

Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

February 2010

Bridgwater College

SR61/2009

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2010

ISBN 978 1 84979 109 0

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

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Preface

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

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

Purpose of IQER

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

The IQER process

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

Developmental engagement

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

The main elements of a Developmental engagement are:

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

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

Summative review

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

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

Evidence

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

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

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

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, 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 Bridgwater College carried out in February 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 dynamic and empowering leadership of the Senior Management Team fosters a culture of continuous improvement
- well-supported staff development contributes to enhancing the student learning experience
- the College is strongly committed to valuing the student voice in promoting a high-quality educational experience
- the well managed and firmly embedded tutorial system offers responsive support for student learning
- the strategic investment in resources strengthens the growing and distinctive higher education identity of the provision
- the development of the use of the virtual learning environment drives forward a programme of continuous improvement by means of staff development in blended learning approaches to support teaching and learning
- the Higher Education Bulletin provides a clear example of the importance that the College attaches to communication with its higher education students.

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:

- undertake further work to ensure the alignment of the unit learning outcomes with appropriate level descriptors, core texts and work-based assessment tasks for work-based learning.

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

- continue to develop its strategy for embedding the processes of personal development planning in its higher education.

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 Bridgwater College (the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the College discharges its responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes which the College delivers on behalf of Edexcel; Bath Spa University; Bournemouth University; the University of Central Lancashire; Oxford Brookes University; and the University of Plymouth. The review was carried out by Ms Maggie Carroll, Ms Helen Corkill and Mr Fazal Dad (reviewers), and Mr Robert Jones (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, an employer 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 awards, Section D of this report summarises details of the Foundation Degree programmes delivered at the College.

4 The College was established as a tertiary college in 1973 and amalgamated with Cannington College in 2004. It is responsible for the majority of post-16 education and training in Bridgwater and its surrounding area. There are currently nearly 20,000 full and part-time students at the College. Higher education students attend programmes both at the Bridgwater main site and at the Cannington Centre, where specialised land-based programmes are located. There are currently 372 full-time and 287 part-time higher education students at the College within the scope of this review, comprising 481 full-time equivalents. Approximately 50 per cent of the higher education student intake are college leavers, the majority of whom are from Bridgwater College. Most of the College's higher education students are recruited from Somerset, with the remainder mainly coming from adjacent counties in the south west. The College offers its higher education provision within a strategic framework that provides for seamless progression from further to higher education and reflects the economic, social and cultural needs of the local area.

5 The higher education awards funded by HEFCE are listed below, with the number of students in brackets after each award.

Bournemouth University

- Certificate in Higher Education (CHE) and FdSc Landscape Design (full and part-time) (28)
- BSc (Hons) Landscape Design Top Up (full and part-time) (8)

Integrated quality and enhancement review

- CHE and FdSc Golf and Sports Turf Management (full and part-time) (10)
- CHE and FdSc Applied Animal Management and BSc (Hons) Animal Science (full time) (29)
- BSc (Hons) Animal Science Top Up (full-time) (4)
- CHE and FdSc Countryside Management (full and part-time) (34)
- Foundation Degree (FdSc) Forensic Science with Forensic Archaeology (full-time) (23)
- BSc (Hons) Applied Computing Top Up (full-time) (17)
- FdSc Creative Audio Technology (full-time) (24)
- BA (Hons) Early Years Care and Education Top Up (full-time) (18)

University of Plymouth

- FdA Early Years - Sector Endorsed (part-time) (40)
- CHE Food Technology (part-time) (27)
- CHE and FdSc Agricultural Management (part-time) (54)
- FdSc Public Services with Outdoor Education (full-time) (25)

Oxford Brookes University

- FdSc Road and Race Car Technology (full and part-time) (30)

Bath Spa University

- Postgraduate Certificate in Education (part-time) and Certificate of Education (part-time) (57)

University of Central Lancashire

- FdSc in Nuclear Decommissioning (full-time) (5)

Edexcel

- Higher National Certificate/Diploma (HNC/D) Computing (Software Development) (full and part-time) (57)
- HNC Manufacturing Engineering (full and part-time) (61)
- HNC Automotive Management and Technology (part-time) (18)
- HNC/D Sports Science (full-time) (36)
- HNC/D Business (full-time) (30)
- HNC/D Advanced Practice with Children and Families (full-time) (24).

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

6 The College has a mix of its own directly-funded Edexcel provision and indirectly-funded validated provision from five university partners. The College has developed a strategy of working with university partners with a particular strength or expertise in the curriculum area the College wishes to offer.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

7 The College has made significant investment in new buildings and resources. These include the new Animal Care Centre and state of the art farm equipment for animal management programmes, the Walled Gardens at Cannington for landscape design programmes and the new race team and equipment for the automotive programmes. A new Energy Skills Centre is currently under construction which will accommodate programmes related to engineering and nuclear engineering. Recent programme developments include the new BA (Hons) Top Up in Early Years Care and Education, and the BSc (Hons) Top Up in Applied Computing which both provide progression routes for existing level 5 provision.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

8 Students on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the team. The submission was facilitated by senior tutors, but produced by a small writing group of students, based upon the input from student representatives from all higher education groups in the College. The submission was clear, evaluative and useful to the team. During the review the team had a productive meeting with representative students.

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?

9 The College takes a strategic approach to the management of its higher education provision. The College Senior Management Team provides dynamic and empowering leadership, as is evidenced throughout this report and is supported by a recent Ofsted report that reconfirmed the College's outstanding grades in all five areas of assessment. The Vice Principal has overarching management responsibility for the higher education provision and is accountable to the College Principal. Each programme is run by a programme manager who reports to a section leader, who then reports to one of four curriculum area heads. This is an efficient and effective system. The team found good evidence to support the claim in the self-evaluation that the academic standards of the higher education programmes are clearly managed by the College in line with the regulatory requirements of the awarding bodies. The College's arrangements with its awarding bodies are closely based on the relevant partnership agreements. There are effective working relationships between the College and its awarding bodies that facilitate the development of a shared understanding of partner responsibilities relating to the management of standards and quality. Well-embedded link tutor arrangements with the validating universities foster relationships at programme level.

10 The College's committee structure includes a range of strategic and quality assurance groups. The key committees are the Performance and Quality Review Committee, responsible for both further and higher education matters, and the Higher Education Review Group which concentrates on higher education. Scrutiny of their minutes confirms that higher education business is systematically and successfully embedded within the College and is supported by comprehensively documented quality assurance procedures. The quality monitoring process is facilitated centrally through the Area of Staff and Quality Services which provides reports to the Senior Management Team, the Higher Education Review Group and the Performance and Quality Review Committee on quality outcomes. Where required, improvement strategies are identified and monitored on a termly basis. Key performance indicators are closely monitored both centrally by Staff and Quality Services and at programme level. The College acts on issues arising through a well-established system of review meetings and reporting mechanisms. At programme level, in addition to annual monitoring reports required by the university partners, the College's self-assessment monitoring meetings are held on a termly basis. Actions and updates from these meetings feed into reports to meetings chaired by the Principal at the end of each term.

11 The Higher Education Review Group, which is effectively chaired by a College governor with experience of higher education, takes an overall view of the quality assurance of the higher education programmes, systems and practices. The Group is also a forum for discussing a range of higher education issues and developments, and it considers, for example, the annual monitoring reports, external examiners' reports, the outcomes of examination boards, issues arising from audit, and issues which students may bring to a college forum.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

12 The College acknowledges the Academic Infrastructure as the key external reference point for ensuring the quality of higher education at the College. The understanding and use of the Academic Infrastructure is widespread in the College and is, for example, consistently referred to in programme validations and revalidations and policy documentation. Prior to external validation all new higher education programmes are subject to a thorough internal validation procedure that checks alignment to the Academic Infrastructure, including the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice*, especially *Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. Together with its awarding bodies, the College provides staff development events for updating current knowledge of the Academic Infrastructure. In particular, a significant step in staff development of higher education has been the introduction of the annual higher education conference in 2008. The theme of the conference in 2009 was the Academic Infrastructure.

13 There is clear evidence in the definitive validation documents of the Foundation Degree programmes that the programmes are aligned to the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. Employers are directly involved in validation and throughout the delivery of work-based experiences.

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?

14 Partnership agreements, regulations and handbooks clearly set out the systems and procedures for validation, delivery and review of programmes. Staff and Quality Services manage all awarding body regulatory requirements, including compliance with the validation of all awards.

15 The College operates its assessment against the regulations and operational guidance provided by each university partner as appropriate. In addition, it has developed a comprehensive internal assessment framework, which ensures cross-college coherence. It provides clear guidance to staff and students on the College and awarding body regulations and procedures, that enables the College to manage effectively the arrangements with multiple awarding bodies.

16 The awarding bodies appoint external examiners to assure themselves of the academic standards at programme level. The College has effective and rigorous systems in place to ensure that these reports are responded to and acted upon. Staff and Quality Services monitor the reports and responses to ensure that all have been received and distributed as appropriate and in line with awarding bodies' requirements. The Principal and the Head of Staff and Quality Services read all external examiners' reports to inform quality improvement activities. Programme managers have responsibility for liaising with their external examiners, responding to reports and implementing any resulting actions. A summary of all reports is reviewed annually by the Senior Management Team. Individual programme reports are reviewed as part of annual monitoring processes by university partners. External examiners' reports contribute to the College's own self-evaluation process by informing opportunities to share good practice or identify areas for improvement.

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

17 The College is committed to the continuous development of its staff in order to improve the quality of the student experience. The College's annual programme of continuing professional development activities provides a focused approach, embracing internal and external staff developmental events. There are comprehensive policies for staff induction, mentoring, staff development and appraisal. While these policies are wider in remit than higher education alone, the College addresses the different requirements of higher education staff by providing appropriate staff development opportunities. The College also actively encourages staff to become engaged in research and opportunities presented by partner universities, from which several successful projects have resulted. Staff development needs are identified through a variety of means, including the appraisal system, and observation of teaching and learning, the higher education conference, forum meetings for higher education programme managers and university annual monitoring reports. Evidence of effective and developmental scholarly activities through research at postgraduate degree level, together with a developing body of published material, indicates a positive culture across the College.

18 The annual higher education conference provides a valuable opportunity for all higher education staff to meet and engage with external specialists and university colleagues and to share good practice internally. The breadth of provision and physical distance between programme delivery locations means that there is a danger of intellectual isolation. The higher education conference is an invaluable forum for bringing together staff from a wide variety of disciplines so that they can exchange thoughts on higher education on a cross-college basis. The College runs structured staff development days throughout the year and workshops are included that have a specific higher education focus. Staff and Quality Services work with university partners to provide university-led development sessions at the College to ensure that its staff are up to date with key systems and themes. Programme managers liaise directly with link tutors to organise programme-specific sessions as required. Staff development activities and feedback are monitored centrally by Staff and Quality Services and recorded on each member of staff's individual record.

19 Through its recruitment processes the College ensures that staff are appropriately qualified and experienced to teach on its programmes. Awarding body partners are notified upon appointment of a new member of staff and the staff curriculum vitae is sent for approval to the university link tutor or nominated person. Staff and Quality Services work with programme managers to monitor updates.

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?

20 The responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities and the consequent processes reflect those for managing academic standards as described in paragraphs 9 to 11. Teaching staff are clear about their responsibilities in these processes, and how an issue focusing on teaching and learning would be addressed through them.

21 The Senior Management Team has an overview of the management of learning opportunities. Its strong leadership, which has resulted in significant investment in human and physical resources to support the higher education provision, promotes the dissemination of good practice to support high quality teaching and learning. This is done through the work of the Higher Education Review Group, the annual higher education conference and the workshops for higher education programme managers. A well-evidenced, strong and underlying ethos of improvement is embedded in the College's quality systems.

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

22 The College has effective and well-established partnership agreements with its awarding bodies as described in paragraphs 14 to 16. They specify particular expectations of the College in terms of approval of staff and general resource provision, annual monitoring and staff development.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

23 Teaching and learning provision is clearly aligned to the Academic Infrastructure as described in paragraphs 12 and 13. It is evident that appropriate consideration of the FHEQ and the relevant sections of the *Code of practice* support the quality of learning opportunities.

24 In the Developmental engagement in assessment, the College was advised to review the appropriateness and levels of work-based learning in Foundation Degrees. The College subsequently initiated a project to review its policy towards work-based learning in higher education, as a result of which handbooks have been produced that outline the College's approach to work-based learning for staff, students and employers. These handbooks were launched at the higher education conference in August 2009, and their impact will be evaluated through the users, the university partners and the external examiners. However,

following a review of student work for work-based elements of the Foundation Degree programmes, and a subsequent discussion with staff, the team believes that there remains a lack of shared understanding of the nature and purpose of work-based learning. In order to satisfy precept 1 of the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*, and as identified in the Developmental engagement, further work still needs to be undertaken to ensure the alignment of the unit learning outcomes with appropriate level descriptors, core texts and work-based assessment tasks.

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

25 The College has recently published a draft of a teaching and learning strategy for higher education level provision, developed from its existing mission, where teaching and learning are at the heart of its work. It links specifically with the College's strategic aims and priorities. The strategy provides key points of reference for staff, students and other stakeholders in situating the particular experience of its higher education students within relevant sections of the *Code of practice*. It provides a framework for student development, staff recruitment, staff development and scholarly activity, and resource allocation. The strategy's impact will be evaluated through several approaches, which include analysis of key performance indicators, the student voice, staff feedback and evaluation.

26 Advanced practitioners, who take a leading role in the dissemination and development of good teaching, learning and tutoring practice, are an inspiration to others through their mentoring roles. The College has a rigorous programme of graded lesson observations and all staff are observed at least once a year. This leads on to performance appraisal in which staff have an annual discussion of their progress with their line manager and agree targets for further development. Appraisal is an important part of the development process, and is set into the context of the College's Investors in People kitemark. The observations are thorough and offer effective feedback to staff. Outcomes of the observations and the appraisal are fed into the annual staff development planning cycle.

27 Students attest to the high quality of the teaching and to the expertise of the teaching staff. The importance placed on the value of the student voice in the College ensures that staff at all levels know about students' perceptions of their programmes. Listening to and responding to students is branded by the 'What's gone well/less well?' and 'You said/we did' strategies, which reflect the strength of the commitment to valuing the student voice in promoting a high-quality educational experience. In addition to the formal structures, informal liaison with staff enables the student experience to be managed effectively. Students report with enthusiasm on the accessibility of all staff and how they value the prompt responses to their questions and concerns.

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

28 Support for students is extensive and well managed, in a context of comprehensive College policies for equality and diversity, widening participation, and a single equality scheme. The support is coordinated by the Learner Services Team, comprising student support, inclusive learning, learning resources, and additional learning needs. The Head of Learner Services is a member of the College Senior Management Team, and as such is a positive influence in the promotion of student support initiatives. The College has recently been reaccruited by Matrix for the high quality of its information, advice and guidance support.

29 There is a well-managed tutorial system for student support, the aim of which is to encourage successful, active and independent learning. The system is embedded firmly in all programmes and fully supported by the senior tutor for each curriculum area. All students are allocated an academic, personal tutor. They receive an hour's tutorial each week, which includes at least two individual reviews each year. Students report that the tutorial support is excellent and covers all aspects of college life. They are happy with the academic guidance they receive which is often one-to-one and readily available. Those with particular needs praise the services they receive, which include appropriate and timely consideration of their individual learning support.

30 The College has identified clearly the importance of personal development planning within its tutorial system, with links to the academic curriculum and to work-based learning and much of this is already in place. In meetings with students, however, there was considerable confusion about the nature and processes of personal development planning and to some extent this extended to staff. Further clarification of these processes will be necessary in order to support the College's intent to situate personal development planning within its higher education teaching and learning strategy.

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

31 In its higher education strategy, the College is committed to the continuous development of its staff in relation to a higher education pedagogy and scholarly activity. To support this there are comprehensive policies for induction, mentoring, continuing professional development, initial teacher training and appraisal. The Training and Development Policy and Procedures Handbook offers a framework for managing staff training and development needs. The Investors in People award, successfully reaccredited on a regular basis, attests to the College's commitment to its staff.

32 Contracts for teaching staff incorporate a three-week period for professional development, which is normally used for research and updating of professional knowledge. Staff curricula vitae provide good evidence of continuous updating of professional and academic experience.

33 All new staff and staff new to teaching at the higher education level have a well-constructed induction programme and are allocated a mentor. Induction and mentoring are supported by effective guidance, which ensures the secure implementation of the processes for quality management and enhancement.

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 Provision of resources is ensured at the point of validation of the university awards. Thereafter, resources are allocated through a college-wide process, led by the Principal, and arising from the annual strategic plan, which is informed by local, regional and national priorities. At subject level, resource needs are primarily identified through programme meetings, university annual monitoring processes, self-assessment monitoring meetings, student feedback and annual curriculum reviews.

35 The College has invested strategically in high-quality resource provision in order to strengthen its growing and distinctive higher education identity. Higher education study rooms are available on both sites. The learning resource centres are well stocked and support the higher education programmes effectively. Students report great satisfaction with the stock, the facilities and the staff of the centres. The range of books is regularly

reviewed and students find the journal collection particularly good. The specialist teaching rooms and resources are much appreciated by the students, as are the opportunities for external site visits to support their learning. Part-time students' needs are met well and they report comparable satisfaction with the provision.

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

Core theme 3: Public information

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

36 The College publishes a range of information for applicants in both paper and online formats. The College website provides the most current information for students applying for higher education programmes. Written to a consistent template, the individual course information is comprehensive, user-friendly and well illustrated. Information on the validating body for each award is reinforced by the clear use of the relevant logo. The College publishes an attractive, well-illustrated and informative higher education prospectus. This is supported by a set of individual course information sheets for every programme which are written to a user-friendly, standard template and include a full range of information for applicants.

37 Students praised the information made available to applicants. Furthermore, students were very appreciative of the way in which the College followed up initial enquiries and applications, often on a personal basis. Additional information, such as confirmation of fees, was sent in the post in good time.

38 The College produces a range of documents and materials for current students. Students on all courses are provided with a programme handbook. Handbooks are available in paper-based format and are posted onto the relevant course sections of the virtual learning environment. Students commented that in general information provided in programme handbooks is useful, accurate and well-explained. Second and third-year students added that the handbooks had improved since new templates had come into use.

39 Higher education students at the College have access to one or more virtual learning environments, depending on the awarding body of the programmes. Students value greatly the increasing use made of the College virtual learning environment. Since the time of the Developmental engagement, both the activity and appreciation of the virtual learning environment as a tool to support teaching and learning have significantly increased. A number of new staff have been appointed who enthusiastically support the development of the virtual learning environment and blended learning approaches, at both institutional and subject level. At present, with the notable exception of imaginative use by the computer and technology-based courses, the bulk of the virtual learning environment usage is as a repository both for programme documentation and teaching materials. Students appreciate this function and confirm that they make good use of the electronic materials provided to supplement paper handouts. In addition, however, an institutional initiative has been put into place to encourage the development of more interactive features of the virtual learning environment and its effective use is being carefully monitored. The active approach being taken to drive forward the use of the virtual learning environment to support teaching and learning is an example of good practice. This impetus illustrates the College's culture of continuous improvement.

40 Since 2008 the College has produced a well-illustrated and informative Higher Education (HE) Bulletin three-times a year. Written primarily for students, this is a distinctive full-colour publication available in both paper-based and e-formats that provides a variety of useful and interesting information about academic, sports and social activities taking place on both campuses. Students confirmed that the HE Bulletin was widely read and that they liked it. The production of the HE Bulletin illustrates the importance the College attaches to communication with higher education students and also promotes their self-awareness as a distinctive group.

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 The College and its awarding bodies recognise the need to monitor the reliability of public information and have clear procedures to ensure regular reviews of relevant documentation. The information available to students and other stakeholders is produced in accordance with partnership agreements between the College and its validating universities, and reflects the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

42 Information distributed by the College is agreed with partner universities prior to publication. There are clear procedures for checking the reliability and accuracy of all publicity, marketing and student materials, such as module handbooks and programme leaflets. The College's marketing department is responsible for publishing information about the higher education provision at the College to potential students and produces key documents such as the prospectus and course information sheets as well as the College website. The marketing department has well-established procedures to ensure the accuracy, relevance and timeliness of the information published. Following proofreading and checking by the section leaders, the final sign-off for both paper and web-based information lies with the Vice Principal.

43 Information on the performance of students is collected from a variety of sources. Published data about programmes and students is assured for accuracy in accordance with the requirements of university partners through annual monitoring processes and examination boards. The College's own thorough monitoring processes help to ensure the accuracy of data as an ongoing process through the year.

44 As a result of the Developmental engagement, the College was advised to introduce a college-wide system to ensure the completeness of the information on assessment published in the form of handbooks, programme specifications, and documents on the virtual learning environment. New processes have subsequently been put in place for Staff and Quality Services to coordinate the production of programme handbooks and check their accuracy and completeness. A more unified approach to using the virtual learning environment as a standard repository for documentation has been introduced to ensure that all students have access to authoritative information.

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

45 The Developmental engagement in assessment took place in May 2008. There were three lines of enquiry: the appropriateness of assessment in relation to intended learning outcomes; student awareness and understanding of assessment processes and the effectiveness of the College mechanisms to gain feedback on their understanding of assessment experiences; and the quality of feedback to students on formative and summative assessment.

46 The Developmental engagement team identified a number of areas of good practice. Both the internal quality assurance processes and partnership arrangements are well managed. In many cases, students are provided with clear information to enable them to link their activities with intended learning outcomes. They receive helpful feedback in a variety of forms and benefit from an exceptionally wide range of effective mechanisms for seeking and acting upon their feedback.

47 The team also made a number of recommendations. It considered that the College should review the appropriateness and levels of work-based assessment tasks and should introduce a college-wide system to ensure the completeness of the information it publishes on assessment. It might benefit from developing common assessment brief formats and marking front sheets.

D Foundation Degrees

48 Since the merger with Cannington College, there has been a development from several land-based Foundation Degrees to the 10 in the College's current provision. The Foundation Degrees have developed in response to industry or employer demand, for example the new FdSc in Nuclear Decommissioning and the established FdA Early Years - Sector Endorsed. Plans for the further development of Foundation Degrees include an FdA in Media Practice with Bournemouth University, an FdSc in Nuclear Engineering with the University of Central Lancashire, and an FdSc in Engineering with the University of Bath.

49 The Foundation Degrees provided by the College are included in the list in paragraph 5. This provision is closely integrated with the other higher education programmes by means of a common quality assurance process and the areas of good practice and recommendations apply equally to the Foundation Degrees as follows.

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

- the dynamic and empowering leadership of the Senior Management Team fosters a culture of continuous improvement (paragraphs 9, 17, 21, 28, 35, 39)
- well-supported staff development contributes to enhancing the student learning experience (paragraphs 17, 18, 31, 32, 33)
- the College is strongly committed to valuing the student voice in promoting a high-quality educational experience (paragraph 27)
- the well managed and firmly embedded tutorial system offers responsive support for student learning (paragraph 29)
- the strategic investment in resources strengthens the growing and distinctive higher education identity of the provision (paragraph 35)

- the development of the use of the virtual learning environment drives forward a programme of continuous improvement by means of staff development in blended learning approaches to support teaching and learning (paragraph 39)
- the Higher Education Bulletin provides a clear example of the importance that the College attaches to communication with its higher education students (paragraph 40).

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

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

- to undertake further work to ensure the alignment of the unit learning outcomes with appropriate level descriptors, core texts and work-based assessment tasks for work-based learning (paragraph 24).

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

- to continue to develop its strategy for embedding the processes of personal development planning in its higher education programmes (paragraph 30).

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

52 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Bridgwater College's management of its responsibilities for academic standards and for the quality of learning opportunities of the awards the College offers on behalf of its awarding bodies. This was based upon discussion with staff and students and scrutiny of evidence provided by the College and its awarding bodies: Edexcel; Bath Spa University; Bournemouth University; the University of Central Lancashire; Oxford Brookes University; and the University of Plymouth.

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

- the dynamic and empowering leadership of the Senior Management Team fosters a culture of continuous improvement (paragraphs 9, 17, 21, 28, 35, 39)
- well-supported staff development contributes to enhancing the student learning experience (paragraphs 17, 18, 31, 32, 33)
- the College is strongly committed to valuing the student voice in promoting a high quality educational experience (paragraph 27)
- the well-managed and firmly embedded tutorial system offers responsive support for student learning (paragraph 29)
- the strategic investment in resources strengthens the growing and distinctive higher education identity of the provision (paragraph 35)
- the development of the use of the virtual learning environment drives forward a programme of continuous improvement by means of staff development in blended learning approaches to support teaching and learning (paragraph 39)
- the Higher Education Bulletin provides a clear example of the importance that the College attaches to communication with its higher education students (paragraph 40).

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

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

- to undertake further work to ensure the alignment of the unit learning outcomes with appropriate level descriptors, core texts and work-based assessment tasks for work-based learning (paragraph 24).

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

- to continue to develop its strategy for embedding the processes of Personal Development Planning in its higher education programmes (paragraph 30).

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 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 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 completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Bridgwater College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 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 dynamic and empowering leadership of the senior management team fosters a culture of continuous improvement (paragraphs 9, 17, 21, 28, 35, 39) 	Ensure opportunities for improvement continue to be explored and led strategically by the senior management team.	Sept 2010	Senior Management Team, Principalship	<p>HE Strategy and Action Plan reflect the College's culture of continuous improvement</p> <p>Identify areas for improvement through Improvement Strategies and monitor success.</p>	HE Review Group Standards Committee	<p>Review of previous strategy and success against actions in latest strategy document.</p> <p>HE Self Evaluation</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> well-supported staff development contributes to enhance the student learning experience (paragraphs 17, 18, 31, 32, 33) 	<p>Expand the HE Teaching & Learning Strategy's programme of staff development.</p> <p>Highlight and share good practice.</p>	Sept 2010	Head of Staff & Quality Services Senior Management, Section Leaders, Programme Managers, SQS	<p>HE Teaching & Learning Strategy staff development programme improved.</p> <p>Scholarly activity good practice is shared.</p>	HE Review Group HE Bulletin	<p>HE Self Evaluation</p> <p>Strategic Plan</p>

Bridgwater College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 2010						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College is strongly committed to valuing the student voice in promoting a high quality educational experience (paragraph 27) 	<p>Ensure Area level HE Student Forums are included in the Management Calendar.</p> <p>Ensure feedback from students is documented, acted on, as appropriate, and reported back to students in a timely manner.</p>	<p>July 2010</p> <p>Sept 2011</p>	<p>Curriculum Area Heads</p> <p>Principalship, Area Heads, Section Leaders, Programme Managers, SQS</p>	<p>Dates are included in the Management Calendar.</p> <p>Minutes and action plans reflect responsiveness and impact of actions taken.</p> <p>Continue to include updates on actions taken in response to student feedback in the HE Bulletin.</p>	<p>Senior Management Team</p> <p>HE Student Forums</p> <p>HE Bulletin</p>	<p>HE Review Group</p> <p>HE Self Evaluation</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the well-managed and firmly embedded tutorial system offers responsive support for student learning (paragraph 29) 	<p>Review and update the HE Tutorial guidance document; ensure updates are disseminated and embedded in the tutorial system.</p>	<p>Sept 2010</p>	<p>Senior Tutors</p>	<p>HE Tutorial guidance documentation is updated and staff are briefed.</p>	<p>Senior Tutor Meeting</p> <p>HE Review Group</p>	<p>HE Self Evaluation</p>

Bridgwater College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 2010						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the strategic investment in resources strengthens the growing and distinctive higher education identity of the provision (paragraph 35) 	Ensure effective resourcing of new provision.	Sept 2011	Principalship and Senior Management Team	Resources needs are strategically responded to.	Self Assessment Monitoring meetings, Operational Plans review meetings each term	HE Self Evaluation HE Strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the development of the use of the virtual learning environment drives forward a programme of continuous improvement by means of staff development in blended learning approaches to support teaching and learning (paragraph 39) 	<p>Implement the usage standards to monitor and promote good practice in using the virtual learning environment.</p> <p>The cross college HE e-learning group produces a college model for online/blended learning.</p> <p>Provide further opportunities for supporting staff development in blended learning.</p>	Sept 2010 Sept 2010 Feb 2011	SQS and Student Services Cross college HE e-learning group SQS and Student Services	Standards are introduced, disseminated impact and monitored. Online learning model is produced and implemented in at least one programme per Area. Opportunities are identified and reflected in the HE Teaching & Learning Strategy.	SMT HE Review Group and SMT HE Review Group	HE Self Evaluation Student Feedback

Bridgwater College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 2010						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the HE Bulletin provides a clear example of the importance that the College attaches to communication with its higher education students (paragraph 40) 	<p>Continue to publish an edition each term and distribute to all HE students and staff.</p> <p>Review and improve content including the contribution by the student body.</p>	<p>July 2010</p> <p>Sept 2010</p>	<p>SQS and Marketing</p> <p>SQS and Marketing</p>	<p>HE Bulletin is published termly and distributed appropriately.</p> <p>Content is reviewed and improved. HE Bulletin is added as a standard agenda item to Area HE Student Forums.</p>	<p>HE Review Group</p>	<p>Student and staff feedback</p>

Bridgwater College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 2010						
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<p>The team agreed the following area where the College should be advised to take action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to undertake further work to ensure the alignment of the unit learning outcomes with appropriate level descriptors, core texts and work-based assessment tasks for work-based learning (paragraph 24) 	<p>Identify foundation degrees requiring review of existing WBL learning outcomes.</p> <p>Update college guidance on WBL to include guidance on learning outcomes.</p> <p>Undertake review/modification of foundation degrees with HEI partners as appropriate.</p>	<p>July 2010</p> <p>Aug 2010</p> <p>Sept 2011</p>	<p>SQS</p> <p>SQS</p> <p>SQS, Programme Managers, Programme Teams and HEI partners</p>	<p>Foundation degrees identified.</p> <p>Existing guidance updated and available on SQS document site.</p> <p>Foundation degrees successfully reviewed with WBL learning outcomes addressed.</p>	<p>Principalship and HE Review Group</p> <p>HE Conference HE Review Group</p> <p>HE Review Group, HE Programme Managers</p>	<p>Review of foundation degree WBL learning outcomes through the HE Self Evaluation</p>

Bridgwater College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 2010						
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team agreed the following area where it would be desired to take action:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to continue to develop its strategy for embedding the processes of Personal Development Planning in its higher education programmes (paragraph 30) 	<p>Establish a cross college working group to review and improve the College's approach and understanding of PDP.</p> <p>Produce definitive college guidance on PDP.</p> <p>Monitor impact.</p>	<p>Sept 2010</p> <p>Oct 2011</p> <p>Sept 2012</p>	<p>SQS, Advanced Practitioners, Senior Tutors</p>	<p>Understanding of PDP by staff and students.</p> <p>Production of definitive college guidance on PDP.</p> <p>Impact on student experience through student feedback.</p>	<p>HE Review Group</p> <p>HE Conference</p> <p>HE Review Group SMT</p>	<p>Analysis of impact, including student feedback, through the HE Self Evaluation</p>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
Email comms@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk

RG 590 05/10