



# **Integrated quality and enhancement review**

**Summative review**

**East Durham College**

**December 2010**

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## **Preface**

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

## **Purpose of IQER**

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

## **The IQER process**

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

## **Developmental engagement**

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

The main elements of a Developmental engagement are:

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

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

## Summative review

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

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

## Evidence

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

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

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

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

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

## Outcomes of IQER

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

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

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

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

## Executive summary

### The Summative review of East Durham College carried out in December 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 agreement, for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding body. The team also considers that there can be **confidence** in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreement, 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 appointment of a senior manager at Vice Principal level with responsibility for the overall coordination, monitoring and university liaison for higher education programmes ensures the effective management of the provision in terms of the partnership agreement
- the close working relationships at strategic and operational levels between the College and the University of Sunderland ensure that both partners are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and that reporting mechanisms are effective
- the implementation and management of the Annual Monitoring Review process enables the College to ensure the continuous improvement of the higher education provision
- the College has in place effective mechanisms for the collection of student views about their learning, which leads to any necessary action, and the outcomes, are reported back to students
- the excellent quality in teaching and learning contributes to the success of the students on the higher education courses and relates to their practice
- at all levels, the College provides strong support for students, particularly tutorial support, which enables students to achieve their potential and is widely welcomed by them
- the University and College have collaborated to provide an advice and guidance centre in order to provide students with full information about higher education
- the high level of targeted provision of professional development for higher education ensures that teaching is at an appropriate level and that its content is current
- the development of informational learning technology and the College virtual learning environment is effective in enabling independent learning, especially for part-time students
- the very close collaboration between the College publications staff and the students in the preparation of the prospectus ensures that it is written in accessible language and contains detailed information about course content and the College's approach to learner support.

## Recommendations

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

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

- develop further the broad awareness and understanding by all staff teaching on higher education of the Academic Infrastructure, with particular reference to the *Foundation Degree benchmark statement*, in order to ensure consistency
- given the College's plan to increase its provision of vocational higher education, develop further its strategy for work-based learning and its engagement with employers
- review its full-time and its part-time prospectus together with its Houghall Campus prospectus to enable students to readily access all materials relating to higher education programmes to help them choose a suitable programme of study
- review its provision of electronic information relating to financial support to produce College-specific information so that students are able to obtain the information they need without recourse to external agencies.

## 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 East Durham 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 the University of Sunderland. The review was carried out by Ms Claire Blanchard, Mr Maldwyn Buckland (reviewers) and Dr Daniel Lamont (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 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 the Developmental engagement is provided in section C of this report. The review also considered the College's use of the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers, with reference to the *Code of practice 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 East Durham College is a medium sized general further education college with two main centres. The recently opened new building in Peterlee delivers general further and higher education mainly for the residents of East Durham, which is a former mining area historically suffering high levels of social deprivation and low progression to higher education. The Houghall site in Durham City is a former land-based college and now delivers an evolving curriculum to a wider regional catchment. Courses are also provided at a number of community venues in East Durham and there is a substantial amount of delivery within the workplace.

5 East Durham has long been an area of low educational achievement and low expectations. Performance at Key Stage 4 is low, although improving. Consequently, there is low progression to higher education and also there is a low percentage of residents with higher level qualifications. Therefore, the College aims to work with local partners such as schools, Local Strategic Partnerships and Aimhigher in order to raise aspirations and provide appropriate pathways to higher level study either in an institution or in the workplace. For instance, the College runs summer schools, apprenticeship events, maths challenges, and so on aimed at school pupils (to raise aspirations). It also provides extra support and guidance for College students of all ages to progress to higher study in the form of mentoring, assisted travel to university events and in-college experiences.

6 Currently all of the College's HEFCE funded higher education work is delivered via a collaborative arrangement with the University of Sunderland to offer courses in education, art and design, sports studies and arboriculture as listed below. There are a total of 88 full-time equivalent (FTE) students.

- FdA Music (FT/PT) (3 FTEs)
- FdA Performing Arts (FT/PT) (7 FTEs)
- FdA Education and Care (PT) (14 FTEs)
- FdA Training & Work-Based Learning (FT/PT) (3 FTEs)
- Certificate Post Compulsory Education & Training (Qualified Teacher Learning & Skills Sector) (QTLS) (PT) (13.5 FTEs)
- PCET Post Compulsory Education & Training (Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills Sector) (QTLS) (PT) (8.5 FTEs)
- FdSc Sports Coaching (FT) (27 FTEs)
- HND/C Arboriculture (Urban Woodland Management) (12 FTEs)

## **Partnership agreements with the awarding body**

7 The College has a formal partnership agreement with the University of Sunderland. This is up to date and clearly defines the responsibilities of both partners. Partnership arrangements with the University are devolved with clear mechanisms in place for maintaining a rigorous oversight of the provision. There is a strong sense of partnership between the College and the University, which is exemplified by the provision of documentation to support the partnership and the arrangement of relevant staff training events.

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

8 Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. The students made a written submission which was produced with the support of the College in calling meetings and in preparing the report. In addition, the review coordinator explained the Summative review process with student representatives at the preparatory meeting and the team met with full and part-time students. The submission identified a number of issues that were useful to the team, and which were discussed in the meetings with students during the visit.

# **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 current Strategic Partnership Agreement recognises the common aims and aspirations of both partners in collaborative working and sets out shared strategic aims and actions. Over the last 16 years, the College has developed a mature partnership with its sole validating partner, the University of Sunderland. Strategic managers from both organisations are currently engaged in further discussion about the future development of the relationship.

10 The management of higher education programmes is by Model A or Model C. In Model A, the programmes are validated by the University and delivered by the College, while Model C programmes are jointly delivered by the University. In Model A, the College is responsible for programme planning and design, with the university responsible for the appointment of external examiners and the chairing of assessment boards. The College

designates an assistant programme leader for all Model C programmes, who is responsible to the programme leader of the University programme and who sits on programme and assessment boards chaired by the University. These arrangements facilitate clear and collaborative management of programmes and are good practice.

11 The management of higher education within the College is undergoing significant change as the result of restructuring. In the future, the management arrangements for higher education will be through two new vice principal posts, one with responsibilities for curriculum and performance, and the other for business development and external relations. The post-holders will take up their posts in December 2010 and January 2011 respectively. It was clear to the team that the College takes its responsibilities for the management of higher education seriously.

12 Liaison at management level is by means of the University Partnership Office and the Strategic Partnership Steering Group. The Strategic Partnership Steering Group (SPSG) is a high level group consisting of the College Principal, University Vice Chancellor and the Director of Partnerships, who meet at least once per year to review partnership operations and inform strategic development planning. The team found that reporting mechanisms for higher education programmes are detailed and effective and thus constituted good practice.

13 There is a comprehensive framework of both College and University committees which take responsibility for strategic and operational matters and oversee quality improvement. Within the College, the Higher Education Curriculum Group and Quality and Standards Sub Committee are effective bodies which are proactive and ensure that the College's higher education provision is well-managed at programme level. The Higher Education in Further Education Practitioners Group, consisting of both University and College partners, has been newly formed in order to consider quality assurance matters and identify and share good practice. This Group receives all collaborative partner Annual Monitoring Reports and produces an overall Annual Collaborative Provision Grid which is reviewed and monitored by the Strategic Partnership Steering Group.

14 The team concludes that the College committee structure for the consideration of higher education issues constitutes a robust and effective mechanism for assuring the quality and standards of higher education provision within the College and is a clear strength.

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

15 The partnership arrangements with the University ensure that College processes and procedures take into account the Academic Infrastructure and *Code of practice*. The College management and assistant programme leaders make good use of the Academic Infrastructure and this is strongly supported by the University. The team found, however, that staff awareness of the Academic Infrastructure was not fully consistent across the whole provision. While key staff demonstrated a good understanding of the Academic Infrastructure and its application in support of the setting, approval and maintenance of the quality and standards of higher education provision, discussions with staff suggested that there was some variability and inconsistency of understanding. This was particularly so in relation to the *Foundation Degree benchmark statement*, where understanding of the defining characteristics of Foundation Degrees and the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* was not as comprehensive as it might be and it would be desirable for the College to address this.

**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?**

16 The overall responsibility for academic standards rests with the University. However, the College assures itself that academic standards are in line with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) by consideration of the outcomes of assessment boards, reviews of collaborative provision, and lesson observations monitoring, which is undertaken by the College leadership. At the recent Quinquennial Review of Collaborative Arrangements in June 2009, the University of Sunderland reported full confidence in the College's ability to deliver franchised programmes. The Review confirmed that the College demonstrates a strong and clear commitment to working in partnership, with staff displaying high levels of awareness of key issues. In addition, the College takes part in a strong collaborative inter-college network for moderation and new staff mentoring. These close working relationships at strategic and operational levels are good practice.

17 The Annual Monitoring Report process is well established and effectively managed. This is a good practice that demonstrates to the University that the internal management and monitoring of higher education academic standards and quality assurance facilitates continuous improvement. Based on programme annual monitoring reports, the College produces an overview report which is considered by the College Quality and Standards Sub-Committee of Academic Board and the College Leadership Group. Feedback from external examiners indicates that assessment practice is appropriate with good practice regularly identified. Issues raised by external examiners are implemented within the University's Annual Monitoring Report for each programme. The team found that the course monitoring system was responsive and supported enhancement.

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

18 The College's self evaluation states that its continuing professional development policy actively encourages activities in the areas of industrial updating, peer working and engaging in cross-College and University projects. Discussion with staff and the reading of documents confirmed this. For example, staff in the education and care team have benefitted from attending events dealing with critical thinking, assessment and feedback, and have been involved in a University project entitled Feed Forward. The College provides strong support for continuing professional development activities through a range of events focused on the development of practice in teaching and learning, assessment, programme management and management development in general. Both the College and the University have provided staff with the opportunity to engage in staff development relating to the Academic Infrastructure. Events have included joint marking exercises, induction programmes for new staff, collaborative partner conferences and other programme-based activities, and attendance at the Higher Education Academy events. Staff confirmed that the college provided supportive resources for higher education continuing professional development through the provision of the mandatory 30 hours annual allowance. The team identified this as an item of good practice.

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

## **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?**

19 The responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities and reporting arrangements reflect those for managing academic standards as described in paragraphs 10-18. The day-to-day management of individual higher education programmes is the responsibility of assistant programme leaders who have a clearly defined role in the College's quality systems. The Higher Education Strategy Group has a key role in coordinating the process.

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

20 The programme Annual Monitoring Report, which must be approved by the College Leadership Group, forms part of the overall College Annual Review. These reports, together with other internal reviews, enable the College to monitor the quality of learning opportunities and to ensure that they are properly managed. The outcomes of this process are reported to the Governing Body and to the University. Annual monitoring is thorough and effective and ensures that any recommended actions are implemented.

21 While the team did not meet with employers, it learnt that engagement with employers is effective and planned at a strategic level within the Learner Responsive Strategy. In addition, the Learner Involvement Strategy is the means by which the College implements its commitment to involving and developing learners as individuals and allowing them to reach their potential. It provides a clear and cohesive approach to the development and delivery of the curriculum in College and is one of the means of focusing attention on the key priority areas. The team confirmed that there is currently appropriate employer input on each of the Foundation Degrees, but as the provision expands the College should consider developing its strategies for managing work-based learning and employer engagement.

22 The College takes the collection of students' views on the quality of their learning very seriously. Feedback is actively sought through various means such as questionnaires and learner consultation sampling. Programme boards include student representatives, thus providing a valuable two-way communication channel. Students reported that matters raised by them are promptly addressed and, where appropriate, action is taken. Learning opportunities are of a high standard, which enable the students to progress academically and intellectually. The team concluded that these processes worked well and that student concerns are fully taken into account and constitute good practice.

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

23 As outlined in paragraph 15, the team found that the Academic Infrastructure is embedded in the guidance provided to the College by the University, and constitutes the framework within which the College operates its higher education programmes. The team saw examples of programme specifications, which demonstrate the College's use of the *Code of practice* published by QAA, and also the relevant benchmark statements. Teaching and learning is appropriately designed to ensure that the programme specifications are achieved.

24 The course handbooks articulate the defining characteristics of Foundation Degrees and how these relate to the particular learning needs of students. The precepts of the *Code of practice* on work-based learning are fully embedded in all the courses and personal development planning is situated within a structured framework throughout. Students reported that their learning is shaped and enhanced through the work-based tasks and assessments, which clearly link theory with practice. Module handbooks set out the opportunities for learning in the workplace clearly.

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

25 The team found that the College has a robust process to develop the quality of the learning experience. There is a comprehensive teaching handbook online which is demonstrated to new staff on induction into the College. A team of advanced practitioners, many of whom are higher education teachers themselves, work with staff individually and collectively to improve performance and instigate various processes of peer support and monitoring. Peer observations are well established as a route to sharing good practice and are welcomed by staff. The use of information technology has been identified as a key development for the College and considerable training has been provided by the Advanced Practitioner Team. This is used to appropriate effect in delivery, and students and staff are being encouraged to make effective use of the College virtual learning environment as well as that of the University. Part-time students in particular confirmed that they found this facility most helpful.

26 Students commented enthusiastically on the accessibility of all staff and how they value the prompt responses to their questions and concerns. There is appropriate follow-up action. Students also reported that tutors are encouraging, and give detailed and effective feedback on their work which enables them to progress. Tutorials are helpful in developing their learning. This is confirmed by end-of-module evaluations which demonstrate high levels of student satisfaction with the quality of academic guidance and feedback. The team was clear that the College's Learner Involvement Strategy was being effectively implemented.

27 Excellent quality in teaching and learning contributes to the success of the students on the higher education courses. Students confirmed the high quality of the teaching and the expertise of the staff. They appreciate the way their learning relates to their own practice and enhances it. They reported that through the range of approaches to learning and teaching, they have become confident, knowledgeable, independent professionals who have been challenged academically throughout their courses. The team found that the College's claim in its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy to motivate learners and build on their skills, knowledge and understanding of the curriculum and to set challenging targets for its learners to raise aspirations and ensure they reach their potential was fully met and identified this as good practice.

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

28 There is a comprehensive induction process. All students receive an induction whereby all College processes and procedures are explained, as well as the aims and outcomes of their programmes of study and the learning resources available. Staff from the University contribute to this and students are taken to the University library to receive a library induction. The University is responsible for inducting registered students as University of Sunderland students while the College is responsible for inducting registered students to their programme of study. Progression opportunities are included in course promotional materials, discussed at interview and during the programme, where applicable, either by the programme lecturer or appropriate speakers.

29 Student Services are based at both campuses and the College has a team of trained counsellors who offer a totally confidential service to students. In addition, the College provides pastoral support by means of a team of student support workers, learning support assistants and classroom assistants. The College Careers Advisor and University Liaison Officer are both available to provide progression advice and guidance. The Access to Higher Education course has proved to be both popular and effective as a way of encouraging learners to progress to higher education.

30 Support for students is broad and effective. All Foundation Degree students are assigned a personal tutor. If these personal tutorials identify the need for more individual support to improve study skills or to address other issues, the lecturer either supports the student personally or refers them to Student Services where there are higher education liaison staff who deal with immediate issues such as financial matters, but who can also refer students to other specialist staff. Tutorial support is primarily centred upon developing self esteem, time management, study skills and interpretation of assignment briefs. Tutors collate a file of evidence and record tutorial visits so that learners' vocational knowledge and practice is monitored during the workplace mentor visits.

31 Tutorials and seminars are built into each module. Learners are able to generate ideas for discussion and receive the support they require for completion of assessments. The high quality of tutor comment on assignments helps students to progress academically and intellectually. Within the PGCE/Cert Ed programme the College uses a well structured Personal Learning Plan which helps the students self assess and plan for their own development. This is supported by termly tutorials, email support and feedback from both assignments and also observation. This was welcomed by the students. The team agreed that the comprehensive arrangements for the support of students were good practice.

32 The University of Sunderland Mini-Gateway allows students access to a wide range of University services and also provides a learning resource by providing computer facilities and access to the University's learning resources. This space, therefore, is a focal point for students to use as a place for study, either individually or in groups. The Gateway is staffed by a member of the University and provides a similar level of advice and guidance support for College students to that available at the University. This complements the advice and guidance available through the Student Services department. The Gateway is a visible presence for higher education in East Durham and helps to encourage the aspirations and expectations of students to go on to further study. Students welcomed this facility and made good use of it.

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

33 The arrangements outlined in paragraph 18 all support staff development for learning opportunities. Every member of staff must be registered with the Institute for Learning and hold a teaching qualification. The College provides a series of staff professional development programmes focused on the development of practice in teaching, learning and assessment. These lead to bronze, silver and gold awards with the Gold series aimed at those staff already regularly being assessed as good or outstanding to allow them to better and share these standards. The College is responsible for ensuring that the staff assigned to teaching on higher education programmes engage in continuous professional development or scholarly activity/research, such as to maintain currency at a level above that which they are responsible for delivering. Staff particularly welcomed the staff development activity to support the use of information and learning technology. The team agreed that these arrangements for staff development represent good practice.

34 Professional development also takes place externally for relevant professional updating or in other role-related activities. For example, staff have access to appropriate events in University staff development programmes, and work with the University in other University opportunities such as projects, visiting lectureships and course/curriculum development. A good example of this is the attendance by the care and education team at University seminars on critical thinking, assessment and feedback, and their involvement in a project with the University entitled Feed Forward. College staff access a range of 'sharing of good practice' opportunities, both in-house during Higher Education Committee meetings, and externally either by attendance at programme/assessment boards or at formal professional development events such as the University Collaborative Conference.

**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?**

35 The resourcing of each programme is agreed in the Memorandum of Agreement and monitored by annual monitoring reviews as well as regular University course revalidations. This covers the provision of appropriate staffing, facilities, equipment and learning materials. All courses are included in College curriculum reviews, which cover all aspects of course and student progress, including recruitment, retention, success and progression. Registered students are entitled to full membership of the University's student union and will have physical and electronic access to the College and University libraries. The College is responsible for ensuring support for local information services and library facilities, and maintaining agreed levels of core materials

36 All curriculum areas utilise the College virtual learning environment. Students can access material either from College or from home, and report that they find this straightforward and useful. They welcome the fact that all the course information they need is accurate and clear. The students, especially part-time students, confirmed that they made good use of it and that it assists with their studies. The e-journals and e-books are now being widely used, together with other library resources.

37 College students taking sports programmes have the use of sports science laboratory and related specialist equipment at the University. Not only does this give the students access to the equipment needed to study physiology at degree level, it also goes some way to introducing and integrating the students into the University. Other specialist resources available, for example, are the College's specialist physiotherapy equipment.

38 The College has an Information and Learning Technology Strategy which outlines how the College will develop its use to support and enhance learning across the organisation. The College is committed to embracing learning technology in order to ensure that the College provides the appropriate infrastructure and environment which is conducive to both learners' needs and the widest use of technologies in all aspects of College life. Both the students and staff confirmed that the virtual learning environment is well used within the College and develops independent learning. The team agreed that this was an area of good practice.

**The team concludes that it has confidence in the College's management of its responsibilities for the quality of the learning opportunities, as required by the awarding body, 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?**

39 The College produces a range of both printed and electronic material in support of its higher education academic provision. These include the full-time and part-time prospectuses, the Houghall campus full-time prospectus, a range of programme-specific handbooks and leaflets, website and virtual learning environment. Students, both full and part-time, confirmed that, at induction and enrolment, the College provided induction and programme handbooks, both of which offer a comprehensive range of detailed information relating to specifications, expectations, academic study requirements and appeals procedures. Students were complimentary about the information they received and welcomed the support offered via these publications and electronic resources.

40 The College full-time prospectus for 2011-12 contains both further and higher education programme information. The publication is attractive and colourful in design and was produced with significant student input. Student focus groups engaged fully in the concept and design process of the prospectus prior to final decision making and publication. The team, however, found that, while the part-time higher education prospectus provides a clear and comprehensive overview of the College's higher education provision at a glance, in the full-time prospectus, information about higher education was difficult to locate, a view shared by some students. While a general information page offers an insight into study at the College and potential progression opportunities at the University of Sunderland, detailed course information is difficult to locate as it is distributed throughout the prospectus. This section gives a clear and comprehensive overview of the College's higher education offer at a glance. It would be desirable to review this to make the information for prospective students more accessible and complete so that they are able to make a fully informed choice about selecting a programme of study.

41 The team confirmed that the higher education Mini Gateway located within the College offered an excellent series of leaflets produced by the University of Sunderland's Financial Counselling Service related to funding issues and money management. These leaflets are comprehensive and offer valuable information to potential students within the College who may be considering higher education as the next step in their career progression. The Houghall Campus prospectus again contains limited information on support for higher education students and refers students to external agencies such as UCAS and the University of Sunderland prospectus.

42 The team agreed that it would be desirable for the College to review its presentation of information about its higher education provision to make easily accessible to students the full range of provision together with information about the support available to students, including advice and guidance about financial support.

### **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?**

43 The College produces programme handbooks using a standard University template. Handbooks are audited for quality and consistency by the Vice Principal Curriculum and Performance and approved by the appropriate University programme leader. In addition, handbooks are updated, reviewed and reapproved annually. The team's analysis of electronic publications included the content of web pages and virtual learning environment, downloadable documents, and the procedures employed by the College to assure accuracy

and completeness prior to release into the public domain. While web content is the responsibility of the college, approval of all marketing and academic material is in conjunction with the University Partnership Office.

44 The College recognises that while it does not have a formal procedure for the checking and 'signing off' of higher education materials prior to publication, informal systems are systematic, robust and effective, ensuring material is scrutinised for approval by a range of appropriate academic and senior managerial staff. For the production of both printed and electronic marketing materials, the College Marketing Manager liaises directly with appropriate curriculum and student support staff to ensure the accuracy and completeness of course information. Accuracy and completeness of equality and diversity information is currently the responsibility of the Assistant Principal (External Relations and Higher Education). Final approval for all public information has been the responsibility of the College management team and the University of Sunderland Partnership Office. All non-course content for the website is subject to regular audit by the College marketing team.

45 The higher education pages on the website give a comprehensive overview of programme provision, including a range of Access to higher education programmes and Foundation Degrees. However, as in the prospectus, it is difficult to find explicit information in the higher education pages of the website when seeking information relating to higher education tuition fees and wider guidance on financial support and bursaries. For example, students seeking financial information and guidance are required to exit the higher education pages and access the College's Student Services area where information on financial support for students is predominantly focused on further education. For financial information on higher education, students are directed to external websites. Students commented that finding information on finances had been problematic in some cases and was of concern to them. It would be desirable for the College to review its provision of information, both in electronic and print form, about student finances so that students can readily find what they need.

46 The team agreed that the College publishes a wide range of high quality publications in support of higher education provision. However, they also agreed that, while information relating to higher education finance and tuition fees was accurate and complete, the process for accessing this information is extensive and burdensome, offering little support to potential students seeking important information, which in many cases is pivotal to their engagement with higher education study.

**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**

47 The Developmental engagement in assessment took place in October 2009. The review included one institutional nominee. The lines of inquiry agreed with the College were as follows:

**Line of enquiry 1:** How does the College manage within its partnership arrangement, assessment policies and procedures in order to ensure that students are reaching the appropriate level of achievement and securing academic standards?

**Line of enquiry 2:** Is the provision for both written and oral feedback on assessed work and assessment related support well understood and does formative and summative assessment support student learning and academic development?

**Line of enquiry 3:** Does the College effectively publicise its assessment principles and procedures for and processes of assessments in ways that are explicit, valid and reliable?

48 The scope of the Developmental engagement encompassed five Foundation Degree programmes, an HND, and a Certificate and Postgraduate Certificate in Post-Compulsory Education and Training (University of Sunderland).

49 The Developmental engagement team identified several elements of good practice: the coherent and extensive monitoring framework which ensures continuous development of teaching, learning and assessment; the moderation practices within the College and cluster partnership, which ensure the maintenance of grading parity; the Teaching Practitioner Handbook, which provides clear information on the key role that assessment plays in the development of students' learning; the role of advanced practitioners in mentoring and coaching staff in all aspects of higher education teaching and assessment; the comprehensive feedback on assessed work, which clearly indicates how students can improve their performance; the comprehensive and accessible advice and guidance published by the College for its higher education students; the comprehensive and informative course handbooks, which provide students with the means to take responsibility for their own learning.

50 The team's report considered that it would be advisable to:

- ensure that retention data is accurately recorded in order to implement its retention strategy more effectively and to ensure that moderation processes and outcomes are completely and consistently recorded in a standard form.

51 The team also felt that it would be desirable for the College to:

- extend the effective collaboration with the University to tailor assessments and modules to the particular needs of employers and the College
- to ensure that the source of all material placed on the virtual learning environment is clearly identified in order to confirm its reliability
- to ensure that all part-time students receive timely information about available support in order to take advantage of funding opportunities
- to ensure that the College website is systematically updated.

## **D Foundation Degrees**

52 Foundation Degrees provide enhancement opportunities for students to extend work-based learning and see the relevance of linking this to theory. Strengths include close relationships with employers, high quality student support, and the incorporation of skills development in programmes. Foundation Degrees provide enhancement opportunities for students to extend work-based learning and see the relevance of linking this to theory. They fully conform to the *Foundation Degree benchmark statement*.

53 The team concludes that the College manages its Foundation Degrees effectively and for the benefit of students. The course monitoring systems and the College committee structure for the consideration of higher education issues constitutes a robust and effective mechanism for assuring the quality and standards of higher education provision. Learning

opportunities are of a high standard which enable the students to progress academically and intellectually, and student concerns are fully taken into account. The team found that the claim in the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy to motivate learners and building on their skills, knowledge and understanding of the curriculum and to set challenging targets for its learners to raise aspirations and ensure they reach their potential was fully met. The team agreed that the College publishes a wide range of high quality publications in support of higher education provision. It noted a number of areas of good practice and made some desirable recommendations, which included developing the College's strategy for engagement with employers and reviewing its information for students on financial support.

## **E Conclusions and summary of judgements**

54 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in East Durham 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 body. This was based upon discussion with staff and students and scrutiny of evidence provided by the College and its awarding body, the University of Sunderland.

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

- the appointment of a senior manager at Vice Principal level with responsibility for the overall coordination, monitoring and university liaison for higher education programmes ensures the effective management of the provision in terms of the partnership agreement (paragraph 10, 11)
- the close working relationships at strategic and operational levels between the College and the University of Sunderland ensure that both partners are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and that reporting mechanisms are effective (paragraphs 12, 16)
- the implementation and management of the Annual Monitoring Review process enables the College to ensure the continuous improvement of the higher education provision (paragraph 17)
- the College has in place effective mechanisms for the collection of student views about their learning, which leads to any necessary action, and the outcomes, are reported back to students (paragraph 22)
- the excellent quality in teaching and learning contributes to the success of the students on the higher education courses and relates to their practice (paragraph 27)
- at all levels, the College provides strong support for students, particularly tutorial support, which enables students to achieve their potential and is widely welcomed by them (paragraph 31)
- the University and College have collaborated to provide an advice and guidance centre in order to provide students with full information about higher education (paragraph 32)
- the high level of targeted provision of professional development for higher education ensures that teaching is at an appropriate level and that its content is current (paragraphs 33, 34)
- the development of informational learning technology and the College virtual learning environment is effective in enabling independent learning, especially for part-time students (paragraph 38)
- the very close collaboration between the College publications staff and the students in the preparation of the prospectus ensures that it is written in accessible language and contains detailed information about course content and the College's approach to learner support (paragraph 40).

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

- develop further the broad awareness and understanding by all staff teaching on higher education of the Academic Infrastructure, with particular reference to the *Foundation Degree benchmark statement*, in order to ensure consistency (paragraph 15)
- given the College's plan to increase its provision of vocational higher education, develop further its strategy for work-based learning and its engagement with employers (paragraph 21)
- review its full-time and its part-time prospectus together with its Houghall Campus prospectus to enable students to readily access all materials relating to higher education programmes to help them choose a suitable programme of study (paragraph 40)
- review its provision of electronic information relating to financial support to produce College-specific information so that students are able to obtain the information they need without recourse to external agencies (paragraph 45).

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 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.

58 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.

59 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.

**East Durham College action plan relating to the Summative review: December 2010**

| Good practice  | Action to be taken   | Target date                                      | Action by  | Success indicators   | Reported to      | Evaluation  |
|--|--|--|--|--|------------------|---|
| <p>In the course of the Summative review the team identified the following areas of <b>good practice</b> that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:</p>  |  |  |  |  |                  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the appointment of a senior manager at Vice Principal level with responsibility for the overall coordination, monitoring and university liaison for higher education programmes ensures the effective management of the provision in terms of the partnership agreement (paragraph 10, 11)</li> </ul> | <p>Full induction process to allow appointee to function effectively</p> <p>Assistant Principal - External Relations and Projects will ensure a smooth handover of the higher education role to the new Vice Principal - Business Development and External Relations</p> | <p>February 2011</p> <p>February - June 2011</p> | <p>College induction completed 08 February 2011</p> <p>University Partnership induction completed 10 February 2011</p> | <p>Smooth transition to new role</p> <p>Successful meetings and changes cascaded to focus and embedded into courses for the start of the new academic year</p> | <p>Principal</p> | <p>Staff appraisal</p> <p>New changes embedded into higher education deliverers' programmes in terms of partnership agreements</p> <p>College Higher Education Action Plan reviewed externally by Assistant Principal Higher Education of City of Sunderland College (external examiner for University of Teesside) - July 2011</p> |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the close working relationships at strategic and operational levels between the College and the University of Sunderland ensure that both partners are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and that reporting mechanisms are effective (paragraphs 12, 16)</li> </ul> | Continued participation in meetings, reviews and other events   | <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Higher Education Finance - February 2011</p> <p>Higher Education Arboriculture - February 2011 (new standards)</p> <p>Higher Education Standardisation meeting - February 2011</p> <p>Termly Group Higher Education meetings - February 2011</p> |   | 100 per cent compliance at required meetings/events | Vice Principal | <p>College Annual Review - June 2011</p> <p>Termly Higher Education meetings</p> <p>Higher Education Action Plan updated termly</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the implementation and management of the Annual Monitoring Review process enables the College to ensure the continuous improvement of the higher education provision (paragraph 17)</li> </ul>  | <p>Continued production of annual monitoring reports in line with published schedule and achievement of action plans</p> <p>Ensure higher education</p> | Ongoing  | <p>Higher education teams attend Higher Education curriculum-specific events</p> <p>Team completes reviews termly</p> | 100 per cent compliance                             | Vice Principal | <p>College Annual Review - June 2011</p> <p>Higher education team course reviews</p>  |

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|  | <p>curriculum team record, track and respond to changes and review course success</p> <p>Higher education teams attend University Review/ Standardisation and Development Event</p>  |  |  |   |                       |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the College has in place effective mechanisms for the collection of student views about their learning, which leads to any necessary action, and the outcomes are reported back to students (paragraph 22)</li> </ul> | <p>Continued development and subscription to the Learner Engagement Strategy</p> <p>Higher Education Curriculum Team College based students focus groups</p> <p>Course evaluations</p> <p>Higher Education questionnaire</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> <p>December 2010, March 2011</p> <p>May 2011</p> <p>February 2011</p> | <p>Student Liaison Officer</p> <p>Curriculum directors</p> <p>Curriculum directors</p> | <p>High student satisfaction rates when compared with national benchmarks</p> | <p>Vice Principal</p> | <p>College Annual Review - June 2011</p> <p>Acted upon and fed back via 'you said we responded' poster June 2011</p> <p>Feedback informs and develops course delivery for the start of the next academic year - June 2011</p> <p>(As above)</p> |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the excellent quality in teaching and learning contributes to the success of the students on the higher education courses and relates to their practice (paragraph 27)</li> </ul> | Further development of Teaching and Learning Strategy  | Ongoing                 | Quality Improvements Manager                                 | Further increase in internal and external lesson observations  | Vice Principal   | College Annual Review   |
|  | Individual continuous professional development maintain and develop teaching and learning                                | October - December 2010 | Line managers self referral/Quality Improvements Manager     | Further increase in success rates<br><br>Improved observation grade profile  |  | Best practice areas integrated into lessons<br><br>Ideas shared among higher education deliverers termly  |
|  | All peer observations to share good practice<br>Some deliverers attend Gold continuous professional development Sessions | January - April 2011    | (As above)   | Share best practice. Learn new teaching for learning skills<br><br>Small scale action research to investigate, reflect and improve classroom procedure | Quality Improvements Manager<br><br>Quality Improvements Manager | Research findings shared among College-wide deliverers through virtual learning environment and within teams<br><br>Improvement of the learner experience June 2011 |
|  | Some deliverers attend Platinum continuous professional development sessions   | November - June 2011    |  |  |  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>at all levels, the College provides strong support for students, particularly</li> </ul>  | College ensures that Student Services facilities are maintained  | October 2011            | Vice Principal - Business Development and External Relations | Student feedback in questionnaires<br><br>Increase student   | Vice Principal   | College Annual Review - June 2011   |

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| <p>tutorial support, which enables students to achieve their potential and is widely welcomed by them (paragraph 31)</p>   | <p>even in difficult financial climate (counselling, financial and student voice)</p> <p>Models of tutorial support to be discussed at higher education meeting for sharing good practice</p>   | <p>July 2011</p> <p>Termly meetings February and April 2011</p> |   | <p>focus groups</p> <p>Student individual tutorial support reviews</p>  |                             | <p>Individual curriculum area review</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the University and College have collaborated to provide an advice and guidance centre in order to provide students with full information about higher education (paragraph 32)</li> </ul> | <p>Maintain level of service for current students</p> <p>Develop use of centre as 'Outreach' for potential students and local school population</p> <p>Cascade and update any changes to students via University based contact in the Mini Gateway and deliverers</p> | <p>July 2011</p>  | <p>Assistant Principal</p> <p>Sunderland University College Representative</p> <p>Course deliverers</p> | <p>Feedback from higher education students</p> <p>Use of centre by school and other local population</p> <p>Wider interest in HE courses, students interviews</p> | <p>Partnership Director</p> | <p>Review of Centres - June 2011</p> <p>June 2011</p> <p>Updated information cascaded via interviews, course information and College prospectus and guidance, including 'Come to College events' for school leavers</p> |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the high level of targeted provision of professional development for higher education ensures that teaching is at an appropriate level and that its content is current (paragraphs 33, 34)</li> </ul>        | <p>Induction of new staff appraisal system supports current continuous professional development and extends the targeting of future needs</p>             | <p>Appraisal system March - June 2011</p>                                      | <p>Curriculum directors' training February - March 2011</p>                        | <p>100 per cent of staff given appraisal and agreed CPD requirements</p>  | <p>Vice Principal</p> | <p>College Strategic Plan - June 2011</p>  |
|   | <p>External continuous professional development is captured through Human Resources</p>   | <p>Continuous professional development courses January - July 2011</p>         | <p>July 2011 CPD opportunities recorded</p>  | <p>100 per cent attendance</p>  | <p>Vice Principal</p> | <p>Improved observation grade profile</p>  |
|   | <p>Partnership Development Day</p>  | <p>Partnership Days set by University calendar ongoing January - June 2011</p> | <p>Course Teams</p>  | <p>100 per cent attendance</p>  | <p>Vice Principal</p> | <p>Curriculum area self assessment report</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the development of informational learning technology and the College virtual learning environment is effective in enabling independent learning, especially for part-time students (paragraph 38)</li> </ul> | <p>Further develop informational learning technology usage in curriculum delivery and improve College virtual learning environment to broaden its use</p> | <p>Ongoing</p>   | <p>Full implementation and usage by Higher Education Team in 2011-12 programme</p> | <p>Improved usage reported in observation and feedback from students</p> <p>Course relayed information easy to access</p> | <p>Vice Principal</p> | <p>College Annual Review - June 2011</p> <p>Curriculum Area Self Assessment Report - June 2011</p> |

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|  | Introduction of ProMonitor online target setting to plan deliverers continuous professional development training undertaken to track learner progress and record targets                        | Termly February - June 2011<br>Ongoing support January - July 2011  |   | Students can track their own progress   |                |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the very close collaboration between the College publications staff and the students in the preparation of the prospectus ensures that it is written in accessible language and contains detailed information about course content and the College's approach to learner support (paragraph 40).</li> </ul> | <p>Maintain level of student involvement initially and advising on quality of materials</p> <p>Ensure that course information is easier to locate with progression opportunities identified</p> | <p>New materials produced for June 2011</p> <p>Assistant Programme Leaders consult with Marketing Manager by March 2011</p> | University curriculum directors' course teams | <p>Feedback from students - right student, right course</p> <p>Improved information available both electronically and on hard copy by April 2011</p> <p>Feedback from initial student questionnaire/ focus groups</p> | Vice Principal | <p>College Annual Review - June 2011</p> <p>Improved Student Recruitment</p> |

| 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 <b>desired</b> to take action:</p>  |  |  |                                |   |                       |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop further the broad awareness and understanding by all staff teaching on higher education of the Academic Infrastructure, with particular reference to the <i>Foundation Degree benchmark statement</i>, in order to ensure consistency (paragraph 15)</li> </ul> | <p>Ensure all current staff teaching on Foundation Degrees and any new staff in future receive regular updates on use of benchmark statements especially in practice by engaging in continuous professional development, joint and second marking and assessment validation boards</p> | <p>Continuous professional development to take place by summer 2011</p>                                    | <p>Vice Principal</p>          | <p>All staff attend continuous professional development and/or share good practice</p>                                | <p>Vice Principal</p> | <p>College Annual Review - June 2011</p>                                       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>given the College's plan to increase its provision of vocational higher education, develop further its strategy for work-based learning and its engagement with employers</li> </ul>  | <p>Vice Principal will develop Employer Engagement Strategy in general but special focus on introducing higher education offer</p>   | <p>Higher Education Strategy Group set up in February 2011 consisting of members of College Leadership</p> | <p>Vice Principal to chair</p> | <p>Increase in engagement of employers on bespoke higher education provision</p> <p>Strategy for embedding higher</p> | <p>Vice Principal</p> | <p>College Annual Review - June 2011</p> <p>College Self Assessment Report</p> |

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| (paragraph 21)   |   | Group<br>Report back by<br>June 2011 |  | education within<br>College<br>curriculum  |                |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>review its full-time and its part-time prospectus together with its Houghall Campus prospectus to enable students to readily access all materials relating to higher education programmes to help them choose a suitable programme of study (paragraph 40)</li> </ul> | Vice Principal will work with Marketing Manager to ensure that future version will be more accessible for such information                                | New material produced<br>June 2011   | Vice Principal in conjunction with assistant programme leaders and Marketing Manager | Feedback from students and stakeholders via induction questionnaire and focus groups | Vice Principal | College Annual Review -<br>June 2011<br><br>Increased student numbers on courses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>review its provision of electronic information relating to financial support to produce College-specific information so that students are able to obtain the information they need without recourse to external agencies (paragraph 45).</li> </ul>                   | Head of Student Services will liaise with Marketing Manager to develop comprehensive and up to date information, available in both paper-based and online | New material produced<br>June 2011   | Vice Principal   | Feedback from students<br><br>Student survey questionnaires (October 2011)           | Vice Principal | College Annual Review -<br>June 2011   |

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