Northern Regional College

Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review, Northern Ireland: Summative Review by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

November 2013

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, Northern Ireland (IQER NI).

Purpose of IQER NI

Higher education programmes delivered by further education colleges (colleges) lead to awards made by higher education institutions or Pearson. The awarding partners retain ultimate responsibility for maintaining the academic standards of their awards and assuring the quality of the students' learning opportunities. The purpose of IQER, NI 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 partners. IQER NI focuses on three core themes: academic standards, quality of learning opportunities and public information.

The IQER NI process

IQER NI is a peer review process. It is divided into two complementary stages: Developmental engagement and Summative review. In accordance with the published method, all DEL-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 student submission by the student body
- a preparatory meeting between the college and the IQER NI coordinator several weeks before the Developmental engagement visit
- the Developmental engagement visit, which normally lasts 2.5 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 DEL-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 NI coordinator and QAA reviewers. They do not include nominees.

Evidence

In order to obtain evidence for the review, IQER NI review 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 NI review teams' expectations of colleges are guided by a nationally agreed set of reference points, known as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. This is published by QAA and consists of three main parts:

- *Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards*
- *Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality*
- *Part C: Information about higher education provision*.

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 NI

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 NI. Progress against these action plans is monitored by QAA in conjunction with DEL and/or the college's awarding bodies as appropriate. The college's action plan in response to the conclusions of the Summative review will be published as part of the report.

Executive summary

The Summative review of Northern Regional College carried out in November 2013

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 number and range of the enhancements to the curriculum which significantly increase the students' employability skills (paragraph 26)
- the comprehensive and effective feedback on the Institute of Leadership and Management programmes provides students with excellent guidance for future assessments (paragraph 27)
- the extensive and effective engagement with employers (paragraph 33)
- the effective processes for checking public information (paragraph 38).

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:

- improve its engagement with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (paragraphs 12 and 22)
- improve staff use of the virtual learning environment to enhance delivery of the provision (paragraph 37).

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

- further develop student engagement in its senior committees and enhance students' awareness of the impact of their contributions (paragraph 10)
- continue to develop its use of performance indicators (paragraph 11)
- review the induction process for staff teaching on higher education programmes (paragraph 24).

A   Introduction and context

1   This report presents the findings of the Summative review of higher education funded by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) conducted at Northern Regional 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 Assessment and Qualifications Alliance, the Chartered Management Institute, Cisco Certified Network Associate, City and Guilds, the Counselling and Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body, the Institute of Leadership and Management, the Institute of Accounting Technicians Ireland, the Institute of Motor Industry Awards Limited, the National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health, Oxford, Cambridge and RSA, Pearson and the University of Ulster. The review was carried out by Mr Liam Curran, Mr Jonathan Doney, Mrs Patricia Millner and Mr Colin Stanfield (reviewers) and Dr Peter Steer (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, Northern Ireland* (the handbook), published by QAA. Evidence in support of the Summative review included documentation supplied by the College and awarding bodies and organisations, meetings with staff, students, employers and reports of QAA. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagement in assessment carried out in October 2011. 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 UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) on behalf of higher education providers.

3   In order to assist DEL in gaining information to assist with the assessment of the impact of Foundation Degree (FD) awards, section D of this report summarises details of the FD programmes delivered at the College.

4   The provision at Northern Regional College consists of general further education, training courses and higher education. The College serves a large geographical area, with eight buildings on six sites across two counties at Ballymena, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Larne, Magherafelt and Newtownabbey. The College vision is encapsulated in the three words 'Aspire, Aim, Achieve'. Most students come from the main towns where the campuses are located, although a substantial number travel from small rural villages in the region. Within this wide geographical area there are significant pockets of unemployment. By early October 2013 total enrolment for 2013-14 had reached approximately 16,600. The majority of further education learners are on level 3 programmes, while the majority of learners on training programmes are studying at level 2 or 3. The College's current enrolment on further education and training programmes is approximately 13,900. There are 265 full-time and 1133 part-time higher education students. In 2012-13, enrolment was 272 full-time and 1096 part-time students.

5   The College has three faculties: Building, Engineering and Science; Care, Access and Creative Arts; and Professional and Leisure Studies. Each faculty head is supported by two or three heads of school. The College delivers full and part-time higher education at the Ballymena, Coleraine, Magherafelt and Newtownabbey campuses, with Ballymoney offering part-time study only. The higher education provision offered by the College is as follows (with student numbers in brackets).

Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA)

- Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling (98)
- Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling - work with Trauma module (35)

Chartered Management Institute (CMI)

- Level 7 Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership (11)

Cisco

- Cisco Level 4 Certified Network Associate (20)

City and Guilds

- Level 5 Diploma in Primary Health Care Management (6)
- Level 4 Higher Professional Diploma in Early Years (13)
- Level 4 Award in Internal Quality Assurance Of Assessment Processes and Practice (3)

Counselling Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body (CPCAB)

- Level 6 Certificate In Therapeutic Supervision Counselling (7)
- Level 5 Diploma in Cognitive Behavioural Therapeutic Skills (15)

Institute of Accounting Technicians Ireland (ATI)

- Level 5 Diploma for Accounting Technicians Ireland (124)

Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM)

- ILM Level 5 Certificate/Diploma in Management (48)
- ILM Level 4 Award/Certificate in Leadership and Management (11)

Institute of Motor Industry Awards Limited (IMIAL)

- IMIAL Level 5 Diploma in Automotive Management (9)
- IMIAL Level 4 Diploma in Vehicle Maintenance and Repair Principles (14)

National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health (NEBOSH)

- NEBOSH Level 6 Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety (14)

Oxford, Cambridge & RSA

- Level 4 Certificate/Diploma Business and Administration (15)

Pearson

- HNC Advanced Practice in Work with Children and Families (26)
- HND Advanced Practice in Work with Children and Families (28)
- HNC Business (53)
- HND Business (94)

- HNC Construction and Built Environment (11)
- HND Construction and Built Environment (16)
- HNC Diploma in Computing and Systems Development (58)
- HNC Diploma in Electrical and Electronic Engineering (23)
- HND Diploma in Electrical and Electronic Engineering (26)
- HNC Health and Social Care (89)
- HND Health and Social Care (61)
- HNC Diploma in Interactive Media (8)
- HNC Diploma in Manufacturing Engineering (24)
- HND Diploma in Manufacturing Engineering (34)
- HNC Diploma in Operations Engineering (19)

University of Ulster

- BSc (Hons) Business Studies (74)
- FdSc Counselling (115)
- FdSc Building Technology and Management (27)
- FdSc Retailing (19)
- FdSc Sport Exercise and Fitness (40)
- Level 4 Certificate in Counselling (84)

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

6   The College has responsibility for recruitment and admissions and also for the provision of resources, teaching and student support. ATI and NEBOSH take responsibility for all aspects of summative assessment on their awards. For the other awards, the College has a responsibility in the setting of summative assessments, the first marking of work, its moderation and providing feedback to students. AQA, CPCAB, City and Guilds, Pearson, IMIAL, OCR and the University of Ulster appoint external examiners who report on the College provision. All the awarding partners oversee completed summative assessments. Many of the awarding partners have websites providing wide-ranging and valuable programme information for students.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

7   The College's maximum student number cap has increased from 255 in 2011-12 to 282 in 2013-14. Computing facilities at both Farm Lodge and at Newtownabbey have been upgraded. Since the Developmental engagement, the College has started the delivery of the level 4 Certificate in Counselling in Antrim Library.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

8   Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team and did so in September 2013. The submission used the results from three surveys of higher education students conducted by the College over the last two years which also provided mostly quantitative data. It also incorporated the findings of focus groups conducted in May 2013 with a random sample of higher education students from each campus which provided mostly qualitative information. The student statement was initially collated by the Quality Manager. It was circulated to the students involved in the focus groups for their feedback, input and approval. Students met the team during the review. Their involvement was helpful for the team and provided an

insight into a number of topics including the provision of resources and learning and teaching.

B   Evaluation of the management of DEL-funded higher education

Core theme 1: Academic standards

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

9   The College has a clear and effective management and reporting structure. There are strong lines of communication within this structure. The Higher Education Committee, which is chaired by the Director of Curriculum, provides an effective oversight of the programmes. It reports to the Curriculum Management Team and through to the Executive Management Team. It plays a valuable role in setting, monitoring, maintaining and enhancing the standards of the provision. Operationally, responsibilities for the management of academic standards are delegated to the heads of faculties, heads of school and course coordinators. The College Learning and Teaching Committee, also chaired by the Director of Curriculum, helps to secure academic standards by taking a cross-campus perspective of the delivery.

10   Student engagement in the College's assurance of academic standards is limited to the programme level. It consists of a well developed and informative range of student feedback activities including questionnaires and the staff/student consultative committees. The College does not have significant higher education student engagement at a faculty or College level. While students welcome the opportunity to offer their opinions, they indicated that they would value a deeper engagement with the process and more awareness of the outcomes of their input. It is **desirable** for the College to further develop student engagement in its senior committees and enhance students' awareness of the impact of their contributions.

11   The College's monitoring of the provision using key performance indicators is being developed based on data from a number of areas. For example, data on the student experience covers recruitment, attendance, retention, achievement, success, student voice and quality inspections. Based on the key performance indicators, the College may call programme teams to a panel to review their performance and develop action plans. This process is in the early stages of implementation. For example, the College recognises that the success of students on its part-time programmes is an area for improvement. Attendance and retention are monitored in-year. However, there is not yet an extensive in-year review of performance to allow for actions to be taken at an early stage. It is **desirable** for the College to continue to develop its use of performance indicators.

What account is taken of the Quality Code?

12   The Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) informs the delivery of the provision although its use could be extended. Senior managers within the College have a high level of awareness of the Quality Code. The University of Ulster has delivered a formal Quality Code briefing to the majority of relevant College staff. Some discussions about the Quality Code occur at the Higher Education Committee which includes academic and student support staff from across all the campuses. However, the College acknowledges that it needs to further raise the awareness of the Quality Code. The Quality Improvement Plan

2013-14 for Higher Education highlights the need to map the chapters of the Quality Code to the College's strategies, policies and procedures. There has been an emphasis on waiting until the particular College policy is up for revision before using the guidance in the Quality Code. For example, the College has not mapped the Quality Code, *Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards, Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes.* It is **advisable** for the College to improve its engagement with the Quality Code.

13   Use of the Quality Code is extensive in some areas. The College's Higher Education Strategy states an intention to develop foundation degrees particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects. New foundation degrees in the engineering and building areas are being developed with clear reference to the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark.* There is strong employer involvement at the design stage and throughout the programmes. The external examiner for the FdSc Sport, Exercise and Fitness commented that the structure and content of the foundation degree is relevant to employer requirements, has well formulated work-based learning and is delivered at appropriate levels. In response to a recommendation from the Developmental engagement 2011 concerning Pearson programmes, staff have written clear and specific programme specifications using QAA guidance.

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

14   The College is clear about its responsibilities to its awarding partners. The College's responsibilities for its provision with the University of Ulster are set out in its Memorandum of Recognition at College level and in the recognition agreements for individual programmes. For the other awarding partners, the College follows a standard agreement clearly set out by these organisations. For awards validated by the University of Ulster, programmes are subject to annual review involving University Subject Partnership Managers and also to quinquennial revalidation. External examiners confirm that there is compliance with all the awarding partner agreements.

15   The College has an effective system for reviewing its provision. At programme level, evaluative annual self-evaluation reports and quality improvement plans are produced and considered by the Learning and Teaching Committee. There is a specific self-evaluation report covering all higher education based on the analyses at the programme level. Self-evaluation reports are thorough in their review and planning for the enhancement of the delivery. Action plans are reviewed biannually. An example of the effectiveness of the self-evaluation process is the modification to assessment practice on the Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling where reviews identified and corrected an example of over assessment.

16   The College has a clear and robust process for the receipt and response to external examiner reports. The Quality Improvement Unit receives the reports and disseminates them to course coordinators for consideration and for a response. Actions are taken directly or built into annual self-evaluation reports and their associated action plans. The College carefully tracks the completion of the actions. The College has arrangements in place to share external examiner reports with students.

17   The College has an effective process of internal verification. It has the responsibility for setting and marking of assessments for the majority of its provision. External examiners and external verifiers confirm that assessment practice is fit for purpose. Students speak positively of their experience of assessment. The robust verification and moderation processes assure the standards of assessment, marking and feedback. The verification

process provides valuable feedback to initial markers that helps them in future assessment activity.

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

18   The College has a detailed programme of Continuous Professional Development that provides a suitable level of support for the delivery of the provision. Key priorities are documented in the College's Development Plan which is guided by the continuous professional development   Policy. The annual College planning process, which includes the results of staff appraisal, identifies the development needs for all staff. Staff evaluation of continuous professional development   is contained in an annual report produced by the Quality Improvement Unit which is received by a subcommittee of the College's governing body. Staff have a positive attitude towards continuous professional development. They indicated that many personal development activities had resulted from their appraisal. Normally, the College does not fund postgraduate study although it has done so where there is a direct impact on curriculum development and strategic aims.

19   The College is expanding the scope of its staff development events. A Higher Education 'Sharing Best Practice' Day with external and internal speakers has been held. There was a high level of attendance. The event is to become an annual event. The College has developed international links including staff teaching on counselling programmes travelling to the USA to work alongside colleagues delivering similar programmes. As part of the Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Strategy, staff must undertake the Technology for Learning Delivery qualification before teaching on blended/online learning programmes. TEL best practice is shared at staff development events. Examples include cross-programme use of video technology on FdSc Building Technology and Management in conjunction with HNC Construction and Built Environment. The College has made further higher education development events a priority.

> **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 partners**

Core theme 2: Quality of learning opportunities

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

20   The processes and procedures considered in paragraphs 9 to 11 are also relevant to managing the quality of learning opportunities. The College is responsible for all aspects of the quality of learning opportunities as is clearly stated in the partnership agreements.

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 College effectively meets its obligations to its awarding partners concerning learning opportunities. The procedures described in paragraphs 14 to 17 are also relevant to learning opportunities. For example, the Higher Education Committee meets regularly to oversee the management of the provision including recruitment and admissions, student

support and marketing. At programme level, teaching teams meet regularly to discuss all aspects of programme provision.

What account is taken of the Quality Code?

22   There is scope for further use of the Quality Code in managing the quality of learning opportunities. The College aims to use the indicators within the Quality Code as a key part of its Quality Improvement Strategy. Plans to reference and map indicators against College policies and procedures are set out in the Quality Improvement Plan for Higher Education 2013-14 (see paragraph 12). The College has aligned its TEL strategy with the guidance in *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* of the Quality Code. Policies, procedures and annual programme self-evaluations also indicate a broad alignment with the expectations of the Quality Code on learning and teaching and student engagement, but closer mapping at the indicator level has not taken place. In reviewing its admissions policy the College is making use of the guidance in the Quality Code*.* The recommendation in paragraph 12 also applies to the quality of learning opportunities.

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

23   The College has appropriate policies and procedures for the oversight of learning and teaching. Its teaching and learning strategy does not distinguish between further and higher education. However, the overall Quality Improvement Strategy and the Curriculum Strategy for Higher Education provide suitable additional guidance. Observation of teaching and learning is carried out in a number of formal and informal ways. The main formal process is observation linked to appraisal carried out by line managers. Informally the new Learning and Teaching Support Visits Scheme, which operates on a voluntary basis, is being introduced for higher education staff this year. It aims to develop professional dialogue and share good practice using information collected by the managers who undertake these teaching observations.

24   The College operates a robust recruitment and selection process. It is expected that staff will hold a qualification at least one level above that being taught and also have relevant vocational experience. The College requires all new staff members who do not have a teaching qualification to complete one within three years of appointment. Staff who are new to teaching receive a generic induction and some helpful guidance. However, there is no introduction to the specific features of higher education such as quality assurance processes and the Quality Code. Only on some programmes is induction to higher education aided by course coordinators and programme teams sharing materials and team teaching. It is **desirable** for the College to review the induction process for staff teaching on higher education programmes.

25   The College has appropriate measures to monitor and enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Information from teaching observations feeds into the Quality Improvement Unit though no overall collation of outcomes or oversight report is produced. The comprehensive annual self-evaluation reports evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. Using these reports the Learning and Teaching Committee identifies good practice and supports improvements in areas of underperformance. The College uses an appropriate range of approaches to obtain and act upon student opinions at the programme level on all aspects of delivery including staff-student meetings and surveys.

26   Teaching and learning is effective and innovative. Students are extremely positive about the teaching they receive. Staff have good subject knowledge and presentation skills and use a variety of interesting teaching methods including class discussions, team work

and practical activities. Students value the vocational and professional practice of staff which brings 'real life' experience into the teaching. Enthusiastic, creative and highly committed staff have developed a wide range of activities which enhance the curriculum and add to student employability. These include opportunities for students to take part in national skills competitions, experience professional work placements, undertake research projects with employers, take part in international visits and exchanges, and host and attend conferences which develop valuable personal and employability skills. The number and range of the enhancements to the curriculum which significantly increase the students' employability skills is **good practice**.

27 Feedback to students on their work properly supports their learning and in some cases is excellent. Feedback on the ILM programmes is excellent because of its depth, extent and alignment with the programme's learning outcomes and assessment criteria. This comprehensive and effective feedback provides students with excellent guidance for future assessments and is **good practice**.

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

28 The College has developed a comprehensive and coordinated approach to the delivery of student support. Both full and part-time students have a class tutor who is the first point of contact for academic and pastoral support. The system works effectively providing one-to-one discussions on academic progress and pastoral issues as well as group sessions. Students appreciate the support they receive from their class tutors. Study skills development is delivered in a number of ways to meet the needs of students on different programmes. On most programmes, academic skills are embedded in the curriculum and developed during group tutorials. However, on the FdSc Sport Exercise and Fitness programme there is a specific skills module. Students reported that library staff are very helpful in enhancing their study skills. For the students who need additional academic support and who live in areas covered by particular postcodes, the College has been proactive in securing funding to provide a learning mentor. External examiner reports comment positively on the support for students throughout their programmes. Students who declare additional needs at pre-entry, at enrolment or any time during their programme are suitably supported by the education support staff. Students without Disabled Student Allowance are also well assisted.

29 The College provides valuable guidance on the student support available. The wide range of college-wide student support services such as counselling are highlighted in the programme handbooks and the intranet. Students are informed of these services at induction and during tutorials. The College provides staff with a helpful student induction pack and further guidance on the staff intranet.

30 Analysis by the College of its retention data has led to valuable improvements in the student experience. For example, the College has introduced the staged payment of fees and a cut-off date to avoid late enrolments, has enhanced inductions to settle students in quickly, and has amended the curriculum and assessment to make them more relevant.

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

31 The staff development procedures discussed in paragraphs 18 and 19 are also relevant to the quality of learning opportunities.

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?

32   The College has a systematic approach to the review and allocation of learning resources which is being used to upgrade them. The annual curriculum planning process provides the basis for consideration of resource needs. Priorities are agreed by the College Management Team and finally by the Senior Management Team. Students confirmed that resources allow them to achieve the learning outcomes. They expressed confidence that a parity of provision exists for those programmes delivered on more than one site. Students following University of Ulster programmes have access to a range of library and study facilities at the University. Students reported that the College computers are slow. The College is aware of the need to upgrade its information technology infrastructure and is part of the way through the process.

33   The College has effective relationships with employers which significantly enhance the provision. Employers report that the College is a very strong partner and the students they meet are well equipped for placement and full-time employment. Their relationship with programme teams is both extensive and effective with numerous examples of collaboration including the provision of help with employers' needs. Employers actively contribute to programme development providing a wide range of advice on industry requirements. Industrial placement under the 'College Industry Initiative' scheme gives staff knowledge of current working practices which enhances their teaching. Employers are invited to contribute to continuous professional development activities regarding workplace practice and the college-led Careers Academy provides a forum where they receive information about mentoring. The extensive and effective engagement with employers is **good practice**.

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

Core theme 3: Public information

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

34   The College has clearly defined responsibilities for publishing information within its awarding partner agreements to which it adheres closely. Agreements normally state that the College is responsible for the advertising, marketing and promotion of the programmes. Some awarding organisations such as ATI, CMI and ILM supply students with a considerable amount of information such as handbooks.

35   The College provides helpful information in a number of ways. It publishes the higher education prospectus online and in hard copy. Students report the website is user-friendly. For example, the key features of programmes are provided in a standard format. The website also includes information about module content and progression opportunities on completion of the programme. The College makes increasing use of social media as a means of communicating with both students and employers, for example on events it is running. It promotes the provision at a wide range of locations such as local schools and businesses and provides a variety of materials advertising the programmes.

36   Handbooks produced by the College provide a suitable range of information. Programme handbooks provide students with useful information on, for example, assessment, student support and the mechanisms for students to voice their opinions. Students receive programme specifications. The College provides students with work-based learning handbooks that provide comprehensive information and guidance.

37   The virtual learning environment (VLE) is not used consistently across the College. A VLE policy has recently been introduced which provides guidance for teaching staff on how they should use the VLE to support programme delivery. This policy encourages staff to have a consistent approach in the content and quality of materials uploaded. Sites on the VLE can receive a bronze, silver and gold award depending on their level of development. Students reported that when staff use the VLE extensively, they find the information supporting the teaching very helpful. However staff use is not extensive in many areas, with few achieving any of the awards. There has been some increase in staff use of the VLE since the Developmental engagement. It is **advisable** for the College to improve staff use of the virtual learning environment to enhance the delivery of the provision.

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?

38   College arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of public information for internal and external use are comprehensive and effective. To ensure the accuracy of web-based publications the College operates a rigorous procedure for making adjustments. For any changes, staff must complete a change control form which is submitted to the E-marketing Coordinator who is responsible for the management of the process. The marketing team produces an annual publication schedule for public information. It is responsible for the production of all marketing materials which must be approved by the appropriate heads of school and faculty. The College has a number of robust compliance protocols that ensure the accuracy and consistency of information and terminology. For example, the brand and publications compliance protocol ensures a comprehensive process is in operation for checking that the prospectus and the website are accurate and that they meet College requirements. The marketing team evaluate and review the effectiveness of all accuracy of publication protocols annually and report formally to the College's senior management. Programme handbooks must be signed off by heads of school and faculty before release to the students. The College has appropriate policies for the oversight of the use of social media by staff and students. The marketing team seeks the views of students through focus groups on the accuracy and effectiveness of the public information the College provides. Students report that the various types of information they receive about the College are accurate and complete. The effective processes for checking public information are **good practice**.

39   For programmes validated by the University of Ulster the College must obtain prior approval for all promotional material. The Subject Partnership Manager monitors programme information with regard to accuracy and content.

40   Information for employers is accurate and comprehensive. The College provides templates for general use across the College, for example on health and safety. However, most information is produced and checked within schools. Employers reported that the information they receive is accurate and comprehensive, providing significant help for their role in supporting students during all types of work-based learning. They confirmed that they have an input into the content of College documentation.

> **The team considers that reliance can be placed on the accuracy and/or 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

41   The Developmental engagement in assessment took place in October 2011. It addressed the following lines of enquiry agreed with the College.

- How effectively are internal verification and internal moderation processes used by the College to maintain academic standards?
- How does assessment feedback provided by the College enhance student learning?
- How accurate and complete is the information that the College produces and provides to students regarding assessment?

42   The areas of good practice identified during the Developmental engagement were the detailed written feedback provided to students on their work on HNC/D Advanced Practice in Work with Children and Families, FdSc Building Technology and Management and FdSc Sport, Exercise and Fitness; the timely return of students' work with written feedback; the provision of effective verbal feedback to students; the valuable feedback for students on the work-related aspects of their programmes and the use on some programmes of the virtual learning environment (VLE) for providing students with valuable information about assessment.

43   The Developmental engagement indicated that it was advisable to provide written feedback to students which is strongly linked to the intended learning outcomes and which provides guidance on ways to improve and enhance the opportunities for future learning; ensure programme handbooks are accurate and complete; and provide programme specifications for Pearson awards that are contextualised for the delivery at the College. It also found that it was desirable to ensure that use of the VLE is more widespread across the provision.

D   Foundation degrees

44   The College has four foundation degrees which are awards of the University of Ulster. The College provides all of them in part-time mode with the FdSc Sport, Exercise and Fitness also available for full-time study. In the academic year 2013-14 there are 168 part-time and 33 full-time enrolments. In 2012-13 there were 196 part-time and 35 full-time enrolments. The College's Higher Education Strategy includes a three-year plan for the introduction of a number of foundation degrees, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects.

45   The College manages its foundation degrees in an effective manner as part of its detailed oversight of all of its provision. The University of Ulster provides access to some resources for students and extensive support for staff.

46   All the team's findings and conclusions are relevant to the foundation degrees except the second bullet point in the list of good practice.

E   Conclusions and summary of judgements

47   The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Northern Regional 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 partners. This was based upon discussion with staff and students and scrutiny of evidence provided by the College and its awarding partners: the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance, the Chartered Management Institute, Cisco Certified Network Associate, City and Guilds, the Counselling and Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body, the Institute of Leadership and Management, the Institute of Accounting Technicians Ireland, the Institute of Motor Industry Awards Limited, the National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health, Oxford, Cambridge and RSA, Pearson and the University of Ulster.

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

- the number and range of the enhancements to the curriculum which significantly increase the students' employability skills (paragraph 26)
- the comprehensive and effective feedback on the Institute of Leadership and Management programmes, which provides students with excellent guidance for future assessments (paragraph 27)
- the extensive and effective engagement with employers (paragraph 33)
- the effective processes for checking public information (paragraph 38).

49   The team also makes some recommendations for consideration by the College and its awarding partners.

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

- improve its engagement with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (paragraphs 12 and 22)
- improve staff use of the virtual learning environment to enhance delivery of the provision (paragraph 37).

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

- further develop student engagement in its senior committees and enhance students' awareness of the impact of their contributions (paragraph 10)
- continue to develop its use of performance indicators (paragraph 11)
- review the induction process for staff teaching on higher education programmes (paragraph 24).

52   Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, and other documentary evidence and from its meetings with staff and students, the team concludes that it has **confidence** that, in the context of this Summative review, the College discharges its responsibilities effectively, as set out in the relevant partnership agreement for the management of the standards of the awards of its awarding partners.

53   Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, and other documentary evidence and from its meetings with staff and students, the team concludes that it has **confidence** that, in the context of this Summative review, the College discharges its responsibilities effectively, as set out in the relevant partnership agreement for the management of the quality of learning opportunities to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

54   Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, and other documentary evidence and from its meetings with staff and students, the team concludes that, in the context of this Summative review, reliance **can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Northern Regional College action plan relating to the Summative review November 2013						
Good practice	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
In the course of the Summative review the ream identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
• the number and range of the enhancements to the curriculum which significantly increase the students' employability skills (paragraph 26)	Continue to avail of and further promote all opportunities that arise to further enhance the employability and international activity of students • Activity by School to be updated and circulated each semester • New initiatives to be shared at the Higher Education Committee and Higher Education Conference • Achieve Erasmus Charter • Increase the level of internationalised activity within the higher education	April 2014	Head of Business Development	Increased number and variety of employability skills activities Enhanced student employability skills Erasmus Charter awarded and funding accessed to support higher education staff and student Five per cent increase in student feedback regarding overall student experience	Higher Education Committee	Completed team and College Self-evaluation reports Number of Erasmus-funded staff/student activities Number of Study USA places Number of international exchange visits Student feedback

				curriculum		
• the comprehensive and effective feedback on the Institute of Leadership and Management programmes provides students with excellent guidance for future assessments (paragraph 27)	• Summarise good practice occurring on Institute of Leadership and Management programmes and circulate to higher education course coordinators to implement within course teams • Organise continuous professional development activities around the sharing of good practice identified	February 2014	Head of Faculty for Professional and Leisure Studies	Three continuous professional development activities regarding effective feedback Four sharing good practice events Five per cent increase in student feedback regarding assessment feedback	Higher Education Committee	Continuous professional development Records Student feedback External examiner reports
• the extensive and effective engagement with employers (paragraph 33)	• Continue to promote the use and benefits of employer engagement within higher education • Continue to share good practice within higher education staff via continuous professional development activities • Continue to develop the use of the Connected project	May 2014	Head of Business Development	Number of courses with effective employer engagement Improved level of employer feedback 100 per cent of all higher education curriculum areas are involved with the Connected project	Higher Education Committee	Continuous professional development records Completed team self-evaluation reports Employer feedback Student feedback DEL independent evaluation of the

	within higher education curriculum areas to engage with small and medium enterprises • New project proposals to be submitted by March 2014 by all higher education curriculum areas within the College			100 per cent achievement of all Connected funded outcomes and targets against each curriculum area Positive feedback for Northern Regional College in DEL Independent Evaluation of the Connected project		Connected project
• the effective processes for checking public information (paragraph 38).	• Continue to raise awareness with all staff regarding processes for checking public information • Continue to review public information available • Include question within student induction survey regarding public information	February 2014	Head of Customer Services and Communication	Staff awareness of marketing processes No complaints regarding public information Five per cent increase in student feedback within student induction survey	Senior Management Team	Accuracy of public information available No complaints regarding public information Student feedback
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:						

• improve its engagement with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (paragraphs 12 and 22)	• Continue to raise staff awareness of the Quality Code through continuous professional development activities • Cross reference relevant Northern Regional College policies/procedures/ strategies to the Quality Code • Link self-evaluation report questions to the Quality Code • Link quality improvement action plans to the Quality Code	May 2014 March 2014	Head of Quality Improvement	Two continuous professional development events held regarding the Quality Code 100 per cent of higher education staff aware of the Quality Code 100 per cent of all relevant Northern Regional College policies/ procedures/ strategies refer to the Quality Code 100 per cent of relevant self-evaluation reports and quality improvement action plans refer to the Quality Code	Higher Education Committee	Staff feedback Continuous professional development records Completed team self-evaluation reports College self-evaluation report and quality improvement plan
• improve staff use of the virtual learning environment to enhance delivery of the provision	• Review College virtual learning environment standards to facilitate team progression from	June 2014	Head of Quality Improvement	Review all virtual learning environment standards 100 per cent of all	Higher Education Committee	Northern Regional College virtual learning environment standards

(paragraph 37).	bronze through to gold • Continue to raise the standard and quality of the virtual learning environment within higher education courses • Continuous professional development to move higher education course teams to bronze/silver standard and improve quality of materials on the virtual learning environment • Newsletter to be developed to share best practice on virtual learning environment and technology • Annual audit of higher education virtual learning environment content to be carried out • All higher education course teams to			higher education courses have a minimum bronze standard as evidenced in audit reports 15 continuous professional development events regarding the virtual learning environment and sharing of best practice Five per cent increase in student feedback regarding the virtual learning environment One newsletter per semester produced and made accessible to all staff Two external awards applied for		Higher education virtual learning environment content Continuous professional development records Completed team self-evaluation reports College self-evaluation report and quality improvement plan Student feedback Virtual learning environment audit reports

	benchmark against virtual learning environment standards within annual self-evaluation reports • Staff encouraged to apply for external awards on their virtual learning environment work					
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:						
• further develop student engagement in its senior committees and enhance students' awareness of the impact of their contributions (paragraph 10)	• Identify committees requiring higher education student representation and invite student representatives • Improve feedback via staff-student consultative committees • Improved analysis of student feedback with self-evaluation reports	April 2014	Head of Quality Improvement	Student representatives on relevant committees Five per cent increase in higher education student feedback regarding their student experience 100 per cent of all higher education self-evaluation reports analyse higher education student feedback	Senior Management Team	Committee minutes Student feedback Course team self-evaluation report College self-evaluation report and quality improvement plan

| • continue to develop its use of performance indicators (paragraph 11) | • Raise awareness of key performance indicators and balanced scorecard via staff briefing sessions and committee meetings
• Monitor number and use of key performance indicators to improve the quality of provision
• Link key performance indicators/balanced scorecard to the Quality Code
• Include question in staff survey regarding key performance indicators and balanced scorecard | June 2014 | Director of Curriculum | Three staff briefing sessions held

Key performance indicators and balanced scorecard is a standard agenda item across all committees and management team meeting

Greater level of staff awareness regarding key performance indicators and balanced scorecard | Wider Management Team | Governing body reports

Minutes of committee meetings

Staff survey results

Course team self-evaluation report

College self-evaluation report and quality improvement plan |
| • review the induction process for staff teaching on higher education programmes (paragraph 24) | • Review content of current staff induction programme
• Develop staff induction to include higher education specific information
• Incorporate higher education specific | May 2014 | Head of Quality Improvement | Induction programme and guidance developed to include specific higher education information

100 per cent of new higher | Senior Management Team | Staff feedback

Student feedback

Guidance for new teaching staff handbook

Induction materials |

	information into the Guidance for New Teaching Staff Handbook			education teaching staff inducted using new guidance Five per cent increase in higher education student feedback regarding their student experience		Continuous professional development records

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