Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

Liverpool Community College

October 2011

[SR 003/11]

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 effectively manages 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* (FHEQ), which includes descriptions of different higher education qualifications
- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*)
- 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 Liverpool Community College carried out in October 2011

As a result of its investigations, the Summative review 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:

- staff, students, and employers demonstrate a high level of awareness of the way in which the Academic Infrastructure has been used to inform College policy relating to student assessment, placement, and work-based learning
- employer involvement in developing the curriculum and assessment methods for FdSc Building Services Engineering helps to ensure that students have the opportunity to attain a range of employability and subject-specific skills
- staff development activities which are funded by the College and activities involving awarding body representatives which are included as part of College Higher Education Research Days and Development Days promote discussion of pedagogic and scholarly themes
- the proactive nature of the Student Financial Advice and Support Services ensures that students and staff are provided with up to date advice and guidance on a comprehensive range of support relating to disability and inclusive learning.

Recommendations

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

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

- consider developing a policy and implementing a procedure to ensure that reports resulting from awarding body quality processes are received centrally by an identified role within the College prior to being circulated to programme teams for action or comment.

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

- review existing processes to ensure that all higher education students are fully aware of access arrangements to, and opening hours of, the facilities and resources provided in the Learning Exchange

- consider adopting a uniform approach to producing higher national student handbooks to ensure all higher education students are receiving consistent, accurate information
- consider developing and implementing an e-learning policy to enable the virtual learning environment to be used to its full potential consistently across all higher education programmes.

A   Introduction and context

1   This report presents the findings of the Summative review of higher education funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) conducted at Liverpool Community College. The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the College discharges its responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes which the College delivers on behalf of De Montfort University, Edexcel, Edge Hill University, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool John Moores University, and Manchester Metropolitan University. The review was carried out by Professor Christopher Gale, Mr Gary Hargreaves, Mrs Patricia Millner (reviewers) and Mr Grant Horsburgh (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 a wide range and variety of documentation supplied by the College and awarding bodies; meetings with staff, students, employers, former students, and partner institutions; and reports of reviews by QAA and inspections by Ofsted. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagement in assessment. A summary of findings from this Developmental engagement is provided in Section C of this report. The review also considered the College's use of the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers, with reference to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice),* subject and award benchmark statements*, The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and programme specifications.

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

4   Liverpool Community College is a large inner-city general further education college with a diverse student population. The mission of the College is 'to provide high quality education and training which is inclusive and matches the needs of our diverse learners and the economy. Liverpool Community College exists so that students, employers and communities are equipped for the futures they choose, at a cost that represents excellent value for money'. The College comprises six teaching centres, four of which accommodate at least one higher education programme. The newest of the six is the Learning Exchange which opened in June 2011. Higher education in the College builds on the strengths in further education and most of the prescribed higher education programmes sit within curriculum areas that have achieved Centre of Vocational Excellence status. The College works in partnership with five universities but also offers Edexcel higher national qualifications and non-prescribed qualifications at FHEQ level 4. These are primarily competence-based and delivered on a self-financing basis in response to demand on a part-time basis for people who are in employment.

5   At the time of the visit, 494 students (409.95 full-time equivalent students) were enrolled on 20 higher education programmes, making up approximately five per cent of the College student population. The provision is available in a variety of modes of study including full and part-time, as well as day and block release.

Higher education provision at the College

6   The College's HEFCE-funded higher education provision in 2011-12 is shown below with the awarding bodies and full-time equivalent student enrolments in brackets.

De Montfort University
- FdSc Dental Technology, part-time over 3 years (4.29 full-time equivalent students).

Edexcel
- HND Engineering, full-time over 2 years (6 full-time equivalent students)
- HNC Building Services Engineering, part-time over 2 years (4.8 full-time equivalent students)
- HNC Construction, part-time over 2 years (11.5 full-time equivalent students)
- HNC Engineering, full-time over 1 year (3 full-time equivalent students)
- HNC Engineering, part-time over 2 years (12.5 full-time equivalent students)
- HNC Performing Arts, full-time over 1 year (30 full-time equivalent students).

Edge Hill University
- FdSc Information Technology, full-time over 2 years (32 full-time equivalent students).

Liverpool Hope University
- Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector, part-time over 2 years (19 full-time equivalent students).

Liverpool John Moores University
- BA (Hons) Social Work, full-time over 3 years or part-time over 4 years (80 full-time equivalent students)
- FdSc Building Services Engineering, block release over 2 years (28 full-time equivalent students)
- HNC Building Services Engineering, part time over 2 years (3.7 full time equivalent students)
- FdA Digital Media/Media Production Practice, full-time over 2 years (23 full-time equivalent students)
- FdA Early Years Practice, full-time over 2 years (20 full-time equivalent students)
- FdA Music and Audio Production, full-time over 2 years (19 full-time equivalent students)
- FdA Popular Music, full-time over 2 years (22 full-time equivalent students)
- FdA Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector, part-time over 2 years (0.75 full-time equivalent students)
- FdA Leisure and Tourism/Hospitality, full-time over 2 years (28 full-time equivalent students)
- Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector, part-time over 2 years (20.5 full-time equivalent students).

Manchester Metropolitan University
- FdA Fashion and Clothing Technology, full-time over 2 years (43 full-time equivalent students)
- FdSc Dental Technology, part-time over 3 years (3.3 full-time equivalent students).

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

7   The College has current partnership agreements with De Montfort University, Edge Hill University, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool John Moores University, and Manchester Metropolitan University. The partnership agreements have been developed by the awarding bodies to take account of the requirements of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. The awarding bodies retain responsibility for the academic standard of their awards, including programme approval and monitoring, the appointment of external examiners, and the approval of teaching staff. The College has responsibility for daily quality management, recruitment, programme organisation and timetabling, and student support (both academic and pastoral). The maintenance of academic standards is monitored and supported through an existing quality system without unduly replicating processes.

8   The College also offers six higher national programmes under the Edexcel Standard Note and there is no separate partnership agreement. The courses are delivered and managed in accordance with the College's policies and procedures and are subject to external verification in accordance with established Edexcel protocols.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

9   The volume of higher education at the College has remained stable over the last two years apart from revisions following periodic review, the introduction of new programmes, and changes to validation arrangements. New for 2011-12 are: FdA Media Production Practice in partnership with Liverpool John Moores University; Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector with Liverpool Hope University; FdSc Dental Technology in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University; and HNC/D Engineering in partnership with Edexcel. From 2012-13, the College plans to extend higher education to include level 5 qualifications in science and to increase volume in engineering.

10   In 2010-11, the College appointed a Higher Education Manager to assist the Director of Higher Education. This clarified the distinction between strategic and operational management, which is reflected in the committee structure, with the Director chairing the Higher Education Strategy Group and the Manager chairing the Higher Education Management Group. In addition to reviewing and revising existing procedures for annual monitoring and assessment of students' work, the College introduced for 2011-12 new arrangements for teacher observation and the coordination of work-based learning. These systems are designed to complement their further education counterparts and will enable the College to report separately on higher education, or on further education and higher education collectively. The College is also building on its investment in technology-enhanced learning to extend staff use of the intranet and virtual learning environment, to improve communication and enhance their opportunities for sharing good practice. The College is undergoing a full strategic review following the appointment of a new principal in late summer 2011.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

11   Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. A submission was written by a volunteer second-year Foundation Degree student, from notes taken during student focus groups and completed questionnaires. The College Quality Improvement Manager managed the development of the written submission by developing focus group prompts, adapting the standard higher education student feedback questionnaire and coordinating the writing-up

process. Students from eight higher education programmes delivered by the College contributed to the submission, with 116 students (23 per cent of higher education students) completing the questionnaire. In meeting a sample of students during the visit to the College, the team found that the written submission generally provided an accurate reflection of the views and opinions of the College's higher education students.

B   Evaluation of the management of HEFCE-funded higher education

Core theme 1: Academic standards

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

12   The College values and is committed to higher education and has a strong management and support structure that is embedded in the College's overall strategy and operational planning. Higher education is represented on all College committees by senior staff, with additional discrete groups to deal with particular higher education concerns, for example the Higher Education Strategy Group and the Higher Education Management Group. Following the Developmental engagement, the College has made further improvements to its management of higher education in providing more explicit detail of the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Higher Education and the Higher Education Manager. These roles are now fully integrated into the College quality systems.

13   The College has a clear management structure that includes quality assurance. Management responsibility for delivering programmes is held at faculty level. This is supported by an effective management and operational policy, and committee structure that outlines clearly the allocation of responsibilities for the management of standards. The committee structure is comprehensive and enables the College to manage its responsibilities in accordance with awarding body expectations relating to higher education standards. The College systems and processes are effective in identifying, and taking action on, matters of concern.

14   The College has a common system for managing higher education that responds and differentiates to take account of the requirements of its six awarding bodies. The operational processes are clearly understood by staff, students and employers and supported by a range of appropriate policies and procedures. This enables the College to deliver, consistently and effectively, a quality student experience which is maintained and monitored through the higher education committees. Heads of section meetings provide operational delivery support and advice to programme teams.

15   The College makes good use of a document management system to ensure that policy documents are consistent and are used universally by programme teams. Key policy documents are available to staff online on the College intranet. The effective use and implementation of assessment policy documents was highlighted during the Developmental engagement and this practice extends to all policies and procedures. This helps to ensure consistent practice across the higher education provision.

16   External examiner reports are sent either to programme teams or the Director of Higher Education. Similarly, awarding body feedback on responses to external examiner reports and other reports resulting from awarding body quality systems are sent to either programme teams or the Director of Higher Education. This offers the possibility of the

content of such reports not being examined systematically. The team considers it advisable that the College considers developing a policy and implementing a procedure to ensure that reports resulting from awarding body quality processes are received centrally by an identified role within the College prior to being circulated to programme teams for action or comment.

17   Annual monitoring reports are an effective tool for monitoring and enhancing all aspects of the higher education provision. The College has adapted its existing annual monitoring process to meet the needs of awarding partners. Annual monitoring reports are comprehensive and include an analysis of module and programme achievement data. The College further enhanced the annual reporting process during 2010-11 through the advanced lecturers adopting the role of a 'critical friend' to programme teams and providing feedback on draft annual monitoring reports.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

18   The College has taken appropriate account of all elements of the Academic Infrastructure. Higher education policies take account of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*; for example, the higher education assessment policy reflects the content of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* and provides a clear distinction between assessment strategy and assessment policy. Staff, students and employers demonstrated a clear understanding of the purpose of the Academic Infrastructure in general and the *Code of practice* and FHEQ in particular. This was evident in the operational practices adopted by programme teams and during discussions with students and employers who demonstrated a sound awareness of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*, and FHEQ. This was particularly evident through the long-standing employer involvement in developing the curriculum and assessment methods for FdSc Building Services Engineering, which helps to ensure that students have the opportunity to attain a range of employability and subject-specific skills. The team noted this as an example of good practice.

19   Following the Developmental engagement, programme specifications have been provided for all higher national programmes and these reflect the distinctive features of the programmes. The programme specifications indicate alignment of higher national programmes to relevant subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ.

How does the College assure itself that it is fulfilling its obligations to ensure that the standards of higher education provision meet the requirements of validating partners and awarding bodies?

20   The College assures itself that it is fulfilling its awarding bodies' expectations through oversight by the Higher Education Strategy Group and the Higher Education Management Group. The Director of Higher Education assisted by the Higher Education Manager has a key role in monitoring the effectiveness of the College's quality mechanisms to ensure awarding body requirements are met. The specific detail of each awarding body agreement has been summarised for staff who demonstrated a clear understanding of their responsibilities to their respective awarding body. There is substantial evidence to indicate close and effective working relationships with all six awarding bodies.

21   While the student written submission indicated that some part-time students identified little connection with their awarding body, current students reported that they had already attended induction and meetings with their awarding body. Students were aware of a wide range of learning resources provided by their awarding body, including virtual learning environments and library resources.

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

22   The College makes a significant investment in lecturers' preparation and assessment time by counting every higher education class contact hour as 1.2 towards their contractual total. The teaching contract requires new members of staff to achieve a recognised teaching qualification within two years of taking up the post. Staff who join without a teaching qualification enrol on the Diploma for Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector delivered by the College in partnership with Liverpool John Moores University. More than 95 per cent of staff teaching higher education have the Diploma or a higher teaching qualification.

23   In addition to the systematic reduction in annual teaching hours, the College allocates £26,000 per year for higher education-specific staff development and scholarly activity. The Higher Education Development budget, managed by the Director of Higher Education, is used imaginatively to enable staff to develop their practice, extend their subject knowledge, improve their qualifications, and develop the higher education curriculum. Funded activities can extend to the engagement of external practitioners on short-term contracts who provide specialist input to courses that benefit both the students and the staff, for example in the HNC Performing Arts. The College encourages legitimate requests for support for staff development. If a proposal cannot be paid for by the higher education development budget alone, it is co-financed by another department in the College. Staff development and scholarly activity are monitored by the Higher Education Management Group and College Staff Development Group, and are evaluated through the annual monitoring process. The funding of staff development activities is a feature of good practice.

24   The annual Higher Education Development Day and the biennial College Research Day provide staff with the opportunity to share practice and engage with colleagues in other academic institutions. The Academic Infrastructure has been a particular focus of staff development in collaboration with awarding partners. These well established events are supplemented with a section on higher education continuing professional and personal development, on the College virtual learning environment. The College anticipates that this site will grow as higher education teams use it as a resource and as a medium for sharing information, asking questions, and reporting on successful practice. Staff development and scholarly activity extend beyond those teaching students, to those who support students. There is a strong record of scholarly activity relating to disability and to dyslexia in particular. The College staff development activities, involving awarding body representatives and included as part of College Higher Education Research Days and Development Days to discuss pedagogic and scholarly themes, demonstrate good practice.

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

Core theme 2: Quality of learning opportunities

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

25   Responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities and the arrangements for reporting are clear and well understood by the College and awarding partners. The College is responsible for delivering the programmes using its own staff and resources and for maintaining the quality of its provision to meet the academic standards of the awarding bodies. Awarding bodies provide guidance, support, and prescribed access to their libraries and e-learning resources. The arrangements with Liverpool John Moores University are particularly helpful for students with many making extensive use of the University's library and online learning resources. Partnership agreements indicate that the College is responsible for setting assignments, arranging work placements, and dealing with appeals, complaints and student discipline. College higher education policies and procedures have been designed to take account of these responsibilities. Induction of new students is managed by the individual programme teams with specialist input from student services, including the Student Finance and Welfare Officer and the Learning Resource Centre Team. Where practicable, students visit their awarding partner university for induction into the University's learning resource centre and other services. Meeting minutes and reports confirm that appropriate structures and reporting systems ensure that learning opportunities are managed effectively.

26   The new Learning Exchange provides a central venue for many of the activities with higher education students that have previously taken place on separate sites across the city. The College enhanced the induction experience in 2011-12 with academic writing and referencing sessions for students and staff in the autumn term. Stage 1 academic appeals are dealt with by the College under its own higher education procedure. Student complaints against the College are dealt with appropriately under its own common procedure.

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

27   The College has a high level of autonomy in its management of the quality of learning opportunities for students. The mechanisms for assuring itself that it is fulfilling its obligations are discussed in paragraph 20. The College is wholly responsible for recruitment and admissions. Students are enrolled primarily with the College and, for award purposes, separately with the awarding partners. Incoming UCAS applications are managed directly by the Director of Higher Education's office. The system works effectively to track applicants, keep admissions tutors to UCAS deadlines, and update application information required by UCAS. Furthermore, it provides a level of control that is essential in preventing over-recruitment of full-time students.

28   Partners' requirements for work-based learning and the managing of placement learning are specific to each programme. The requirements are set out in the partnership agreements and in programme documents. There are distinct differences between the management of work-based learning in the case of students who have been released by their employers to attend College, for example, FdSc Dental Technology, FdSc Building Services Engineering, and FdA Early Years, and those who are full-time students on placement. Furthermore the full-time Foundation Degree students' work placement is fundamentally different from that of the BA (Hons) Social Work students, where the latter's placement in year two and year three are statutory requirements of their course. Work-based

learning is reviewed and action plans developed within annual monitoring reports. Employers were enthusiastic about their involvement with the College and felt that students benefited from work-based learning and from the College's organisation of it.

29   Higher education students have access to progression and careers guidance through student services at the College and, subject to the partnership agreement, through partner universities. In practice most students rely heavily on the advice and support of their teachers with 90 per cent of students surveyed in 2010-11 agreeing that continuing advice and guidance about progression to further study is helpful.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

30   The College is taking appropriate account of the precepts of the *Code of practice*, subject benchmark statements and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. Meetings with staff confirmed that lecturers teaching on higher education programmes are familiar with the Academic Infrastructure. Staff were able to show how relevant sections of the *Code of practice* had assisted in the development of a framework to inform their management of the assessment process in work-based learning. In particular, the significant input from employers in the FdSc Building Services Engineering is a feature of good practice.

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

31   The College mechanisms for assuring itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced are discussed in paragraph 20. Quality is managed efficiently and effectively through the higher education committee structure, which is designed to complement the arrangements for managing quality within awarding partner institutions.

32   The College undertakes higher education peer observation carried out within, and sometimes between, programme teams. It also observes teaching as part of the management of higher education, during which at suitable points in the observed session the observer takes feedback from students in the class. A new and enhanced form of observation, which will use higher education managers to identify good practice, make recommendations for development and make judgements about standards and the quality of learning opportunities, is planned for 2011-12.

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

33   The College expects students to attend all timetabled sessions, including tutorials, and maintains registers of attendance which can be viewed by the student, lecturers, personal tutors and managers through the College intranet. Individual student progress is discussed at programme team meetings and reported to heads of section. Faculties monitor attendance at course and programme level and report monthly to the Senior Management Team on courses where attendance has fallen below 80 per cent. An appropriate system is in place to follow up on non-attending students. Heads of section meet once a term with the assistant principals to review progress in relation to higher education courses causing concern.

34   The College Study Support for Students with Disabilities Team is a specialist team that provides support for students with specific medical, learning and physical needs. This includes working proactively to identify students who may require specialised support over a wide range of areas including autism, dyslexia, physical disabilities, hearing or visual

impairment, and mental health problems. The team also provides individual in-class and personal care support to students who would benefit from this. The College actively supports this service by enabling team members to update their skills through participation in appropriate staff development and continuing professional and personal development activities. Students are highly appreciative of the proactive nature and level of support they receive, which demonstrates good practice.

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

35   The College arrangements for staff development to maintain and enhance the quality of learning opportunities are discussed in paragraphs 22 to 24.

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?

36   The Learning Exchange houses the College's largest learning resource centre. The building has three distinct areas for student use: a silent study floor, a quiet area where tutors can bring their classes to do research, and a large 'social learning' space where group work and social activities can take place. These arrangements provide a significant improvement to the learning resources for students and the teaching resources for staff. However, students reported limited opening times and access difficulties due to the proximity of their primary site of study or the block release nature of their course. Discussions with staff indicated that while students' perceptions with regard to access and opening times are unfounded, the team considers it desirable for the College to review existing processes to ensure that all higher education students are fully aware of access arrangements to, and opening hours of, the facilities and resources provided in the Learning Exchange.

37   The learning resource centre within the Learning Exchange provides a wide and appropriate range of learning resources for students. Staff and students can make requests for new stock, and the centre regularly puts on promotional displays and events to publicise available resources to users. The library catalogue provides information on where materials are located and shows images of book covers to make them easier to find on the shelf. Electronic resources are directly accessible from the catalogue through the internet and can be viewed online or downloaded from either the student intranet or the College virtual learning environment. Students may book a computer in advance through telephoning the Learning Resource Centre, using the online booking system or calling in person.

38   Support is available to students through an effective induction programme which offers three levels of support including a general overview, a subject-specific induction, and an e-resources induction. The Learning Resource Centre Team also offer bespoke training to groups of College staff on the resources available to their students, including an introduction to using e-books and support for using the College virtual learning environment. The Learning Resource Centre Team has taken up a variety of staff development opportunities to enhance their skills and enable them to support staff and students, including teaching and information technology qualifications, management qualifications, and customer service training. The team has also recently restructured their department. Supervisory grade staff now have a named faculty to support, giving teaching staff one point of contact regarding resources and training for their subject area. 'Roving support' is offered to users, meaning that staff are timetabled to 'rove' around a section of the Learning Resource Centre and be on hand to support staff and students as required at the point of usage.

> **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?

39   The College is responsible for publishing marketing, promotional, and programme material in accordance with its partnership agreements. The College does not produce a hard copy higher education prospectus. Information for prospective applicants is held in an operating system called the Electronic Student Prospectus on the College's website. Students indicated that this is insufficiently detailed but that they are able to obtain the information they need by telephoning the contact numbers provided. The College acknowledges that the Electronic Student Prospectus is no longer fit for purpose because it imposes strict limitations on the amount of information it carries per programme and does not allow links to other sites or illustrations. This makes for a bland and less detailed presentation than is desired. The College is in the process of migrating the higher education prospectus to a different system to overcome these shortcomings.

40   Programme information sheets are downloaded from the Electronic Student Prospectus for use at open and UCAS promotional events, thus effectively ensuring consistent, up to date information is provided and version control is easily managed. If programme leaders obtain permission, leaflets may be produced as in the case of the FdA Fashion and Clothing Technology and the FdA Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector. These must be approved by the awarding body and the College Marketing Group for house style and format check. The Higher Education Manager sits on the group and is therefore able to monitor the accuracy of the leaflet information.

41   At entry, the College provides all higher education students with a comprehensive programme pack comprising a programme handbook, module handbooks, and a useful College Student Higher Education Handbook which contains information about finance, support for learning and student services, advice, and guidance. A programme specification, assessment strategy, and schedule are included along with web links to College policies, procedures, and awarding partner regulations. These publications are also available through the virtual learning environment.

42   Employer information and mentor handbooks are produced to support students undertaking placement or work-based learning. These are comprehensive, high quality booklets outlining the responsibilities of the employer, mentor and student, as well as detailed assessment information and a learning agreement. The good practice noted in the Developmental engagement regarding the comprehensive mentor handbook provided by the FdA Early Years has been incorporated into the new work-based learning checklist, which will take effect from October 2011 to ensure a uniform approach and quality of experience across all higher education programmes with a work-related component.

43   The College's virtual learning environment continues to develop. The team saw good examples of its use for submission of assessments and provision of programme information for students off-site or who had missed sessions, but practice across programmes is variable. Students have access to the virtual learning environment of the

awarding university but some expressed confusion with regard to which one to use when both that of the College and the University are in use.

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?

44   Information for the Electronic Student Prospectus is provided by programme leaders. In the cases of awards conferred by university partners, all marketing and promotional material must comply with the terms of the partnership agreements and be approved before publication. Only the Director of Higher Education and the Student Services Manager have authority to upload programme information. Throughout the year, the Director of Higher Education is responsible for checking the Electronic Student Prospectus for accuracy and completeness, and updates as necessary. In addition, the Student Services Manager holds an annual meeting with heads of section to review all information prior to re-publication. This provides an effective mechanism for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information the College has responsibility for publishing.

45   There is differing practice in the production of the student handbooks. In the case of Manchester Metropolitan University, a template is provided into which the programme team places its own information while for engineering programmes awarded by Liverpool Hope University the handbooks are developed during the validation process. In all cases, handbooks must be approved by the awarding University. Handbooks for higher national awards in engineering and construction are modelled on that produced for FdSc Building Services Engineering but other higher national programme handbooks have different formats and vary in detail. Heads of section are responsible for checking accuracy and completeness of handbooks in their area. The team considers it desirable that the College looks at adopting a uniform approach to producing higher national student handbooks to ensure all higher education students are receiving consistent, accurate information.

46   Teaching staff are responsible for maintaining and updating their own programme sites on the virtual learning environment. The opening of the new building has provided an opportunity to deliver staff training on the virtual learning environment and drop-in sessions are available. There is little evidence of quality audit of material on the virtual learning environment. The College does not have a clear e-learning policy which sets out the minimum expectations for use and content, or the continuing provision of training for staff and students. The team considers it desirable that the College looks at developing and implementing an e-learning policy to enable the virtual learning environment to be used to its full potential consistently across all higher education programmes.

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 lines of enquiry for the first Developmental engagement agreed with the College in advance of the team's visit were:

Line of enquiry 1: In managing assessment, how effective is the College in maintaining consistent academic standards across the provision?

Line of enquiry 2: How does the College assure itself that its assessment strategy is understood and embraced by staff and applied consistently to enhance learning and enable progression?

Line of enquiry 3: How does the College ensure that clear and accurate information on assessment is communicated effectively to every student and to other parties who have a legitimate interest in receiving it?

48   In the course of the Developmental engagement, the team identified several areas of **good practice**:

- the inclusive approach adopted by the College of consulting staff in developing a coherent set of assessment policies and procedures to ensure consistent practice across the higher education provision
- the use of the College Higher Education Development Fund in contributing to the maintenance of consistent academic standards across the provision
- the development of comprehensive assessment strategies for the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector and the FdSc Building Services Engineering
- the use of the virtual learning environment by the FdSc Information Technology programme team to encourage students to submit work online for assessment
- the comprehensive handbook provided by the FdA Early Years Practice programme team for workplace mentors that clearly explains the structure of the programme, the mentor's role, and the assessment schedule, together with a pro forma for recording meetings between students and mentors.

49   The team also indicated that it was **desirable** for the College to take action on five points:

- explore the role of the annual Higher Education Development Day as a means of effectively disseminating good practice across the higher education provision to maintain consistent academic standards
- ensure that all student programme packs contain an assessment strategy in accordance with College expectations
- ensure across all programmes that assessment feedback is legible and provided to students in a timely manner in accordance with awarding body and College expectations
- provide potential students with alternative or additional ways of receiving comprehensive information on teaching, learning and assessment at an early stage
- consider developing and extending the virtual learning environment to communicate assessment information between staff and students and to share good practice in assessment within and across programme areas.

50   The College provided as part of its evidence base for the Summative review an updated Developmental engagement action plan which clearly indicated that an effective and appropriate mechanism is in place to ensure that the action plan will be taken to a full and successful conclusion.

D   Foundation Degrees

51   As noted in paragraph 6, the College offers 11 Foundation Degrees in partnership with five awarding partners. Foundation Degrees have been designed to respond to the needs of local and national business. Students in building services, dental technology, and early years are already employed in their subject areas. Full-time Foundation Degree students obtain substantive work placements as part of their programme, and programme annual reports indicate that the majority move into work or continue to study using progression routes provided by the awarding partner. The employer-funded Foundation Degree in Building Services Engineering is cited by the employer as having made a significant contribution to the success of the company.

52   While the College has no plans to expand directly funded higher education, additional Foundation Degrees will be developed to meet the needs of students and business where they can be funded. The College intends to maintain priority provision in existing subject areas and any new Foundation Degrees will build on strengths in the further education curriculum and provide pathways for progression.

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

- staff, students and employers demonstrate a high level of awareness of the way in which the Academic Infrastructure has been used to inform College policy relating to student assessment, placement, and work-based learning (paragraph 18)
- employer involvement in developing the curriculum and assessment methods for FdSc Building Services Engineering helps to ensure that students have the opportunity to attain a range of employability and subject-specific skills (paragraphs 18, 28 and 30)
- staff development activities which are funded by the College and activities involving awarding body representatives which are included as part of College Higher Education Research Days and Development Days promote discussion of pedagogic and scholarly themes (paragraphs 23 and 24)
- the proactive nature of the Student Financial Advice and Support Services ensures that students and staff are provided with up to date advice and guidance on a comprehensive range of support relating to disability and inclusive learning (paragraphs 25 and 34).

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

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

- consider developing a policy and implementing a procedure to ensure that reports resulting from awarding body quality processes are received centrally by an identified role within the College prior to being circulated to programme teams for action or comment (paragraph 16).

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

* review existing processes to ensure that all higher education students are fully aware of access arrangements to, and opening hours of, the facilities and resources provided in the Learning Exchange (paragraph 36)
* consider developing and implementing an e-learning policy to enable the virtual learning environment to be used to its full potential consistently across all higher education programmes (paragraph 46).

E   Conclusions and summary of judgements

57   The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in the 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 De Montfort University, Edge Hill University, Edexcel, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool John Moores University and Manchester Metropolitan University.

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

* staff, students and employers demonstrate a high level of awareness of the way in which the Academic Infrastructure has been used to inform College policy relating to student assessment, placement, and work-based learning (paragraph 18)
* employer involvement in developing the curriculum and assessment methods for the FdSc Building Services Engineering helps to ensure that students have the opportunity to attain a range of employability and subject specific-skills (paragraphs 18, 28 and 30)
* staff development activities which are funded by the College and activities involving awarding body representatives which are included as part of College Higher Education Research Days and Development Days promote discussion of pedagogic and scholarly themes (paragraphs 23 and 24)
* the proactive nature of the Student Financial Advice and Support Services ensures that students and staff are provided with up to date advice and guidance on a comprehensive range of support relating to disability and inclusive learning (paragraphs 25 and 34).

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

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

* consider developing a policy and implementing a procedure to ensure that reports resulting from awarding body quality processes are received centrally by an identified role within the College prior to being circulated to programme teams for action or comment (paragraph 16).

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

* review existing processes to ensure that all higher education students are fully aware of access arrangements to and opening hours of the facilities and resources provided in the Learning Exchange (paragraph 36)

- consider adopting a uniform approach to producing higher national student handbooks to ensure all higher education students are receiving consistent, accurate information (paragraph 45)
- considers developing and implementing an e-learning policy to enable the virtual learning environment to be used to its full potential consistently across all higher education programmes (paragraph 46).

62   Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, 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.

63   Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, 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.

64   Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, 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.

Liverpool Community College action plan relating to the Summative review: October 2011						
Good practice	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
In the course of the Summative review the team identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
• staff, students and employers demonstrate a high level of awareness of the way in which the Academic Infrastructure has been used to inform College policy relating to student assessment, placement, and work-based learning (paragraph 18)	Provide employers and partners with College higher education policy update report with space for comments and recommendations	May 2012	Higher education manager with programme leaders	Improved communication with employers and partners and continued confidence in the effectiveness and propriety of policies and procedures	Higher education management group and WBL operations group	Higher education annual monitoring reports at programme and college level Employer feedback; partner feedback
	Review the higher education student handbook and charter for content in respect of higher education policies and procedures	June 2012	Higher education manager	Students will understand how College policies and procedures differ from, and articulate with, those of the partner institutions		Student feedback
• employer involvement in developing the curriculum and assessment	Extend established good practice in Building Services with this large employer to to new and developing	July 2013	Director of higher education with Director of Business Development and	Students in employment or placement will acquire skills that improve their	Higher education strategy group Employment Engagement	Higher education annual monitoring reports College self-

methods for FdSc Building Services Engineering helps to ensure that students have the opportunity to attain a range of employability and subject-specific skills (paragraphs 18, 28 and 30)	relationships with other large employers as part of the overall strategy for business development in the College		Assistant Principal	opportunities for employment or advancement in the workplace The College will increase the volume and proportion of students in work-based higher education with significant employers	Management Group	assessment review
• staff development activities which are funded by the College and activities involving awarding body representatives which are included as part of College Higher Education Research Days and Development Days promote discussion of pedagogic and scholarly themes (paragraphs 23 and 24)	Clear the teaching diary for College Research Day 2013 Site the event in the Learning Exchange	April 2012	Director of higher education with Vice Principal	Every higher education practitioner will be free to attend in a venue large enough to accommodate	Senior Management Team	Higher education annual monitoring reports Staff development annual report

• the proactive nature of the Student Financial Advice and Support Services ensures that students and staff are provided with up to date advice and guidance on a comprehensive range of support relating to disability and inclusive learning (paragraphs 25 and 34)	Enhance the appearance, layout and content of the higher education Handbook Incorporate information into the student intranet and new website	June 2012 June 2012	Student Finance and Welfare Officer Webmaster	This will form part of an improved set of documents that make up the Course Information Pack (and see higher national student handbooks below)	Higher education management group

Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is **advisable** for the College to:						
• consider developing a policy and implementing a procedure to ensure that reports resulting from awarding body quality processes are received centrally by an identified role within the College prior to being circulated to programme teams for action or comment (paragraph 16).	Notify all partners that external reports must be addressed to the Director of Higher Education Amend the College policy for assuring the quality of assessment to specify that all external examiners' reports must come to programme teams via the Director of higher education and that external report action plans and responses to external examiners are approved by the Director of higher education	January 2012	Director of higher education	Clear lines of reporting for external reports through higher education Director and into higher education Committees	Higher education Strategy Group Higher education Management Group	Higher education annual monitoring reports

Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is **desirable** for the College to:						
• review existing processes to ensure that all higher education students are fully aware of access arrangements to and opening hours of the facilities and resources provided in the Learning Exchange (paragraph 36)	Place signage in the learning resource centre Notification through the student intranet Review learning resource centre staffing requirements	January 2012 February 2012 July 2012	Learning resource centre Manager with higher education Manager Learning resource centre Manager with higher education Manager Learning resource centre Manager and Director of higher education and Vice Principal	Higher education students will be clear about library opening times for browsing and taking out items on loan College will be in a position to set staffing budgets for 2013 which take account of the needs of higher education students	Higher education Management Group Higher education Strategy Group	Higher education annual monitoring reports Student feedback
• consider adopting a uniform approach to producing higher national student handbooks to ensure all higher education students are	Establish a template for higher national Handbooks together with a set of minimum standards for content and production quality	February 2012	Higher education Manager with programme teams	This will be finalised at the higher education Development Day in February to enable production by June 2012	Higher education Management Group Marketing Management Group	Higher education Annual Monitoring Reports Student feedback

receiving consistent, accurate information (paragraph 45)						
• consider developing and implementing an e-learning policy to enable the virtual learning environment to be used to its full potential consistently across all higher education programmes (paragraph 46)	Establish minimum requirements for placing programme information on the virtual learning environment in respect of content and assessment	February 2012	Higher education Manager with programme teams	This will be finalised at the higher education Development Day in February to enable implementation by June 2012	Higher education Management Group Teaching and Learning Management Group	Higher education Annual Monitoring Reports Student feedback