



South West College

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

November 2013

Preface

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

Purpose of IQER NI

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

The IQER NI process

IQER NI is a peer review process. It is divided into two complementary stages: Developmental engagement and Summative review. In accordance with the published method, all Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)-funded colleges will take part in Summative review.

Developmental engagement

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

The main elements of a Developmental engagement are:

- a self-evaluation by the college
- an optional written student submission by the student body
- a preparatory meeting between the college and the IQER NI coordinator several weeks before the Developmental engagement visit
- the Developmental engagement visit, which normally lasts 2.5 days
- the evaluation of the extent to which the college manages effectively its responsibilities for the delivery of academic standards and the quality of its higher education provision, plus the arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of public information it is responsible for publishing about its higher education
- the production of a written report of the team's findings.

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

Summative review

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

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

Evidence

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

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

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

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

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

Outcomes of IQER NI

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

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

Colleges are required to develop an action plan to address any recommendations arising from IQER NI. Progress against these action plans is monitored by QAA in conjunction with DEL and/or the college's awarding bodies as appropriate. The college's action plan in response to the conclusions of the Summative review will be published as part of the report.

Executive summary

The Summative review of South West College carried out in November 2013

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

Good practice

The team has identified the following good practice for dissemination:

- the Management Effectiveness Team meetings which are valued by all staff as an inclusive and supportive mechanism for enhancing the provision in an effective and timely manner (paragraph 12)
- the industry-related opportunities for staff development which enhance the student experience and maintain the currency of the curriculum (paragraph 25)
- the internship programme which supports students to find beneficial work placements (paragraph 36)
- the responsive and specialised curriculum which is informed and supported by employers (paragraph 40).

Recommendations

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

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

- ensure that assessment feedback is provided consistently in accordance with the stated policy (paragraph 30)
- continue to develop and implement its emerging tutorial policy (paragraph 35).

A Introduction and context

1 This report presents the findings of the Summative review of higher education funded by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) conducted at South West 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: Accounting Technicians Ireland, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, City and Guilds, Institute of Leadership and Management, National Open College Network, Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations, Queen's University Belfast, Pearson, University of Ulster and Vocational Training Charitable Trust. The review was carried out by Professor Paul Brunt, Ms Heather Miller, Mr John Hawthorn, Ms Sandra Middleton (reviewers) and Mr Grant Horsburgh (coordinator).

2 The Summative review team (the team) conducted the review in agreement with the College and in accordance with *The handbook for Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review, Northern Ireland* (the handbook), published by QAA. Evidence in support of the Summative review included a comprehensive self-evaluation document and supporting evidence provided by the College, and meetings with staff, students, employers, graduates and awarding body representatives during the visit. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagement in assessment. A summary of findings from the Developmental engagement is provided in Section C of this report. The review also considered the College's use of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers.

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

4 South West College operates across four campuses in Cookstown, Dungannon, Enniskillen and Omagh. It is the most rural college of the six Northern Ireland area-based colleges and covers the largest geographical area which includes Counties Tyrone and Fermanagh. The College is organised into four curriculum departments: Business Services, Health and Life Services, Technology and Training. The curriculum offered is designed to support the local and regional economy and the College strives to work closely and meaningfully with the community it serves. It aims to provide a quality service in a caring and supportive environment for all students alongside a professional, business-like relationship with employers and other external stakeholders. The College has enrolled 22,000 students and is leading or partnering on several European projects. The College has a budget in excess of £42 million and a complement of 939 staff comprising 620 academic, 305 business support and 14 senior management staff.

5 The College has seen a significant increase in demand for full-time higher education in recent years and successfully bid to increase its allocation of full-time places from 221 in 2009-10 to 538 in 2013-14. Over the same period the number of part-time higher education students has increased from 803 to 917. In 2011-12, 94 per cent of students achieved their intended award and the student retention figure was 92 per cent. The College's DEL-funded higher education provision in 2013-14 is shown below by awarding body or organisation and student enrolments.

Accounting Technicians Ireland

Level 5 Diploma for Accounting Technicians (89)

Association of Chartered Certified Accountants

Professional Qualification Fundamentals (11)

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

Level 5 Intermediate Certificate In Human Resource Management (15)

City and Guilds

Level 4 Certificate in Advanced Automotive Diagnostic Techniques (83)

Level 4 Certificate Information Computing and Technology Professional Competence (14)

Level 4 Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (10)

Level 4 Diploma in Business and Administrative Management (15)

Level 5 Diploma in Business and Administrative Management (8)

Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Children's Care, Learning and Development (16)

Institute of Leadership and Management

Level 5 Award in Leadership and Management (11)

Level 5 Certificate in Leadership and Management (8)

Level 5 Certificate in Leadership and Management Skills (32)

National Open College Network

Level 4 Computer Aided Design (14)

Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations

Level 4 Award in Conducting Internal Quality Assurance of the Assessment Processes and Practice (4)

Pearson

Level 4 HNC Business (4)

Level 4 HNC Health and Social Care (46)

Level 4 HNC Manufacturing Engineering (16)

Level 4 HNC Performing Arts (10)

Level 4 HNC Photography (8)

Level 4 HNC Sport (8)

Level 5 HND Beauty Therapy Sciences (2.21)

Level 5 HND Hair and Beauty Management (46)

Level 5 HND Health and Social Care (48)

Level 5 HND Sport (71)

Level 5 HNC Advanced Practice in Work with Children and Families (12)

The Queen's University of Belfast

BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies (39)

BA (Hons) Management and Business Studies (33)

FdA Early Childhood Studies (54)

FdEng Energy Environment and Sustainability (35)

University of Ulster

BSc (Hons) Business Studies (39)

BSc (Hons) Health and Well Being (11)

BSc (Hons) Social Work (36)

FdSc Applied and Medical Science (17)

FdEng Architectural Technology with Sustainable Design (4)

FdEng Building Services and Renewable Energy (17)

FdA Business Services Management (83)

FdEng Civil Engineering and Transport (29)

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FdSc Computing (137)
FdA Contemporary Design and Manufacture (10)
FdA Counselling (26)
FdA Creative Media Production (59)
FdEng Engineering (with Specialisms) (Industrial Electronic Engineering, Wind Technology, Motorsport Technology) (69)
FdEng Engineering Management/Engineering Manufacturing (42)
FdA Financial Services (29)
FdSc Hospitality and Tourism Management (25)
FdA Performing Arts (1)
FdEng Sustainable Construction (60)
FdA Sustainable Events Management (Events-led Tourism) (17)
Certificate in Counselling Studies (45)

Vocational Training Charitable Trust

Level 4 Certificate in Sports Massage Therapy (11)

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

6 The College has partnership agreements with each of the awarding bodies and organisations listed above. The majority of these partnerships are long standing. The awarding partners retain responsibility for the academic standard of their awards, including programme approval and monitoring, the appointment of external examiners and also the approval of teaching staff. The College has responsibility for daily quality management, recruitment, programme organisation and timetabling, and student support (both academic and pastoral). The maintenance of academic standards is monitored and supported through existing quality systems without unduly replicating processes.

7 The College offers higher national programmes but there is no formal partnership agreement with Pearson. The courses are delivered and managed in accordance with the College's policies and procedures and are subject to external verification in accordance with established protocols.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

8 Since the IQER Developmental engagement in November 2011 the College has invested significantly in Specialised Technology Centres for each of the College's campuses. These centres are used to support teaching, learning and innovation among higher education students and industry. DEL has allocated funding for Higher Level Apprenticeships and commissioned two pilot courses, one in information and communications technology and one in engineering. Students who participate in these programmes are employed in industry, attached to an approved employer, study a foundation degree in the relevant area and gain the technical skills demanded by a City and Guilds level 5 qualification. The College is running a pilot Higher Apprenticeship in Information and communications technology and is making arrangements to offer programmes in engineering and rural sustainability. The College has submitted a preliminary proposal to DEL, in collaboration with its university partners, which sets out the College's vision to develop a pilot rural university base to meet the DEL strategy for higher education. The priority of the DEL project is accessibility to higher education and that the location of the pilot should take place in a College with no easy access to a university campus.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

9 Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. The Higher Education Coordinator wrote to all higher education students in April 2013 informing them that the Summative review was taking place. Students were invited to produce a self-evaluation submission which reflects the views of students on selected core themes. Students from each campus were then invited by higher education course directors to participate in focus groups which provided an open forum for all students to participate. Participating students represented full and part-time students from a wide variety of higher education courses. Subsequently three bachelor's degree with honours students collated and analysed the data collected at the focus groups and completed a final independent report which was circulated and approved by focus group participants. The Coordinator met a group of students during the preparatory meeting and the team met a representative group of students. Overall students made a valuable contribution to the Summative review process.

B Evaluation of the management of DEL-funded higher education

Core theme 1: Academic standards

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

10 The College has clearly articulated and effective management and reporting structures for higher education provision. The Deputy Director for Curriculum and Business Development has overall responsibility for the management of academic standards and for monitoring and review of all aspects of higher education provision. The Deputy Director reports formally to the College Director and the Senior Management Team on a monthly basis. Heads of Department and their deputies have overall responsibility for the management of the provision, with the support of the Higher Education Coordinator, relevant curriculum managers and higher education course directors.

11 Awarding body and organisation requirements are implemented in line with relevant agreements. The University of Ulster ensures that requirements are being met through liaison with course directors. Subject-level annual reporting and five-year revalidation of programmes ensures compliance with agreements. The Queen's University Belfast has a similar process, operating a collaborative provision group. City and Guilds and Pearson undertake an annual audit of college policy and procedures plus subject-level external verification. College management monitor awarding body and organisation effectiveness through the Management Effectiveness Team.

12 Since the Developmental engagement, the College has introduced a Management Effectiveness Team which meets once a fortnight with individual course teams. The team comprises the Director, three deputy directors and the Quality Assurance Manager. The meetings enable senior managers to monitor the effectiveness of the awarding partnerships and the quality of academic standards. Course teams are encouraged to highlight good practice and to discuss at an early opportunity areas for concern including the key performance indicators of recruitment, retention and achievement. Actions are identified for both the course team and the College and good practice is recorded for dissemination to other teams. A strength of this initiative is the speed of response to matters relating to higher

education by senior management. Dissemination of meeting outcomes negates the need for other course teams to wait for the annual College report to learn of good practice or areas of concern. Meetings are valued by all staff who see it as an inclusive and supportive mechanism for enhancing the provision in an effective and timely manner and is considered **good practice**.

13 The Deputy Director for Curriculum and Business Development chairs a monthly Curriculum and Quality and Performance Unit meeting to maintain oversight of curriculum and quality matters for the College's entire provision. Higher education specific matters discussed include curriculum planning, key performance indicators and quality assurance. The team includes the four heads of department, the Higher Education Coordinator, the Virtualisation Manager and the Quality Assurance Manager. The Higher Education Coordinator has a key college-wide role in overseeing the management and delivery of higher education standards and in ensuring consistent operation of the associated reporting arrangements.

14 The Higher Education Forum maintains strategic oversight of higher education provision. It meets four times a year and is chaired by the Higher Education Coordinator. Membership includes the Director, the three deputy directors, the four school directors, the Quality Manager, one curriculum manager and the Virtualisation Manager. The Higher Education Forum monitors College compliance with awarding body and organisation requirements, the Quality Code, enhancement, and matters relating to standardisation to ensure consistency of delivery across the campuses. Higher education course directors manage course teams. They meet with the Higher Education Coordinator each semester to discuss external examiner reports, module evaluations, work-based learning, staff development and other matters relevant to higher education. At school and curriculum level course directors report to heads of department who are responsible for quality assurance and deputy heads of department who are responsible for higher education provision.

15 The Higher Education Coordinator represents the College on external forums and working groups which support the development and delivery of higher education. These include the University of Ulster Collaborative Partnerships forum, the Queens University of Belfast Strategic Working Group and the recently constituted Northern Ireland Higher Education Manager forum. Information on strategic developments in higher education, subject areas, areas of concern and strategic imperatives are identified, discussed and actions agreed where appropriate. Outcomes are reported back to the Senior Management Team and used to enhance the provision and inform future planning.

What account is taken of the Quality Code?

16 The College takes appropriate and effective account of the Quality Code. The Higher Education Coordinator has mapped the Quality Code to relevant College policies and procedures which has ensured that the Quality Code is embedded throughout higher education provision. Amendments or additions to the Quality Code are circulated to relevant staff by the Higher Education Coordinator. The College has developed a guide to the Quality Code which sets out practical examples of how staff might engage with, and make use of, the Quality Code. Staff development events have been held as new chapters have been published and staff spoke knowledgeably about Quality Code expectations and indicators. Staff have attended events organised by university partners where engagement with the Quality Code, *The framework for higher education qualifications* (FHEQ) and subject benchmark statements has occurred, for example, developing, monitoring and reviewing courses.

17 Further external benchmarking includes professional accreditation and recognition for foundation degrees. Since the Developmental engagement, the FdEng Civil Engineering

and Transport has gained professional recognition, allowing students to register with any of four professional bodies. The Institute of Leadership and Management accredits the FdA Business Services. The College has secured professional recognition for the FdEng Sustainable Construction, FdEng Building Services and Renewable Energy, and FdEng Engineering with specialisms.

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 College obligations to ensure that the standards of higher education provision meet the requirements of awarding bodies and organisations are clearly articulated through the partnership agreements. The Higher Education Quality Handbook 2013-14 provides comprehensive and coherent explanations of the College's strategy for managing and delivering academic standards. It covers all aspects of the provision including relevant structures, policies, procedures and individual roles to ensure compliance with awarding body requirements. The handbook ensures that higher education staff have a complete understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

19 Course directors are responsible for the development of self-evaluation reports which feed into the College's Annual Self-Evaluation Report. Course self-evaluation reports take account of separate university awarding partner requirements. These reports are reviewed by the appropriate university and feedback is provided on good practice and areas for improvement. Heads of department in conjunction with the Quality and Performance Unit review course self-evaluation reports to identify matters for discussions between and across teams including student performance and progress in addressing action plans. Course self-evaluation reports are also regularly reviewed at the Higher Education Forum and discussed at a designated College-level annual self-assessment meeting.

20 External examiner reports are received simultaneously by the Quality Assurance Manager and Higher Education Coordinator. Course teams are expected to reflect and comment on external examiner reports as part of the annual review process. Course coordinators attend examination boards and receive oral feedback from external examiners. This helps to ensure that course teams are aware of strengths and areas for improvement which may be obscured in a report covering provision which may be delivered in more than one location or institution. Responsibility for responding to the external examiner comments lies with course directors. An action plan in relation to any areas for improvement is developed and forwarded to the Quality and Performance Unit. External examiner reports are standing items on the Course Committee and Staff Student Consultative Committee. Reports and action plans are monitored by a number of forums including the Higher Education Forum and the Higher Education Internal Examination/Review Board to review completed actions and to identify any which need to be carried forward.

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

21 The College has appropriate procedures for the management and oversight of staff development. The recruitment of new staff is in line with the relevant partnership agreement, and must first be confirmed by the universities or awarding organisations. New staff must be qualified at least to the level of the course they will deliver. All new staff are offered coaching and mentoring. A requirement for all teaching staff to be part of formal appraisal, including three observations, every two years, is currently being introduced to determine any development needs. The College Industry Initiative provides staff with industry placements and the programme of events run by the Innotech centres ensures that lecturers can update

knowledge and skills. Course teams meet regularly to share teaching strategies and develop learning materials. Lecturers are encouraged to request a supportive lesson observation to review current practice. The team in FdSc Computing uses peer lesson observation to informally assure and provide support for teaching and learning. This information is used to reflect on teaching and learning as part of the annual quality cycle and request support for issues raised.

22 The College has a Learning and Development Plan for staff development that reflects its strategic objectives, consistent with the College's Development Plan. There are clear procedures for staff development with all activities recorded and evaluated. The Deputy Director for Corporate Services and Student Support has overall responsibility for staff development. Operational responsibility is delegated to the Human Resources Manager, who works closely with the Quality Assurance Manager and Higher Education Coordinator, to ensure appropriate opportunities for higher education staff including further study, personal and scholarly skills development. An annual calendar of events and activities is produced and the Higher Education Forum takes an oversight of staff development activities. Records of staff participation are maintained and analysed.

23 The procedures for identifying staff development needs are appropriate. The College has an effective induction for all teaching staff which provides an opportunity to discuss training needs. A programme to maintain and enhance the standards of teaching has been initiated, and is supported by dedicated Teaching and Learning Advisers. The College has made a significant investment in programmes to support teaching and learning. The Quality Assurance Manager, supported by the Teacher-Tutor, Teaching and Learning Advisers and Teaching Thinking Coach, successfully leads and manages a number of established teaching practice development programmes including initial teaching qualifications and MEd unit accreditation. Systematic assistance is provided to all new part-time lecturers who are allocated a mentor and have the opportunity to attend a series of formal workshops on teaching delivery themes. They each have a lesson observation with feedback and further development sessions are scheduled where required or requested. The scheme promotes part-time lecturer confidence, good team working and informal monitoring of teaching and learning practices.

24 The College also identifies staff development requirements through its annual cycle of quality procedures. These have included staff development for the virtual learning environment, and awareness and incorporation of the Quality Code.

25 The College has made extensive and highly effective use of research and development projects to enhance the provision through its Innotech Centre. In these, higher education staff engage in industry research and development projects which ensure the currency of programmes and the enhancement of the student experience. Examples include the design of an electronic circuit enclosure, programmable logic controller system development, and passive house design. Employers and students confirmed that such projects have been of benefit, are clearly linked to employment and provide a significant enhancement of the curriculum. The industry-related opportunities for staff development which enhance the student experience and maintain the currency of the curriculum is **good practice**.

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

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?

26 Responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities are described in paragraphs 10 to 15 and are effective. Responsibility for teaching and learning is delegated to course teams. Monitoring the quality of learning opportunities is carried out through Annual Course Review and self-evaluation reports. The report and action plan, which take account of external examiner comments, are monitored by the Quality and Performance Unit as described in the College Quality Handbook.

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

27 College procedures to ensure that students receive appropriate learning opportunities in accordance with awarding body obligations are described in paragraphs 18 to 20 and are effective. Responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning is delegated to the College and is clearly defined in partnership agreements. Course approval and validation processes ensure that appropriate and sufficient learning resources are provided. Subject partnership managers ensure liaison between the College and the awarding universities on a continuing basis.

What account is taken of the Quality Code?

28 The account of the Quality Code and other relevant external reference points is set out in paragraphs 16 and 17.

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

29 The College implements appropriate and effective systems to monitor, maintain and enhance teaching and learning. There is a teaching and learning strategy which was revised in 2012 and approved by the governing body. It provides clear priorities for development with a phased programme of implementation. The strategy is evaluated through the quality assurance cycle using a variety of sources including module reviews, student feedback, the biannual staff appraisal process, external examiner reports and staff-student consultations. The strategy also encourages staff to develop lesson plans to deliver an outstanding learning experience. Podcasts have been used to provide students with assessment feedback, in engineering courses. Some courses give students the opportunity to comment on positive and negative matters of interest at the end of lectures, and encourage students to keep an online journal which is used to inform student evaluation of the module at the end of delivery.

30 As a response to an advisable recommendation in the Developmental engagement the College identified, as a key priority, that all course teams operate the College assessment and feedback policy to support academic achievement and improvement. However, despite considerable effort to provide students with assessment feedback within the 10 days set out in the policy, during the review visit a small number of students reported that this does not happen consistently across all programmes or campuses. It would be

desirable for the College to continue its planned activities to ensure that assessment feedback is provided consistently in accordance within its stated policy.

31 There are a large number of efficient mechanisms for listening and responding to matters raised by students. Post-induction surveys, student focus groups and module evaluations are regularly analysed by the Quality and Performance Unit and the results forwarded to course directors and the Higher Education Coordinator to agree actions for course improvements and to share good practice. Through the quality cycle outcomes of actions are recorded and progress against targets tracked. Students commented that they felt that issues raised were addressed and resolved. As part of the process assessment schedules were reviewed and specialist resources in FdA Creative Media Production and FdEng Engineering Management/Manufacture purchased. To increase student engagement a Student Union Development Officer has been appointed to represent student interests and attend the Higher Education Forum. Students and staff spoke enthusiastically on the effectiveness of this appointment.

32 The network of international links and partnerships enhance teaching and learning and are a strength of the College. A long established link with a college in Germany has provided opportunities for reciprocal study visits for students in FdA Hospitality and Tourism Management and FdA Creative Media Production. European funding is used to provide study tours to enhance learning opportunities and encourages students from different foundation degrees to work across disciplines. Links with the United States of America and Europe have been developed within the FdEng Engineering Management/Manufacture and FdA Hospitality and Tourism Management to provide work placements. The College's virtualisation strategy facilitates student working remotely with partners in USA and Zambia to share lectures and seminars.

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

33 There are a variety of pastoral and academic processes which provide consistent support for full and part-time students throughout their learning. The admission policy and recruitment process is clearly defined and includes an entry survey for all students to identify specialist learning and support needs. Identified specialist learning needs are well supported. Students are fully informed about the services available during their induction and found them easy to access. A comprehensive College induction includes information about careers, finance, learning support and course requirements. Programme-specific inductions are supported by awarding and organisations and bodies where additional resources and future opportunities for progression are highlighted. The induction content and process is updated regularly following an annual post-induction survey.

34 The Deputy Director for Corporate Services manages a Higher Education Support Services Plan which is an initiative to further develop academic support, student engagement and the student experience. Significant progress has been made in meeting the identified aims. Support is given to train student representatives and extend higher education resources on the virtual learning environment. Academic advisers were appointed in March 2013 and are working with students to shape services for the future.

35 Course teams work proactively to support students. Lecturers operate an open door policy and are available outside of timetabled hours to provide support and guidance. Attendance monitoring is managed by course leaders to identify students who are at risk. Programmes have a weekly timetabled tutorial for pastoral care and academic support. However, students' experience of the tutorial system is variable. The College has acknowledged that this is an area for development within the 2012-13 Whole College Quality Improvement Plan. A draft tutorial policy specifies tutorial entitlements including the

systematic review of individual student performance. It would be **desirable** for the College to continue to develop and implement its emerging tutorial policy.

36 Students are fully supported to find work placements suitable to meet awarding partners' requirements and support the development of employability skills. The College has a work-based learning policy and employers and students commented that they were advised about the placement process and supporting documentation. To complement the College widening access policy a student internship and bursary scheme has been established. The internship programme helps students find placements in College in the areas of finance, creative media, engineering and computing. These paid placements are valued by participating students as they provide a well structured learning experience with a variety of relevant work experience. External industrial partnerships are being developed to extend the number of internship places available. The internship programme which supports students to find beneficial work placements is **good practice**.

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

37 The College's arrangements for staff development to maintain and enhance the quality of learning opportunities are discussed in paragraphs 21 to 25 inclusive.

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?

38 The College has sufficient learning resources to deliver higher education programmes. Resource allocation processes are effectively managed by the Deputy Director of Corporate Services and reflect the priorities of the College higher education growth strategy. Heads of department prepare a business case informed by industry and sector skills bodies and this is evaluated beside college priorities. There has been a substantial investment of £3.4 million by the College over the past three years in additional learning resources including the development of innovation centres and purchase of new plant and specialist industry standard equipment within science, technology, engineering and mathematics areas.

39 Learning resource centres are fully equipped with ample computing resources, e-books and bookable self-study areas. Learning resource staff provide academic support and research guidance which the students find useful. As a response to a request from students and employers, remote access to specialist software was extended to include home and workplace use. This provides construction and engineering students with greater flexibility and independence in managing their learning. Students value the College virtual learning environment. It provides a broad range of programme information and learning materials, a dedicated higher education resource area for study support and access to awarding body virtual learning environments. There is a dedicated virtual services team who work with teams to trial new software and develop the use of e-resources.

40 The College provides higher education programmes which are responsive to the needs of local industry and encourage close involvement of employers. Employers commented to the team that they frequently contribute to programme reviews and find that college graduates have the employability and technical skills they need. The College has developed 22 foundation degrees providing specialist qualifications, for example, in the areas of wind technology, contemporary design and renewable energies. These programmes cater for small numbers of students but produce employees with skills that employers view as important for the future growth of local and regional industries.

The introduction of fast-track foundation degrees delivered over two years part-time and participation in the higher level apprenticeships pilot has increased the flexibility and accessibility of higher education programmes for employers and students. The strong industry partnerships ensure that teams are in regular contact with employers who participate as guest speakers, support placement students, and provide case studies and site visits. The industrial experience of many part-time staff helps to keep courses current. Students valued being taught by industry practitioners as they provide useful insights and a source of career advice. The responsive and specialised curriculum which is informed and supported by employers is **good practice**.

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

Core theme 3: Public information

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

41 The College has effective and appropriate mechanisms for providing public information in accordance with awarding partner expectations. The amount and scope of information provided by the College varies between awarding partners. For example, the College provides almost all information for Pearson courses while the Accounting Technicians Ireland supplies much of the information for students. Representatives from the awarding universities approve marketing and course material for their validated programmes. In the case of University of Ulster validated programmes the Faculty Subject Partnership Manager monitors College public information for content and accuracy.

42 The College publishes a wide variety of documentation that provides students and staff with information on higher education courses, policies and quality assurance procedures. In addition to a comprehensive Higher Education Student Handbook each course provides a course handbook which includes a programme specification and information on teaching and learning and assessment deadlines. Courses awarded by partner universities use specific handbook templates, while others have a standard cross-college format. Students are also provided with detailed module or unit information.

43 The website is a valued information source for prospective students. It is comprehensive and relatively easy to navigate and includes course details, entry requirements, admission guidance, and awarding body and organisation information. Website information is available in large print and Braille. The College website holds the definitive version of documents and is updated frequently.

44 Employers reported that the information they receive is very helpful and is appropriate for their differing needs. They stated that they are able to influence changes to documentation provided to them through the employer forums and directly with course staff. The College has made considerable progress and taken appropriate action in response to the Developmental engagement recommendations to standardise higher education documentation and to develop the virtual learning environment.

**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?**

45 The publication of information for prospective students is thoroughly checked. There is an effective policy to ensure the accuracy and completeness of information. Overall responsibility for the implementation of the policy rests with the Deputy Director for Strategy and International Development, who reports on it to the Higher Education Forum as a standing item. The marketing team manage the storage, delivery, distribution and allocation of all College promotional publications. The final version of any publicity material is the responsibility of the team following an exchange of information between the relevant curriculum manager and course director. In the case of the partner universities, the material has to be agreed with the university prior to being sent for publication. This is facilitated by the marketing team. The marketing team regularly seeks feedback on the effectiveness of College information through surveys and focus group activities with both prospective and enrolled students, and through internal audits.

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

46 The Developmental engagement in assessment took place in November 2011. Each line of enquiry provided a route through which the team was able to evaluate the three Core themes. The lines of enquiry for the Developmental engagement in assessment agreed with the College in advance of the team's visit were:

Line of enquiry 1: How effective are the internal moderation procedures in supporting academic standards?

Line of enquiry 2: How effective is the College assessment strategy in promoting engagement with industry in programme assessment to ensure currency of industry skills and knowledge?

Line of enquiry 3: Does assessment information available to students in the public domain accurately reflect the College assessment strategy and practice?

47 In the course of the Developmental engagement, the team identified several areas of **good practice**: cross-college standardisation days and the level of staff engagement with such activities provide an effective means of enhancing the relevance and currency of higher education provision as well as a forum for standardising assessment practice; extensive links with industry and long-established engagement with local employers in designing and delivering courses and in assessing students which provides them with a current and relevant learning experience; work to gain professional body accreditation for its foundation degree programmes; and the development and introduction of an accuracy of information policy with its links to awarding body agreements.

48 The team also indicated that it was **advisable** for the College to take action to continue to develop its mechanisms for providing students with written assessment feedback

which is linked more clearly and consistently to assessment criteria and learning outcomes. The team indicated that it would be **desirable** for the College to take action on three points: consider entering into a dialogue with its awarding bodies and organisations to see what opportunities may exist to enable students to routinely receive examination scripts and feedback on their performance; continue to work with its awarding bodies and organisations to achieve the desired level of standardisation of documentation on all higher education courses; and continue to develop the virtual learning environment and the virtualisation project as a means of further enhancing student learning.

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

D Foundation degrees

50 The College offers 22 foundation degrees in partnership with two university awarding partners. There are 714 students enrolled on the foundation degrees which have been designed to respond to the needs of local and national business. Students obtain substantive work placements as part of their programme, and programme annual reports indicate that the majority move into work or continue to study using progression routes provided by the awarding partner. The meeting with employers indicated that the College has a close working relationship with a wide range of local and national companies and is a preferred partner in developing bespoke vocational education through its foundation degrees.

51 Additional foundation degrees will be developed to meet the needs of students and business where they can be funded. The College intends to maintain priority provision in existing subject areas and any new foundation degrees will build on strengths in the further education curriculum and provide pathways for progression.

52 The good practice identified and the recommendations made throughout this report apply to all higher education provision including foundation degrees.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

53 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in South West 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 Accounting Technicians Ireland, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, City and Guilds, Institute of Leadership and Management, National Open College Network, Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations, Queen's University of Belfast, Pearson, University of Ulster and the Vocational Training Charitable Trust.

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

- the Management Effectiveness Team meetings which are valued by all staff as an inclusive and supportive mechanism for enhancing the provision in an effective and timely manner (paragraph 12)
- the industry-related opportunities for staff development which enhance the student experience and maintain the currency of the curriculum (paragraph 25)

- the internship programme which supports students to find beneficial work placements (paragraph 36)
- the responsive and specialised curriculum which is informed and supported by employers (paragraph 40).

55 The team also makes two recommendations for consideration by the College and its awarding bodies.

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

- ensure that assessment feedback is provided consistently in accordance with the stated policy (paragraph 30)
- continue to develop and implement its emerging tutorial policy (paragraph 35).

57 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 and organisations.

58 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.

59 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.

South West College action plan relating to the Summative review November 2013.						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
In the course of the Summative review the ream identified the following areas of good practice that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Management Effectiveness Team meetings which are valued by all staff as an inclusive and supportive mechanism for enhancing the provision in an effective and timely manner (paragraph 12) 	<p>Continue the process of engaging with teams on a monthly basis</p> <p>Actions identified to be followed up and monitored</p> <p>Annual report to be produced</p>	<p>Monthly schedule to be produced</p> <p>Every three months</p> <p>September 2014</p>	Quality Assurance Manager	<p>Improvement in retention, attrition rates, achievement rates</p> <p>Enhanced student experience</p>	<p>Management Effectiveness Team</p> <p>Education Sub-Committee of Governing Body</p>	<p>Annual Report</p> <p>Annual Course Review</p> <p>Student feedback through module reviews and student staff consultative meetings</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the industry-related opportunities for staff development which enhance the student experience and maintain the currency of the curriculum 	<p>College to engage with the Department for Employment and Learning on Lecturers Into Industry initiative</p> <p>Appraisal system to be used to identify staff opportunities for industry engagement</p>	June 2014	<p>Quality Assurance Manager</p> <p>Higher Education Coordinator</p> <p>Human Resources</p> <p>Heads of</p>	<p>Increased numbers of staff participating in industry related activities</p> <p>Improvement in retention, satisfaction achievement rates</p>	Higher Education Forum	<p>Annual Report</p> <p>Annual Course Reviews</p> <p>Curriculum modifications as a result of industry input and staff experience</p>

(paragraph 25)	All foundation degree programmes to have a fully functional Industry Advisory Board		Department			External examiner reports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the internship programme which supports students to find beneficial work placements (paragraph 36) 	Identify further opportunities for students	June 2014	Higher Education Coordinator Course Directors Deputy Director Curriculum and Business Development	Increased numbers of staff participating in industry related activities Improvement in retention, satisfaction achievement rates	Higher Education Forum	Annual Report
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the responsive and specialised curriculum which is informed and supported by employers (paragraph 40). 	Continue to review and refine the curriculum by further development of Industry Advisory Boards	June 2014	Higher Education Coordinator Course Directors Deputy Director Curriculum and Business Development	Number of Industry Advisory Boards for example one per programme	Higher Education Forum	Annual Report
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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that assessment feedback is provided consistently in 	Ensure policy has been embedded through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> induction process 	June 2014	Heads of Department Higher Education Coordinator	All higher education students are fully aware and understand the	Higher Education Forum Curriculum and Quality Team	Post-induction surveys

accordance with the stated policy (paragraph 30)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • post-induction survey focus groups • Staff Student Consultative Committee Meetings • module evaluations 		Course Directors	feedback mechanisms in particular timeframes that operate under the feedback policy		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continue to develop and implement its emerging tutorial policy (paragraph 35). 	<p>Draft document to be reviewed, amended and circulated for consultation</p> <p>To be ratified by Governing Body</p> <p>Higher education course teams to operate a more structured tutorial system</p>	June 2014	<p>Quality Assurance Manager</p> <p>Higher Education Coordinator</p> <p>Course Directors</p> <p>Deputy Director Curriculum and Business Development</p> <p>Heads of Department</p>	All higher education courses to implement a tutorial system that is structured with clearly defined outcomes and evidence	<p>Curriculum and Quality Team</p> <p>Higher Education Forum</p>	<p>Embedded in September 2014</p> <p>Annual Course Review</p> <p>Student Staff Consultative Committee Meetings</p>

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 000

Email: enquiries@qaa.ac.uk

Website: www.qaa.ac.uk

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