Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

Lowestoft College

March 2012

SR 048/12

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* (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 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 Lowestoft College carried out in March 2012

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 additional layer of quality assurance of students' assessed work provides further insight into the effectiveness by which tutors engage with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*
- the specific budget to encourage further education lecturers to acquire teaching skills appropriate to the delivery of the higher education programmes.

Recommendations

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

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

- review the strategies for the use of the virtual learning environments and new software to stimulate further interactive teaching and learning opportunities for students
- review its policies for the access, regulation and control of information exchanged between staff and students using social and other networks.

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 Lowestoft College (the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the College discharges its responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes which the College delivers on behalf of the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex. The review was carried out by Ms Heather Barrett-Mold, Mr David Eastwood, Mr Rob Mason (reviewers) and Mr Robert Hodgkinson (coordinator).

2   The Summative review team (the team) conducted the review in agreement with the College and in accordance with *The handbook for Integrated quality and enhancement review* (the handbook), published by QAA. Evidence in support of the Summative review included documentation supplied by the College, meetings with staff, students and awarding bodies, reports of reviews by QAA, and from inspections by Ofsted. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagement in assessment. A summary of findings from this Developmental engagement is provided in Section C of this report. The review also considered the College's use of the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers, with reference to the *Code of practice,* subject and award benchmark statements*,* the 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   Lowestoft College is a medium-sized general further education college serving the district of Waveney in North-East Suffolk. It is a community college in an area of educational and social deprivation. Its main areas of provision include health and public services, engineering, construction, retailing and commercial enterprise, and preparation for life and work. There are 1,268 further education students aged 16 to 18 and 1,052 over 19 years of age. The College's employer-responsive provision attracts over 1,000 students and this forms a substantial part of its work. The higher education programmes are offered as part of the University Campus Suffolk and validated jointly by the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex. University Campus Suffolk is a joint venture between the University of Essex and the University of East Anglia, established as an equal partnership and officially launched on 1 August 2007. The venture is conducted through a private company limited by guarantee (University Campus Suffolk Ltd), with the universities as the sole members. The College has 291 higher education students, of whom 176 are full-time and 115 part-time, amounting to about 225.6 full-time equivalents. Of these there are 16 full-time students studying at foundation level which is validated separately by the University of East Anglia.

5   The current higher education awards, with the relevant awarding bodies (full-time equivalent student numbers in brackets), are as follows.

University of East Anglia and the University of Essex (joint)

- BA (Hons) Children's Care Learning and Development (23.7)
- BA (Hons) Design (15)
- BA (Hons) Design (Design Crafts) (9)
- BA (Hons) Design (Graphic and Typographic Design) (9)
- BA (Hons) Inclusive Practice and Integrated Working (15.7)

- BA (Hons) Leadership and Management (4)
- FdA Business Management (4)
- FdA Children's Care Learning and Development (56)
- FdA Football Development and Coaching (5)
- FdSc Operations Engineering (31.6)
- BEng (Hons) Operations Engineering (4.5)
- FdA Supporting Inclusive Learning and Practice (25)
- Cert HE in Social Pedagogy (8.7)
- PGCE/CertEd (Lifelong Learning Sector) (14.5)

University of East Anglia

- UEA Foundation Year - Science and Computing (non-University Campus Suffolk programme) (16)

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

6   The University Campus Suffolk Framework Collaborative Agreement between the two awarding bodies, the University Campus Suffolk and its five learning network colleges defines the operational responsibilities of the College. The awarding bodies are responsible for programme approval and alignment with the Academic Infrastructure, validation, acceptance of applications, ensuring common standards, moderation, final assessment and award, regular meetings to monitor quality and the process of annual evaluation, and continual improvement of academic outcomes. The College is responsible for programme delivery, assessment and internal moderation, the quality of teaching and learning, application of the awarding bodies' standards, regular internal monitoring of quality, and compliance with awarding body requirements for annual evaluation and review.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

7   The Lowestoft College Vision and Strategic Objectives were revised recently as a result of a comprehensive consultation process with stakeholders. Recent changes to the provision include the addition of progression years for two Foundation Degree programmes and the suspension of recruitment in 2011-12 of two other programmes. In addition, the BA (Hons) Design programmes have been revalidated. The recent revalidation of Access to Higher Education programmes has given staff the opportunity to plan and develop more effective in-house progression routes. A Higher Education Section Manager has been appointed to the higher education management team.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

8   Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the team. A former higher education student governor supported by the Higher Education Admissions Officer was responsible for gathering evidence from students for the submission. It was written to reflect the common themes emerging from the discussions with students. Questions were devised and were based on the guidance given by the Head of Higher Education and on consultation with QAA documentation. All participating students were made aware of the purpose of the discussions and questions and were involved in reviewing the final document. During the visit the students were given the opportunity to expand on some of the points that were made in the submission. Their evidence was of value to the team.

B   Evaluation of the management of HEFCE-funded higher education

Core theme 1: Academic standards

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

9   The collaborative agreements between the two awarding bodies, the University Campus Suffolk and its five learning network colleges clearly define the operational responsibilities of the College for managing and delivering higher education academic standards. They identify the structure and scope of the collaboration between the partners. They describe each partner's role in a range of processes and procedures that include their responsibility for quality assurance, programme management, student recruitment, admissions, and support. Additional College responsibilities are reflected in a range of University Campus Suffolk policies, procedures and other documentation, for example in the assessment and moderation policies and teaching and learning strategies. These policies and other documents have been developed in conjunction with the two awarding bodies and appropriately reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice*.

10   The responsibility for the management of academic standards is clearly defined at all levels. The Vice Principal Curriculum and Standards has overall strategic responsibility for the provision. Operational responsibility lies with the Head of Higher Education with the support of the Higher Education Section Manager. The Assistant Principal Quality Improvement and Learner Services oversees the management of the higher education quality assurance processes. At programme level course leaders are responsible for the management of their teaching teams, programme development, teaching and learning, and assessment. A link governor for higher education provides an effective communication mechanism between the governing body, staff and students.

11   The College is represented by its staff on a range of University Campus Suffolk committees and groups. This allows it to contribute effectively and to influence decision making. There is good communication and cooperation between the College and University Campus Suffolk. This is further enhanced by the attendance of University Campus Suffolk staff at College meetings including its Higher Education Forum and at self-assessment reviews. Regular email, telephone and face-to-face contact ensure that communications are good. Programmes that are jointly operated with University Campus Suffolk have a coordinator to enhance communication. When proposing the development of any new provision, College staff adhere to University Campus Suffolk's course approval process.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

12   The College's engagement with the Academic Infrastructure is reflected in its use of University Campus Suffolk's policies and procedures. These have been developed in conjunction with the two awarding bodies and its network colleges. They have been mapped to the *Code of practice* and align with the FHEQ, the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, and relevant subject benchmark statements. Annually, University Campus Suffolk's committees, including its Policy and Procedures Working Group (a sub-group of its Joint Academic Committee), review these policies on a rolling basis. The Partnership Management Team at University Campus Suffolk is responsible for approving and signing off the mapping of these policies and procedures to the Academic Infrastructure. This process ensures that documentation engages with the Academic Infrastructure and is

current. All validations and revalidations of programmes are also expected to engage with the Academic Infrastructure.

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?

13   The collaboration agreement and associated University Campus Suffolk documents clarify what is expected of the College in meeting standards. The College's higher education quality framework cycle clearly illustrates the processes for the annual monitoring and review of its programmes. This includes the timing of the meetings of the Higher Education Forum, lesson observations, student surveys, and the assessment processes. The framework provides a timetable for the consideration of issues by the Higher Education Forum. Staff find this helpful in identifying the sequence and timing of the quality assurance processes.

14   University Campus Suffolk and the awarding bodies prescribe the policies and procedures that relate to academic standards. College staff at all levels are involved in and demonstrate an understanding of the related processes. Staff refer to the Academic Staff Handbook of the University Campus Suffolk, accessed through its virtual learning environment, to refresh their knowledge of relevant policies and procedures. The Academic Staff Handbook assists them in the planning and delivery of module content and in the validation of programmes.

15   The College's Higher Education Forum is responsible for the oversight and monitoring of academic standards and the implementation of the policies and procedures of University Campus Suffolk. Its role is evolving and it is making satisfactory progress in influencing academic standards. Its terms of reference include the development and promotion of staff development and the consideration of innovations in teaching and learning. The Forum, chaired by the Head of Higher Education, meets every two months. Its membership includes senior managers, course tutors, student representatives, and marketing and administration staff. A representative from University Campus Suffolk and the two validating universities also attend. The Forum reports to the College's Academic Board that in turn informs the College's Senior Management and the Governors. The Developmental engagement recommended that the Forum should widen its remit to consider the outcomes of assessment processes and dissemination of good assessment practice. Scrutiny of forum minutes confirms that these recommendations have been addressed satisfactorily.

16   The informal identification and dissemination of good practice is widespread. Examples include the use of discussions in peer lesson observations and the review of self-assessments by peers. Formal arrangements are less well developed and the College is working towards the development of more systematic procedures for the dissemination of good practice. An informal good practice interest group has been set up to promote and to disseminate scholarship and research. It is expected to identify areas that could further enhance academic standards and the quality of learning. Opportunities are also available for staff to attend awarding body good practice events.

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

17   Under the direction of the Assistant Principal Quality Improvement and Learner Services, staff development policy for higher education is well embedded and effectively operated across the College. Staff development is informed through the

self-assessment review and evaluation process that requires the programme teams to complete an annual review and evaluation of each of its programmes. Teams are expected to consider the effectiveness of staff development and its enhancement as part of these reviews. The teaching observation and the peer observation scheme allow the College to identify good practice and areas for future development that can enhance teaching and learning. The consideration of staff development and its monitoring form the basis of individual staff personal development planning. The College and University Campus Suffolk hold generic training events. These include professional development workshops and online training opportunities. The responsibilities for staff development demonstrated in the College and University Campus Suffolk responses to staff needs are well embedded and operate effectively.

18   The College's Higher Education Strategy indicates a commitment to supporting staff in developing and enhancing their understanding and knowledge. It is generous in its financial support for the many opportunities that are provided. These include attendance at conferences, collaborative partner meetings, workshops on electronic learning, and development activities relating to the content of modules, their assessment and the marking of dissertations.

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?

19   The responsibilities for the management of the quality of learning opportunities and reporting arrangements are detailed in paragraphs 9 to 11. The validating universities' Joint Academic Committee monitors the quality of learning at the College. The Vice Principal Curriculum and Standards represents the College on this committee. Its outcomes are reported to the Head of Higher Education who informs the course leaders. The College makes reference to a number of University Campus Suffolk policies and guidelines to maintain and manage the quality of learning opportunities. These include validation documents, policies for tutorials, the management of programmes, academic appeals, and the accreditation of prior learning. The central and local monitoring of these policies ensures that they are followed and confirms that the College's procedures are effective. Through a formal notification process, University Campus Suffolk ensures that College staff are kept well informed of updates and additions to documents. These structures and processes work well and enable the College to discharge its responsibilities.

20   The College's self-assessment review and evaluation process follows University Campus Suffolk's guidelines and uses generic templates and formats. Evidence used to make quality judgements includes external examiners' reports, assessment outcomes, module evaluations, student feedback, and performance data. The process effectively considers the maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards and the management of the quality of learning opportunities. The reviews are, in the main, evaluative and promote self-reflection. Programme self-assessment reports are peer-reviewed annually by the programme teams, students, employers, University Campus Suffolk's staff, the awarding body representatives, and College governors. Staff value the peer review process.

A college-wide self-assessment report, collated from the individual programme reviews, is produced for approval by University Campus Suffolk. After approval the College produces an improvement plan that is subject to regular monitoring and review, at programme and College level.

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

21   The quality assurance arrangements described in paragraphs 13 to 16 are also used by the College to ensure the appropriateness of the learning opportunities. The College has a variety of mechanisms for maintaining an effective dialogue about students' learning opportunities with University Campus Suffolk and its awarding bodies. These include annual reviews and university committees with College staff membership. Regular communications take place at programme level, including cross-partner programme meetings, at cross-centre events, and during staff development. Management information and student data is readily available from the College and University Campus Suffolk. It is used effectively for monitoring the quality of learning opportunities. This information is used for retention analysis, investigating trends, for resource planning, and as a source of information for the self-assessment reports.

22   The previous generic external examiner reports were addressed to the University Campus Suffolk's network of colleges, but these have now been revised. Programme teams are now able to identify recommendations and areas of good practice that are specific to their programmes. This has been welcomed by the teaching staff. External examiners' reports confirm that the assessment processes and the academic standards of the provision are appropriate. It is each programme team's responsibility to reply to external examiner reports. Following the receipt of the reports, action plans are completed and monitored by course leaders, the Head of Higher Education and University Campus Suffolk. The processes are transparent and work well.

23   There are comprehensive and effective moderation procedures to check and ensure that the information provided to students on their assignments is up to date, consistent and accurate. A cross-moderation process for programmes with shared provision in other network colleges promotes consistency and provides an effective forum for staff to debate and share good practice. The College has introduced an additional quality assurance process using an adaptation of QAA's student work assessment note forms. Its aim is to review a sample of student-assessed work and related documentation from every tutor. It allows senior College staff, including the Head of Higher Education, to gain additional insight into the effectiveness by which tutors engage with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*. This new initiative has added an extra layer of scrutiny to the quality assurance processes and the team concludes it is good practice.

24   The scrutiny of College and awarding body reports, as well as discussion with representatives of the awarding bodies, confirms that the College is meeting its reporting requirements in respect of the quality of learning opportunities and its collaboration agreements.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

25   Programme teams are informed of updates and changes to the *Code of practice* through a variety of formal and informal methods. As part of the staff development process there are annual briefings by the University Campus Suffolk, an electronic University Campus Suffolk newsletter, frequent emails from University Campus Suffolk's Head of

Academic Partnerships, and feedback by the College staff to University Campus Suffolk's committees. Programme teams are responsible for updating programme specifications and unit handbooks, using the Academic Infrastructure as a valuable reference point. These methods provide an effective means by which the College's staff maintain their currency with the Academic Infrastructure and its precepts.

26   The College ensures that the Academic Infrastructure is given a high profile by staff delivering the provision. This is supported through staff development events to increase the awareness of its use and implementation. Staff have attended specific training on all aspects of the Academic Infrastructure and continue to receive support and guidance from the awarding bodies and University Campus Suffolk. The Academic Infrastructure is reinforced in University Campus Suffolk's and College committee meetings, and in the documentation used by tutors to inform learning opportunities. Tutors also use the FHEQ to ensure that learning outcomes are set to the appropriate level of study. Academic standards are in general well understood, as are the benchmarks for Foundation Degrees and for specific subjects. The team concludes that the College engages effectively with the Academic Infrastructure to enhance the quality of learning opportunities offered to students.

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

27   The College has applied a range of University Campus Suffolk policies and strategies to ensure a high quality learning experience for its students. These include a Teaching and Learning Strategy, an Assessment Strategy, and a Tutorial Policy. An Academic Handbook details the responsibilities of teaching staff and is available in the virtual learning environment. The College is represented at University Campus Suffolk's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Group meetings that discuss and make recommendations for the development of teaching and learning. These are disseminated to programme teams at staff development events. Chaired by the Head of Higher Education, the College's Higher Education Forum promotes the discussion and enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning. The remit of the Forum has been expanded to include the monitoring and sharing of teaching and learning good practice and scholarly activity. In its recent minutes the sharing of good practice is highlighted as a significant item of discussion. The quality of teaching is analysed within the self-assessment reports and planned actions are identified. Students confirm that teaching and staff knowledge of their subject is generally good.

28   To improve the operational management of teacher education programmes, University Campus Suffolk has set up a learning network management group as part of its Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills Operations Group. The Assistant Principal Quality Improvement and Learner Services represents the College at these meetings. Their purpose is to implement common management processes for teacher education programmes. This is proving to be effective.

29   The College employs effective systems of peer and management observation of its teaching on a biannual basis. These use University Campus Suffolk's standard template and guidelines. The results are held centrally on the College's electronic management system. The outcomes of lesson observations are copied to the University Campus Suffolk's Head of Quality. The college-wide management observation of teaching scheme is the responsibility of the Assistant Principal Quality Improvement and Learner Services and provides an effective basis for annual staff progress reviews, generic updating of staff skills development, and personal development planning.

30   There are numerous opportunities for students to express their views and for the College to provide them with feedback. In accordance with the requirements of University

Campus Suffolk the College is expected to collect and analyse students' opinions, which it does both formally and informally. These include post-module and post-programme evaluations and the results of the National Student Survey. The students are represented at programme meetings, the Higher Education Forums and the self-assessment review and evaluation meetings. A student governor represents the higher education provision on the College's Board of Governors. The students confirm that their views are listened to and acted upon and that staff are responsive to their needs. The use of 'You said - We did' feedback, posted college-wide, confirms that the College is responsive to student views, including feedback on the National Student Survey.

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

31   There is effective support for students' academic and pastoral needs, and students speak highly of this. University Campus Suffolk's and College policies and procedures are well designed to support students throughout their learning. There is a suite of handbooks for students that include information on the College and the University Campus Suffolk as well as specific programme information that includes policies, procedures, access to support, plagiarism, learning outcomes, and grading criteria. Clearly designed and effective recruitment procedures operate, with well defined entry criteria and interview processes. These include informing students of the study opportunities that they can expect for a chosen programme. Prior to starting their programme there is good support, advice and guidance offered to students. Most students have individual discussions with a tutor prior to entry. In the early part of their first semester a learning adviser meets with all new students to identify individual concerns about their programme of study. The preliminary information offered to students is also available in the University Campus Suffolk applicants' portal. The advice offered to students during the pre-enrolment interview process and the guidance provided by tutors ensures that they are well prepared for study. Students value the support provided for them.

32   Students are provided with effective career and progression advice and guidance. There are specific careers advice sessions provided by University Campus Suffolk's careers guidance staff and employers. A common personal development module is offered for those students studying Foundation Degrees and the Certificate of Higher Education programmes. This provides opportunities for self-reflection on students' performance and for the attainment of study skills. Study skills support is offered, as needed, through specific sessions and the learning resource centre study skills team. This support is seen as very important by students as the majority of them hold non-traditional qualifications and are returning to study. The students are fully aware that additional support is available to them and are well informed about its availability. For students undertaking work-based learning, mentor handbooks clarify the support expected of mentors. Dissertation handbooks give clear and detailed guidance to support achievement. Specific dissertation guidance sessions are offered to students prior to their dissertation module.

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

33   The College's Higher Education Strategy expresses a commitment to support staff in developing and enhancing their understanding and knowledge. It recognises the need to support continued professional development, scholarly activity and the updating of professional skills. This commitment is evidenced in the staff development budget allocation for staff delivering higher education. The College has recently allocated a specific budget to encourage its further education lecturers to acquire teaching skills appropriate to the delivery of the higher education programmes. The team considers this represents good practice.

34   University Campus Suffolk offers a variety of training events for College staff. The College's Higher Education Forum promotes staff development activities. In addition the opportunities to pursue relevant academic and higher education-related qualifications are well supported. Staff research relating to education is disseminated through a Celebration of Research event at which staff are invited to present their research to the University Campus Suffolk's research colloquium. The College has recently initiated a higher education good practice group to discuss education-related research as it affects the delivery of learning and teaching. These initiatives are expected to further enhance the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students.

How does the College ensure the sufficiency and accessibility of the learning resources the students need to achieve the intended learning outcomes for their programmes?

35   The College's self-assessment, review and evaluation process identifies staffing and staff development needs for the forthcoming academic year. University Campus Suffolk approves the qualifications and experience of new teaching staff. Their curriculum vitae are checked annually to monitor scholarly activity and the acquisition of further qualifications. Students confirm that teaching staff use their skills and knowledge to help them develop their academic knowledge and practical skills.

36   Programme committees, student feedback and the Higher Education Forum monitor and identify potential resources for updating. Recent improvements to the physical environment include a significant increase in the budget allocated to the learning resource centre for higher education provision. There is increased access to computers and a dedicated higher education study area. Students are now able to use their own laptop computers on-site or borrow them from the learning resource centre. The BA (Hons) Design degrees have benefited from a new dedicated information technology studio and from substantial investment in other resources such as a high specification laser cutter.

37   In the past students have experienced problems in accessing the University Campus Suffolk virtual learning environment which is predominantly used as an electronic storage facility for student learning materials. Most of these problems have now been resolved with the introduction of University Campus Suffolk's new intranet system that replaces the former virtual learning environment. It provides access to information about programmes, module details, careers advice, library access, study skills support, and a student information directory. It is too early to gauge its effectiveness. There is a lack of widespread opportunities for staff to provide and for students to use interactive learning in their studies. It is recommended as desirable that the College review its strategies for the use of the virtual learning environments and new software to stimulate further interactive teaching and learning opportunities for students.

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?

38   The responsibility for providing public information is divided between the awarding bodies, University Campus Suffolk and the College. The College's responsibility for publishing public information is defined clearly by the collaboration agreement. This is supplemented by a University Campus Suffolk publicity protocol. The College produces website content, programme handbooks, work-based and work-enhanced documentation, module handbooks, and programme specifications, all of which are subject to approval by University Campus Suffolk. All of this material is available as hard copy and electronically. The material that is published on the website or the intranet/virtual learning environment is the definitive version. Those students unable to access information through the internet can contact University Campus Suffolk or the College to obtain printed material in an alternative format. All the programme, workplace learning and mentor handbooks are updated annually.

39   The main channel of communication for prospective students is the website. A printed prospectus supplements this. This provides easy access to the University Campus Suffolk's higher education content. University Campus Suffolk manages this site and the College provides a link through which prospective students can easily access comprehensive guidance. The website is attractive, user-friendly and easy to navigate. Key information documents are available in printed form and other formats are available on request.

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?

40   The College's Head of Higher Education is ultimately responsible for the accuracy of public information. It is subsequently checked by University Campus Suffolk before its release. All published promotional and advertising material for any aspect of the University Campus Suffolk is required to follow the publicity protocol and be approved by the two awarding universities. A member of the College marketing team attends the University Campus Suffolk's Communications Group meetings to ensure that the Head of Higher Education and staff are kept informed of University Campus Suffolk's requirements. The College uses standard templates for the production of handbooks and related materials.

41   All new and revalidated programmes and relevant documentation, including programme handbooks, programme aims, learning outcomes, assessment strategies, and resource plans, undergo a thorough and comprehensive approval and validation process carried out by the University Campus Suffolk's Course Approvals Group. The College uses University Campus Suffolk guides and templates to ensure that the content of documentation is of an appropriate quality. All programme specifications and learning outcomes are referenced against the FHEQ.

42   A designated member of the College's marketing team is responsible for uploading information onto the University Campus Suffolk's virtual learning environment in accordance with its protocols. Lecturers are delegated the responsibility for uploading their own programme materials into the virtual learning environment. Students and staff at the College have access to open source electronic portfolio and social networking software that allows the user to control which items and what information other users see. Electronic portfolio users can receive either private or public feedback on their views. Given the increasing use

made of these networks and the information exchanged between staff and students, there is a need for the introduction of strategies that cater for this mode of exchange of information. It is recommended as desirable that the College reviews its policies for the access, regulation and control of information exchanged between staff and students using social and other networks.

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

43   The Developmental engagement in assessment for Lowestoft College was undertaken in March 2011. There were three lines of enquiry.

Line of enquiry 1: How does the College ensure that its assessment practices maintain academic standards across its programmes?

Line of enquiry 2: How effective are learning development support activities and feedback in supporting student learning?

Line of enquiry 3: What procedures are in place to ensure that published information on assessment is accurate, complete and accessible?

44   The three lines of enquiry focused on the structures, policies and procedures that underpin the assessment process, including the documentation available to students. They covered the implementation of the awarding body regulations on assessment across the programmes, as well as the responsibilities of the College in these processes. The Developmental engagement in assessment covered all the higher education programmes offered by the College.

45   The Developmental engagement identified a number of areas of good practice. These included the wide range of assessment methods in assignment briefs and the learning opportunities that promote peer involvement in assessment and feedback as provided in presentations to students by their peers. In addition, the opportunities for formative feedback to students on their coursework and the advice offered to students during the pre-enrolment interview process was cited as good practice. The Developmental engagement identified a number of desirable recommendations. These included the need to review the remit of the Higher Education Forum to consider the outcomes of the assessment processes and the dissemination of good assessment practice. In addition it was recommended that the College explore with the awarding bodies whether the external examiners' reports for its higher education programmes delivered at more than one centre can be made more specific to the needs of the College. The College was recommended to stimulate further interactive assessment opportunities for its students using the virtual learning environments. Finally the College was recommended to review the assessment information provided to students on the University Campus Suffolk website.

D   Foundation Degrees

46   The College currently delivers five Foundation Degrees. They represent 126.6 full-time student equivalents, of which 93 are full-time and 55 are part-time. The awards are in business management, childcare, football development and coaching, operations engineering, and supporting inclusive learning and practice.

47   The Foundation Degree programmes are offered in conjunction with University Campus Suffolk, and are jointly validated by the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex. Suffolk New College is one of five satellite centres delivering higher education as part of the University Campus Suffolk network. The self-assessment reports for the Foundation Degree programmes and the engagement in meetings of College representatives with the awarding bodies and network centres demonstrate the close working relationships and effective communication between the awarding bodies, University College Suffolk and College staff at all levels. University Campus Suffolk provides most of the key policies and procedures that the College is obliged to implement and to monitor their effectiveness. Key University Campus Suffolk committees provide direct oversight and encourage communication and enhancement of the provision.

48   All the conclusions in paragraphs 50 to 52 apply equally to the Foundation Degree provision.

E   Conclusions and summary of judgements

49   The 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, the University of East Anglia and the University of Suffolk.

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

- the additional layer of quality assurance of students' assessed work provides further insight into the effectiveness by which tutors engage with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* (paragraph 23)
- the specific budget to encourage further education lecturers to acquire teaching skills appropriate to the delivery of the higher education programmes (paragraph 33).

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

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

- review the strategies for the use of the virtual learning environments and new software to stimulate further interactive teaching and learning opportunities for students (paragraph 37)
- review its policies for the access, regulation and control of information exchanged between staff and students using social and other networks (paragraph 42).

53   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.

54   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.

55   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.

Lowestoft College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2012						
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:						
• the additional layer of quality assurance of students' assessed work provides further insight into the effectiveness by which tutors engage with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* (paragraph 23)	Continue to carry out management quality assurance review of a sample of assessed work (per module tutor) and review of external examiners' feedback at the end of Semester 1 Provide feedback to the Higher Education Forum; introduce peer review into this process at the end of Semester 1 in the 2012-13 academic year, within and across higher education courses	January 2013 January 2013	Assistant Principal Quality Improvement and Learner Services and Head of Higher Education University Campus Suffolk Lowestoft As above plus key module tutors	Increased sharing of and evidence of good practice in feedback/annotation of student work	Higher Education Forum self-assessment and review evaluation process	Student feedback; annual self-assessment, review and evaluation process - at course and College level
• the specific budget to encourage further education	Continue to annually review higher education-specific budget in relation to	July-September 2012	Assistant Principal Quality Improvement and Learner Services	Increased number of staff delivering in higher education undertake	Head of Higher Education University Campus Suffolk	Annual self-assessment, review and evaluation process

lecturers to acquire teaching skills appropriate to the delivery of the higher education programmes (paragraph 33).	staff development needs identified as part of self-assessment and review evaluation and Performance Review processes to ensure it is sufficient		and Head of Higher Education University Campus Suffolk Lowestoft	appropriate higher education qualifications or update and upgrade existing qualifications	Lowestoft Head of Quality Enhancement at University Campus Suffolk Ipswich	- at course and College level
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 the strategies for the use of the virtual learning environments and new software to stimulate further interactive teaching and learning opportunities for students (paragraph 37)	Work with staff at University Campus Suffolk Ipswich (eg the Education Developer) and via the University Campus Suffolk Learning Teaching and Assessment Group to review, develop and implement increased interactive use of the virtual learning environment Identify a named person per higher education course to provide leadership and mentor support to staff to develop at least two (currently one) interactive learning	December 2012	Head of Higher Education University Campus Suffolk Lowestoft in conjunction with identified staff at University Campus Suffolk Ipswich and at University Campus Suffolk Lowestoft - including the Lowestoft College E-learning Manager and the Learning Resources Higher Education Study Skills Coordinator	At least two examples per level of higher education courses Reports to the Higher Education Forum and sharing of good practice	Head of Higher Education University Campus Suffolk Lowestoft; Assistant Principal Quality Improvement and Learner Services; Higher Education Forum; reported in 2012-13 course and the College self-assessment and review evaluations	Student feedback Annual self-assessment, review and evaluation process - at course and College level

	opportunities per level of course					
• review its policies for the access, regulation and control of information exchanged between staff and students using social and other networks (paragraph 42).	Work with staff at University Campus Suffolk Lowestoft (eg E-learning manager), at University Campus Suffolk Ipswich (members of the Elevate Team) and other learning network colleges to review and develop appropriate policies for the students	December 2012	Head of Higher Education University Campus Suffolk Lowestoft; Lowestoft College E-learning Manager; Vice Principal Curriculum; University Campus Suffolk Ipswich Elevate Team	Policies approved by Joint Academic Committee and Lowestoft College Academic Board by end of the 2012-13 academic year	Head of Higher Education University Campus Suffolk Lowestoft; Assistant Principal Quality Improvement and Learner Services; Vice Principal Curriculum	Higher Education Forum and relevant University Campus Suffolk - wide committees e.g. Learning Teaching and Assessment Group