



# **Integrated quality and enhancement review**

**Summative review**

**Exeter College**

**January 2011**

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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 bodies as appropriate. The college's action plan in response to the conclusions of the Summative review will be published as part of the report.

## Executive summary

### The Summative review of Exeter College carried out in January 2011

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

### Good practice

The team has identified the following **good practice** for dissemination:

- the College's positive approach towards continued higher education expansion and its determination to meet the aspirations of its Strategic Plan creates a positive ethos throughout the higher education provision
- the establishment of the Higher Education Office has had a clearly beneficial impact in ensuring the effective management and development of the provision
- the rigorous approach taken to annual programme monitoring and the monitoring cycle for programme review is effective. Responsibilities for learning opportunities are effectively delegated and reported within the higher education management structure
- the consistently supportive relationship between the College and its partner awarding bodies is impressive and benefits students through a well-managed provision
- the ethos of mutual support and collegiality among higher education staff that promotes good educational practice is a striking feature of the provision and impressed the team
- the role and function of experienced lecturers as improvement practitioners fosters staff expertise and helps meet professional development needs
- the subject expertise of staff and the level of support they give benefits students' learning experience and is much appreciated by them
- employers work with tutors to develop work-based learning opportunities that promote employability and build on learning within the higher education programmes
- the College's portal is an excellent resource for both staff and students. It affords staff from different programmes and faculties the ability to share resources, place data securely and to promote and share good practice
- the College's higher education prospectus contributes to widening participation through being available in formats other than hard copy, for example in audio, Braille and in languages other than English
- many programme handbooks are comprehensive, with a wealth of information about additional learning resources available to students.

## Recommendations

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

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

- ensure assessment and evaluation procedures are communicated clearly and consistently to students
- ensure that all students, regardless of mode of attendance, have adequate access to tutors
- ensure that material in programme handbooks and the prospectus is consistent and complete across the provision
- consider the introduction of an overarching and systematically organised auditing process, reporting on a regular basis, for monitoring the accuracy of public information.

## 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 Exeter 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, the universities of Exeter and Plymouth, Kingston University, and the University College Plymouth St Mark and St John (UCP Marjon). The review was carried out by Professor David Eastwood, Mr Gary Hargreaves and Mrs Gillian McGillivray (reviewers) and Dr John Barkham (coordinator).

2 The Summative review team (the team) conducted the review in agreement with the College and in accordance with *The handbook for Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review* (the handbook), published by QAA. Evidence in support of the Summative review included documentation supplied by the College and awarding bodies, meetings with staff, students, employers and partner institutions, and reports of reviews by QAA. 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 in gaining 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 in 1970 as the first tertiary college in England. It was designed to provide all post-16 education and training provision for the city of Exeter, bringing together the sixth forms from the former grammar schools and the Exeter Technical College. During the past 40 years the College has grown considerably. In September 2010, it enrolled about 4,400 full-time and about 8,000 part-time and work-based learning students on courses across all programme areas. Higher education programmes are delivered in nine of the College's academic faculties. There is a total of 562 students currently enrolled on full (416) and part-time (146) programmes, equivalent to 484 full-time equivalents.

5 The College's mission is 'to be regarded as an outstanding college within our community, realising opportunities through partnership and innovation'. The College is committed to being innovative and agile, placing its students' interests at the centre of its activity. It is based in a number of modern and restored older buildings on, and close to, Hele Road near the centre of Exeter. The College's higher education strategy is to increase the participation of local people by providing them with learning opportunities and pathways for progression that support personal aspirations and the economic priorities of Exeter and its local region in Devon.

6 The list of higher education programmes validated by the awarding bodies and funded by HEFCE, together with the full-time equivalent student numbers in brackets, is as follows:



## Edexcel

- HNC/D Business (39)
- HNC Civil Engineering (10)
- HNC Construction (11)

## University College Plymouth St Mark and St John (UCP Marjon)

- FdSc Coaching and Fitness (31)
- FdSc Sports Therapy (20)

## University of Exeter

- BA (Ord) Business Management (13.5)
- FdA Leadership and Management in the Air Travel Industry (13)

## Kingston University

- FdEng Aircraft Engineering (25)

## University of Plymouth

- FdA Airside Operations (18)
- FdA Early Years (44)
- FdA Fine Art (32)
- FdA Health and Social Care Studies (28)
- FdA Journalism and Practical Media (28)
- FdA Performance Production (16)
- FdA Photography and Digital Arts (25)
- FdSc Public Services (17)
- FdA Television Production (26)
- FdSc Engineering (13)
- HNC Engineering (10.5)
- HNC/D Legal Practice (17)
- Postgraduate Certificate in Education (47)

## Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

7 The College offers higher education programmes in partnership with the universities of Exeter and Plymouth, Kingston University, University College Plymouth St Mark and St John (UCP Marjon) and Edexcel. The majority of the provision is validated by the University of Plymouth. The College is part of the Faculty of University of Plymouth Colleges which is a partnership between the University of Plymouth and over 20 partner institutions, including Exeter College. Partnership agreements with all higher education institution awarding bodies include sections on the aims and management of the partnerships, institutional obligations and responsibilities, management and review, financial arrangements, approved programmes of study and publicity. These agreements have a five-year term. The partnership with the University of Exeter has been in place for many years, while that with Kingston University was signed within the last year, indicating expansion into academic areas new to the College. Edexcel does not have partnership agreements with further education colleges of the same kind as higher education institutions. Currently, the annual monitoring of its provision focuses on the external verification of student assessment,

together with a partial view of those quality processes that support and assure effective assessment.

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

8 Recently, the College recognised a growing need for a more formal central support function. To achieve this, a Higher Education Office was established in February 2009, consisting currently of a Head and an Administrator based at the Hele Road main college site. They provide the key link with the validating bodies and support the delivery of higher education programmes across the College. The Head of the Higher Education Office is a member of the College Leadership Team and chairs the Higher Education Development and Operational group. This consists of all programme managers and some key support staff, including representatives from admissions, marketing and learning resources. The Head of the Higher Education Office and Assistant Principal ensure a cohesive and shared set of aspirations and values common across the academic faculties. The last two years have seen the inception of new partnerships with the University of Exeter and Kingston University. Higher education staff and their programmes have benefited substantially from the new level of support provided by the Higher Education Office.

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

9 Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. The coordinator met some student representatives at the preparatory meeting. A written submission was received from the students soon afterwards. This arose from a meeting of 25 student representatives who gave an evaluation of their educational experience at the College to the Deputy and Assistant Principals and the Head of the Higher Education Office. A week later, a core group of these students summarised the views expressed and drew up their submission in response to key questions under each of the core themes. Reviewers found this document most helpful in providing a basis for their meetings with students during the review.

## **B Evaluation of the management of HEFCE-funded higher education**

### **Core theme 1: Academic standards**

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

10 The College's Higher Education Strategy recognises both the value of the existing provision and the need to develop it further to meet both personal aspirations and the economic priorities of the region. The majority of the provision is validated by the University of Plymouth (see paragraph 6). The Faculty of University of Plymouth Colleges is nationally recognised as one of the largest, longest established and best developed partner college networks in the country. Higher education student numbers have risen through a process of refinement of programme provision and a focus on innovative new developments. The team was impressed by the College's positive approach towards continued higher education expansion and its determination to meet the aspirations of its Strategic Plan, creating a positive ethos throughout the higher education provision.

11 The overall responsibility for higher education provision rests with an assistant principal who represents the area at the Senior Curriculum Group and the Senior Leadership Team meetings. However, since 2009 the Higher Education Office has provided a highly effective day-to-day hub for the management and delivery of all higher education programmes and provides the key link with the validating bodies. The team confirmed the effectiveness of the Higher Education Operational Group in cascading policy changes and disseminating good practice. The establishment of the Higher Education Office has had a clearly beneficial impact in ensuring the effective management and development of the provision. In the team's view, this positive impact in a short space of time is significantly underrated in its own initial annual self-assessment report.

12 Individual faculties have a faculty management group representative who, working with the Higher Education Office and their head of faculty, is responsible for overseeing higher education at faculty level. This includes working with programme managers and other faculty management group members to disseminate consistent good practice across the College. Programme managers are responsible for disseminating key information to tutors and teaching teams. This system is effective.

13 College procedures are reviewed at programme team meetings to ensure consistency of practice across faculties and course reviews. Higher education reviews at faculty level feed directly into faculty self-assessment reports and, subsequently, into the overall College's self-assessment report, thus providing an effective vehicle for two-way dissemination of procedural changes and results. Annual programme monitoring feeds upwards through faculty monitoring, to the Higher Education Office and to the Senior Leadership Team. The Higher Education Office disseminates programme monitoring outcomes to the awarding bodies. The team confirms the effectiveness of this annual monitoring cycle.

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

14 The College views the Academic Infrastructure as being 'at the heart of academic standards', with standards and compliance issues addressed at the highest level within the College through the Senior Curriculum Group and the Corporation Quality Standards Committee. The team confirmed this claim during the review visit.

15 Teaching staff are familiar with the key features of the Academic Infrastructure. The College provides training and development activity to raise staff awareness of the Academic Infrastructure and a compulsory leadership and management programme for all faculty heads, deputy faculty heads and all faculty management group members with responsibility for higher education.

16 Programme specifications are written and monitored taking into account the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. Intended learning outcomes are mapped against subject benchmarks and against the FHEQ. Teaching staff are supported in this by the Head of the Higher Education Office and the appropriate head of faculty. Programme leaders confirmed their appreciation of this support.

17 Monitoring through annual subject panels, awards boards and external examiners ensures that national standards are applied across programmes, together with the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining, Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters, Section 6: Assessment of students* and *Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. The College values employer engagement and involves local employers in the design, delivery and validation of new awards. Employers who met the team expressed satisfaction with their relationship with the College.

**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?**

18 The consistently supportive relationship between the College and its partner awarding bodies is impressive and benefits students through a well-managed provision. Higher education quality assurance procedures are aligned with awarding body requirements through formal partnership agreements. The College succeeds in meeting a variety of formal procedural requirements that differ among awarding bodies. The Higher Education Office ensures that all programmes adhere to individual awarding bodies' processes and procedures. Although in operation for less than two years, the Higher Education Office has proved to be very effective in achieving this adherence.

19 The College has developed a Higher Education Communications Strategy to ensure that the responsibilities of various higher educational operational groups are understood by all stakeholders, both internal and external. These include the Higher Education Development and Operations Group and the Partnership Board of Studies Group. The team confirmed that this Strategy functions well in practice. The College has developed an effective action plan to meet the recommendations made in the Developmental engagement in assessment report. All the college actions in response to that report were fully completed by the end of July 2010.

20 The Partnership Board of Studies Group consists of representation from the awarding bodies and the Head of the Higher Education Office, with the remit to maintain and monitor standards and procedures across all awarding bodies. The College's Higher Education Strategy aims to 'review and enhance existing processes and develop a common systems infrastructure appropriate for higher education (including quality assurance policies and practices)', but recognises that the diversity of awarding bodies makes this complex. As a consequence of having a number of awarding bodies, the College needs to meet differing requirements and students have different educational experiences. Although considerable progress has been made in achieving consistency of student experience across the subject range, some inconsistencies in student perceptions of current assessment and evaluation procedures emerged during the review visit. It is desirable for the College to ensure assessment and evaluation procedures are communicated clearly and consistently to students.

21 Annual programme monitoring plays an important role in standards evaluation for the awarding bodies and the College. The team observed that the timetable adopted and the approaches taken are rigorous and consistent. Faculty internal moderation and verification procedures are in line with the requirements of the awarding bodies. External examiners' reports are considered by the relevant subject teams and a response provided by the programme leader. Awarding bodies are informed of annual student progression and achievement data through the monitoring reports. The College also evaluates progression data at mid-year programme reviews, which provides a timely and valuable indication of probable subsequent progression to the awarding body institutions.

22 Regular partnership board meetings operating on a bi-annual or tri-annual basis are a feature common to all the partnership agreements. The College is represented at this level by the Head of the Higher Education Office or the Assistant Principal. At the review visit, representatives from the awarding higher education institutions confirmed the effectiveness of these procedures.

23 The Head of the Higher Education Office represents the College on the University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty Committee. The Academic Cooperation agreement clearly outlines the obligations of both institutions and College staff confirm that consultation occurs on a regular basis through joint programme committees. Supportive and productive collaboration facilitates the development of a shared understanding of partner responsibilities for quality assurance and enhancement.

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

24 The College and its awarding bodies offer higher education and staff development to support the achievement of appropriate academic standards. Heads of faculty and the Head of Higher Education encourage staff to take higher qualifications and to apply for fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. The 2009-12 College Higher Education Strategy noted a number of concerns in the areas of staff development and relationships with employers and external agencies. It is significant and laudable that, since the creation of the coordinating Higher Education Office, these concerns have already been largely resolved.

25 There is a carefully planned timetable of staff development days during the academic year. For example, the subject librarians, who are closely linked to the higher education programmes, provide training on topics such as referencing and plagiarism. The College also provides effective training and development to raise staff awareness of the Academic Infrastructure and use of relevant parts of the *Code of practice*. An annual Higher Education Conference is held by the College to disseminate good practice between higher education staff across all programme areas, representatives from awarding bodies, and higher education subject librarians. The ethos of mutual support and collegiality among higher education staff that promotes good educational practice is a striking feature of the provision and impressed the team.

26 Staff development activity is linked to the College's personal performance review. Scholarly activity hours are given to each higher education programme to disseminate among the teaching team. There is an effective teacher training programme for new higher education staff. The College's Teaching, Learning and Improvement Office provides obligatory teaching improvement training when deemed necessary as a result of personal performance review.

27 Staff development training offered by the awarding bodies includes, for example, the opportunity for University of Plymouth Colleges staff to apply for appropriate staff development funding. This funding has been awarded to a number of the College's staff to support their continuous professional development.

**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?**

28 Key responsibilities for the quality of learning opportunities, delegated to the College through the partnership agreements, are managed through faculty structures and the Head of the Higher Education Office (see paragraphs 10 to 13). Responsibilities for learning opportunities are delegated and reported within the higher education management structure through a range of college groups and a communication framework. The structures and requirements are set out in the annual monitoring cycle which demonstrates how different awarding body requirements for monitoring and reporting are planned into the academic year and include regular partnership board meetings, partnership visits, team meetings and annual monitoring reports. These arrangements work effectively.

29 Awarding body representatives reported that the processes of annual monitoring and partnership board meetings facilitate effective delivery of learning opportunities for students through regular communication with the College's Higher Education Office (see also paragraphs 10 and 11).

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

30 Quality management responsibilities, as required by partnership agreements, are thoroughly fulfilled through annual programme monitoring, partnership boards of study meetings, programme and faculty meetings. The Higher Education Development and Operations Group is responsible for monitoring quality across the provision. The Higher Education Office and heads of faculty are responsible for ensuring that all students receive appropriate learning opportunities from induction to graduation. For example, the College has created a checklist for induction to be used across all the provision which tutors valued in their planning. In addition, the Higher Education Code of Conduct sets out expectations of students and what students may expect of the College.

31 The College evaluates the effectiveness of its own management structures and processes for managing quality through the process of self-evaluation. For example, the Department of Higher Education self-assessment report for 2009-10 sets out achievements since the Higher Education Office was set up in February 2009 and intends to raise success rates across the provision.

32 The Developmental engagement action plan made no recommendations for areas falling within Core theme 2 and recorded much good practice.

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

33 This report has already noted that the College fully and appropriately engages with the Academic Infrastructure at all levels (see paragraphs 14 to 17). The sections of the *Code of practice* relating to disabled students, academic appeals and student complaints, assessment, career education, and work-based and placement learning are of particular relevance to managing the quality of learning opportunities. All are considered where relevant. For example, progression opportunities are clearly communicated to students; the student portal is accessible to students with specific needs; and employers contribute to programme design.

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

34 Staff expertise and professional development needs are promoted effectively through the Higher Education Strategy, uptake of staff development, records of it having taken place and the role and function of the recently established improvement practitioners. The function of the Teaching, Learning and Improvement Office is to monitor and take action where there is evidence of staff underperformance in programmes. It manages an imaginative scheme for 'intensive care' to support staff improvement in learning and teaching. The role and function of experienced lecturers as improvement practitioners fosters staff expertise and helps meet professional development needs. Improvement practitioners, located within each faculty, act as mentors and provide support for colleagues. Staff reported the system to be beneficial and developmental to their learning and teaching strategies in higher education.

35 Students' views about learning and teaching are sought, monitored and evaluated in several ways, both formally and informally. Student representatives take the opportunity of contributing to programme review through programme committees and the HE Learner Voice group which meets termly. Students reported that when issues are raised, they are responded to promptly and effectively. For example, FdA Photography and Digital Arts students told the team that problems they had experienced with the course the previous year had all been resolved by the College. Students appreciate the accessibility of staff which enables them to raise issues and have them dealt with. More formally, students' views are evident in the completed student perception questionnaires, both for students on University of Plymouth programmes and on those of other awarding bodies, and the National Student Survey. Staff confirmed that results from these surveys are monitored at all levels of management within the College and help inform actions which feed into the annual monitoring processes. End-of-module evaluations are carried out consistently for higher education programmes and, in one case, are a requirement of a professional body, the Civil Aviation Authority, for FdEng Aircraft Engineering.

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

36 All students are allocated a personal tutor who has a pastoral and monitoring role. The Higher Education Office and programme teams offer other forms of support. A common template has been designed for induction programmes for the first time in 2010-11, based on an induction checklist. The checklist illustrates how all programmes are able to plan to meet students' learning needs as they embark on them. Induction processes include training sessions on the College portal, the research zone, and support for students with disabilities. Tutors operate an open-door policy and students know they can arrange personal tutorials according to need. Students generally make use of tutorial support, although on some programmes access to tutors is limited by mode of attendance, for instance in the HNC Construction, HNC Civil Engineering and HNC/D Legal Practice. Teaching staff are aware of this problem and make themselves available by email and telephone.

37 The subject expertise of staff and the level of support they give benefits students' learning experience and is much appreciated by them. Students' views on the support they receive are sought through formal and informal channels. These include one-to-one tutorials with personal tutors, the consistent use of end-of-module evaluations, and programme committees.

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

38 The College's arrangements for staff development in general are recorded in paragraphs 24 to 27. Specifically in relation to the quality of learning opportunities, staff value the support from the awarding bodies, as well as from the Higher Education Office, in enabling them to engage in staff development. The approach empowers staff who appreciate the support to attend conferences that contribute to their learning and teaching.

### **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?**

39 Students clearly value the student portal, and the electronic resources, information and guidance it provides. This medium provides student handbooks, programme aims, assessment requirements and intended outcomes. Additional support and extensive links to resources are provided through the college portal. An effective feature of this is that staff can access other programme areas, enabling them to share and promote the dissemination of good practice.

40 The links with employers provide benefits to students' learning through the provision of workplace resources, as do work-based learning strategies. Employers work with tutors to develop work-based learning opportunities that promote employability and build on learning within the higher education programmes. Programmes that include employment requirements, such as the FdA Airside Operations and the Postgraduate Certificate in Education, are resourced through close liaison with local employers and partnerships.

41 Subject librarians work closely with staff and students and attend programme committee meetings. The student portal facilitates access to bespoke electronic resources for each module. However, the National Student Survey 2010 indicates some disagreement (22 per cent) with the question about library resources being good enough. Some students reported not using the student portal, but these were in the minority, and the student portal is active and populated for all higher education programmes. The team found that the portal is an excellent resource for both staff and students. The ability it affords programme staff to share resources and to promote and share good practice is notable. It also provides useful complementary resources to support students and staff. The Higher Education Strategy includes an aim to improve the 'learning resources available to higher education students within the College'. Students report that issues they raise relating to resources are responded to promptly and effectively.

42 Students undertaking different modes of study have access to electronic resources, such as the portal, whether they are at work, at home or in the College. Also, study rooms and social facilities have extended opening to accommodate students, such as those who need access after work, although students commented that there was no dedicated higher education common room. Nevertheless, there is a quiet study room for higher education students situated within the Victoria House Learning Centre.

43 Resourcing issues are raised through the annual review cycle and internal faculty reviews; they are also brought forward by student representatives. Learning centres encourage the ongoing development of resources to support the programmes. For example, subject librarians liaise closely with programme managers to discuss resource development. Capital expenditure for higher education is ring-fenced by the Senior Leadership Team. The budget is managed by the Higher Education Office and distributed across all areas of delivery. These arrangements work effectively.



**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?**

44 The general focus of public information for which the College is responsible is centred on the student experience, although governance, policy, strategies and freedom of information are recognised as areas that are coming under much more direct scrutiny by a widening audience. The College is responsible for publishing a range of information for students both prior to joining the programme and during their studies. Prospective students are given the higher education prospectus, course information leaflets and they can use the College website. They are able to gain more detailed information by visiting the College for guidance sessions, open events and interviews. A range of detailed information is published for students once they have commenced their programmes. This includes course handbooks, programme and module specifications, assignment briefs and assessment schedules. Awarding bodies confirmed that approval of public information is a regular and ongoing activity in which they are all involved.

45 The College divides its published information into pre-course and on-course. The prospectus is published in a printed format and online publication is managed and checked by the college marketing team. The College also makes the prospectus available in other formats, for example in audio form and in languages other than English, with the capacity to provide Braille versions on request. Software packages to convert to speech are used with dyslexic students. The College's higher education prospectus contributes to widening participation through being available in a range of formats, as mentioned above. The team considers this flexibility of format, contributing to widening participation, to be good practice.

46 The prospectus provides a wide range of general college information and advice as well as specific information about courses. The information about courses in the higher education prospectus is largely in a consistent format. However, some content is less detailed, for example for the HNC Legal Practice and the Postgraduate Certificate in Education. The College has minimum requirements for information contained in the prospectus and some programmes exceed that requirement. As a result, the prospectus will incorporate much exemplary information for all programmes into the latest off and online versions.

47 The induction survey 2009-10 shows that 92 per cent of learners thought that the College informed them well about their course prior to their arrival. Once they had started their programmes, 91 per cent agreed that their lecturers had given them clear information about their course. This view was mostly supported by students met by the reviewers, although some students found some information provided prior to their arrival was not always accurate. However, it is clear that, when problems arise, they are swiftly and expediently dealt with by staff.

48 Student programme handbooks are available online through the student portal and some are provided as hard copies at induction. Many illustrate good practice, being comprehensive, with a wealth of information about additional resources and an overview

of the support available to students. However, the consistency and completeness of the materials provided in some varies significantly between college faculties. It is desirable for the College to ensure that material in programme handbooks and the prospectus are consistent and complete across the provision. Nevertheless, handbooks are extensively linked to additional information using hyperlinks, providing a rich source of information and support both within the College and partner institutions.

**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?**

49 The awarding bodies require the College to monitor and evaluate public information. This involves auditing the prospectus and information provided to students. Employers are also involved, with a commercial airline and the Civil Aviation Authority monitoring all information throughout the year, including teaching materials for the FdA Airside Operation and Management and FdA Leadership and Management in the Air Travel Industry programmes. External examiners also monitor the activity on the virtual learning environment portal. Each awarding body, through its partnership agreement, entrusts the publicity and marketing of each programme to the College. Materials are sent to awarding body marketing teams to check for accuracy and respond accordingly.

50 Although there is a lack of a fully established, overarching and systematically organised auditing process, systems for monitoring the accuracy of public information are effective. For example, the College identified two mistakes in the last twelve months; one in the prospectus and one on the website. Actions to correct these were taken immediately by the Head of Higher Education and the heads of the faculties concerned. The College's Website Task Group is beginning to establish a role in monitoring the effectiveness, accuracy and completeness of public information. Nevertheless, the College should consider the introduction of an overarching and systematically organised auditing process, reporting on a regular basis to achieve this.

51 The College's marketing team, using a standard template, provides guidance about programme information required for the prospectus. A member of the marketing team attends the Higher Education Development and Operations Group's meetings for which marketing issues are a standard agenda item. Information from programme managers is signed off by heads of faculty. The accuracy of the information is verified by the Head of the Higher Education Office and the Assistant Principal. Awarding bodies also proofread information relating to their courses in the prospectus and are fully involved in validating the accuracy of the information. Responsibility is shared, with the Assistant Principal for Higher Education being ultimately responsible, while the marketing team coordinates the content and is responsible for detailed proofreading. These arrangements work well.

52 Following the recommendation in the Developmental engagement report that it was desirable for the College to ensure consistency in both staff and student use of the portal, there has been a developing consistency of its use by both staff and students. Staff and student community portals are now firmly established, with minimum requirements set for student-class portal pages, with the majority of sites heavily populated with resources. Programme managers are responsible for the accuracy and completeness of the information on their sites. For 2011, the Higher Education Office will schedule random sampling of portal sites to check for accuracy and completeness.

**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

53 The Developmental engagement took place in March 2010. There were three lines of enquiry:

**Line of enquiry 1:** To what extent does the College provide appropriate and timely feedback to students on assessed work in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvement?

**Line of enquiry 2:** How are academic standards at the College maintained through assessment practice that also encourages effective learning?

**Line of enquiry 3:** How effectively are assessment procedures and information concerning assessment communicated to students at the College?

The review team explored these lines of enquiry by initially asking a set of written questions that then provided the basis for a college written response, followed by meetings with staff, students and employers during the review visit.

54 The team recorded a number of areas of good practice for the College to promote. These included the exemplary way in which employers and professional organisations have contributed to the design of assessment in the FdA Airside Operations and FdA Leadership and Management in the Air Travel Industry; the way in which the College and awarding bodies' assessment regulations and requirements are being accommodated successfully by the Higher Education Communication Strategy; evidence of the enrichment of assessment practice through continuing professional staff development and scholarly activity; the close and supportive relationships that clearly exist between students and staff at all stages of student assessments; the variety of formative and summative methods of assessment feedback, highly valued by students, including those from employers; the range of high quality information about assessment provided to students before they embark on their programmes; and the clear and appropriate information about assessment methods for each programme, published in student handbooks and the student portal, that enable students to achieve their learning outcomes.

55 The team made very few recommendations. It considered it desirable for the College to continue the work of achieving consistency across programmes in how assessment feedback is provided to students and its timeliness; ensure that the consistency of the practice of signing a declaration of authenticity of the students' own work is disseminated across all programmes; and ensure consistency in both staff and student use of the portal, the College's valuable virtual learning environment.

## D Foundation Degrees

56 The College provides a total of 14 Foundation Degrees, nine of which are FdAs and five FdScs. Ten of these are validated by the University of Plymouth, two by University College Plymouth St Mark and St John and one each by the University of Exeter and Kingston University. The FdA Leadership and Management in the Air Travel Industry, validated by the University of Exeter, received its first students in September 2009, while the FdSc Aircraft Engineering, validated by Kingston University, received its first intake of students in September 2010. At the time of writing, the College is awaiting further indications of the direction of government policy in relation to higher education provision in further education colleges. The College's intention is to keep higher education student numbers

stable in 2011-12, while considering further expansion through widening participation in 2012-13.

57 The Foundation Degree provision (paragraph 6) covers an exceptionally broad range of academic disciplines and is supported by four awarding bodies. As a result, the team explored issues of consistency of practice across the provision in some depth. The needs and practice of assessment, student support, learning resources, monitoring and evaluation necessarily vary significantly from subject to subject. However, the team was impressed by the balance being achieved between the need for consistently sound common policies and practice at college and faculty level, while appropriate diversity at subject level is nurtured. The role of the Higher Education Office is notable in successfully coordinating and monitoring the provision and in promoting good practice.

58 The team's conclusions about Foundation Degrees are the same as those for the whole provision (see Section E), apart from the second recommendation.

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

59 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Exeter 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, the universities of Exeter and Plymouth, Kingston University, and University College Plymouth St Mark and St John.

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

- the College's positive approach towards continued higher education expansion and its determination to meet the aspirations of its Strategic Plan creates a positive ethos throughout the higher education provision (paragraph 10)
- the establishment of the Higher Education Office has had a clearly beneficial impact in ensuring the effective management and development of the provision (paragraphs 11, 16, 18, 24)
- the rigorous approach taken to annual programme monitoring and the monitoring cycle for programme review is effective. Responsibilities for learning opportunities are effectively delegated and reported within the higher education management structure (paragraphs 13, 21, 28)
- the consistently supportive relationship between the College and its partner awarding bodies is impressive and benefits students through a well-managed provision (paragraph 18)
- the ethos of mutual support and collegiality among higher education staff that promotes good educational practice is a striking feature of the provision and impressed the team (paragraph 25)
- the role and function of experienced lecturers as improvement practitioners fosters staff expertise and helps meet professional development needs (paragraph 34)
- the subject expertise of staff and the level of support they give benefits students' learning experience and is much appreciated by them (paragraph 37)
- employers work with tutors to develop work-based learning opportunities that promote employability and build on learning within the higher education programmes (paragraph 40)
- the College's portal is an excellent resource for both staff and students. It affords staff from different programmes and faculties the ability to share resources, place data securely and to promote and share good practice (paragraphs 39, 41, 48)

- the College's higher education prospectus contributes to widening participation through being available in formats other than hard copy, for example in audio, Braille and in languages other than English (paragraph 45)
- many programme handbooks are comprehensive, with a wealth of information about additional learning resources available to students (paragraph 48).

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

62 The team agreed the following areas where it is **desirable** for the College to take action:

- ensure assessment and evaluation procedures are communicated clearly and consistently to students (paragraph 20)
- ensure that all students, regardless of mode of attendance, have adequate access to tutors (paragraph 36)
- ensure that material in programme handbooks and the prospectus is consistent and complete across the provision (paragraphs 46 to 48)
- consider the introduction of an overarching and systematically organised auditing process, reporting on a regular basis, for monitoring the accuracy of public information (paragraph 50).

63 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.

64 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.

65 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.

<b>Exeter College action plan relating to the Summative review: January 2011</b>						
<b>Good practice</b>	<b>Action to be taken</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Success indicators</b>	<b>Reported to</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
In the course of the Summative review the team identified the following areas of <b>good practice</b> that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the College's positive approach towards continued higher education expansion and its determination to meet the aspirations of its Strategic Plan creates a positive ethos throughout the higher education provision (paragraph 10)</li> </ul>	<p>Update the College Strategic Plan</p> <p>Update Higher Education Strategy</p>	<p>March 2011</p> <p>November 2011</p>	<p>Senior Leadership Team</p> <p>Deputy Principal and Head of Quality and Higher Education</p>	<p>Improved focus on strategy which has been informed by current changing landscape of FE and HE in FE</p>	<p>Board of Governors and all stakeholders</p> <p>Board of Governors</p>	<p>Staff and student and stakeholder feedback</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the establishment of the Higher Education Office has had a clearly beneficial impact in ensuring the effective management and development of the provision (paragraphs 11, 16, 18, 24)</li> </ul>	Further integrate quality assurance processes by fully embedding HE function into the Quality function by creating a Department of Quality and Higher Education	March 2011	Principal and Deputy Principal for Curriculum, Quality and Standards	Enhanced internal reputation and improved departmental self-assessment grade	Senior Leadership Team and Governing Body	Staff and student feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the rigorous approach taken to annual programme monitoring and the monitoring cycle for programme review is effective. Responsibilities</li> </ul>	Formal award boards to be set up for Edexcel provision in the faculties of Business and	June 2011	Heads of Faculty and Head of Quality and Higher Education	<p>A more rigorous approach to quality assurance for HNC provision</p> <p>Consistent approach</p>	Senior Curriculum Group	HE Learner Voice Forum

	for learning opportunities are effectively delegated and reported within the higher education management structure (paragraphs 13, 21, 28)	Construction. These will replicate those undertaken for the equivalent University provision			across all HE provision		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the consistently supportive relationship between the College and its partner awarding bodies is impressive and benefits students through a well-managed provision (paragraph 18)</li> </ul>	To ensure partnerships grow the Deputy Principal for Curriculum will take on the overarching line management responsibility for Higher Education	March 2011	Deputy Principal for Curriculum, Quality and Standards and Head of Quality and Higher Education	New opportunities flourish and existing partnerships sustained	Senior Leadership team and the Governing Body	Feedback from partners
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the ethos of mutual support and collegiality among higher education staff that promotes good educational practice is a striking feature of the provision and impressed the team (paragraph 25)</li> </ul>	The HE Conference will showcase new Video Helix repository system to promote good practice within teaching and learning	June 2011	Head of Quality and Higher education	Positive feedback from staff who use the repository system	Deputy Principal for Curriculum, Quality & Standards	Feedback from staff/annual staff survey Feedback from students
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the role and function of experienced lecturers as improvement practitioners fosters staff expertise and helps meet provisional development needs (paragraph 34)</li> </ul>	Following the merger of both the Quality and HE functions, the improvement practitioners will now report directly to the Head of Quality and Higher Education creating opportunities to	December 2011	Head of Quality and Higher Education	Staff further value the role of Improvement Practitioners and their support in enhancing continuous professional development	Deputy Principal for Curriculum, Quality and Standards	Feedback from staff

	further use the expert practitioners to enhance classroom delivery					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the subject expertise of staff and the level of support they give benefits students' learning experience and is much appreciated by them (paragraph 37)</li> </ul>	Continue to support continuous professional development and give scholarly activity hours to teaching teams for academic year 2011-12. For example, The New Engineering Foundation is supporting the College to create immersion opportunities in industry	September 2011	Head of Quality and Higher Education	Learners identify benefits of knowledgeable staff who work closely to support them with both their learning and with pastoral care  Staff remain up to date with industry standards	Deputy Principal for Curriculum, Quality and Standards	Student feedback via module evaluations, on-course surveys and HE Learner Voice Forum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>employers work with tutors to develop work-based learning opportunities that promote employability and build on learning within the higher education programmes (paragraph 40)</li> </ul>	Continue to develop working with employers to inform teaching and assessment within programmes	Ongoing	Programme managers	Learners identify benefits of employer engagement	Head of Quality and Higher Education	Employer feedback Student feedback via module evaluations, on-course surveys and HE Learner Voice Forum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the College's portal is an excellent resource for both staff and students. It affords staff from different programmes and faculties the ability to share</li> </ul>	Undertake College-wide skills scan and build bespoke training through Information and Learning	December 2011	Deputy Head of Quality and Higher Education	Staff identify benefits of training and portal usage increases	Head of Quality and Higher Education	Staff development evaluations  Staff survey



resources, place data securely and to promote and share good practice (paragraphs 39, 41, 48)	Technology champions  Video Helix system to be available on portal					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the College's higher education prospectus contributes to widening participation through being available in formats other than hard copy, for example in audio, Braille and in languages other than English (paragraph 45)</li> </ul>	Maintain current practice and improve through evidence-based marketing	Annual review	Marketing Department	Positive feedback from students	Assistant Principal with responsibility for marketing	Marketing surveys Marketing focus groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>many programme handbooks are comprehensive, with a wealth of information about additional learning resources available to students (paragraph 48)</li> </ul>	Annual auditing of course handbooks  Course handbook for Construction to be reformatted	August 2011	HE Administrator and HE programme managers  Programme Manager for HNC Construction and Civil Engineering	Audit will demonstrate consistency of practice  Positive feedback from students	Head of Quality and Higher Education	Student feedback via module evaluations, on-course surveys and HE Learner Voice Forum

Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team agreed the following areas where it is <b>desirable</b> to take action						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure assessment and evaluation procedures are communicated clearly and consistently to students (paragraph 20)</li> </ul>	To ensure the practice of end of module evaluations is consistent across all areas of curriculum	July 2011	Deputy Head of Quality and Higher Education	Improved delivery models and strategies	Head of Quality and Higher Education	HE Learner Voice Forum On-course surveys National Student Survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure that all students, regardless of mode of attendance, have adequate access to tutors (paragraph 36)</li> </ul>	Explore alternative attendance patterns and increased use of the portal to provide additional out-of-class guidance and support	September 2011	Head of Business and IT Faculty	Learners to identify benefits of new timetable changes	Senior Curriculum Group	HE Learner Voice Forum Adult Learner Voice Immediate feedback button on the Portal Employer Advisory Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure that material in programme handbooks and the prospectus is consistent and complete across the provision (paragraphs 46 to 48)</li> </ul>	In line with the best practice action we will continue to use evidence-based marketing to enhance the prospectus	Ongoing	Marketing Department	A consistent look at all subject content within the prospectus	Assistant Principal with responsibility for marketing	Marketing surveys Marketing focus groups
	Annual auditing of course handbooks	August 2011	HE Administrator and HE programme managers	Audit will demonstrate consistency of practice	Head of Quality and Higher Education	Student feedback via module evaluations, on-course surveys and HE Learner Voice Forum

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consider the introduction of an overarching and systematically organised auditing process, reporting on a regular basis, for monitoring the accuracy of public information (paragraph 50)</li> </ul>	An item at the annual HE Conference will focus on reinforcing staff responsibility to ensure accurate and consistent approach	July 2011	Head of Quality and Higher Education	Reliable and accurate resources	Deputy Principal for Curriculum, Quality and Standards	Student feedback
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