



QAA

Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

June 2009

Bolton Community College

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Preface

The mission of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continual improvement in the management of the quality of higher education.

As part of this mission, QAA undertakes reviews of higher education provision delivered in further education colleges. This process is known as Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER).

Purpose of IQER

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

The IQER process

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

Developmental engagement

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

The main elements of a Developmental engagement are:

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

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

Summative review

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

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

Evidence

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

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

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

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

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

Outcomes of IQER

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

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

Differentiated judgements can be made where a team judges a college's management of the standards and/or quality of the awards made by one awarding body to be different from those made by another.

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

Executive summary

The Summative review of Bolton Community College carried out in June 2009

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/or 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 demonstrated a strong commitment to the management of its responsibilities for its higher education provision as evidenced by the appointment of a Director of Adult Learning and Higher Education, the establishment of the Higher Education Committee and the development of higher education-specific policies, processes and procedures
- staff benefit from the reciprocal arrangements for the peer observation of teaching between College staff and colleagues at the University of Bolton
- students studying the Foundation Degree in Early Years Childhood Studies appreciate and benefit from the development and inclusion of a 10-week pre-study skills module.

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:

- engage with its awarding bodies, to implement more consistent procedures for receiving, monitoring, reporting and disseminating external examiners' reports.

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

- develop further its higher education policies and processes, to ensure that they are comprehensive, designed to minimise duplication and associated bureaucracy, aligned with and add value to the awarding bodies' existing documentation and procedures, and serve better the needs of the College's higher education community
- implement procedures to monitor the measures taken to improve the quality of feedback on student work, to ensure that it is consistent and matches students' expectations
- implement measures that allow students to receive written feedback, which they can keep, within the published deadlines
- continue to review and develop formal methods for sharing and disseminating good practice across its higher education provision.

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 Bolton Community College. The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the College discharges its responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes that the College delivers on behalf of the University of Bolton, Edexcel and the University of Central Lancashire. The review was carried out by Dr Mark Atlay, Ms Ann Kettle, Dr Amanda Wilcox (reviewers) and Mr Robert Hodgkinson (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 inspections by Ofsted. 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 Bolton Community College is a medium-sized general further education college that specialises in vocational education and training, higher education and community-based learning. The College offers courses in all areas of learning except land-based studies. The College was created in April 2001 following a merger between Bolton College and Bolton Community Education Service. It has recently rationalised its provision and now operates at its main site, Manchester Road and across a series of 'hubs and spokes'. The six hubs are: Manchester Road Centre; Horwich Centre; Brownlow Fold; West Houghton Centre; New Bury Community Centre; and Deane and Derby Local Learning Centre. In addition, the College offers provision on over 100 community sites across the borough. Bolton comprises one of the most disadvantaged areas in the country. The majority of the College's higher education provision is delivered at the Horwich Centre, with one higher education programme in Business and Information Technology delivered at the Manchester Road campus. In 2010 the College is expected to relocate to a new building to replace the current Manchester Road site. The College's mission statement was reaffirmed by the Corporation of Bolton Community College in May 2006 and states that it will take students further towards achieving their full potential by providing high-quality lifelong learning opportunities.

5 All of the College's higher education programmes are vocational, with most graduates already employed in their chosen areas of study. Higher education teaching takes place in four curriculum areas: business and information technology; teacher education; early years; and professional building. In the academic year 2008-09, the College has 15,250 student enrolments. Of these 232 part-time and 17 full-time students (111 full-time equivalent) are on HEFCE-funded higher education programmes. These are taught by 22 staff, of whom

nine are part-time. Recruitment patterns indicate that the College primarily recruits students from within the Bolton Metropolitan Borough, with some specialised level 4 courses attracting students from a wider geographical area.

Higher education provision at the College

6 The College provides nine courses, including three Foundation Degrees, as follows:

University of Bolton

- PGCE (full-time) (0)
- Certificate in Education/PGCE (part-time) (0)
- Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTTLS) (part-time) (117)
- FD in Early Years Childhood Studies (part-time) (40)*
- FD for Teaching Assistants (part-time) (11)
- Higher National Diploma (HND) in Business Information Systems (full-time) (8)

University of Central Lancashire

- FD in Utilities Management (part-time) (15)

Edexcel

- Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Civil Engineering (part-time) (49)
- HNC in Construction (part-time) (24).

* Primarily, the University of Bolton manages the FD in Early Years Childhood Studies. Programme delivery is split jointly on an equal basis between Bolton Community College staff and the University of Bolton lecturers. Their delivery is based at Bolton University Campus.

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

7 The College has formal partnership agreements with the Universities of Bolton and Central Lancashire and these documents define the College's responsibilities for higher education provision. The College delivers programmes from existing Edexcel nationally available courses in accordance with Edexcel requirements as described in its standard note and precepts. The universities are responsible for programme design and alignment with the Academic Infrastructure; validation; acceptance of applications; ensuring common standards; moderation; final assessment and award; regular meetings to monitor quality; the process of annual evaluation and continual improvement of academic outcomes. The College is responsible for programme implementation; recruitment; assessment and internal moderation; quality of teaching and learning; application of the universities' standards; regular internal monitoring of quality; complying with the universities' requirements for annual evaluation and review.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

8 The College is planning to relocate to a new campus to be built on its new Deane Road site. The new campus is situated opposite the University of Bolton and is expected to open in September 2010. Curricular plans have been produced that envisage the growth of the

higher education provision from the current level to 200 full-time equivalents by 2011-12. Primarily, these plans anticipate growth with existing awarding bodies and through planned growth in direct HEFCE funding. In conjunction with the University of Bolton, there are plans to introduce an FD in Complementary Therapies, and in 2009-10, an HNC in Business Studies. In addition, in conjunction with Thames Valley University, an FD for Hospital Play Specialists is anticipated for 2010-11. The College's Art and Design curriculum area is considering introducing an HNC/D in Performing Arts in conjunction with the University of Bolton. There are also preliminary plans for FDs in Sport and Public Services.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

9 Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a written submission to the Summative review team and one was produced. In compiling the report, representatives from the higher education student groups attended a training session held by the College. This provided guidance and support for the preparation of the document. Members of the Higher Education Committee assisted in the collation of the information, using focus groups and feedback from learner voice questionnaires. All of the higher education students were invited to participate in these focus groups and to complete an online learner voice survey for higher education. From the focus group sessions and the survey, a draft submission was written and prepared with the assistance of a College administrator. The submission was then circulated to randomly selected students, who amended and proofread the document. The team finds the report to be clear, concise, evaluative and informative. During the review, the team met students and their submission proved to be a valuable and effective reference.

B Evaluation of the management of HEFCE-funded higher education

Core theme 1: Academic standards

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

10 The quality of higher education provision is managed as specified by the awarding institutions. Courses validated by Edexcel follow the College's own quality assurance systems. The ultimate responsibility for curricular quality for the Edexcel programmes rests with the Vice-Principal for Curriculum and Quality. The College's Quality Department is responsible for overseeing the implementation of its quality processes and procedures including those that relate to higher education.

11 As the College now plans to expand its higher education provision, it is putting in place a higher education management structure and strategy. A Director of Adult Learning and Higher Education has been appointed (January 2009), to lead the development and to implement the College's Adult and Higher Education Strategy. The post-holder is also responsible for managing higher education throughout the College, for the development and implementation of new higher education programmes and for liaising with the awarding bodies.

12 The College's higher education provision is overseen by a recently established higher education committee. Its remit is to coordinate and monitor the College's higher education provision. This includes internal validation, receiving an annual report on higher education

provision and its presentation to the senior management team by the Director of Adult Learning and Higher Education, validating higher education course reviews and the higher education self-assessment report. In addition, the Committee is responsible for checking engagement with the Academic Infrastructure in course documentation, ensuring compliance with the awarding body partnership agreements and monitoring and reviewing any actions required in response to external examiners' reports. The Higher Education Committee meets monthly and reports to the College's senior management team. From September 2009, its terms of reference are to be amended to include representation from the awarding bodies. The College is also considering student representation on the Higher Education Committee. The team concludes that the newly introduced role of Director of Adult Learning and Higher Education and the evolving Higher Education Committee will strengthen the College's management of its higher education provision. Furthermore, representation from awarding bodies is likely to enhance the College's ability to undertake the management of its responsibilities. The team considers the introduction of these initiatives to be good practice.

13 Higher education quality systems and procedures are being developed for introduction in September 2009, subject to approval by the Higher Education and the Quality and Standards Committees. These include, for example, a higher education strategy and higher education-specific versions of the College's teaching and learning strategy, its framework for assessment, and procedures for course validation and withdrawal. The team reviewed drafts of these documents. The draft documentation, policies and procedures for higher education are not yet comprehensive. For example, further attention could be paid to the development of specific procedures for the observation of higher education teaching and learning practice, and the use of the Academic Infrastructure and level descriptors to establish standards could be more evident. Nevertheless, the team welcomes the commitment of the College to articulating more clearly separate procedures for establishing, supporting and monitoring the needs of its higher education students. The team recommends that the College further develops its higher education policies, processes and procedures, to ensure that they are comprehensive, align with the documentation provided by its awarding bodies and serve better the needs of its higher education community.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

14 The Academic Infrastructure is well embedded at programme level, being verified by the awarding bodies through their approval and review processes. These processes require evidence to show that the aims, intended learning outcomes and teaching and learning assessment strategies are set within the context of the *Code of practice*, relevant subject benchmark statements and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, and that the programmes are aligned with the FHEQ. The previous lack of an overarching higher education management infrastructure has made it difficult for the College to assure itself that there is consistency in the application of the Academic Infrastructure across all its programmes. A cross-mapping of the *Code of practice* to College policies and documentation is underway to assist with this endeavour. The Higher Education Committee is committed to reviewing all programme specifications annually to ensure their currency and accuracy. It will liaise with the awarding bodies, as appropriate, should changes be required. The team concludes that the College is taking appropriate steps using the revised higher education processes, to ensure that the Academic Infrastructure is applied consistently across the full range of its higher education provision.

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 Programmes are validated and revalidated in partnership with awarding bodies or within the College, as appropriate. The College is reviewing its procedures to ensure that all its programmes are scrutinised internally, before being passed to the respective awarding body for validation. As part of this process, the Higher Education Committee is considering how best to maintain a College oversight of course proposals prior to awarding bodies' validation events. The team considered that early engagement of the Higher Education Committee in the scrutiny and monitoring of new course proposals would assist course teams in the preparation of documentation to the required standard. The team recommends that, as it develops these procedures, the College should ensure that they are comprehensive, designed to minimise duplication and associated bureaucracy, and add value to the awarding bodies' procedures.

16 Programmes are reviewed for quality and effectiveness through the College interim and final course review processes, which lead to the production of action plans to promote continuing improvement. Course reviews feed into the curriculum-level and then the college-level self-assessment reports. During the review, the team was presented with conflicting statistics for overall higher education student numbers, which led them to question the robustness of the data available to support the tracking of students and the annual monitoring process. In discussions, both course leaders and awarding bodies assured the team that the quality of information available at the course level was appropriate.

17 In its self-evaluation report, the College identified the limited priority given to the analysis of the effectiveness of higher education programmes, within the College's self-assessment reporting processes, as an area for action. To address this, a separate higher education self-assessment report is to be written for the academic year 2008-09. This should encourage more higher education-specific action planning and enhancement. The College had developed guidance for heads of area on the higher education self-assessment report, but more work needs to be done to clarify the framework and to support related staff development.

18 Students' work is subject to double-marking or internal verification and final meetings verify grades prior to their submission to awarding bodies. As part of its draft Higher Education Strategy (2009-2013), the College is proposing to establish an assessment panel and examination board. Meeting every term, it is expected to oversee higher education assessment processes and to monitor the progress of students. It will report to the Higher Education Committee and the senior management team. The team concludes that the College has effective assessment processes. It is encouraged to monitor and review the effectiveness of the new assessment panel and examination board to ensure that it enhances existing College procedures and practices.

19 External examiners are appointed to all higher education programmes as required by the respective awarding body and form an integral part of the review process for each course. Issues identified from their reports result in an action plan. The team finds that there is some variation in reporting practices, with some external examiner reports being received directly by the quality department, while others are sent direct to course leaders, for example, in teacher training. The team considers that this may lead to a lack of monitoring and control of the feedback from external examiners by the College. The sharing of external examiners' reports with students is still under development. The team recommends that the College

engages with its awarding bodies, to implement more consistent procedures for receiving, monitoring, reporting and disseminating external examiners' reports.

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

20 The College offers a range of staff development opportunities that encourages subject updating and currency of the provision. Staff have, for example, attended courses on handling complaints in higher education, sharing good practice and in understanding the Academic Infrastructure. Increasingly, these opportunities include activities aimed specifically at the needs of higher education tutors. In addition, a range of activities is undertaken with the awarding bodies. The team concludes that the College is developing an appropriate framework for identifying and responding to the staff development needs of its higher education tutors.

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

Core theme 2: Quality of learning opportunities

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

21 The arrangements described in paragraphs 10, 11 and 12 also apply in supporting the College's management of the quality of learning opportunities. The College currently devolves the majority of its responsibility and supervision to course level, and relies on the close working relationship between course teams and the relevant awarding bodies. Course teams understand and implement their responsibilities for monitoring quality through the annual self-assessment process, the observation of teaching and learning and internal verification. The College is currently developing a new infrastructure for the management of higher education. The team considers that these arrangements are compatible with the expanding provision.

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

22 The reporting mechanisms for academic standards, as described in paragraphs 10, 11 and 12, also apply to the quality of learning opportunities. The scrutiny of partnership agreements confirms that where programmes are delivered as part of a franchise agreement with an awarding body (with the exception of the HNCs in Civil Engineering and Construction), the College has access to the awarding body's resources and support services. The College's own resources are scrutinised as part of the partner validation and then subsequently during the process of programme approval. The team concludes that the meetings with the College and representatives of the awarding bodies confirmed these strong collaborative relationships and the arrangements supporting them.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

23 The arrangements described in paragraph 14 above also apply in supporting the College's management of the quality of learning opportunities. Staff are aware of the Academic Infrastructure and have recently undertaken staff development activities to help embed its precepts into their practices. The course leader for a recently developed Foundation Degree in Complementary Therapies confirmed the close working relationship with the awarding body, and the course team's engagement during the programme's development with the FHEQ, *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* and relevant subject benchmark statements. The team concludes that the College is engaging with the Academic Infrastructure to enhance the quality of learning opportunities offered to students.

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

24 For each programme, the relevant university awarding body approves all staff new to higher education teaching. The College has a comprehensive teaching and learning strategy, as outlined in its teaching and learning handbook. This details the College's expectations with regard to teaching and learning. It sets out the process for annual lesson observation for all members of staff, and how the outputs of this process are linked to annual appraisal and staff development. In addition to the annual process of lesson observation, which is managed centrally by the Quality Department, there is a process of peer observation that is managed locally by the curriculum areas. While this process is voluntary, the majority of staff from the curriculum areas participate. They regard it as a valuable developmental tool for both observers and those being observed. In some curriculum areas, peer observation is extended to include cross-observation of other areas. There are also reciprocal arrangements for the peer observation of teaching between College staff and colleagues at the University of Bolton. The team judges this to be good practice and the College is encouraged to identify other areas where links might be mutually beneficial.

25 The College is currently drafting a higher education teaching and learning strategy. The draft document outlines the processes by which the management of higher education, acting through the Higher Education Committee, will oversee the assurance of the quality of teaching and learning. The team considers these proposals to be necessary and appropriate.

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

26 Students are supported in a variety of ways by the College, including personal development planning as part of the tutorial system. This process is fully embedded across all the curriculum areas. However, not all students acknowledge its value in enhancing the quality of their learning opportunities. Study skills support is integrated throughout the programmes. Additional support is available from the College and the relevant awarding body, as required. The expansion in the number of students entering the Foundation Degree in Early Years Childhood Studies has stimulated the development and inclusion of a 10-week pre-study skills module. Students are expected to complete successfully the module prior to the start of the course. They welcome its effectiveness in preparing them for study. The students and teaching staff confirm the value of this study skills module and the team recognises it as an area of good practice.

27 Support for disability, hardship, welfare and careers is available at the relevant awarding institutions, in addition to the services provided by the College. The students report that these services are accessible, supportive and appropriate. Although the HNC in Civil Engineering and Construction students do not have the same access as those studying courses that are linked to a university, they felt that the support provided by the College meets their needs.

28 The College has an induction programme that is delivered to all students. During this process, students are introduced to the College's policies and procedures, and to academic regulations, which are included in College and course handbooks. Students on franchised programmes also receive additional induction sessions from the awarding body, which they consider to be valuable. In particular, the sessions help them to identify with the respective university, as well as the College. Students have good access to their tutors and are well supported through small class sizes. The College stipulates a minimum entitlement of one tutorial per term. Where a partner university stipulates a different requirement, the College works to the higher minimum requirement.

29 The students' views are expressed through formal modular feedback questionnaires, the Learner Voice Survey for Higher Education and a range of informal mechanisms, including focus groups. Students participate in the completion of the Learner Voice Survey; however, they are not always fully aware of the mechanisms for disseminating the results of the surveys. The College confirms that feedback is normally provided through existing course committees, but recognises that greater use could be made of the College virtual learning environment to facilitate its dissemination. The team concludes that there are effective formal and informal mechanisms for students to express their views. These are underpinned by the College's support for and engagement with its students and its responsiveness to their feedback.

30 In the student written submission some students indicated a desire for additional feedback on personal development planning and more comprehensive written commentary on their assessments. Second-markers and verifiers from the awarding bodies have also raised similar concerns. Teaching staff on some programmes indicated that progress is being made to address this issue. However, the team remains unconvinced by existing initiatives and concludes that the quality of feedback on student work is variable. They recommend that the College should implement procedures to monitor the measures taken to improve the quality of feedback on student work to ensure that it is consistent and matches students' expectations. The students confirm that their marked assessments are returned within the two-week deadline stipulated by the College. However, there is inconsistent practice in making available written feedback to students on their work. Some students are concerned by the limited time made available for them to digest written feedback before it is taken back and sent for internal verification. Other students confirm that, after the initial marking has been completed, they are able to keep a duplicate copy of the feedback on their work. The team concludes that these variable practices limiting the duration of access to written feedback disadvantages some students. Consequently, they recommend that the College implements measures to ensure that students receive written feedback, which they can keep, within the published deadlines.

31 The College has a formal system of student representation whereby student views on their courses are communicated at course committees and at the Principal's Forum. The Forum and the committees aid the dissemination of cross-college issues. Students confirm the effectiveness of these processes. They also confirm that feedback is received from their course tutors on the progress of issues raised, or by means of a letter from the Principal.

The teaching staff were able to provide examples of how the College has responded to student feedback. For example, in teacher education, students requesting a change of venue for delivery of their course will, from next year, have it taught at the Horwich Campus. At the end of each module students are expected to complete feedback questionnaires. From this issues are identified, with actions being communicated, monitored and recorded in the respective curricular self-assessment reports. From the next academic year it is proposed that these actions will be incorporated in the higher education self-assessment reports.

32 The Developmental engagement in assessment concluded that it would be desirable for the College to keep under review significant and evolving higher education policies and procedures that impact on the sharing of good practice across its higher education programme areas. A number of actions have been taken since the Developmental engagement, including a higher education staff development day on the sharing of good practice, and the introduction of a good practice forum. A number of other initiatives are planned or are in the process of being developed. The team finds that there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that actions to date for disseminating and sharing good practice are sufficiently well developed and robust. Consequently, it recommends that the College continues to review and develop formal methods for sharing and disseminating good practice across its higher education provision.

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

33 The arrangements for academic standards as described in paragraph 20, also apply to the quality of learning opportunities. The College recognises the value of employing staff with vocational skills that are relevant to their teaching portfolio and as such employs highly skilled practitioners. This is particularly relevant and evident for staff engaged in delivering the College's Foundation Degree provision. The College offers an annual staff development programme that currently makes little provision for specific higher education staff development opportunities. The awarding bodies provide some higher education staff development opportunities, of which staff are increasingly taking advantage. The team concludes that as the College's higher education portfolio expands, more attention will need to be paid to the development of procedures offering a more coherent approach to staff development.

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 indicates that its learning resource centre is generally well equipped and students generally support this. However, students would welcome increased access to the facilities and more private study rooms. Bespoke higher education resources are limited at the College. The new development to be built on the Deane Road Campus is expected to address existing limitations and, for example, will provide dedicated higher education learning and study facilities, as well as greater access to the University of Bolton campus. Current students indicate that they are aware of, and increasingly making use of, the facilities and services at awarding universities. They confirm their satisfaction with the accessibility of these resources and the quality of the services offered.

35 The College is developing its virtual learning environment and is implementing a strategic plan, which encourages course teams to embed, for example, e-learning and e-assessment into the delivery of its curriculum areas. The Developmental engagement in assessment identified a number of areas of good practice. However, these practices are not

widespread and students indicate that they would welcome the inclusion of some of the innovative practices offered in some programmes, across all programme areas. The majority of information in the virtual learning environment comprises the replication of lecture notes and briefing material, although there is innovative practice implemented by teacher training courses. The College intends to publish all programme and module specifications on the College's virtual learning environment, with the expectation that this process will be complete by the start of the academic year 2009-10. The team welcomes the vision of e-learning provided in the College's strategic plan and encourages all courses to implement the new web-based learning opportunities.

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

Core theme 3: Public information

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

36 The partnership agreements with awarding bodies set out the College's responsibility to secure approval for the information that it publishes about the courses it delivers in collaboration with partners. The College has responsibility for the preparation and publication of publicity and course handbooks for its Edexcel programmes. There is no separate higher education prospectus. The College publicises higher education courses in its online and hard copy course guide, with the result that, according to the College self-evaluation report, 'Higher Education provision tends to be amalgamated into the generic college-wide information'. It is pointed out in the student written submission that, although the information in the course guide on higher education is correct and relevant, it is brief, lacks some essential information and is difficult to locate among further education courses.

37 One of the aims in the draft higher education strategic plan is to ensure that higher education is marketed and promoted with accuracy and integrity. The College's Marketing Department intends to work closely with the higher education curriculum areas to produce and disseminate relevant publicity, such as course guides. Tracking enquiries and applications are to be used to monitor the effectiveness of the marketing campaign. In addition, links with the University of Bolton's Marketing Department have recently strengthened. The students' written submission indicated their willingness to participate in the development of public information on higher education provision. In response, the College intends to use a higher education student focus group to assist with the development of information about higher education. Outcomes are expected to be used in future course guides and on the College's website. Access to public information on higher education has expanded due to the creation of a new College website. This includes an area dedicated to higher education that contains details of available courses and also of quality assurance systems and procedures. The team endorses student views in their written submission that the website has a clean look, is easy to navigate, and to find relevant information.

38 At induction, the College provides students with either a part-time or full-time student handbook containing details of the College's mission and key policies and procedures. Students report that the information provided by the College at induction is useful and accurate. The team concludes that the College provides its higher education students with good quality and accurate college-related information.

39 All students receive a course or programme handbook. Where courses are delivered in collaboration with partner universities, the handbooks are detailed in nature and include programme and module specifications, attendance regulations, useful information on support mechanisms, guidance on effective academic practice, and advice on referencing and the avoidance of plagiarism. In addition, information is provided on how to apply for extensions of time for the submission of assignments and on procedures for making appeals or complaints. Supplementary College course handbooks are provided for the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector and the Foundation Degree for Teaching Assistants. They contain 'user-friendly' College-specific information and students are made aware that the definitive guidance is that contained in relevant University of Bolton handbooks.

40 It was noted in the Developmental engagement report that programme handbooks for the Edexcel courses are less comprehensive in content compared with those provided for franchised programmes. In particular, their format differs significantly from the handbooks provided for the other programme areas and they provide limited information on assessment, which could disadvantage students. The outcomes of the College's Developmental engagement recommended that the College should clarify its guidance on the minimum specifications for its programme handbooks in order to address this variability. Following this recommendation, area heads responded to ensure that handbooks for the 2008-09 session included 'all necessary minimum specifications' before they were released to students. A comprehensive 'Guide to Course Handbooks' has been produced with details of the essential information that the College expects to be included. Staff confirm that the work of standardising the information in handbooks had already begun and was about to be fully implemented. The student written submission suggests that programme handbooks could be enhanced further by the inclusion of glossaries, and the College intends to take action on this suggestion in time for the start of the 2009-10 session.

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?

41 For courses operated in partnership with higher education institutions, the awarding bodies define the procedures for the review and checking of paper-based and web-based documentation for accuracy prior to its publication. In addition, the University of Central Lancashire checks the accuracy of course-level information through its annual monitoring process. Through the offices of the Head of Collaborative Partnerships and Employer Engagement, the University of Bolton undertakes a regular review of publicity and related material provided by partner institutions. Representatives of the awarding bodies confirmed that this liaison between College staff and staff of the partner universities ensures that public information is accurate. In the case of the directly funded Edexcel programmes, checking for accuracy is undertaken through the College's internal processes.

42 Until recently, the curriculum area teams were directly responsible for the information produced to market the College's higher education provision, without approval of its content by the College. Consequently, the quality and content of the information had been found to be variable. Now, information on higher education that is placed within the public domain is subject to increased scrutiny to ensure its reliability, accuracy and currency. In the formulation of information, curriculum area teams work more closely with the College's Marketing Department. No paper-based or web-based information is published without the approval of the Director of Adult Learning and Higher Education, or another member of the

senior management team. Students agree that, in the main, the information provided by the College for its higher education students is helpful, accurate, consistent and current. The team confirms the effectiveness of these procedures.

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

C Summary of findings from the Developmental engagement in assessment

43 The Developmental engagement in assessment for Bolton Community College was undertaken in June 2008. There were three lines of enquiry as follows.

Line of enquiry 1

How is the College assured that its assessment strategies and programme design reflect the appropriate professional practice and academic standards indicated by the intended learning outcomes?

Line of enquiry 2

Does the assessment framework, including the tutorial process and personal development planning, facilitate effective support of the student learning opportunities?

Line of enquiry 3

Can reliance be placed upon the accuracy, consistency and currency of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about its assessment practices and procedures?

These lines of enquiry covered the implementation of the awarding body regulations on assessment across the programmes and the responsibilities of the College in these processes.

44 The Developmental engagement identified a number of areas of good practice. The strategies adopted by teaching staff engage employers in course development effectively, and promote employers' input into enhancing assignments and assessment strategies. The support provided by tutors for students, and the effective personal development planning, all demonstrated good practice. In addition, the professional practice of teaching staff enhanced the assessment strategies and the design of programmes.

45 The report identified that it would be desirable to monitor the effectiveness of the newly formed Higher Education Committee and to keep under review significant and evolving higher education policies and procedures that impact on the sharing of good practice across its higher education programme areas. Furthermore, the report recommends that the structure and content of programme handbooks should be updated to provide a common framework.

D Foundation Degrees

46 As of June 2008, the higher education in further education provision comprises six programmes of which three are validated as Foundation Degrees (FDs) and fall within the scope of this review:

- FD in Early Years Childhood Studies (University of Bolton)
- FD for Teaching Assistants (University of Bolton)
- FD in Utilities Management (University of Central Lancashire).

47 Prior to 2005-06, the College's higher education programmes amounted to fewer than 100 full-time equivalent students. Subsequently the provision has been expanded with the addition of FDs in Early Years and Utilities Management and, during 2008-09, an FD for Teaching Assistants. There are plans envisaging the growth of the higher education provision from the current level to 200 full-time equivalents by 2011-12. Primarily, these plans anticipate growth with existing awarding bodies and through planned growth in direct HEFCE funding. In conjunction with the University of Bolton, there are plans to introduce an FD in Complementary Therapies. In addition, in conjunction with Thames Valley University, an FD for Hospital Play Specialists is anticipated in 2010-11. There are also preliminary plans for FDs in Sport and Public Services. The College and awarding bodies have cooperated in the design of the Foundation Degrees and these engage with the requirements of the *Code of practice* and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. The assessment procedures for the work-based learning element of the Foundation Degrees are approved during the university validation procedures and communicated in the documentation provided by the awarding bodies. The Developmental engagement in assessment identified a number of programmes where the established links with employers, which reflect industry practices, enriched the design of the Foundation Degree programmes and generated work-based learning opportunities for students. This was evident in the FD in Early Years Childhood Studies and the FD in Utilities Management programmes.

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

- the commitment of the College to the management of its responsibilities for its higher education provision, evidenced by the appointment of a Director of Adult Learning and Higher Education, the establishment of the Higher Education Committee and the development of higher education specific policies, processes and procedures (paragraphs 11 to 13)
- the reciprocal arrangements for the peer observation of teaching between College staff and colleagues at the University of Bolton (paragraph 24)
- the development and inclusion of a 10-week pre-study skills module for students studying the FD in Early Years Childhood Studies (paragraph 26).

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

The team also agreed an area where the College is **advised** to take action:

- to engage with its awarding bodies to implement more consistent procedures for receiving, monitoring, reporting and disseminating external examiners' reports (paragraph 19).

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

- to develop further its higher education policies and processes, to ensure that they are comprehensive, designed to minimise duplication and associated bureaucracy, aligned with and add value to the awarding bodies' existing documentation and procedures and serve better the needs of the College's higher education community (paragraphs 13 to 15)
- to implement procedures for monitoring the measures taken to improve the quality of feedback on student work, to ensure that it is consistent and matches students' expectations (paragraph 30)
- to implement measures that allow students to receive written feedback, which they can keep, within the published deadlines (paragraph 30)
- to continue to review and develop formal methods for sharing and disseminating good practice across its higher education provision (paragraph 32).

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

51 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Bolton Community College's management of its responsibilities for academic standards and for the quality of learning opportunities of the awards the College offers on behalf of its awarding bodies. This was based upon discussion with staff and students and scrutiny of evidence provided by the College and its awarding bodies the Universities of Bolton, Central Lancashire and Edexcel.

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

- the commitment of the College to the management of its responsibilities for its higher education provision, evidenced by the appointment of a Director of Adult Learning and Higher Education, the establishment of the Higher Education Committee and the development of higher education specific policies, processes and procedures (paragraphs 11 to 13)
- the reciprocal arrangements for the peer observation of teaching between College staff and colleagues at the University of Bolton (paragraph 24)
- the development and inclusion of a 10-week pre-study skills module for students studying the FD in Early Years Childhood Studies (paragraph 26).

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

The team also agreed an area where the College is **advised** to take action:

- to engage with its awarding bodies to implement more consistent procedures for receiving, monitoring, reporting and disseminating external examiners' reports (paragraph 19).

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

- to develop further its higher education policies and processes, to ensure that they are comprehensive, designed to minimise duplication and associated bureaucracy, aligned with and add value to the awarding bodies' existing documentation and procedures and serve better the needs of the College's higher education community (paragraphs 13 to 15)
- to implement procedures for monitoring the measures taken to improve the quality of feedback on student work, to ensure that it is consistent and matches students' expectations (paragraph 30)
- to implement measures that allow students to receive written feedback, which they can keep, within the published deadlines (paragraph 30)
- to continue to review and develop formal methods for sharing and disseminating good practice across its higher education provision (paragraph 32).

55 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.

56 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.

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

Bolton Community College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 2009						
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 commitment of the College to the management of its responsibilities for its higher education provision, evidenced by the appointment of a Director of Adult Learning and Higher Education, the establishment of the Higher Education Committee and the development of higher education specific policies, processes and procedures (paragraphs 11 to 13) 	<p>Good practice to be reported as a strength in HE and college self assessment report.</p> <p>Wider Dissemination of HE understanding through College Development Days.</p> <p>Continue to monitor the effectiveness of the HE committee and sub committees</p>	<p>October 2009</p> <p>July 2010</p> <p>July 2010</p>	<p>Curriculum heads of area and Director of Adult learning and Higher Education</p> <p>Quality/ Professional Development Managers</p> <p>Director of Adult learning and Higher Education</p>	<p>Improved SAR and success reporting</p> <p>Improved awareness of HE curriculum and actions across all college areas.</p> <p>HE committee and sub committees embedded into college calendar</p>	<p>Director of Quality</p> <p>Director of Adult learning and Higher Education</p> <p>Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality and Senior Management Team</p>	<p>Approved college SAR</p> <p>HE committee minutes</p>

Bolton Community College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 2009							
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation	
	Assess the impact of the new HE policies and procedures during implementation	July 2010	Director of Adult learning and Higher Education and Director of Quality	New policies successfully in operation	Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality and Senior Management Team	HE report to SMT and standards committee	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the reciprocal arrangements for the peer observation of teaching between College staff and colleagues at the University of Bolton (paragraph 24) 	<p>Good practice to be reported as a strength in HE and college self assessment report.</p> <p>He committee to continue monitoring and developing methods for peer observation</p>	July 2010	Course teams and Director of Quality	Improved teaching observation grades and improved student feedback	Director of Adult Learning and Higher Education and members of senior management team	<p>Approved college SAR</p> <p>Improved profile of teaching grades and student evaluation</p>	

Bolton Community College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 2009						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the development and inclusion of a 10-week pre-study skills module for students studying the FD in Early Years Childhood Studies (paragraph 26). 	<p>Good practice to be reported as a strength in HE and college self assessment report.</p> <p>HE committee and course teams to monitor impact of 10 week pre-study skills module and consider its use within other curriculum areas</p>	April 2010	Members of the HE committee and Director of Adult Learning and Higher Education	Improved student retention, achievement and success	Vice Principal for Quality and Curriculum and Senior Management Team	<p>Approved college SAR</p> <p>Course review</p>

Bolton Community College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 2009						
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team agreed a number of areas where the College should be advised to take action:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to engage with its awarding bodies to implement more consistent procedures for receiving, monitoring, reporting and disseminating external examiners' reports (paragraph 19). 	<p>Awarding Bodies to be invited to attend HE committee meetings</p> <p>External examiners reports to be discussed at HE committee meetings</p>	<p>Oct 2009</p> <p>June 2010</p>	<p>Director of Adult Learning and Higher Education</p> <p>Course Teams and Director of Quality</p>	<p>Awarding Bodies actively attend and contribute to HE committee</p> <p>External examiner reports are actioned and disseminated as appropriate</p>	<p>Senior Management Team</p> <p>Senior Management Team</p> <p>Quality Group</p>	<p>HE committee minutes</p> <p>EE action plans</p>

Bolton Community College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 2009						
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<p>The team agreed the following areas where it would be desired to take action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to develop further its higher education policies and processes, to ensure that they are comprehensive, designed to minimise duplication and associated bureaucracy, aligned with and add value to the awarding bodies' existing documentation and procedures and serve better the needs of the College's higher education community (paragraphs 13 to 15) 	<p>Awarding bodies will be invited to attend the HE committee meetings and will act as a reviewer of all new procedures and policies in relation to HE</p> <p>All policies and procedures in relation to HE curriculum will be reviewed by Bolton College quality department on a regular basis</p>	<p>June 2010</p> <p>June 2010</p>	<p>Members of the HE committee</p> <p>Director of Adult Learning and Higher Education</p> <p>Director of Quality</p> <p>Director of Adult Learning and Higher Education</p> <p>Director of Quality</p>	<p>Appropriate policies and procedures are in place that compliment that of the awarding body</p>	<p>Senior Management Team</p>	<p>HE report to SMT</p> <p>HE report to standards committee</p>

Bolton Community College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 2009						
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to implement procedures for monitoring the measures taken to improve the quality of feedback on student work to ensure that they are consistent and match students' expectations (paragraph 30) 	<p>Staff development session on feedback for assessed work to be carried out for HE tutors.</p> <p>Course team to meet to discuss a standardised approach to feedback and its implementation</p>	<p>April 2010</p> <p>October 2009</p>	<p>Director of Adult Learning and Director of Quality</p> <p>Members of the HE committee</p>	<p>All HE staff who assess work to attend training</p> <p>A standardised procedure for feedback implemented throughout HE curriculum</p>	<p>Course teams</p> <p>HE committee</p> <p>Director of Adult Learning and Higher Education</p> <p>Director of Quality</p>	<p>Course reviews</p> <p>Student evaluations</p> <p>HE SAR</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to implement measures that allow students to receive written feedback, which they can keep, within the published deadlines (paragraph 30) 	<p>Course team to meet to discuss a standardised approach to feedback and its implementation</p>	<p>October 2009</p>	<p>Members of the HE committee</p>	<p>All students receive and keep copies of written feedback which aids the learning process within given deadlines</p>	<p>Course teams</p> <p>HE committee</p> <p>Director of Adult Learning and Higher Education</p>	<p>Course reviews</p> <p>Student evaluations</p> <p>HE SAR</p>

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