Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

Ruskin College

May 2011

SR 59/2010

Preface

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

Purpose of IQER

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

The IQER process

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

Developmental engagement

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

The main elements of a Developmental engagement are:

- a self-evaluation by the college
- an optional written submission by the student body
- a preparatory meeting between the college and the IQER coordinator several weeks before the Developmental engagement visit
- the Developmental engagement visit, which normally lasts two days
- the evaluation of the extent to which the college manages effectively its responsibilities for the delivery of academic standards and the quality of its higher education provision, plus the arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of public information it is responsible for publishing about its higher education
- the production of a written report of the team's findings.

To promote a collegial approach, Developmental engagement teams include up to two members of staff from the further education college under review. They are known as nominees for this process.

Summative review

Summative review addresses all aspects of a college's HEFCE-funded higher education provision and provides judgements on the management and delivery of this provision against core themes one and two, and a conclusion against core theme three.

Summative review shares the main elements of Developmental engagement described above. Summative review teams however, are composed of the IQER coordinator and QAA reviewers. They do not include nominees.

Evidence

In order to obtain evidence for the review, IQER teams carry out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the college's self-evaluation and its internal procedures and documents
- reviewing the optional written submission from students
- asking questions of relevant staff
- talking to students about their experiences.

IQER teams' expectations of colleges are guided by a nationally agreed set of reference points, known as the Academic Infrastructure. These are published by QAA and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, which includes descriptions of different higher education qualifications
- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study
- award benchmark statements which describe the generic characteristics of an award, for example Foundation Degrees.

In addition, Developmental engagement teams gather evidence by focusing on particular aspects of the theme under review. These are known as 'lines of enquiry'.

Outcomes of IQER

Each Developmental engagement and Summative review results in a written report:

- Developmental engagement reports set out good practice and recommendations and implications for the college and its awarding bodies, but do not contain judgements. Recommendations will be at one of three levels - **essential**, **advisable** and **desirable**. To promote an open and collegial approach to Developmental engagements, the reports are not published.
- Summative review reports identify good practice and contain judgements about whether the college is discharging its responsibilities effectively against core themes one and two above. The judgements are **confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence**. There is no judgement for the third core theme, instead the report will provide evaluation and a conclusion. Summative review reports are published. Differentiated judgements can be made where a team judges a college's

management of the standards and/or quality of the awards made by one awarding body to be different from those made by another.

Colleges are required to develop an action plan to address any recommendations arising from IQER. Progress against these action plans is monitored by QAA in conjunction with HEFCE and/or the college's awarding 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 Ruskin College carried out in May 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 agreement, for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding body. The team also considers that there can be **confidence** in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreement, for the quality of learning opportunities it offers. The team considers that reliance **can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Good practice

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

- staff demonstrate an informed, consistent use of the Academic Infrastructure in the design of academic programmes
- external moderation and reporting is highly successful in supporting the effective development of the peer observation scheme
- staff enthusiastically and effectively implement a learning and teaching strategy that supports them in fully engaging with the differentiation of learning opportunities for non-traditional students
- the support that is given, especially at the pre-entry stage, effectively encourages students from non-traditional backgrounds to commit themselves to higher education
- the College operates a tutorial system that is specifically focused on the early stages of programmes to support and nurture students from non-traditional backgrounds
- staff provide exceptionally rapid and constructive formative feedback to students
- the Oxfordshire Practice Learning Centre enables learners on professionally accredited programmes to achieve their intended learning outcomes and supports a clear employer focus in assessment that contextualises academic theory and appropriately addresses the competences required on professional practice
- the range of clear and comprehensive information, which is distributed in a timely way, starting at the pre-entry stage, provides reassurance and guidance for students
- the comprehensive range of policy documentation that aligns with the College's strategic aims arises through consensual processes, engaging all staff, and is consequently clearly embedded within academic practice.

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:

- review the means by which the Academic Quality and Standards Committee assures itself of the effectiveness of the College's arrangements for managing quality and standards

- develop a strategy that promotes the central role of the virtual learning environment in strengthening independent learning
- ensure the effective implementation of the central monitoring approach to ensure the consistency and accuracy of information contained within programme handbooks.

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

- move as soon as possible towards implementation of the new statistical software to improve the College's ability to produce cross-college analytical reports and to overview student performance
- ensure that summative assessment is received in a timely fashion.

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 Ruskin 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 Open University. The review was carried out by Ms Maxina Butler-Holmes, Mr John Skinner, Mr Lawrie Walker (reviewers) and Mr Robert Jones (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 body, meetings with staff, students and the awarding body, reports of reviews by QAA and from inspections by Ofsted. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagements in assessment and in student support. A summary of findings from these Developmental engagements is provided in Section C of this report. The review also considered the College's use of the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers, with reference to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, subject and award benchmark statements, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and programme specifications.

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

4   The College is an adult residential college, which was established in 1899 to provide educational opportunities for working class men (and women from 1919) who were denied access to university. The College is based on two sites in Oxford: Walton Street, close to the city centre, and Headington, on the outskirts of the city. The latter is in an attractive setting with ample room to expand and the College is energetically pursuing the strategy of concentrating its provision there. From 2012-13, it will be on just one site at Headington and will have benefited from capital expenditure on new teaching, library and learning resources and on refurbished residential facilities. The mission of the College is to provide educational opportunities to adults who are excluded and disadvantaged, and to transform the individuals concerned along with the communities, groups and societies from which they come*.*

5   The College's higher education programmes are structured into three Academic Groups: Humanities, Social Sciences and Lifelong Learning; Law and International Labour and Trade Union Studies; and Social, Youth and Community Work Studies. There are currently 400 higher education students at the College, 275 of whom are funded by HEFCE. They comprise 161 full-time and 114 part-time students, 234.25 full-time equivalent students. There are 1,012 further education students, 66 full-time equivalent students.

6   The higher education programmes offered by the College funded by HEFCE are listed below, under the heading of the relevant Academic Group of which they are a member, followed by the number of full-time equivalent students. They are all validated by the Open University.

The Open University

Humanities, Social Sciences and Lifelong Learning
- FdA Writing for Performance (15.5)
- BA (Hons) English Studies: Creative Writing and Critical Practice (with exit points at Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) and Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) levels) (35)
- BA (Hons) History with Social Science (incorporating CertHE History, with an exit point at DipHE level) (27)
- BA (Hons) Social Science: Sociology, Politics and Economics (with exit points at CertHE and DipHE levels) (46)
- MA Public History (3)
- MA Women's Studies (1.5)

Law and International Labour and Trade Union Studies
- BA (Hons) International Labour and Trade Union Studies (with exit points at CertHE and DipHE levels) (18.5)
- MA International Labour and Trade Union Studies (13)

Social, Youth and Community Work Studies
- BA (Hons) Social Work (with an exit point at CertHE with the award title Applied Social Studies) (100.75)
- BA (Hons) Youth and Community Work (with exit points at CertHE and DipHE levels, with the award title Working with Young People) (45)

Partnership agreement with the awarding body

7   The College was first approved by the Open University Validation Services, acting on behalf of the Open University, in 1992. Currently the College is a partner institution of the Open University Validation Services, with the levels of delegated authority accorded to partner institutions and is pursuing further delegated authority as part of its forthcoming Institutional Review in 2011-12. The relationship is managed by a Quality and Partnerships Manager of the Open University Validation Services, who is available to advise the College on points of process and whose main point of contact in the College is the Quality Officer. They hold an annual planning meeting to agree the timetable of proceedings for the forthcoming academic year.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

8   The College is currently halfway through a £17million capital project which will culminate in a consolidation of the whole College on the Ruskin Hall site in Headington. Phase 1 is already complete. It involved the refurbishment of the four buildings to the west of the site, three of which are residential blocks, while the fourth combines teaching and office accommodation together with a temporary reception. Phase 2 involves the refurbishment of the main Rookery building and the construction alongside it of a four-floor academic building to house classrooms, offices, the College library and a cafeteria. The College will move out of the Walton Street site and across to Headington, three miles away, in September 2012.

9   The College is expanding its higher education provision with one new Cert HE (in Activism and Campaigning, validated, subject to conditions, in May 2011).

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

10   Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. A focus group of students, facilitated by the Academic Registrar, consulted widely within the College and led to an authoring group producing a clear and evaluative student submission. During the review visit, the team held a productive meeting with representative students.

B   Evaluation of the management of HEFCE-funded higher education

Core theme 1: Academic standards

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

11   In view of its partnership status with the Open University Validation Services, and within an overall annual quinquennial review process, the College is afforded a significant amount of autonomy to manage academic standards, including the design of programmes, admissions, assessments, the regulatory framework governing awards, the management of assessment and award boards, and the issuing of transcripts.

12   The day-to-day management of the College's higher education programmes is undertaken by Programme Coordinators, who are line-managed by three Academic Coordinators, one for each Academic Group. The Academic Coordinators report to the Dean. Quality assurance processes are overseen by a Quality Officer, who also reports to the Dean. Open University Validation Services' Academic Reviewers act as key links between the Academic Groups and the relevant faculties in the Open University.

13   In the College's governance arrangements, the ultimate authority for maintaining academic standards is the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, to which Programme Boards report. The Committee's meetings are conducted in line with its terms of reference, and there is evidence of deliberation about programmes in the process of developing problems and validation. Attendance is variable, however, and the minutes of Programme Boards are not consistently made available to the Committee in a timely manner.

14   Programme Boards may be more accurately described as Academic Group Boards, as they are responsible for all the programmes within the group, rather than an individual programme. They vary in size and attendance and may tend to focus more on operational issues rather than reflective activity. For example, they do not receive the annual reports of the individual programmes, though they do receive oral reports from Programme Coordinators. The programme teams are only required to meet formally once a year, in preparing the annual report for inclusion in the report to the Open University Validation Services. With one exception, however, these meetings are not minuted; and the one set of minutes that was seen made no reference to the annual report.

15   The number of staff teaching higher education in the College is small. There are only 22 academic staff teaching on higher education programmes in the College, 15 of whom are full-time appointments. In practice, this means there is considerable mutual knowledge through daily communication, and overlap between members of different groups.

The management and committee structure is correspondingly flat. Many processes are devolved to the local operation of the three Academic Groups. For example, award certificates are produced by the Open University Validation Services, based upon information provided by the College. The outcomes of examination boards are recorded by academic tutors acting as examination secretaries, who then produce transcripts on behalf of the College, signed off by the chair of the relevant board. Such local generation and approval of data relating to student performance and the resulting award procedure is potentially vulnerable. A study of a sample of transcripts suggests, for example, that the necessary information about location of study and language of instruction and assessment may not be systematically provided by the transcripts and certificates.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

16   The College is responsible for designing and updating its academic programmes, subject to approval by the Open University Validation Services. This ownership of the curriculum is responsibly undertaken by the College. The Developmental engagement on assessment identified as good practice the fact that the Academic Infrastructure is extensively used and referred to by the College in its programme development and design. This was confirmed by the Summative review. Prior to external validation events, all new programmes are subject to a thorough internal scrutiny procedure that checks alignment with the Academic Infrastructure. Levels and outcomes are clearly mapped against the FHEQ, ensuring a clear progression through programmes. Subject benchmark statements are well used to inform curriculum design, as are the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* and *Section 6: Assessment of students.* Assessment tasks accurately reflect programme learning outcomes, in line with the College's assessment policy, reflected in its well-constructed regulatory framework that ensures harmonisation in standards across the College provision as a whole. Programme specifications contain the requisite information, are regularly updated and are publicly available.

17   Quality assurance processes are aligned with the precepts of the *Code of practice.* Mapping of the College's provision against the *Code of practice* as a whole was undertaken for the Open University institutional review in 2007. This is a thorough and ongoing process. For example, the College has recently updated this mapping against recently revised sections of the *Code of practice, Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters* and *Section 9: Work-based and placement learning.* Practice placement activity is aligned to the relevant precepts. Specific updates and changes to College practice are recorded in Annual Reports to the Open University Validation Services.

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

18   The College plans and coordinates the activities of external examiners, whose reports are generally very positive, particularly in relation to assessment practice and the conduct of assessment and examination boards. The Dean studies all external examiner reports and responds on behalf of the College. The use of external examiners to monitor standards is effective. A sample of assessment and examination board minutes confirms external examiner views that boards are well managed, with evidence of genuine discussion.

19   The annual reports of individual programmes clearly follow the Open University Validation Services' guidelines, contain useful data and analysis of evidence from students and external examiners and a systematic approach to action planning. The reports are collected, together with a college-wide commentary, to form an Annual Institutional

Overview, on which the Open University Validation Services comments in detail. The College's responses to these comments are clear and comprehensive and include action plans. There is evidence in this process of the College's ability to monitor the outcomes from its quality assurance processes, to track actions and recommendations, and to report progress to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee and the Open University Validation Services.

20   The Annual Institutional Overview contains a thorough commentary on students' views and the individual programme reports. Otherwise, however, there is little evidence of the College's institutional level monitoring of themes, messages and patterns arising from the evidence base. For example, while the external examiner reports and replies are attached to each programme annual report, there is no overview analysis, although the Developmental engagement in assessment stressed the importance of centrally collating feedback from external examiners so as to enable the identification of cross-college trends. As another example, the statistics concerning student progression and performance at programme level are not analysed at College level for submission to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The recent introduction of statistical software has the potential to provide good quality management information about the relationships between student demography and performance across levels and over time, but its development and embedding is at a very early stage. The team also found little evidence in the committees of the College's ability to 'scan the sector' and to consider how national developments and practice might inform their own practice, though this may be happening elsewhere, for example in Management Team meetings.

21   A welcome development is the way in which the Governing Executive's Audit Committee has begun to take a role in the overview of College governance and selected systems, most recently in the form of an independent review of the College's quality assurance systems that was reported to the Governing Executive but not yet, at the time of the review visit, to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee.

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

22   While there is good evidence of college-led staff development to support teaching and learning, activities directly related to the management of academic standards appear to be limited to a standardisation workshop, a session on preparing annual reports and an admissions workshop. There is scope for additional staff development; for example, in relation to the analysis of data, the role and conduct of assessment boards and the regulatory framework.

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?

23   The arrangements described in paragraphs 12 to 14 also apply to the College's management of the quality of learning opportunities. The Academic Coordinators report to the Dean through the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, which receives all Programme Board minutes including items relating to the quality of learning opportunities.

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

24   The processes by which the College assures itself that it is fulfilling its obligations to the Open University are described in paragraphs 18 to 19. The annual monitoring reports make effective use of feedback from students, external examiners and the programme team in order to review learning opportunities**.**

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

25   As described in paragraphs 16 to 17, the College engages comprehensively with the Academic Infrastructure. Adherence is monitored by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee and work carried out to maintain alignment is outlined in the annual report to the Open University Validation Services. Specific attention is paid to the needs of the students that the College aims to recruit. College policies and procedures regulating pedagogic and pastoral aspects of the student experience reflect the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice.*

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

26   The College employs a range of methods to assure and enhance the quality of teaching and learning. These include module evaluations, annual programme reviews, peer observation of teaching and learning, external observation of staff undertaking postgraduate teacher training and the provision of relevant staff development programmes. The peer observation of the teaching and learning process is externally moderated, ensuring that the observations, judgements and feedback to staff are appropriate for higher education. The College receives an annual report from the external moderator of the process which provides statistical analysis and outlines the strengths and weakness of the scheme. This report provides for a measured assessment of the success of the improvement of teaching and learning and makes independent suggestions for the development of the programme. The observation process is still being developed, but the external moderation and reporting is already highly successful in supporting the effective development of this peer observation scheme.

27   The quality of teaching and learning observed in higher education programmes is consistently high across the College. This view is supported by the favourable comments from external examiners on the quality of teaching and its impact upon student performance across all programmes of study. In meetings with students, the team was further convinced that staff are enthusiastic and supportive and encourage non-traditional students to achieve to their full potential. The teaching is supported by a clear Learning and Teaching Strategy.

This puts at its centre the student experience, based upon supportive pedagogic methods delivered in a collegial and supportive environment and fully acknowledges the role of differentiation. College staff enthusiastically and effectively implement this strategy and fully engage with the policy of differentiation so as to provide a range of learning opportunities suitable for non-traditional students with varying interests, abilities, skills and levels of readiness to learn.

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

28   There is effective support for students. This is at the heart of providing higher education to traditionally excluded and disadvantaged adults. A proactive approach is taken towards offering pre-entry opportunities to attract such students. The support for students starts from their first contact with the College. Before committing to a full-time programme, they are offered a range of higher education access days, short courses and summer schools to increase their preparedness for higher level study. Students are particularly enthusiastic about these opportunities, citing meetings with student ambassadors, the helpfulness of information and the encouragement given at higher education access days as key to their eventual recruitment. The support for students after they are enrolled is also very good. There is a carefully planned induction that thoroughly prepares students for the more demanding learning experiences as they progress through their programmes. Once students are enrolled on a programme, the arrangements for transition from one level to the next fully support intellectual progression. The meeting with students confirmed the effectiveness of the initial induction process and of the equivalent support into the next level of study.

29   A key feature of the College's educational philosophy is its tutorial system, specifically focused on the early stages of programmes, to support and nurture non-traditional students. Highly effective tutorial sessions are provided for groups of three to four students and provide a forum for discussion and support for regular submitted essays. These tutorials also provide the foundation for non-traditional students to develop their skills, understanding and self-confidence, so as to enable them to make the transition to effective independent learning. In this they are outstandingly successful, as the students enthusiastically testified.

30   Closely connected with the tutorial system is the exceptionally rapid and thorough formative feedback that consistently incorporates indicators for improvement. It draws praise from students and external examiners. The College's policy is for staff to give formative feedback on tutorial essays within two weeks, though in practice it is often much quicker than that. The deadline for summative feedback is three weeks. While the quality of summative feedback is equally highly valued by the students, one area for concern is that it is sometimes significantly delayed: only 63 per cent of students were satisfied with its timeliness. These concerns were raised at the relevant Programme Boards, and assurances have been made that all feedback and assessment results will be returned promptly, and in accordance with the regulatory framework on assessment. The team's meeting with students indicated that the problem has not been fully resolved, particularly at and around natural administrative pinch points in the assessment calendar and delays in sampling due to extensions. This is a disappointing aspect of what otherwise is excellent feedback.

31   The College assures itself that students are supported effectively by eliciting their views through cross-college surveys, module reviews and student representation on Programme Boards and on the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The student submission shows that most students feel well supported by both academic and administrative staff. Student surveys show that 91 per cent of students thought that access to tutors was good; 90 per cent thought advice on study was well regarded; and 96 per cent of students agreed that the teaching on their course was good.

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

32   The College has a clear commitment to providing staff development designed to maintain and enhance the quality of learning opportunities. To ensure that staff skills are developed and maintained, attendance at continuous professional development events is encouraged and attendance is monitored. The College holds a number of internal events each year. The continuous professional development events include topics that relate to equality and diversity, retention and other topics arising from the reviews of the observation of teaching. Additionally, good practice is shared amongst staff at sessions organised at the end of each term.

33   All staff, where appropriate, are encouraged to undertake a postgraduate qualification in teaching and the College encourages higher education staff to join the Higher Education Academy. Staff are supported financially to undertake internal and external postgraduate courses to enhance their skills for teaching higher education.

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?

34   There are clear processes for considering learning resources during the development and validation of new programmes as required by the Open University Validation Services. The learning resources of existing programmes are monitored by annual programme reviews. The College has, in addition, been undertaking a major review of the sufficiency and accessibility of its learning resources. The library collection is situated at Walton Street and is seen by the students as a very useful resource, though its distance from Headington presents a problem for students based there, which will, however, be resolved when the library moves to Headington in 2012. The College has supported these students by extending the opening hours and providing more online journals. All students benefit from being able to attend University of Oxford lectures without charge and to use its libraries, privileges which are actively exercised and much appreciated.

35   The College's computers are situated on both sites, giving students 24-hour access, seven days a week during term time. The move to a single site in 2012 requires deviation from the normal three year replacement policy and the College plans to update servers and computers in the same cycle in 2012. Initially there was some degradation of the Wi-Fi network at Headington which drew criticism from students, but this has been rectified. Students at Walton Road state that recently there has been less access to computers on that site. This is a result of re-rooming and examination sessions requiring computers. These problems are being resolved.

36   The virtual learning environment provides students with access to some learning materials and assessment information, including programme handbooks, lecture notes, access to the library catalogue and information relating to student support services. The use of the intranet and e-learning is addressed in the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and the College acknowledges that more widespread use is required within a blended learning approach. There are some limited instances where the virtual learning environment is being used in a more interactive way so as to meet students' needs and learning styles. However, the virtual learning environment is underdeveloped, especially as a means of developing independent learning.

37 The Oxfordshire Practice Learning Centre is an integral part of the College and is a key resource to enable students in the BA (Hons) Social Work and the BA (Hons) Youth and Community Work to achieve the intended learning outcomes for their programmes. It locates work placements, collaborates effectively with employers to ensure strong employer involvement in practice placements and assessments and provides thorough training for intending practice teachers/fieldwork supervisors. It has particularly strong links with Oxfordshire County Council and Essex County Council and works with a wide network of voluntary organisations and statutory bodies in the region. The provision of this resource supports a clear employer focus in assessment that contextualises academic theory and appropriately addresses the competences required in professional 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 bodies to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.**

Core theme 3: Public information

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

38 A Higher Education Prospectus and a range of information leaflets are published by the College for the guidance of applicants. The prospectus is attractively produced, informative and clearly reinforces the educational values of the College. The information leaflets provide an insight into individual subjects and a flavour of the student experience. Students confirmed that information is clear and helpful in assisting student choice.

39 The College's website provides user-friendly information and a welcoming image to prospective students. This includes guidance on student support and financial matters. There are monthly news articles and student testimonials which are targeted at current and former students. Recruitment information provides an introduction to each subject. There are some staff profiles included, which adds an interesting dimension, an approach which the College is encouraged to use more widely. Online applications have recently been introduced. Over the past year, the College has endorsed the use of social networking media which is welcomed by students.

40 Students are provided with reliable and comprehensive information at different stages during the pre-entry phase. This creates a realistic preview into and engages students with the learning culture. Students were unanimous in affirming the usefulness of the pre-entry information. Staff from the Registry, Student Services and Marketing work in a coherent and coordinated way to provide information to both applicants and students.

41 There are two primary sources of information relating to supporting students' experiences at the College. The Learning and Support Handbook and the Community and Residence Handbook are available in both electronic and hard copy format. The Learning and Support Handbook is arranged into sections which comprehensively cover a wide range of college policies, procedures and academic regulations. Section 3 contains the Academic Code of Practice which defines mutual expectations. There are clear role descriptors for key staff such as the Personal Tutor and Academic Tutor. The range of support functions are all included in the Handbook, which students find an essential source of reference. The Community and Residence Handbook provides a similarly comprehensive range of

information. The cumulative effect of the clear and timely information, distributed from the pre-entry stage onwards, is to provide reassurance and guidance to students.

42   Programme handbooks are generally helpful, but there is some variation in quality. The Youth and Community Work Handbook is one of the best examples of a well presented and coherent document. In some other programme handbooks there are examples of inconsistencies which are easily correctible. Students confirmed that they are introduced to and guided through programme handbooks. Some module handbooks provide students with clearly detailed weekly session outcomes, reading and preparatory work. This practice is worthy of further dissemination.

43   Clearly written practice learning and fieldwork handbooks provide detailed and comprehensive information to students on Social Work and Youth and Community Work programmes. They were noted as examples of good practice in the Developmental engagement in assessment and the new FdA Writing for Performance has a placement handbook modelled on this.

What arrangements does the college have in place to assure the accuracy and completeness of information the College has responsibility for publishing?

44   The College has acted upon a desirable recommendation in the Developmental engagement in assessment for a more centralised monitoring of the prospectus. Paper and web-based promotional information is approved by the Outreach and Recruitment Committee, which reports to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, and signed off by the Principal. The Outreach and Recruitment Committee has been provided with a clearer remit as part of the development of the marketing strategy. It monitors and reviews the effectiveness of recruitment and induction processes. Information for external dissemination is the responsibility of the College's Marketing Department.

45   The College's Strategic Plan, which is ratified by the Governing Executive, translates into related strategy and policy documents of which the key document is the Higher Education Strategy. Other major policy documents, which derive from the Higher Education Strategy, include the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Curriculum Strategy, together with formal policies relating to academic matters such as admissions and assessment. The policy documents are comprehensive, well written and reflect a clear and coherent educational philosophy. There is a Policy Review Schedule of business through which policies are drafted, checked, and approved by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. They emerge through a consensual approach and the resulting involvement of staff in policy formation ensures that they are effectively embedded within academic practice.

46   The Quality Officer is responsible for the annual review of programme handbooks. Following a desirable recommendation in the Developmental engagement in assessment, the College has taken steps to address the need for accuracy and consistency in programme handbooks. The resulting standard template provides general information and guidance on policies and regulations, as a framework into which subject teams insert programme-specific information. However, some handbooks contain more than one description of grading ranges not consistent with the College's own generic assessment regulations at levels 4 and 5. There are instances of missing appendices, outdated references, and 'cut and paste' errors. The accuracy and completeness required remains in need of attention through more transparent monitoring.

47   Programme level information on the virtual learning environment is the responsibility of Programme Coordinators, who oversee module information posted by tutors and monitor

the postings on student message boards. There are, however, no minimum standards identified for the content of learning materials. Control of the social networking facilities is appropriately exercised through the Marketing Officer.

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 engagements

48   The first Developmental engagement was in assessment and took place in February 2009. There were three lines of enquiry: the quality and effectiveness of feedback on formative and summative assessment; the maintenance of academic standards, with particular reference to the College's processes and procedures for external examiners; and the contribution of practice placements to learning opportunities and the effectiveness of the College's published information, with particular reference to practice placements.

49   The Developmental engagement team identified a number of areas of good practice. There is a clear college-wide assessment policy and staff have a clear understanding of the Academic Infrastructure. The programmes with practice placements benefit from strong employer involvement and have effective links between theory and practice. The intensive college-wide academic tutorial system fosters exceptionally thorough formative and summative assessment and there is thorough training for practice teachers/fieldwork supervisors. There are examples of comprehensive handbooks for external examiners and placements.

50   The team also made a number of recommendations. It considered that it would be desirable for the College to collate the feedback from external examiners; to consider the design and use of college-wide documentation covering both summative and formative assessment; and to consider the central monitoring and editing of the higher education prospectus.

51   The second Developmental engagement was in student support and took place in January 2010. There were three lines of enquiry: the College's provision of, and its published information about, student learning support outside of the classroom; how the College ensures differentiation in the classroom by gearing teaching to the differing capabilities and needs of individual learners; and internal and external student progression in the context of a dual (further education and higher education) institution.

52   The Developmental engagement team identified a number of areas of good practice. The personal tutor system provides outstanding support to students. The thoughtful design of documentation and the nurturing culture take full account of the needs of students of different abilities and needs. Teaching methods are successfully employed to engage all students, irrespective of their abilities; disadvantaged adults are attracted by the College's proactive approach to pre-entry opportunities; students are carefully prepared for more demanding learning experiences as they progress through their programmes; and they are provided with reliable and comprehensive information.

53   The team also made a number of recommendations. It considered it advisable for the College to adopt a more rigorous approach to the analysis of retention and

progression data; to continue to work towards the publication of destinations data; and to identify a more formalised system for integrating personal development plans with related College processes.

D   Foundation Degrees

54   The College currently has one FD, the FdA Writing for Performance, which enrolled its first students in 2010-11. The programme is well designed but it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of the College's management and delivery of this programme.

E   Conclusions and summary of judgements

55   The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Ruskin 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 body.

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

- staff demonstrate an informed, consistent use of the Academic Infrastructure in the design of academic programmes (paragraph 16)
- external moderation and reporting is highly successful in supporting the effective development of the peer observation scheme (paragraph 26)
- staff enthusiastically and effectively implement a learning and teaching strategy that supports them in fully engaging with the differentiation of learning opportunities for non-traditional students (paragraph 27)
- the support that is given, especially at the pre-entry stage, effectively encourages students from non-traditional backgrounds to commit themselves to higher education (paragraph 28)
- the College operates a tutorial system that is specifically focused on the early stages of programmes to support and nurture students from non-traditional backgrounds (paragraph 29)
- staff provide exceptionally rapid and constructive formative feedback to students (paragraph 30)
- the Oxfordshire Practice Learning Centre enables learners on professionally accredited programmes to achieve their intended learning outcomes and supports a clear employer focus in assessment that contextualises academic theory and appropriately addresses the competences required on professional practice (paragraph 37)
- the range of clear and comprehensive information, which is distributed in a timely way, starting at the pre-entry stage, provides reassurance and guidance for students (paragraphs 40, 41, 43)
- the comprehensive range of policy documentation that aligns with the College's strategic aims arises through consensual processes, engaging all staff, and is consequently clearly embedded within academic practice (paragraph 45).

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

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

- review the means by which the Academic Quality and Standards Committee assures itself of the effectiveness of the College's arrangements for managing quality and standards (paragraphs 14, 15, 20)
- develop a strategy that promotes the central role of the virtual learning environment in strengthening independent learning (paragraph 36)
- ensure the effective implementation of the central monitoring approach to ensure the consistency and accuracy of information contained within programme handbooks (paragraphs 42, 46).

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

- move as soon as possible towards implementation of the new statistical software to improve the College's ability to produce cross-college analytical reports and to overview student performance (paragraph 20)
- ensure that summative assessment is received in a timely fashion (paragraph 30).

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

61   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.

62   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.

Ruskin College action plan relating to the Summative review: May 2011						
Good practice	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
In the course of the Summative review the team identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
• staff demonstrate an informed, consistent use of the Academic Infrastructure in the design of academic programmes (paragraph 16)	Demonstrate its use at external and internal quality events, including (re)validation	Ongoing programme	Programme Coordinators and Quality Officer	Successful events	Academic Quality and Standards Committee	Review of (re)validation documents by Academic Quality and Standards Committee
• external moderation and reporting is highly successful in supporting the effective development of the peer observation scheme (paragraph 26)	Submit annual reports to the Observation of Teaching and Learning scheme external moderator annually	Ongoing programme	Observation of Teaching and Learning observer group vice-chair and Quality Officer	Actions taken following receipt of the moderator's report	Observation of Teaching and Learning group and Academic Quality and Standards Committee	Consideration of Observation of Teaching and Learning annual report at Academic Quality and Standards Committee

• staff enthusiastically and effectively implement a learning and teaching strategy that supports them in fully engaging with the differentiation of learning opportunities for non-traditional students (paragraph 27)	Review the applicability of the strategy as per schedule and as required	Ongoing programme	Management Team	Continued application of strategy	Academic Quality and Standards Committee	Consideration of Academic Quality and Standards Committee minutes at Governing Executive
• the support that is given, especially at the pre-entry stage, effectively encourages students from non-traditional backgrounds to commit themselves to higher education (paragraph 28)	Review annually and update as necessary	September 2012 and ongoing	Academic Registrar	Induction survey	Academic Quality and Standards Committee	Consideration of Academic Quality and Standards Committee minutes (including report into induction survey) at Governing Executive
• the College operates a tutorial system that is specifically focused on the	Continue to build into teaching and learning strategies as resources allow	Ongoing programme	Cost Centre Managers and Estates Committee	Student retention and feedback	Governing Executive	Review of Teaching and Learning strategy by Academic Quality and

early stages of programmes to support and nurture students from non-traditional backgrounds (paragraph 29)						Standards Committee
• staff provide exceptionally rapid and constructive formative feedback to students (paragraph 30)	Maintain by ensuring standardisation and new staff induction process	Ongoing programme	Programme Coordinators	Student feedback	Programme Boards	Consideration of Programme Board minutes at Academic Quality and Standards Committee
• the Oxfordshire Practice Learning Centre enables learners on professionally accredited programmes to achieve their intended learning outcomes and supports a clear employer focus in assessment that contextualises academic theory and appropriately addresses the	Maintain this good practice	Ongoing programme	Oxon PLC	Student feedback	Social Work and Youth and Community Work Programme Boards	Reports to Programme Advisory Group and Programme Boards

competences required on professional practice (paragraph 37)						
• the range of clear and comprehensive information, which is distributed in a timely way, starting at the pre-entry stage, provides reassurance and guidance for students (paragraphs 40, 41, 43)	Review annually and update as necessary	September 2012 and ongoing	Academic Registrar	Induction survey	Academic Quality and Standards Committee	Consideration of Academic Quality and Standards Committee minutes (including report into induction survey) at Governing Executive
• the comprehensive range of policy documentation that aligns with the College's strategic aims arises through consensual processes, engaging all staff, and is consequently	Review annually through the Governing Executive policy framework	Ongoing programme	Clerk to the Governors	Continued relevance of documentation	Management Team	Via Policy Review Schedule overseen by Governing Executive

clearly embedded within academic practice (paragraph 45).						
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:						
• review the means by which the Academic Quality and Standards Committee assures itself of the effectiveness of the College's arrangements for managing quality and standards (paragraphs 14, 15, 20)	Realign the internal submission dates for document drafts to the committee timetable	December 2012	Quality Officer and Principal	Receipt and consideration of reports at Programme Boards and Academic Quality and Standards Committee	Programme Boards	Ensuring that submission dates and committee (Academic Quality and Standards Committee) dates align
• develop a strategy that promotes the central role of the virtual learning environment in strengthening independent learning (paragraph 36)	Utilise relationship with The Open University to review IT infrastructure with a view to maximising e-learning	Delivery of pilot by September 2014	Academic and Programme Coordinators working with Management Team and IT.	Pilot blended learning/distance learning programmes and review within all (re)validations	Programme Boards	Academic Quality and Standards Committee to receive report into the pilot and consider roll-out programme

• ensure the effective implementation of the central monitoring approach to ensure the consistency and accuracy of information contained within programme handbooks (paragraphs 42, 46).	Centrally monitor the use of the generic template for Programme Handbooks	Autumn 2012 intake	Quality Officer and Programme Coordinators	Consistency and accuracy of handbooks	Programme Boards	Quality Officer report to Management Team confirming consistency
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:						
• move as soon as possible towards implementation of the new statistical software to improve the College's ability to produce cross-college analytical reports and to overview student performance (paragraph 20)	Review of all software capability	September 2011	Management Team, Quality Officer and MIS	Full reporting within agreed framework	All relevant College committees	Report of review and recommendations to Governing Executive

• ensure that summative assessment is received in a timely fashion (paragraph 30).	More rigorous management of the process and reporting to Management Team	July 2012	Academic Coordinators	Feedback by target dates Student feedback	Management Team	Consideration of Programme Board minutes (including reports from students) at Academic Quality and Standards Committee