally, and these inform and enhance learning and teaching practice. Staff met by the team who had experience of teaching in both further and higher education displayed a clear understanding of the different

levels involved and explained how they encourage students to become independent learners.

36 The College operates a well-established Peer Observation Support Scheme that aims to encourage a supportive and developmental approach to learning and teaching. Each member of staff is observed on an annual basis and feedback is used to identify good practice and development needs. Staff endorse the benefits of the process, which the team judges to be an area of good practice.

37 Support systems and learning and teaching strategies ensure that students understand assignments and assessment tasks. Formative assessment and feedback are fully embedded in learning and teaching practice through subject-specific and tutorial schemes of work. They are further supported through the virtual learning environment. Students met during the visit were satisfied with the assessment process and with the quality and timeliness of the feedback they received. Internal and external moderation systems ensure the ongoing monitoring of standards and quality. Since the Developmental engagement, the transparency of the moderation process has been enhanced through new recording documentation. Student feedback on learning and teaching is collected by means of module evaluation, both paper-based and electronically, and is used by staff teams to inform annual programme reviews and action plans.

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

38 The thorough and effective student support system is led by a dedicated team of support officers and managers. The College's general tutorial model has been adapted by the University Centre to meet the needs of higher education students. An Every Student Matters group monitors the quality and consistency of tutorial provision. Every student has a set tutorial entitlement and a personal tutor, whose role and responsibilities combine academic development, including personal development planning, and pastoral care. Personal tutors are themselves supported by training opportunities and extensive documentation. Lead tutors in each school have a pivotal role in implementing the tutorial model at school level and in the tracking and monitoring of student retention and achievement. Students identified as 'at risk' are referred to a student support officer. In addition, students have access to the College's wide range of specialised support services. Students met by the team confirmed the positive views expressed in the written submission. They spoke highly of the support provided by personal tutors, some of it through the virtual learning environment. The College's provision of tutorial support is an area of good practice.

39 The University Centre assures itself that it is supporting its students effectively by collecting and acting on various forms of feedback. Student representatives provide feedback at course, school and centre-level meetings. A University Centre and Student Joint Committee, including school and students' union representatives, has been recently established as a forum to raise centre-wide issues. An overview of student feedback, engagement and representation is compiled annually from the annual programme review reports. Analysis of the National Student Survey results for 2009-10 has shown that the College scored above the average in comparison with other further education colleges in all seven areas of the survey. It is intended, however, to review systematically the interlocking of feedback and engagement representation processes in order to reduce 'survey fatigue' and ensure consistency in action planning. Students express satisfaction that they can make their views known, that they receive appropriate feedback on any concerns and that the College is responsive to student needs. For example, the College was quick to respond to student requests for more catering, social and study space by extending the new University Centre building in 2010 and by combining study and social areas.

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

40 The College has a detailed staff development policy with clear opportunities and funding to support professional development and scholarly activity. The team was provided with evidence to support the claim in the self-evaluation that the opportunities afforded to staff to develop both academically and vocationally inform and enhance the quality of learning opportunities. Staff are given remission of teaching in order to develop new courses or to study for higher degrees. Time is made available for staff to undertake research projects through the new Research and Employability Unit. Training sessions are provided on quality assurance processes, such as writing annual programme reviews. A system of peer review of annual programme review reports enables staff to work between and across schools, sharing good practice and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience. The College's arrangements for staff development clearly enhance the quality of learning opportunities and are an example of good practice.

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

41 The College addresses issues related to learning resources, such as buildings, facilities and social space, on an annual basis through business planning that takes into account both staff and student feedback. The University Centre building, opened in September 2009, provides a distinctive learning environment for the College's higher education students and, as explained in paragraph 42, the building was extended in 2010 in response to student feedback related to catering, social and study space.

42 The new Centre contains a discrete learning resource centre for higher education students, and the combination of library and information technology facilities has significantly increased rates of student satisfaction with the learning resources provided. Students met by the team were enthusiastic about the quality of the learning resources and the support they received from staff in their use. They have access, through the virtual learning environment, to the electronic learning resources of the awarding bodies.

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?

43 Most of the responsibility for the production of public information is delegated to the University Centre, subject to checks by the partner higher education institutions. Publicity materials are produced by the College's marketing team in collaboration with the relevant programme teams and are audited internally.

44 The University Centre website contains detailed information for both applicants and ongoing students that is well presented and easily navigated. Clear systems and protocols exist to ensure that this information is regularly checked for currency and accuracy.

45 Course-level documentation, such as programme and module specifications, are produced by the College and audited by the relevant awarding institution, except in the case of the provision franchised from the University of Glamorgan. Course handbooks are the responsibility of the College and are produced to a standard template, although there is some variation in the level of detail provided in the course-specific sections, which it would be helpful to standardise. Course handbooks are contextualised to the academic regulations of the appropriate awarding body.

46 The University Centre is responsible for materials which appear on the College virtual learning environment. There are clear processes for the production and auditing of materials. The Developmental engagement identified the innovative and well-used virtual learning environment as an area of good practice, but recommended that it could be further developed to support students on all courses, in particular those with varied modes of study. Considerable progress has been made to address the recommendation. This is evident in the appointment of a Head of e-Learning, who has been charged with developing and implementing an e-learning strategy for the University Centre and to strengthen the quality of electronic learning resources. A number of initiatives have been introduced, including the implementation of a system of minimum expectations for different types of courses, training in the use of the virtual learning environment, and the appointment of virtual learning environment 'champions'. This has resulted in greater consistency in the sites at course level, though work remains to be done to ensure greater consistency at module level. It is desirable for the College to build on the progress already made by continuing with initiatives to develop and extend e-learning.

47 A second initiative resulting from the Developmental engagement has been a move to standardise further the information produced for employers. This initiative is being led by a dedicated Work-based Learning Lead Officer. The work is being informed by a thematic review of the process being undertaken in conjunction with Lancaster University and a partner further education college. In addition, the ongoing development of a framework of electronic resources includes the provision of documentation relating to quality and standards on the staff intranet that is accessible to employers. Employers commented positively on these developments and on the responsiveness of the College in terms of curriculum and programme development.

**What arrangements does the College have in place to assure the accuracy and completeness of information the College has responsibility for publishing?
How does the College know that these arrangements are effective?**

48 There are clear protocols relating to the various areas of public information, including the website, prospectus, virtual learning environment and programme or module documentation. These detail the responsibilities of the parties involved, including those areas retained by the awarding bodies. The monitoring of public information is the responsibility of a subgroup of the University Centre Learning and Teaching Committee. This is the result of recent changes to the Centre's governance structures. While there is evidence of effective scrutiny in the past, it will be important for the College to monitor this within the new structures.

49 The College has developed an extensive range of information materials to support students from application through to admission and induction. There is a clear system for ensuring these are given to students at the right time, with clearly defined roles for marketing, admissions and programme teams.

50 Currently the College is ensuring minimum standards for all information provided on e-learning applications for differing types of programme, including full-time, blended and distance-learning initiatives. Staff can attain 'Gold', 'Silver' or 'Bronze' internal accreditation

for the quality of their information and assessment practice. The intention to ensure suitable minimum standards of information has the potential to ensure consistency but this is at an early stage of development.

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

51 The Developmental engagement in assessment took place in February 2010. There were three lines of enquiry as follows: to ascertain that the systems at the University Centre within the College ensure the consistent sharing of good practice and innovation in assessment processes and supporting publications while maintaining equivalence in standards and student effort across levels, programmes and disciplines; to what extent the processes and published information available at the University Centre within the College ensure the consistent application of the relevant elements of the Academic Infrastructure and other external references to work-based assessment; and to what extent the inclusive systems and procedures support the assessment needs of widening participation student cohorts, and how information on this is communicated to students.

52 The Developmental engagement team identified a number of areas of good practice, including a culture of continuous improvement, with robust programme approval processes and an effective partnership with awarding body universities. It identified a wide range of assessment methods with some innovative practice. Peer observations and themed group meetings that support the sharing of good practice were highlighted, as well as supportive staff development. Partnership working with employers was reported as providing opportunities for student and staff research, leading the enhancement of assessment. There was also good practice in the systematic review of work-based learning, and the appointment of a Work-based Learning Lead Officer. An innovative and well-used virtual learning environment system and accessible public information were reported as being supportive of student needs. The effective arrangements for student support and a clear commitment to engagement with widening participation were also highlighted.

53 The team also made a number of recommendations, including the need to further develop the consistency of feedback on both formative and summative assessments, both in text and on front sheets, and encourage students to critically engage with both theory and practice. It reported on the need to clarify the process of moderation and second-marking and ensure that this is consistently applied. In addition, the team recommended further consolidation of the work to develop a coherent infrastructure for work-based learning, as well as the further development of the virtual learning environment system. The team also recommended that the College should ensure that the current work in developing new documentation is continued and disseminated.

D Foundation Degrees

54 The College has developed 42 Foundation Degrees validated by Lancaster University and the University of Central Lancashire. A wide range of subjects is offered, including business and finance, early years, childcare and education, health, the arts, technology, information technology and sport. To address the planned growth in employer-led and work-based Foundation Degrees, the College has recently appointed a Work-based Learning Lead Officer and a Placement Coordinator. These roles have been created to support the development of a coherent infrastructure to support work-based learning and

assessment. An audit of existing policies and approaches has been undertaken and has resulted in new documentation to ensure that employers are well prepared to support work-based learning and assessment. Employers are increasingly involved in the development of the curriculum to ensure relevance to the local and regional communities.

55 The Foundation Degree provision is closely integrated with the other higher education provision by means of a common validation and quality assurance process. The areas of good practice and recommendations listed below apply equally to the Foundation Degrees.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

56 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Blackburn 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, Lancaster University, the University of Central Lancashire, the University of Glamorgan and the University of Huddersfield.

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

- the College has robust and effective systems for programme approval to ensure that academic standards are consistently attained (paragraphs 14, 22)
- there is effective employer involvement in curriculum development to ensure programmes are vocationally relevant to the local and regional community (paragraphs 16, 20, 32)
- curriculum development material is comprehensive and provides useful guidance for staff and employers in meeting the requirements of the Academic Infrastructure (paragraph 22)
- there is facilitative staff development for higher education staff that contributes to the maintenance of standards and enhances the quality of learning opportunities for students (paragraph 28)
- the College has a rigorous annual programme review process that is used effectively to enhance quality (paragraph 30)
- the Peer Observation Support Scheme is developmental and aids the dissemination of good practice across the higher education provision (paragraph 36)
- there is an exemplary tutorial model tailored to meet the needs of higher education students through personal development planning and pastoral care (paragraph 38)
- the College has been responsive to the views of students in the provision of combined social and study space (paragraphs 41, 42)
- the College website that is easy to navigate and which provides access to a full range of information for existing and potential students (paragraph 44)
- there is a well-designed system to provide continuous information to support the student through the application and admission process (paragraph 49).

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

59 The team agreed the following areas where it would be **desirable** for the College to take action:

- evaluate the effectiveness of the newly created staff roles and recently implemented committee structures in the management of higher education (paragraph 19)

Integrated quality and enhancement review

- continue the positive initiatives to develop and extend e-learning across the higher education programmes (paragraph 46).

60 Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, and other documentary evidence and from its meetings with staff and students, the team concludes that 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.

61 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.

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

Blackburn College action plan relating to the Summative review: October 2010						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
In the course of the Summative review the team identified the following areas of good practice that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College has robust and effective systems for programme approval to ensure that academic standards are consistently attained (paragraphs 14, 22) 	Specific review of programme approval processes to embed contemporary developments on Academic Infrastructure and to accommodate the requirements for Foundation Degree awarding powers	June 2011	Dean/Associate Dean (Curriculum and Standards)	External examiner reports, and recognition from external accreditation	Academic Council; Academic Board	Annual programme review process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there is effective employer involvement in curriculum development to ensure programmes are vocationally relevant to the local and regional community (paragraphs 16, 20, 32) 	Continuous programme of review of all higher education curriculum on a cyclical basis with appropriate employers to ensure that it meets contemporary professional and vocational standards	All programmes to be covered by June 2014	Work-based Learning Lead Officer/Associate Dean (Curriculum and Standards)	All higher education curriculum successfully provides opportunities for students to gain vocational and professional knowledge and skills	Academic Council; Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Committee; Research, Curriculum and Employability Committee	Annual programme review process

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> curriculum development material is comprehensive and provides useful guidance for staff and employers in meeting the requirements of the Academic Infrastructure (paragraph 22) 	<p>Review of curriculum development material to inform and develop staff and employers working collaboratively in the context of curriculum development, delivery and review</p>	<p>June 2011</p>	<p>Head of Curriculum Development/ Associate Dean (Curriculum and Standards)</p>	<p>Staff empowered with contemporary knowledge and skills to develop successfully, and deliver curriculum development materials</p>	<p>Academic Council; Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Committee; Research, Curriculum and Employability Committee</p>	<p>Summary report to Academic Council</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there is facilitative staff development for higher education staff that contributes to the maintenance of standards and enhances the quality of learning opportunities for students (paragraph 28) 	<p>Programme of scheduled staff development for new and experienced staff and review of this through the annual programme reviews</p>	<p>June 2011</p>	<p>Head of Tutorial & Guidance/ Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching)</p>	<p>Increase in level of staff development impacting on the successful achievement of standards by students</p>	<p>Academic Council; Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Committee; Learning and Teaching Committee</p>	<p>Summary report to Academic Council</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College has a rigorous annual programme review process that is used effectively to enhance quality (paragraph 30) 	<p>Production of guidance on annual programme reviews to be produced annually</p>	<p>June 2011</p>	<p>Quality Team/ Head of Quality/ associate deans (Curriculum and Standards and Teaching and Learning)/ heads of school</p>	<p>Decreased incidence of reports needing amendment before finalisation</p>	<p>Academic Council</p>	<p>Summary report</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Peer Observation Support Scheme is developmental and aids the dissemination of good practice across the higher education provision (paragraph 36) 	Review of scheme against its original objectives	June 2011	Head of Tutorial & Guidance/ Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching)	Increase in incidence of good practice disseminated across higher education provision	Academic Council	Summary report
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there is an exemplary tutorial model tailored to meet the needs of higher education students through personal development planning and pastoral care (paragraph 38) 	Monitor the implementation and impacts of this model through timely student surveys	June 2011	Head of Tutorial & Guidance/ Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching)	Increase in student satisfaction score, successful completion and achievement	Academic Council; Learning and Teaching Committee; Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Committee	Report to Academic Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College has been responsive to the views of students in the provision of combined social and study space (paragraphs 41, 42) 	Student surveys will specifically address these aspects and any feedback will be reviewed and implemented appropriately	June 2011	Head of Tutorial & Guidance/ Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching)	Increase in student satisfaction in relation to score against this indicator	Academic Council; Learning and Teaching Committee; Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Committee	Report to Academic Council Academic Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College website that is easy to navigate and which 	Specific stakeholder surveys will specifically address	June 2011	Higher Education Manager/College Marketing	Increase in satisfaction score in this	Academic Council	Report to Academic Council/

provides access to a full range of information for existing and potential students (paragraph 44)	the continued effectiveness of the website information		Manager	aspect from all stakeholders including students and employers		Academic Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there is a well-designed system to provide continuous information to support the student through the application and admission process (paragraph 49). 	The whole admission process is evaluated annually through student surveys and the students' union and feedback will be reviewed and implemented as appropriate	June 2011	Head of Tutorial & Guidance/ Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching)	Increase in satisfaction score against this indicator	Academic Council	Report to Academic Council

Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team agreed the following areas where it would be desired to take action:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> evaluate the effectiveness of the newly created staff roles and recently implemented committee structures in the management of higher education (paragraph 19) 	Full review of the effectiveness of the newly created roles and committee structure in the Centre	December 2011	Vice Principal/Dean	Specific research on the impacts of the work of the newly created roles and committees for the University Centre through comparative studies and staff and stakeholder surveys	Academic Council	Report to Academic Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue the positive initiatives to develop and extend e-learning across the higher education programmes (paragraph 46). 	Planned extension of e-learning across all higher education	September 2013	Head of e-Learning/ associate deans (Learning and Teaching and Curriculum and Standards)	All higher education programmes covered by e-learning provision	Academic Council	Summary of annual programme review reports

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