Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

Plumpton College

November 2011

SR 010/11

Preface

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

Purpose of IQER

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

The IQER process

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

Developmental engagement

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

The main elements of a Developmental engagement are:

- a self-evaluation by the college
- an optional written submission by the student body
- a preparatory meeting between the college and the IQER coordinator several weeks before the Developmental engagement visit
- the Developmental engagement visit, which normally lasts two days
- the evaluation of the extent to which the college 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/or the college's awarding body/ies as appropriate. The college's action plan in response to the conclusions of the Summative review will be published as part of the report.

Executive summary

The Summative review of Plumpton College carried out in November 2011

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

Good practice

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

- the close and mutually supportive relationship between the College and the University of Brighton which secures appropriate academic standards
- there is a comprehensive approach to research and scholarly activity that enhances the currency of the curriculum and teaching
- there is a close integration of academic, vocational and practical teaching and learning throughout the curriculum that gives courses a high degree of vocational relevance.

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:

- take further steps to ensure the sufficiency and accessibility of library resources and availability of electronic journals
- make available appropriate information and documentation for all workplace learning activities.

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

- continue to ensure that good practice is identified, shared and implemented
- consider more appropriate ways of recording and demonstrating information about professional membership and updating such information
- ensure that feedback consistently helps students to improve their future work.

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 Plumpton 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 courses which the College delivers on behalf of The University of Brighton, Harper Adams University College and the Royal Agricultural College. The review was carried out by Mrs Claire Blanchard, Dr Gillian Blunden, Mr John Hawthorn (reviewers), and Dr John Hurley (coordinator).

2   The Summative review team (the team) conducted the review in agreement with the College and in accordance with *The handbook for Integrated quality and enhancement review* (the handbook), published by QAA. Evidence in support of the Summative review included documentation supplied by the College and awarding bodies, meetings with staff, students, employers and partner institutions, and reports of reviews by QAA. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagement in assessment. A summary of findings from this Developmental engagement is provided in Section C of this report. The review also considered the College's use of the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers, with reference to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*)*, subject and award benchmark statements, The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and course 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 courses delivered at the College.

4   Plumpton College is a land-based college specialising in education and training across the range of land-based businesses. Plumpton College was built in 1926 as part of a national network of county-based agricultural colleges. The campus is six miles from Lewes and 10 miles from Brighton. The College expanded rapidly throughout the twentieth century with courses to meet the needs of land-based industries. The first higher course to be developed was the Higher National Diploma (HND) Wine Studies course launched in 1995 and further developments led to a suite of HND courses. In 2005, the existing HNDs and HNCs were replaced by Foundation Degrees and the University of Brighton's common academic framework was adopted.

5   In 2010-11, the College provided over 1,500 further and apprenticeship education places and delivered full cost training to over 1,500 further participants. This constitutes approximately 1,300 full-time equivalents. Higher education students number 420 full-time equivalents. Approximately one-third of the higher education students are 18-25 and the remaining two-thirds are over 25, which is the reverse of the University of Brighton's profile.

6   The College makes the following provision with the awarding body (full-time equivalent student numbers for 2011-12 are in brackets):

University of Brighton

- FdA Garden Design (18)
- FdA Wine Business (31)
- FdSc Arboriculture (18)

- FdSc Animal Science (66)
- FdSc Countryside Management (29)
- FdSc Forestry and Woodland Management (12)
- FdSc Equine Studies (29)
- FdSc Outdoor Adventurous Activities (45)
- FdSc Veterinary Nursing (24)
- FdSc Wine Production (52)
- BSc Hons Degrees Viticulture & Oenology (41)
- BSc Hons Equine Sports Performance (19) (honours degree courses are provided both as complete degree courses and the third year as a top-up)
- Foundation Diploma Equine Sports Coaching (2)
- Foundation Diploma Garden Design (0)
- Foundation Diploma Wine Production (7).

Two higher education provisions have been made with short-term HEFCE REEDNet project funding with:

Harper Adams University College
- Foundation Certificate Commercial Harness Horse Driving

Royal Agricultural College
- Foundation Certificate Wine Trade in Britain.

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

7   The partnership agreement with the University of Brighton gives the University overall responsibility for standards, quality of learning opportunities and public information. Plumpton College provides teaching, assessment, tutoring, resources, and staff development to the requirements and policies of the University. Student support provisions and publications are shared between the institutions. All Plumpton College higher education courses report to a College Board of Studies which is also constituted as a School of the Faculty of Science and Engineering, with joint membership from the University and the College. The high degree of integration means that higher education at Plumpton essentially functions as if it were a part of the University.

8   The agreements with Harper Adams University College and the Royal Agricultural College are established through REEDNet project funding and essentially validate short-term courses which are the full responsibility of the College.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

9   While the overall level of provision is stable, the College is in the process of developing further in-house subject-specific top-up degrees in a number of areas. These will replace other established progression routes. The College is bidding for HEFCE Transitional Funding to secure its allocated student places.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

10   Students studying on higher education courses at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. The submission was based on responses to questionnaires and internal student perception survey data. Responses were analysed by an occasional member of staff and approved by student representatives.

There was a relatively low level of response, with substantially different response rates from different courses, which somewhat skews the conclusions with a number of concerns that are specific to particular courses.

11   During the course of the visit the team met students for a private meeting. In discussion the students confirmed the overall strengths and areas for development identified in the survey for the written submission. The differences between courses were also clearly articulated. The student views expressed to the team are also apparent in the outcomes of the National Student Survey and are substantially supported by other evidence available. This is reflected in the report.

B   Evaluation of the management of HEFCE-funded higher education

Core theme 1: Academic standards

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

12   The College operates an internal matrix management structure in which the management of higher education is integrated into the College's management structure as a whole. The Academic Planning Manager fulfils the role of higher education manager at the College, line-managed by the Deputy Principal (Academic and Quality). Reporting four times a year to the College's Corporation Academic and Quality Committee and monthly to the Senior Management Team, the Academic Planning Manager produces an annual review of all higher education provision, compiled from a variety of sources including individual course reports, National Student Survey results, other student surveys, and external examiners' reports. This is considered by both the College and the University together with a separate summary and action plan of all significant matters arising from a consideration of the external examiners' reports.

13   The respective responsibilities of the College and its awarding bodies are specified clearly in a comprehensive Memorandum of Cooperation. The College has been accorded 'equivalent school status' by the University's School of Science and Engineering. The Dean of Faculty attends the Plumpton Board of Studies as do University link tutors and other key University staff; the College Higher Education Manager; other senior College staff; and course leaders. This oversees the strategic management of higher education courses delivered at Plumpton College. Additionally the Plumpton higher education manager represents the College at the University's Academic Partnership Committee, Faculty Academic Standards Committee, and Faculty Academic Board. The College higher education provision is effectively integrated within the University. The close and mutually supportive relationship between the College and the University of Brighton secures appropriate academic standards and is good practice, as it ensures parity between the College and the schools of the University.

14   Higher education courses are managed by course leaders reporting to their Heads of Department. Each course team is responsible for the planning, delivery, assessment, and review of their courses. These responsibilities are outlined in the College's Higher Education Strategy and role descriptions of the course leaders. They comply with the University of Brighton's Examination and Assessment Regulations (GEAR). Each course team meets with students through a course board which meets at least once a semester. Course teams produce an annual report of the course. Coordination and consistency in the day-to-day

management of higher education is achieved through monthly meetings between the Deputy Principal (Academic and Quality), the higher education manager, and course leaders.

15   Management of assessment is assured effectively, with allocated verifiers for all units. The relevant internal verifier is then responsible for confirming the suitability of the brief, and the quality of the marking and feedback. Internal verification currently involves taking a sample of assignments covering a range of grades. Overall the internal management systems are judged to be effective in maintaining the standard of assessment.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

16   The College operates within a framework established by the University which ensures that account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure. This supports staff involved in the development of new higher education courses; delivery and assessment of courses; and monitoring and enhancement of courses. The course validation documents and course specifications make appropriate reference to the FHEQ, subject and qualification benchmarks, and the *Code of practice* including *Section 4: External examining*. The qualification benchmark for Foundation Degrees has been taken into account by the College. The College is developing its own specific top-up degrees to assist progression, which will replace more generic provision at the University.

17   Adherence to these policies is achieved through the monthly higher education meetings. The advisory recommendation from the Developmental engagement - to identify intended learning outcomes on all assignment briefs - has been addressed by course staff and audited by the Academic Planning Manager. Reviewers confirm this has been completed. Best practice in assignment verification has also been shared to improve consistency in the verification of marking standards.

18   Plumpton College has a clear strategic rationale for the development of its higher education portfolio and its successful integration of theory and practice-based learning. Work-related learning forms a significant part of the College's Foundation Degrees and staff demonstrate awareness and use of the relevant section of the *Code of practice* in course design (*Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*). As a consequence a wide range of practical and work-based activities permeate the curriculum.

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?

19   Course teams produce an annual self-monitoring report of their course. These annual reviews form the basis for improving courses for the following year, as well as being incorporated into the annual Academic Health Report compiled by the Higher Education Manager. The reports incorporate and evaluate module leader reports, performance data, an analysis of student feedback, and external examiners' comments. Course teams include action points in their quality improvement plans for their courses. External examiner reports are also considered across higher education for the annual report. This report then forms the basis of consideration at the Plumpton Board, operating as an 'equivalent school' in the University of Brighton, and an action plan is drawn up and monitored. Plumpton College fulfils its obligations for ensuring standards effectively.

20   Opportunities exist within the higher education monthly meetings for the sharing of good practice. This was identified as an area for further development in the Developmental engagement. While progress has been made since the Developmental engagement, students report continuing inconsistencies between courses in a number of areas.

The role of the Higher Education Manager is instrumental in identifying and disseminating better practices. It is desirable that the College continues to ensure that good practice is identified, shared and implemented.

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

21   The College has clear policies for staff development, research and scholarly activity. All academic staff employed at Plumpton College for the management and delivery of higher education courses are approved by the awarding body at validation or when they subsequently join the teaching teams. Academic staff are well qualified. In addition to those members of staff already holding doctorates or master's degrees in their subjects, currently there are three members of Plumpton College academic staff engaged on PhD research at the University of Brighton, three following master's degree courses, and a further five are preparing proposals for registration for a higher degree. This helps to ensure academic currency.

22   Staff have a wide range of industrial experience, and many hold membership of professional bodies and undertake related continuing professional development. It is apparent that not all staff declare this, leading to under-reporting of industrial updating. It is desirable that the College considers more appropriate ways of recording and demonstrating information about professional membership and updating such information.

23   The College and University have active joint research groups in equine and wine subjects with some commissioned research projects. Higher education staff are given an additional time allowance by the College to support the scholarly activity necessary to the delivery of higher education courses and to maintain currency. In addition, a small number of research active staff are given substantial timetable teaching remission to support their research activities. This helps to create a genuine higher education culture in the College. There is a comprehensive approach to research and scholarly activity which is good practice as it enhances the currency of the curriculum and teaching.

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?

24   The College is responsible for the teaching, tutoring, and resources enjoyed by students within a policy framework established by the University of Brighton. The College manages the quality of these learning opportunities through the structures outlined in paragraphs 12 to 15.

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

25   The management and assurance of teaching, student support, and resource provision are outlined in the following section of the report. These are reported and reviewed through the mechanisms outlined in paragraph 19.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

26   The Higher Education Manager has undertaken mapping, jointly with the University, to ensure that sufficient account is taken of the *Code of practice* in College procedures. This has extended to *Section 10: Admissions to higher education, Section 3: Disabled students* and *Section 8: Career education, information, advice and guidance.* The team encourages continuing attention to mapping the *Code of practice* in procedures at Plumpton College.

27   Some staff spoke enthusiastically about their use of the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* as a guide to course organisation. Work placements are an integral part of most courses and along with case studies and live projects add to the vocational relevance of course content, which is embedded throughout the curriculum of courses. A very wide range of vocationally relevant opportunities are provided, from short practical courses which lead to additional qualifications to opportunities for volunteering and practical work in placements or in the College commercial units. Students value the balance of vocationally relevant and academic content within their courses. The team considers that the close integration of academic, vocational and practical teaching and learning throughout the curriculum is good practice as it gives courses a high degree of vocational relevance.

28   It is apparent, however, that guidance for students on work placements is variable and that, with one exception, little information is given to employers and placement providers. While there is some complexity in the range of situations to be documented, the team consider that, in this respect, the College could take more account of the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning.*

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

29   There is an effective policy in place for lesson observation. The plan for teaching observations of higher education is part of the wider College system and includes observation of tutorials. The observation format employs a short checklist and is adaptable for different contexts. Higher education observations are carried out by observers with teaching experience at this level. Outcomes from the system lead to personal action plans for support and development, where appropriate, which are negotiated through individual appraisal with the Head of Department.

30   Students confirmed that the overall quality of teaching is a strength, with some variation between 'adequate' and 'excellent'. Staff turnover was identified as a problem on some courses. A more widespread concern is that feedback on assessment is concentrated on what was done well or not well, but does not consistently indicate to students how future work can be improved. The College system of recording feedback and tutorial outcomes on handwritten carbons, while facilitating information-sharing and recording, makes it more difficult for some students to decipher what was being fed back. The quality and consistency of feedback has improved since the Developmental engagement, but there remains scope to

improve its contribution to future learning. It is desirable that the College ensures that feedback consistently helps students to improve their future work.

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

31   The University of Brighton has student support and tutoring policies which its partner colleges are required to deliver. These establish a clear student entitlement to induction, personal and academic tutorial support, and academic review. Plumpton College implements the policy through its induction processes and a regular timetabled tutorial system. Academic review and tutorial outcomes are recorded and students are provided with a copy. In addition tutors are available for informal pastoral and academic matters. All staff are provided with information on the policy and expectations of their tutorial roles.

32   Students contributing to the student submission were generally satisfied with the level of support. Those in the student meeting also had examples of the student support system working well to meet their academic and pastoral needs. Records show that review and tutoring is systematically implemented and on many courses extends beyond the minimum entitlement. The team considers that the College makes a well managed and appropriate tutorial provision in response to the University requirements.

33   Student support responsibilities are allocated by the University to each partner institution. Support for additional learning needs is assessed and organised through the University in the first instance. Students are asked to declare any learning needs, but the College is taking a more active role in identifying students who require support. Some courses use their own initial diagnostic and learning styles questionnaires to become aware of student needs. The currently known disabilities of students are monitored by the College. Support is offered to students for a range of learning difficulties and physical disabilities.

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

34   Staff new to higher education are appropriately supported through a teacher induction course and, where appropriate, the University of Brighton's PGCE course. They are also supported by a mentor, the Higher Education Manager, and other members of their course teams. The College commitment to Continuous Professional Development is demonstrated in its staff development policy. Both the College and the University provide training which enhances the capacity of staff to carry out their teaching and tutorial duties. Staff development records illustrate participation in a wide range of appropriate activities. Formalised staff exchanges with the University are used to enhance the quality of staff expertise, strengthen relationships, and promote the higher education culture in the College. There is effective support for staff to sustain the integration of academic and practical teaching through their own development.

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   Current staff have an extensive and substantial mix of vocational experience and academic and professional qualifications which support the currency of teaching and assist the integration of vocational and academic learning. The team noted this as a strength of the College provision.

36   The College has a well managed course of investment in the physical resources available to higher education. These have benefited from HEFCE and University funding and some have attracted commercial sponsorship. The resources include operational farms and woodlands, vineyards and wine making facilities, equine yards, and outdoor pursuit facilities. Many of these are run on a commercial basis to provide real world working experience for students. The vocationally specific resources are of a very high standard and are, in some cases, more advanced than current industry practice.

37   The students' generally high evaluation of vocational learning resources does not extend to the library and related learning facilities. These do not demonstrate the same level of investment from the College necessary for higher education. The library tries to ensure access to books relevant to each area of study, but students expressed a desire for more modern resources in the library, and increased computer provision there. There is currently only one library professional among staff working in the library. Although the published opening hours are 0830 to 2230, these cannot always be covered by qualified library staff. Students have access to the University of Brighton library plus a very wide range of electronic journals through the University portal. There remains a need to develop facilities in Plumpton. Book stock and electronic journals are limited in many higher education subjects at the College. The team considers it advisable for the College to take further steps to ensure the sufficiency and accessibility of library resources and availability of electronic journals.

38   Higher education students use the University of Brighton virtual learning environment, Student Central. Evident progress has been made since the Developmental engagement with staff and students citing this as an integral part of the learning process and a major information source.

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

Core theme 3: Public information

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

39   The University has responsibility for publishing most of the information on HEFCE-funded higher education at Plumpton College, in collaboration with Plumpton College staff. This includes publicity and recruitment information, student handbooks, and other general student information on the University virtual learning environment, Student Central. This reflects the close integration of Plumpton with the University, and the processes which originate from this information are similar to other schools of the University. Staff at the College have an active role in the process, for example since the Developmental engagement the higher education manager has led staff in revising student handbooks according to a consistent template so that they all contain similar information.

40   The College produces a small number of publications which are specific to higher education students studying at the College. These include a College higher education handbook which outlines College policies, facilities and services, and a study skills handbook. Unlike the University publications they are undated. The study skills handbook contains much useful advice but the team concurs with the higher education manager that some revision could make the content more accessible and relevant to students in the

College. Plumpton College is responsible for the content of the College website. All changes are channelled through the Principal who is the 'webmaster'.

41   While work-based learning is well developed and employers are highly supportive, few courses produce information specifically for employers and placement providers on their role. The FdSc Veterinary Nursing produces extensive documentation as part of a national scheme but no evidence was presented from other courses. A majority of employers and placement providers stated they would find short and non-bureaucratic information helpful. Specific course information on work-based learning for students is also variable. It is advisable that appropriate information and documentation is available for all workplace learning activities taking account of the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*.

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?

42   College processes ensure that the University requirements are met. The Higher Education Manager is responsible for ensuring processes are in place to approve, review and publish course handbooks, assessment schedules, the student handbook, and the study skills handbook. She also ensures that responses to the outcomes of student evaluation of courses including National Student Survey results and internal student surveys are published and shared with the student representatives. All information originated in the College is checked by the Higher Education Manager before submission to the University verification processes within the faculty and by the Marketing Unit. Guidelines for activity related to marketing and publicity are stated in the document *Marketing and publicity functions for partner colleges* and included in the University of Brighton Partnership Handbook, published on the University of Brighton website.

43   Course leaders are responsible for the accuracy of course level information, subject to University approval. They lead their teams in developing and reviewing the course handbook, course specifications, the semester assessment schedule, and development of module assessment briefs. They are responsible for ensuring that course handbooks, module specifications and course board minutes are distributed in print or available on Student Central. The students confirmed that the necessary information relating to their course assessment can be found either on Student Central or in course handbooks. Once information has been approved by the University it is subject to final confirmation by course leaders. The team considers these procedures to be effective in closing the loop on the quality control of information within the College.

44   Information on the Plumpton website is updated by Plumpton staff. Course leaders check the content and email necessary changes regarding the higher education provision to the 'webmaster'. The content closely reflects that on the University website and is checked by the University Link tutor. Overall, the team considers that the information available in print and online is accurate and that information for students is sufficiently complete.

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

45   A Developmental engagement was carried out at the College in November 2010. The lines of enquiry were:

Line of enquiry 1: How does the College assure itself that the assessment strategy reflects the appropriate academic standards including the use of internal verification and external examiners, and that those assessment procedures are clearly documented and communicated to staff and students?

Line of enquiry 2: Is appropriate feedback (tutorial, formative and summative) provided to students on assessed work in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvement?

Line of enquiry 3: How does the College ensure that published information on assessment is current, accurate and complete; and that it is communicated effectively to the relevant stakeholders?

46   Good practice was identified in the assessment process, maintaining rigour and standards through the Board of Studies, and combating plagiarism. Additional assessments leading to vocational or professional qualifications enhanced student employability. Staff development support was effective in promoting good assessment practice, subject currency, scholarship, and industrial updating. Some areas had begun to share external examiners' reports with students.

47   Development areas were the need to gain greater consistency in the assessment process by identifying intended learning outcomes clearly on all assignment briefs, and strengthening consistency in marking and feedback through internal verification.

D Foundation Degrees

48   The College runs 10 Foundation Degrees which form the majority of provision, and cover wine, equine, tree and countryside management, animal and veterinary science, garden design, and outdoor activities. In addition, two honours degrees run in parallel to wine and equine courses; these share many common modules with the Foundation Degrees and provide top-up years. The College is currently introducing further top-up degrees to augment established progression routes. Diplomas based on a selection of modules from Foundation Degrees are available in three subject areas.

49   The team conclude that the Foundation Degrees have a very high degree of integration between the academic, vocational and practical elements of the course both in the curriculum and teaching. This is supported by staff who combine high levels of academic qualification with strong industrial and professional experience. There is genuine research activity supporting the curriculum in some areas, and encouragement of scholarly activity maintains subject currency for staff. In much teaching there is an orientation to hands-on practical activity, some leading to additional industrial or professional qualifications. In addition there is an exceptionally well resolved balance between theory and practice which students also recognise as a strength. Since the Developmental engagement the College has made significant efforts to improve the consistency of its provision through sharing good practice, and is encouraged to continue this effort with reference to formative feedback on assessment, fuller documentation of its processes for work-based learning, and publication of these for students and employers.

50   All the conclusions below apply to the Foundation Degree provision.

E   Conclusions and summary of judgements

51   The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Plumpton 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 Brighton, the Royal Agricultural College, and Harper Adams University College.

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

- the close and mutually supportive relationship between the College and the University of Brighton which secures appropriate academic standards (paragraphs 13, 16, 34 and 39)
- there is a comprehensive approach to research and scholarly activity that enhances the currency of the curriculum and teaching (paragraph 23)
- there is a close integration of academic, vocational and practical teaching and learning throughout the curriculum that gives courses a high degree of vocational relevance (paragraphs 18, 27 and 35).

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

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

- take further steps to ensure the sufficiency and accessibility of library resources and availability of electronic journals (paragraph 37)
- make available appropriate information and documentation for all workplace learning activities (paragraphs 28 and 41).

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

- continue to ensure that good practice is identified, shared and implemented (paragraph 20)
- consider more appropriate ways of recording and demonstrating information about professional membership and updating such information (paragraph 22)
- ensure that feedback consistently helps students to improve their future work (paragraph 30).

56   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.

57   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.

58   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.

Plumpton College action plan relating to the Summative review: November 2011						
Good practice	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
In the course of the Summative review the team identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
• the close and mutually supportive relationship between the College and the University of Brighton which secures appropriate academic standards (paragraphs 13, 16, 34 and 39)	Continue to attend Academic Partnership Committee, Faculty Academic Standards Committee, and Faculty Academic Board, and feedback developments to course leaders and other college staff	Ongoing	Higher education manager	Higher education staff aware of developments at University of Brighton	Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality)	Higher education department monthly meeting minutes; Plumpton Board of Study minutes
	Exam boards to continue to function in the current collaborative manner to secure academic standards	February 2012 June 2012 July 2012 September 2012	Higher education administrator; Higher education manager	Efficient exam boards with timely results communicated to students	Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality); Dean of Faculty (Science & Engineering)	Area Exam Board and Course Exam Board minutes; external examiner reports; student feedback
	Continue to disseminate pertinent University of Brighton training opportunities to higher education staff	Ongoing	Higher education manager	Staff take-up rates on University of Brighton training events	Governor's Academic and Quality committee	Governor's Academic and Quality committee minutes Annual College Academic Health report

• there is a comprehensive approach to research and scholarly activity that enhances the currency of the curriculum and teaching (paragraph 23)	Continue to run regular research and scholarly activity team meetings	Ongoing	Head of Research & Development	Sharing of good practice across the higher education community	Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality)	Meeting minutes
	Continue to offer higher education teaching staff the opportunity to study for higher degrees at University of Brighton	Ongoing	Head of Research & Development	Research-literate higher education teaching staff	Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality)	Timetables (remission); research reports
	Involve research assistants in the review and teaching of identified modules to improve the usage and currency of research in the curriculum	Ongoing	Head of Research & Development; Higher education manager	Increased currency of research used in teaching, eg PL224 Health Wellbeing & the Outdoors	Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality)	External examiner reports; student feedback eg EvaSys surveys; numbers of students continuing in higher education eg top-up, Master's level
	Continue to feedback on scholarly activity and research regularly	Ongoing	Research assistants; Head of Research & Development	Sharing good practice across the higher education community	Higher education manager; Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality); Governor's Academic Committee	Plumpton Board of Study minutes; Governor's Academic Committee minutes

	Continue to publish research completed by Plumpton staff	Ongoing	Head of Research & Development and relevant research-active staff	Published articles available in public sphere; research contracts bid for and won	Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality); Governor's Academic Committee	Research report (Plumpton Board of Study minutes); Governor's Academic Committee minutes
• there is a close integration of academic, vocational and practical teaching and learning throughout the curriculum that gives courses a high degree of vocational relevance (paragraphs 18, 27 and 35)	Consult with industry regarding the content/skills taught on the degree programmes via Curriculum Advisory Panels	July 2012	Higher education course leaders; heads of departments	High rate of employment of students in land-based industries	Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality)	Curriculum Advisory Panel minutes; Annual Academic Health report includes destination data; destination of leavers from higher education survey results
	Annual review of courses via higher education Review Day and July sub-committee of Plumpton Board of Study	July 2012	Higher education course leaders	Courses showing balance of content and updated regularly to meet industry and student expectations	Chair of the Plumpton Board of Study; Dean of Faculty	Plumpton Board of Study minutes showing module revisions made and programme specification revisions made; Course Board minutes

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:						
• take further steps to ensure the sufficiency and accessibility of library resources and availability of electronic journals (paragraph 37)	Library to be staffed from 8.30am-10pm Monday-Friday as per the published hours; part-time staff hours utilised where necessary	February 2012	Principal	Students comment favourably regarding access to the library	Governors	EvaSys surveys; National Student Survey; Course Board minutes
	Course leaders to identify necessary resources and request the librarian to order either hard copies or electronic copies of books	Ongoing but specifically by each July	Higher education course leaders; librarian	Students comment favourably about the sufficiency of resources	Higher education manager; Principal	EvaSys surveys; National Student Survey; Course Board minutes
	Course leaders to identify necessary electronic journals and request the librarian to order them; IT to support by ensuring that remote access is available	Ongoing but specifically by each July	Higher education course leaders; librarian; IT staff and manager	Students comment favourably about the sufficiency of electronic journals; continuing evidence in external examiner reports that students are accessing journals	Higher education manager; Principal; Deputy Principal (Resources)	EvaSys surveys; National Student Survey; Course Board minutes; external examiner reports
• make available appropriate information and documentation	Course leaders to advise what information their workplace providers	April 2012	Higher education course leaders	Work placement providers consulted	Higher education manager	Emails between higher education manager and course leaders

for all workplace learning activities (paragraphs 28 and 41)	would prefer					
	Higher education manager to liaise with higher education manager at other partner colleges to gain best practice information regarding documentation	May 2012	Higher education manager; Higher education managers at partner college (Academic Partnership Committee meeting)	Successful sharing of good practice across the partner colleges	Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality)	Emails between higher education manager and partner college staff; Academic Partnership Committee minutes
	Higher education manager to liaise with college health and safety staff to ensure completeness and accuracy of information	June 2012	Higher education manager; Facilities & Projects Officer; Safety Officer	Health and safety trained staff input into higher education workplace documentation to ensure that college policies and legislation are adhered to	Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality); Deputy Principal (Resources) Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality)	Emails between higher education manager and health and safety college staff; draft document
	Higher education manager to write employer-facing workplace document	July 2012	Higher education manager	Document written and disseminated to work placement providers	Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality)	Document on Q-drive and available on virtual learning environment
	Document amended/updated in response to workplace provider feedback	November 2012	Higher education manager	Document reviewed and changed as necessary		Document on Q-drive and available on virtual learning environment

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:						
• continue to ensure that good practice is identified, shared and implemented (paragraph 20)	Good practice disseminated via higher education meetings	Ongoing	Higher education course leaders	Good practice is spread across the portfolio of courses at the College	Higher education manager	Higher education meeting minutes
	Higher education review day to include a section on good practice	July 2012	Higher education course leaders; higher education manager	Staff involved in higher education delivery meet together and share ideas	Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality)	Agenda for higher education review day; Powerpoint shown at higher education review day
• consider more appropriate ways of recording and demonstrating information about professional membership and updating such information (paragraph 22)	Staff CV proforma to be amended to include a section on professional membership	March 2012	Higher education manager; Human Resources Officer	Staff record more efficiently their professional body membership; easier to collate data	Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality)	Yearly updating of CVs will show that professional body membership is recorded and updated
• ensure that feedback consistently helps students to	Revise, after consultation, the higher education feedback sheet to ensure that	July 2012	Higher education course leaders	Feedback sheet explicitly has a section directing staff to give 'how	Higher education manager	Audit of internal verification forms and scrutiny of sample of

improve their future work (paragraph 30)	feedback is focused on 'how to improve'			to improve' comments		returned work
	Internal verification schedule to include more staff so that best practice is shared more widely	September 2012	Higher education manager	More staff involved in the internal verification process and sharing their good practice	Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality)	Internal verification schedule 2012-13
	Internal verification schedule 'shaken up' to involve more staff in internally verifying modules outside their department	September 2012	Higher education manager	Staff internally verifying outside their own departments will spread good practice and challenge the way it has always been done, eg checking language is accessible and instructions clear	Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality)	Internal verification schedule 2012-13
	Internal verification assessment decision audit held	May/June 2012	Higher education manager; Quality development manager	College quality assurance system checking that assessment decisions are comparable across courses and sharing good practice	Deputy Principal (Academic & Quality)	Good practice briefing post-audit